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More buses on the way: Balancing act, changes coming to Snoqualmie Valley transit | Photos



Carol Ladwig/Staff Photo

Nearly all of the Snoqualmie Valley Transportation staff gathered for a photo with key SVT partners recently, and to acknowledge a \$15,000 grant from King County Councilwoman Kathy Lambert. Pictured from left are: front - dispatcher Mike Antone with staff dog Oso, driver Gary Martin, dispatcher Jonathan Nelson, Jake Repin with the Snoqualmie Tribe, King County Councilwoman Kathy Lambert, driver Scott Murray, and Snoqualmie Mayor Matt Larson; back, driver Monique Vanderford, SVT director Amy Biggs, and Mount Si Senior Center Director BJ Libby.

By [CAROL LADWIG](#)

Snoqualmie Valley Record Staff Reporter

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Metro is revamping bus service in the Snoqualmie Valley again, and regular riders have braced themselves for more bad news, more routes to be cut due to low ridership. They can relax, says

Amy Biggs, future executive director of Snoqualmie Valley Transportation, because this round of changes will actually bring more service to most of the Valley.

"They (King County Metro Transit) listened to every single rider on the buses here... and they actually doubled the number of routes!" Biggs said. "What they're doing is amazing, and I think everybody should know about it!"

It's true that the biggest change is a cut, but it's a cut with a replacement service. The Route 224 bus makes its last run between Snoqualmie and Duvall on Sept. 27, but the next day, when Metro's five-year plan for alternative services in the Snoqualmie Valley starts, the little white SVT buses will be on the 224 route, running up and down the Valley every 90 minutes.

The new Intra-Valley Shuttle Service from SVT is a big part of Metro's future plans, Metro supervisor Matt Hansen told the North Bend City Council at its May 7 meeting. Hansen was there to give an overview of Metro's proposed changes, and to answer any questions.

"We're not actually proposing to reduce any services," Hansen emphasized.

Instead, Metro has committed to, and the King County Council on Monday, May 13, approved a five-year plan that will replace all or parts of three routes in the Valley with expanded service from Snoqualmie Valley Transportation, and add a new route with peak access from the North Bend Park and Ride, through Snoqualmie Ridge, to the Issaquah Transit Center.

"From the standpoint of a North Bend citizen, the only thing that's changing here is that if you still want mid-day access to Issaquah via Preston and North Bend, you have to go through the Snoqualmie Ridge," Hansen said.

The proposal, developed with feedback from more than 500 bus riders in the Valley and more than 14 community groups, calls for:- Contracting with SVT for Intra-Valley Shuttle service, with trips from North Bend to Duvall every 90 minutes from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.- Reducing outbound trips on Route 209 to three trips each morning and afternoon, and eliminating the Northwest 14th Street to Boalch Avenue Northwest to S.R. 202 loop. - Creating a Route 208 to provide service between North Bend and Issaquah via Snoqualmie and Snoqualmie Ridge middays, evenings and Saturdays.- Cutting the Snoqualmie to Duvall portion of Route 224, but adding a loop through Redmond Ridge. - Cutting the Woodinville to Duvall portion of Route 311.

Hansen said the cost of the shuttle service, fully subsidized by Metro, would be about \$400,000, plus some startup costs this year. The service will also continue to operate under its demand-response, or dial-a-ride model within North Bend, Snoqualmie and Fall City, using its own buses and funding.

A few councilmen asked pointed questions of Hansen following his presentation.

David Cook asked approximately how much Metro funding, in terms of bus fares, property tax support, congestion reduction fees, and so on came to Metro from North Bend citizens.

Hansen said it was roughly \$7 million, and that Metro provided the city with roughly \$6 million worth of service hours.

Ross Loudenback commented on how frustrating that was for the city. "We send in a lot," he said, but service tends to get cut first in such smaller communities. "We do have concerns that we're the first on the chopping block," he added.

Hansen assured him, "Metro will not eliminate last connections (between cities, transit centers and other areas of transportation activity), and the Intra-Valley Shuttle Network is a last connection."

In a follow-up phone call, Hansen told the Record, "We're maintaining the last connection, because we can get you to Duvall, then to Redmond through the 224."

Local opinion SVT is not the last, but the only connection that some of its riders have for transportation. Last fall, for instance, Cleo Krenzler said she had to give up driving after developing macular degeneration in both her eyes, so she was a regular bus rider, and one of many.

"We move 36,000 people a year," said Biggs, for everything from daily job commutes, to shopping, to socializing. "Without transportation, a lot of people end up losing everything."

When the service lost funding last fall and had to shrink, cutting out all trips to the Lower Valley, she said, they scrambled to find ways to keep offering the service.

"These are such wonderful, caring people, it hurt them to tell someone 'no, we can't help you at that time,'" Biggs said.

They raised fares -- to \$1 per trip -- and required at least three days notice for rides, so they could build schedules that kept the service running efficiently, if a little less conveniently for riders. Later, they added a fixed route from North Bend to Fall City, called "the loop" to the service. The loop bus circulates through six regular stops and all three cities throughout the day, picking up riders from outlying areas and shuttling them on to their destinations. It also doesn't require an appointment.

"It's nice because people know, if they're at one of the stops, that within an hour, a bus will be there," said Biggs.

The regular stops include the Mount Si Senior Center in North Bend, the Snoqualmie Casino, Snoqualmie Coin Laundry, Sno-Falls Credit Union in Snoqualmie, the North Bend Library, and North Bend Safeway.

The loop is an efficiency that has helped to keep the struggling service operating as it comes to the end of a two-year funding cycle. Starting July 1, SVT will begin a new season, supported by a two-year \$700,000 grant from the state Department of Transportation (WSDOT), and will restore demand-response service to the lower Valley.

The state funding is separate from the Metro contract that will begin in September, although the services will share the administrative staff and drivers. They might share equipment, too, since none of the Intra-Valley Shuttle buses Metro will provide will have ORCA card readers. All shuttle rides will be offered for a suggested donation of \$1.

Metro, like SVT, is always in need of additional funding, however. The new five-year plan will actually cost Metro more to implement in the coming year, Hansen said, but should result in savings of \$40,000 or less in the following years. He also said the plan is not dependent on the outcome of any state legislature decisions regarding local funding options for transit systems.

"We would be doing this anyway, whether we were getting more funding or not," he said.

For specific details on the proposed changes, visit <http://metro.kingcounty.gov/have-a-say/projects/alternative-service/snoqualmie-valley.html>.



Amy Biggs is currently working part-time with Snoqualmie Valley Transportation, but takes over July 1 as the full-time executive director of the service, currently based in the Mount Si Senior Center. SVT will begin a contract with Metro Transit in September to restore service, via the Intra-Valley Shuttle, from North Bend to Duvall.



After acknowledging a recent \$15,000 grant from King County Councilwoman Kathy Lambert to Snoqualmie Valley Transportation, SVT staff and officials briefly discussed transportation in the Snoqualmie Valley and an upcoming survey being sent to all households in the Upper Valley. From left, driver Gary Martin, SVT director Amy Biggs, driver Monique Vanderford, communications director for Councilwoman Lambert Ross Marzolf, Snoqualmie Mayor Matt Larson, and Lambert.



Valley transportation advocates, from left, Jake Repin, Snoqualmie Tribe Operations, Amy Biggs, incoming Snoqualmie Valley Transportation Executive Director, King County Councilwoman Kathy Lambert and Snoqualmie Mayor Matt Larson.

Contact Snoqualmie Valley Record Staff Reporter Carol Ladwig at cladwig@valleyrecord.com.

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