



PRESS RELEASE

Kitsap Transit pauses expansion of Sunday bus service

Board directs staff to evaluate potential financial impacts of Initiative 2117

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BREMERTON, Wash. – Kitsap Transit is pausing the start of Sunday bus service in Port Orchard, Silverdale and Poulsbo to give the agency time to evaluate the potential financial impact of a November ballot initiative that would repeal the state’s Climate Commitment Act. The Sunday service expansion was scheduled to go into effect on Sunday, March 10.

At a Feb. 20 meeting, Executive Director John Clauson told the Kitsap Transit Board of Commissioners he would examine the possible impacts of Initiative 2117 (I-2117) on the agency’s budget and prepare a contingency plan.

If passed, I-2117 would repeal the state’s 2021 Climate Commitment Act (CCA), which the Legislature estimated would provide \$5.4 billion over 16 years to transit and other transportation programs.

In the 2023-2025 biennium, Kitsap Transit received \$5.276 million on an annual basis in CCA funds for transit operations and additional funds to support its paratransit (*ACCESS*) services. In addition, Kitsap Transit has used CCA funds to develop inductive charging capability at its transit bases and accelerate work on an all-electric ferry to operate its local foot ferry routes in Sinclair Inlet.

“We need to pause this Sunday service expansion until we’ve had the opportunity to evaluate all the impacts we could face from I-2117 and give our Board the time to consider changes to our roadmap should we lose Climate Commitment funding,” Clauson said.

Last September, Kitsap Transit launched Sunday bus service in Bremerton, the first of three phases for rolling it out across Kitsap County. Kitsap Transit planned to start Sunday bus service in Poulsbo, Silverdale and Port Orchard in late 2023 and Bainbridge Island in early 2024 but was forced to delay implementation due to a bus operator shortage. The latest delay is not due to a shortage of bus operators and will not affect the existing Sunday bus service in Bremerton.

At the Feb. 20 Board meeting, Kitsap Transit staff shared plans to restore bus services that were cut in 2020 after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The near-term roadmap includes restoring trips on North Kitsap bus routes -- such as half-hour service on Routes 344 and 390 and all-day service on Route 91 -- and later evening service on certain bus routes across the county. A further expansion of bus service, as envisioned in Kitsap Transit's Long-Range Transit Plan, will require more revenue to pay for it.

"If we want to do a whole lot more, we're going to have to have the discussion of how are we going to pay for it because we're right now doing the extent that we can," Clauson told the Board at its Feb. 20 meeting. "With the potential of the Climate Commitment Act being repealed by the initiative, we're going to have to have a discussion about what do we change, what do we do."

At the meeting, Commissioners said they were wary of Kitsap Transit expanding services with I-2117 on the ballot and potential loss of state funding if voters approve it in November.

"If it gutted \$5 million a year out of our operation and we're faced with service cuts, that's a different conversation," said Port Orchard Mayor Rob Putaansuu. "I think we should be considering talking to our voters about what they want out of our transit agency."

A contingency plan would help the Board understand the financial repercussions if I-2117 passes, said Kitsap County Commissioner Christine Rolfes, as well as guide decisions on service expansion between April and December of this year.

"Why start something and then take it away?" Rolfes said.

Poulsbo Mayor Becky Erickson added that if I-2117 passes, the agency will need to take a hard look at capital projects, which require local dollars as a match. "We're going to have to see that balancing between service delivery and capital expansion," she said. "In other words, I'd rather have the service than the new shiny things."

Kitsap Transit will develop a contingency plan and bring it to the Board in the coming months.

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About Kitsap Transit

Kitsap Transit has been operating friendly, convenient public transit since 1983. The transit agency for Kitsap County carried more than 3.84 million riders in 2019 across a multi-modal system of routed buses, passenger ferries, paratransit shuttles, vanpools, and worker/driver buses for the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard.

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