

# Grapeview schools eye reopening dates

By Gordon Weeks  
gordon@masoncounty.com

The Mason County Public Health Department reported 563 residents have tested positive for COVID-19 as of 4 p.m. Tuesday.

No new cases were reported on Tuesday, but 10 new cases were reported the day before. The number of Mason County deaths remains nine. Fifty-five of the cases are active, with one person hospitalized in Mason County; 14,127 tests have been conducted.

Of the Mason County residents who have tested positive for the disease, 97 are 19 years old and younger; 214 are ages 20 to 39; 141 are between the ages of 40 and 59; 89 are between the ages of 60 and 79; and 22 are 80 and older.

On Tuesday, the Grapeview School District announced it is tentatively scheduled to begin bringing students in kindergarten through second grade back to the classrooms Nov. 5 — depending on Mason County reaching a “moderate” level of COVID cases as outlined by the state Department of Health, along with input by the Mason County Public Health Department.

Under the proposal, Grapeview would begin the “A/B hybrid” format. Half of the students in each grade level would be at the school Mondays and Thursdays, the other half Tuesdays and Fridays. Parents will still have the option to continue with all-remote learning.

The tentative dates to begin the hybrid home/on-site instruction are kindergarten through the second grade Nov. 5; students in grades three to five on Nov. 23; and grades six to eight on Dec. 14.

The safety measures will include wearing face masks, maintaining distance, using proper hygiene and keeping students who not feeling well home. The water fountains have been disabled, and students will need to have and use their own water bottle. For more information, go to the district’s website at [www.gsd54.org](http://www.gsd54.org).

To reduce the spread of the coronavirus, wash your hands often and avoid close contact with others; cover your mouth and nose with a mask around others and always cover your coughs and sneezes; and monitor your health daily and stay home if you are sick or experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms.

# Mason Transit adjusts proposed 2021 budget

By Kirk Boxleitner  
kboxleitner@masoncounty.com

Mason Transit Authority General Manager Danette Brannin introduced the first draft of Mason Transit’s 2021 budget to little fanfare during the MTA’s regular meeting Oct. 20, acknowledging that the coming year’s budget is not routine for Mason Transit.

Brannin and Administrative Services Manager LeeAnn McNulty presented the draft budget to the MTA Board by describing it as maintaining “a conservative approach to revenue forecasting” because revenue is an area where they agreed that 2020 “has taught us that nothing is certain.”

Among the known unknowns of revenue that the draft budget has sought to anticipate is sales tax revenue, which the 2021 draft budget has kept flat with the 2020 budgeted amount, and fare revenue, which has decreased because of fewer riders. Although sales tax revenue remains at historic levels for Mason Transit, Brannin and McNulty expressed management’s belief that these record levels may not be sustainable, and could experience a drop-off in 2021.

Among its other assumptions, the draft forecasts wages and benefits will be down 14% compared with 2020, due to layoffs resulting from COVID-related reductions in service demands, and that operating such reduced service will result in lower fuel and maintenance costs.

Brannin told the *Shelton-Mason County Journal* that she doesn’t expect any of the staff Mason Transit has laid off will be called back to work “anytime soon.”

Running concurrent with these reduced expenses will be some COVID-

related increased expenses. The draft provides a significant increase to Mason Transit’s supplies to cover safety and cleaning supplies as the pandemic persists, and increased operating expenses, including money set aside for public relations and increased communication to the public to promote “a safe return to ridership.”

Brannin told the *Journal* that these budget supplies include personal protective equipment for Mason Transit staff and riders to provide passengers with masks if they have none when they board.

In non-COVID-related areas, the draft budget factors in increases in facility rent and Park and Ride costs stemming from Mason Transit’s temporary office location in Belfair for its drivers, and money for a study to assess the future Park and Ride needs of the Hoodsport and Allyn areas.

As of the 2021 draft budget, Mason Transit’s contracted services now include ongoing software license subscriptions to maintain its Microsoft compliance and to use the technology already in place on the fleet.

“In addition, having received nine new cutaways, along with the replacement of the worker driver fleet, will result in fewer major repairs,” Brannin said.

Brannin reiterated this is the draft budget for 2021, not the final budget, and in addition to the tweaks and revisions she expects to occur, she invited the public to offer their comments at two public hearings in the MTA Transit Community Center Conference Room at 601 W. Franklin St. in Shelton.

The first public hearing is at 4 p.m. today, and the second is scheduled for 4 p.m. Dec. 1, with the MTA Board making its decision on the budget in December after the second public hearing.



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