

Bus route changes designed to serve rural areas

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By Sam Kenyon



Courtesy King County Metro

This map shows the new bus routes serving the Valley.

King County Metro Transit has re-thought the bus system in the Snoqualmie Valley.

In an effort to make routes more cost efficient and improve metro services, particularly in rural or low-population areas, King County is experimenting with what they call Alternative Service Delivery. Six weeks ago several systematic changes were made to multiple bus routes in the Valley. The changes are part of an effort to do more with less.

"Why would we pour a lot of resources into routes that weren't carrying very many people?" said Matt Hansen, the Supervisor of Market Development for Seattle Metro.

The King County Council charged Metro with finding alternative solutions to inefficient bus routes. The council encouraged Metro to approach the issue with novel solutions.

"This project is a challenge for us to be creative," Hansen said.

In one of the biggest policy changes, a Valley Shuttle has been created to provide transportation between North Bend, Snoqualmie, Fall City, Carnation, and Duvall. From 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays the Valley Shuttle runs every 90 minutes. The Shuttle has a fixed route everywhere except North Bend and Duvall, where it offers variable scheduling. This means passengers call the Shuttle to arrange custom pick-up or drop-off locations that are not part of any regular bus stop.

To provide this service, Metro has partnered with the Snoqualmie Tribe and Snoqualmie Valley Transportation (SVT). This partnership was crucial for implementing the new programs. Hansen said that the changes could not have happened without the partnership of the tribe and SVT.

"This is a better, more attractive service because the tribe helped make it happen," he said.

SVT is a local non-profit bus company in Snoqualmie Valley, and their organization will be operating the Valley Shuttle. The service is open to the public and during intra-valley trips will have a suggested donation policy. "It's terrifically successful," said Amy Biggs, Director of SVT. "The riders of the Valley have been overwhelmingly positive in their support."

Ridership for the new shuttle already exceeds 50 people a day and is expected to rise in the near future as awareness of the new service increases.

"They have never done anything quite like this before," said Biggs.

A new bus line has also been established. Route 208 provides hourly service between North Bend and Issaquah, including stops along Snoqualmie Ridge, during weekdays and Saturdays.

The old Route 209 now only runs during peak commute times which are Monday through Friday, 6-9 a.m. and 3-6 p.m., where it runs the opposite direction of Route 208. Route 224 has been given extended trips and will offer timed connections with the Valley Shuttle in Duvall and the Redmond Transit Center.

Route 311 has been shortened to serve the Woodinville Park-and-Ride only. To reach downtown Seattle, riders may use Routes 224 and 232 to connect to Sound Transit Route 545 and the Redmond Transit Center.

These policy changes are a part of a broader effort by King County Metro to more cost-effectively serve areas. Metro and the council have embraced new, innovative solutions to these goals. Part of their inspiration for the new policies came from encouraging public feedback and genuinely considering the solicited opinions.

"It's really important to go out and find out, 'what do people really need?'" Hansen said. "Are we doing something that's responsive or are we doing it because that's what we've done forever?"

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