

MTA already meets new COVID safety standards

By Journal staff
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The state Department of Health recently issued a new set of COVID-19 guidelines for transportation agencies, but Mason Transit Authority already met most of those safety standards.

"We were already living up to all the latest requirements, except for having a physical barrier between passengers and the driver," MTA General Manager Danette Brannin said.

Brannin told the *Shelton-Mason County Journal* that MTA is installing permanent plexiglass barriers, and has installed clear curtains to serve as temporary barriers in the meantime.

Brannin praised the new state guidelines, which she said will "clarify industry standards and help us all ride safely," but at the same time, she emphasized the rigor and quality of the MTA's existing safety standards.

"We have intensely focused on cleaning, physical distancing and

wearing face coverings since last spring," Brannin said. "Personal safety is the priority."

Brannin said that face coverings are required for all employees, riders and others in MTA vehicles and facilities, including the transit community center in Shelton, and are made available to riders who don't have their own face masks.

Hand sanitizer stations are installed on all MTA vehicles, including the front and rear doors of buses, while new barriers and protocols have been established in an effort to maintain physical distancing on MTA vehicles, and in the transit community center.

Riders enter and exit at the rear of the buses whenever possible, with bus rows and seats blocked off to ensure safe distances for those riders as well, Brannin said.

"If a bus is full, another bus or vehicle will be dispatched to pick up the riders who are still waiting at a stop," Brannin said. "We are very careful to ensure no riders are left behind when buses fill up."

Brannin cited preventative measures such as daily employee health screenings and cleanings of "high-touch" surfaces on vehicles as helping keep MTA riders safe.

"We have a COVID-19 coordinator who helps monitor employee health and enforce our safety plan," Brannin said. "Our team is committed to passenger safety."

MTA is continuing to limit the number of riders scheduled for each Dial-a-Ride trip, which should make the shared rides both safer and faster, while its fare-free rides within Mason County not only allow riders to save on pocket change, but also help lower the risk of spreading the disease because tickets or cash don't change hands.

more than four passengers to ensure safe social distancing.

The service is an on-demand ride-share — users call and schedule rides and shuttles typically pick up several people before delivering them to their destinations.

Reservation requests can be made on the same day or up to two weeks in advance.

"Dial-A-Ride is meant for people who need that door-to-destination service, or who are going somewhere not along a regular bus route," Brannin said.

"We help people get to appointments, job interviews and shopping. You name it, and we'll take you there, as long as it's in Mason County and our shuttles can safely get there."

For more information, or to schedule a Dial-A-Ride, call 360-427-5033 or go to www.masontransit.org/dialarideandlinkservice.

Riders for out-of-county trips can purchase tickets online or through the Token Transit mobile app, although the fare box is still available for out-of-county trips.

Dial-A-Ride offers door-to-destination service

Dial-A-Ride uses accessible 14-16 passenger shuttle vans, allowing no



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