



Ridership on Mason Transit Authority buses is down about 85% due to the threat caused by the coronavirus. For the second time since the outbreak of the pandemic, the agency is reducing service. *Journal photo by Gordon Weeks*

Mason Transit Authority again reduces bus service

Ridership plummets due to coronavirus pandemic

By Gordon Weeks
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Beginning Monday, Mason Transit Authority for the second time will reduce services due to decreasing ridership and the shortage of drivers caused by coronavirus concerns.

In a news release, MTA states ridership has declined due to social distancing measures mandated by Gov. Jay Inslee's "Stay at Home, Stay Safe" decree and concerns with employees being exposed to the disease.

"We are finding many riders are staying at home as directed and ridership has continued to decline," MTA General Manager Danette Brannin said in the news release. "MTA ridership is down approximately 85 percent. Additionally, nearly half of our drivers are opting to stay home and

self-quarantine because they or a family member fall into the high-risk category. They are vulnerable and I want to respect their need to protect themselves and their family."

Trips into Olympia will be serviced via Dial-a-Ride beginning Monday. Riders will need to call customer service at 360-427-5033 or toll free at 1-800-374-3747 to schedule a ride to Olympia. This includes the Cole Road and Kamilche stops that are serviced by route 6 and 26. Riders will be able to set up a subscription service for their ride.

Rides will be limited to essential needs, such as work and medical appointments, MTA states. Riders will not be dropped off at the Olympia Transit Center, but at their essential location.

Along with reduced service, the customer service line will not be available on Saturdays. Customers can leave messages that will be returned on Mondays or sooner, the agency said.

The agency states that it is also

concerned about running empty buses, especially on trips out of Mason County.

"We want to be good stewards of our resources and it does not make sense to run empty buses on routes not being utilized," Brannin said. Many of MTA's riders rely on public transportation to reach essential services such as medical appointments for life-sustaining and other crucial services, work and grocery stores, so it is necessary to provide service to people in need while assuring the public that resources are used wisely, she said.

The agency has placed measures throughout the system for cleaning and social distancing. Riders are asked to enter and exit through the back door if they are able. The ramp and the lift are still available to riders who need assistance.

Routes 3, 6, 23 and 26 are free of charge through April 30, or until the stay-at-home order is lifted, so riders can use the back door and not worry about inserting fare into the fare box

next to the driver.

Some buses have taped-off areas for riders to remain behind so the proper distance between the rider and the driver is maintained. Buses are wiped down with disinfecting solution or wipes between routes as much as feasible. On routes within Mason County, ridership is limited to 10 customers.

"Our service is frequent enough on most of our in-county routes that another bus will be by the bus stop soon to pick up riders," Brannin said. "We feel this is the best way to help keep our drivers and passengers alike as safe as possible from exposure."

In the news release, MTA states it appreciates the cooperation of riders and asks that riders be kept to essential needs only.

"We want to do our part in helping reduced the spread of COVID-19 and still be here for our community," Brannin said.

For more information and to schedule rides, call customer service between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays.

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