

Getting from point to point not a given in rural areas, but Snoqualmie Valley Transportation is quietly bringing change

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Like a lot of people in the Snoqualmie Valley, David Egan takes his dog, Bernie, everywhere with him. For Egan, it's not just nice to have the mellow Golden Retriever at his side, it's necessary. Egan is blind and relies on the guide dog for his own safety. In the same way, he relies on public transportation to get him to medical appointments, to his gym, and to his volunteer work, and says everyone should be able to use the service.

"It should just be a given. Every single person should have that," the Ames Lake man said.

In rural areas like the Snoqualmie Valley, though, transportation isn't always a given. Egan refers to himself as "a transit-dependent" person, and says he watched with growing concern as Metro bus routes and dial-a-ride services were shrunk and then eliminated in the past two decades.

His main bus route, the one that enabled him to get to his teaching job at Benjamin Rush Elementary School, lasted until 2010, just a few years after his retirement.

"When they cut the route, I was stranded at home," he said.

At the time, he and his wife, Susan, seriously thought about giving up their beloved home to move closer to the bus services David used. They chose to stay, relying on Metro's dial-a-ride service and later Snoqualmie Valley Transportation, which began covering the entire valley with fixed-route and shared-ride options through contracts with Metro to provide those services.

David, of course, also asks his wife to drive him where he needs to go but said he won't create the "unfair burden" of always expecting her to be available for his transportation. "I don't want to use anybody."

Uber and Lyft aren't viable choices for him, he says, because not all drivers want a dog in their cars, and the service isn't always available in his area.

Also, he says, he wants to ride the bus, to support the service, to show up in the rider reports, and to work his dog in various situations.

"Sometimes, I wish everybody had to be travel-dependent, so they'd understand," he says.



PHOTO: David Egan, with his guide dog Bernie. Photo courtesy of Snoqualmie Valley Transportation/Carol Ladwig

To help spread that understanding, and to advocate for what he feels is an essential government service, Egan has taken an active role in transportation advisory groups such as the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative, King County Mobility Coalition, and Snoqualmie Valley Transportation Coalition, all of which are open to anyone interested in participating.

The funding model for public transportation, typically based on levels of ridership, are frustrating to him, since they usually lead to cuts in rural service areas first.

"It really bothers me that people, and classes of people, should be pitted against each other," he said. "It's not fair to compete for dollars. Somebody's always going to lose in that scenario."

And the loss is significant. Egan recalled his first trip to Carnation on the Snoqualmie Valley Transportation door-to-door service after he'd been "stranded" at home for a while. "I went to the hardware store, I got a haircut, I was like a little kid!"

Without public transportation, he would lose most of his independence, he said, and it's not a good feeling to constantly worry about more funding cuts to this crucial service.

Snoqualmie Valley Transportation has provided the solution to most of his transportation needs, picking him up at his home with its demand-response service, and dropping him off at requested locations or a bus stop for the shuttles – Snoqualmie Valley Shuttle, covering North Bend to Duvall every 90 minutes, or the Duvall-Monroe Shuttle, looping through Monroe and back to Duvall every 90 minutes. All rides on SVT buses are a \$1 suggested donation.

“I see Snoqualmie Valley Transportation as being an example for other transit service providers,” Egan said. “They’re thinking beyond the dollars of the routes. They’re thinking it’s a service that should just be a given.”

Learn more about Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative: www.eastsideeasyrider.org

Learn more about King County Mobility Coalition: www.metro.kingcounty.gov/advisory-groups/mobility-coalition

Learn more about Snoqualmie Valley Transportation: www.svtbus.org