

## Oak Harbor Senior Center Outreach, 9/5/14

Total number of seniors who commented on the public transportation system: **24**

*Senior Center comments; those not in quotes are paraphrased.*

### **Female, disabled senior**

She lives below the poverty level and has been riding Paratransit since 2005. “I would be lost without Paratransit.” She has no driver’s license and no vehicle. Feels Island Transit/Paratransit are “very clear” on how to sign up and use the system—she places a phone call, and there are prompts after that for scheduling. Recalls the customer service from when she first signed up; a representative came to her home to do an interview. She now has a laminated photo ID card for Paratransit, which she appreciates. She talked at length about her gratitude for the kindness and familiarity of the Island Transit drivers.

She sometimes sees younger people using the buses, including some with mental and physical disabilities who receive transport to and from Oak Harbor schools. “Paratransit is my family, just like the staff here is my family.” She remarked on the courtesy of the drivers, who will also carry items to the rider’s door if they need help. She said a Paratransit driver visited her in the hospital last year, and that meant a great deal to her.

### **Female, senior with glaucoma**

“Paratransit is a necessity.” The system is on time, but sometimes comes too early. There is often a long span of time to wait for the return ride; in excess of two hours. She walks 1.5 miles to the bus stop, but can’t walk uphill so they drop her off at her home. Her most frequent trip is to medical appointments. She expects Island Transit to be conservative with funds and feels the system is abused by those not needing what she calls “necessary” services—hair appointments vs. medical appointments, etc. She feels it should be preserved for those riders who need it for more critical purposes. She also feels Island Transit needs to bring back Saturday service. “The senior population is growing, and they (are willing to) pay to ride.”

### **Male, disabled senior**

“The money (at Island Transit) is going to the fancy offices. There’s a misappropriation of funds. They need to can a few people at the top.”

### **Female, senior with macular degeneration**

Can no longer drive; says Paratransit is “great.” If not for Paratransit, she would have to sit home five days per week. She mostly uses the system to access social activities like the Senior Center luncheons and gatherings, and eats at the Senior Center 3 days per week (\$4 per meal). Her son lives nearby and is able to take her to most medical appointments, but he works full time and this is inconvenient. Reiterates that she would be “stuck at home” were it not for Paratransit.

### **Male, disabled senior, 28-year Army veteran**

Paratransit should be improved, especially on the Southern part of Whidbey Island—they lack (adequate) service. “Take the politics out of it, and get back to basics.” Island and Skagit Transit need to partner with the “Metra.” He needs to get

to King County's VA hospital, but the Disabled American Veterans van goes the hard way up and around Whidbey Island and it takes too long and leaves too early in the morning. Feels Island Transit is especially useful because it's free, but they should install a "token box" if they can't afford to keep the current services. "Charge money!"

**Male, senior**

"I got rid of my car when I moved here from Houston. The public transit system is cheaper than having a car, paying insurance, et cetera. I use them mostly to get to my medical appointments in Coupeville. I hardly need a car."

**Male, senior**

"I'm very impressed with Paratransit. The drivers are very friendly, and I've been riding since 2005. In all that time, I've only seen one driver act like he had a bad day." Feels that increased public transportation leads to more jobs and higher employment.

**Male and female, senior spouses**

"There is a lack of coordination between transit agencies and ferry system—this leads to hostility." His ferry was once late by 15 minutes, and he missed the last bus and was left at the ferry dock. Luckily he had a friend who could give him a ride from Clinton ferry to Oak Harbor. Feels strongly that late ferries should coordinate with transit system so no one is left without a ride.

"Some people are trying to end the fee bus system altogether because they think it's socialist that everyone pays and only some use it." He and his wife would be happy to pay additional taxes to keep it going. Tax cuts are damaging; "taxes run the country." Island Transit needs sustainable funding plan—not "mismanagement."

The schedule of the buses doesn't fit peoples' needs. "Why does the bus run at 8:30am instead of 7:30am?" People could get to work; they could have two buses coming on and off Whidbey Island every morning. "Instead, we see hundreds of cars."

-Notes by Liz Theaker, SCOG intern.