

SNOQUALMIE VALLEY RECORD

Opinion | A real ride on the Valley bus

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A young man in a black, hooded jacket boards the bus by the credit union, takes his seat, and slips on headphones. On an iPod, he clicks on some of his favorite Ozzy Osbourne songs. But the rock can wait as he tells his story.

Garth is in his early 20s, and the Snoqualmie Valley Transportation bus is his link between Transitional Learning Classes at Mount Si and home in North Bend. For a buck, he's got a lift that's safer than a walk in the rain or hitchhiking across town.

Garth got grief on the school bus. Riding the SVT for more than two years, he's never looked back.

I had the chance last week to ride along with Garth, and the driver, Steve, on the shuttle route.

Besides Garth, in an hour, two other passengers hopped on in a slow Tuesday afternoon. A teen went home from Encompass. A woman embarked from the North Bend Library. Steve got a call for a pick-up at Snoqualmie casino, but the two women, who were there for a job interview and hoping to catch a connection with King County Metro Transit in the Valley, couldn't be found when we got there. Presumably they found another ride.

For SVT to really take off, services like Steve's shuttle should be used more. A buck is a great deal to get around the Valley, and the shuttle runs hourly, 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays. With time, SVT's shuttle will add stops. But for the moment, hop on a hub—Snoqualmie's downtown laundromat, the library, Mount Si Senior Center, or Safeway—and ride.

SVT is homegrown. Dispatchers work out of a small office at the senior center. The fare box is a wicker basket filled with singles—but Steve shows me punch cards for regulars, not a bad idea. Yes, there are gaps in service—unaccompanied children under 13 can't ride—and in hours, and on weekdays, but it's a start, and it's something with promise.

As David Egan, the Ames Lake man who relies on public transit but can't often get it, puts it, these options make sense: It's more important than ever to bring people together.

We may not be the big city, but there's no reason why guys like Garth should have to hitchhike in the rain in Snoqualmie. Cars are great, highways are vital, but not everyone drives.

So, while the agencies, Metro, Snoqualmie Tribe, the cities, work with the big numbers, year in and out, to keep these buses rolling, there's something very simple that any Valley resident can do to help: Ride the bus. Catch the shuttle on an evening or afternoon. See where it takes you. Think about the possibilities. About the hard

choices. And the potential: More routes, more riders, more connectivity. Easy, low-cost ways to get around the community, or bring back options to places like Ames Lake and Carnation. We're only beginning.

Let's fill this bus up, and see where it can take us.

- To book a ride, call (425) 888-7001 or (425) 333-5554; Learn more at www.snoqualmi-tribe.com/content/transportation or at <http://mtsi-seniorcenter.org/svt.html>

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