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KITSAP TRANSIT BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING
MINUTES OF February 17, 2026

Board of Commissioners Present:
Driskell, Robert, Teamsters Local No. 589, *non-voting member, Absent*
Mockler, Anna, Councilmember, City of Bremerton
Moriwaki, Clarence, Mayor, City of Bainbridge Island, **Vice Chair**
Putaansuu, Robert, Mayor, City of Port Orchard
Rolfes, Christine, Kitsap County Commissioner, *Virtual*
Root, Oran, Kitsap County Commissioner, *Virtual*
Rosapepe, Jay, Councilmember, City of Port Orchard, *Absent*
Stern, Ed, Mayor, City of Poulsbo
Walters, Katie, Kitsap County Commissioner, **Chair**
Wheeler, Greg, Mayor, City of Bremerton

Staff Present:
Jackie Bidon, Clerk of the Board, Public Records Officer; Michael Bozarth, Operations Director; John Clauson, Executive Director; Dennis Griffey, Vehicle and Facilities Maintenance Director; Steffani Lillie, Service and Capital Development Director; Charlotte Sampson, Executive Assistant/Deputy Clerk of the Board; Paul Shinners, Finance Director; Nick Zylstra, Marine Services Director

Also Present: David Weibel, Legal Counsel, *Virtual*

Select the video Zoom address below or copy and paste into your browser address field to hear the Kitsap Transit Board of Commissioners discussion of a specific topic, or the complete meeting. Note the video time stamp beside the topic.
https://kitsaptransit.zoom.us/rec/share/7vsOEsRtYGnIwZ87t2Y7GVdslI6xB9B8P_L6VoCx-ww6TYmxVqPcjz_vm6_GKylH.ZviUkERTp3dd_OLv Passcode: iH13n$@w

1. CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Commissioner Walters called the meeting of the Kitsap Transit Board of Commissioners to order at 8:32 AM.

2. AGENDA REVIEW

Upon review by the Board, the agenda remained unchanged.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S COMMENTS

Commissioner Walters commented on the success of Kitsap Transit's response to the Seahawks parade, its positive customer experience and flexibility in adding another boat to move fans to the event.

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0:02:03, Executive Director Clauson stated that Kitsap Transit is using this event as a learning tool for the World Cup experience. He credited staff for the outstanding job of pulling this together, noting that they all did a great job.

4. FULL DISCUSSION / ACTION ITEMS

a. Presentation - Passengers per Revenue Hour

00:02:36, Executive Director Clauson shared that at a previous meeting there were comments regarding the Ridership Report and performance. He requested Ed Coviello present information and background with perspective from the transit industry and what their peers are reporting.

0:03:34, Transportation and Land Use Planner Ed Coviello, began the presentation on Passengers Per Revenue Hour, focusing on the Routed service compared to their peers in Washington. He shared that Kitsap Transit is unique in that there is not an agency the same. He cited sources of data used as the National Transit Database and WSDOT 2024 Summary of Public Transportation reports. Every year transit agencies submit ridership, financials, and other information to the State Department of Transportation where they summarize the information and publish a report each December.

Mr. Coviello highlighted that Kitsap Transit's 13.4 passengers per hour for fixed route services in 2024 was lower than the state average of 18.73, with King County Metro and Pullman Transit reporting higher figures.

0:06:17, Commissioner Rolfes requested clarification on the reference to “bus,” asking if that means per bus.

Mr. Coviello replied that “bus” references routed or fixed route.

0:06:31, Mayor Moriwaki requested information on how Kitsap Transit transitioned into a large urban agency when much of their service area is rural and dispersed.

0:06:37, Mr. Coviello reported that the U.S. Census defines urbanized areas by using aerial imagery to draw boundaries around locations that meet specific population or employment density thresholds. Once those boundaries are set, the total population within them determines the official size of the urbanized area. In 2010, the region fell just below the 200,000 person threshold. However, subsequent growth pushed the population above 200,000 by 2020, moving the area into a new classification category. Mr. Coviello noted that the increase was slight but sufficient to shift the designation.

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Mr. Coviello discussed Kitsap Transit's transition into the large urban category and the challenges of serving a dispersed population. They compared their ridership metrics to peer agencies and noted changes in travel patterns due to COVID-19.

0:08:31, Commissioner Walters stated that the report indicates that the systemwide average for bus service is 13.45 revenue hours, meaning Kitsap Transit carries an average of 13.45 riders per service hour across the whole system.

0:08:50, Executive Director Clauson explained that the report focuses on fixed-route service, including the Worker/Driver program, and is structured to allow direct comparison with peer agencies and their reporting methods. He confirmed that routed service and Worker/Driver are the two programs included in this performance category.

0:09:30, Mr. Coviello continued by listing the peer agencies reviewed for routed bus service, including agencies in Washington State as well as agencies in other states with similar geography.

0:15:41, Councilmember Mockler asked about the impact of the Olympic College pilot program on ridership, noting that systems with college connections often show higher ridership. She asked whether data is available on how the pilot affected Kitsap Transit's ridership figures.

0:16:10, Executive Director Clauson responded that data is available on how many students rode and how frequently during the Olympic College pilot program. However, because the pilot operated for a relatively short period, it is unlikely to have had a significant effect on annual ridership totals. He shared that if they did have a program with Olympic College, then they would certainly see an uptick in the passenger per hour.

0:16:39, Mr. Coviello continued with an overview of changes since 2020, noting that COVID-19 significantly affected travel behavior. He explained that more people continue to work from home, overall demographics have shifted, and the system now serves more occasional riders such as those commuting only two or three days per week or traveling to access services. The strong commuter demand that previously drove ridership has diminished. He added that Kitsap Transit has increased service frequency, including half-hour headways from Poulsbo south through the system. While expanding frequency increases service hours, it takes time for riders to adjust to and utilize more frequent service. Ridership is growing, but sustained higher frequencies typically require years to generate substantial increases. Mr. Coviello also noted that land-use patterns play a significant role in long-term ridership growth.

0:19:37, Mayor Stern asked about current farebox recovery for routed service and requested the percentage figure.

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0:20:00, Finance Director Paul Shinners responded that he did not have the specific farebox recovery percentage for routed service available at the meeting. He noted that routed service and marine service differ significantly, with marine service recovering approximately 20 percent. He stated that routed service recovery is considerably lower and that he will provide the exact figures for Board members.

0:20:35, Mayor Stern reiterated his interest in evaluating the viability of fare-free routed bus service, like models used in other jurisdictions such as Clallam County. He emphasized the importance of understanding both the potential benefits and tradeoffs, beginning with the current farebox recovery percentage for routed service. Mayor Stern suggested that, depending on the recovery rate, it may be appropriate to consider budgeting for a formal study in 2027.

0:21:29, Mayor Puttaansuu acknowledged the interest in exploring fare-free routed service and noted that while such an approach would be appealing, farebox recovery is already low across public transit systems. He emphasized the importance of reviewing not only the recovery percentage but also the total dollar amount involved, as eliminating fares would require identifying several million dollars in reductions elsewhere in the system to offset the loss.

0:22:01, Finance Director Paul Shinners noted that farebox recovery for non-marine services is even lower than the marine service rate previously discussed. He stated that the total dollar amount, eliminating fares, would create a significant financial gap. Shinners explained that the agency's five-year outlook, updated twice annually, shows a declining cash position due to the combination of capital project commitments and operating costs. He emphasized that while fare-free service is not impossible, it would require making substantial budgetary choices to offset the loss of revenue.

0:22:50, Commissioner Rolfes asked when the remaining software would be installed on the buses to allow the agency to track boardings and alightings by route and stop. She noted that having this data will be important before engaging in any discussion about fare policy.

0:23:17, Executive Director Clauson reported that the automated passenger-counting system is currently in its certification phase. Staff are conducting manual ride checks to compare against the automated data to ensure accuracy. He stated that the agency is hopeful the system will be certified later this year, allowing its use for National Transit Database reporting and meeting Federal Transit Administration requirements. The system is installed and operational, but not yet certified; however, staff have begun using it for limited internal information needs.

0:25:30, Services and Capital Development Director Steffani Lillie shared that while the automated passenger counting data is available for internal review, it cannot be officially used, published, or presented as validated information until the system receives full certification.

0:25:36, Executive Director Clauson reported that during the recent Seahawks event, staff used the

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opportunity to observe the automated passenger counting system in real time. A service planner and supervisor monitored bus load factors from the operations room, allowing staff to see how the data could support decisions such as dispatching additional buses when vehicles approach capacity. He noted that while the system is being actively used and evaluated, they are not yet comfortable relying on it operationally.

0:26:18, Councilmember Mockler revisited the discussion on fare-free service and that Kitsap Transit currently incurs costs to purchase, install, maintain, and replace fareboxes, including staffing dedicated to that function. She added that fare-free pilot programs in other systems have shown important non-monetary benefits, such as reducing conflicts between passengers and operators and improving both perceived and actual operator safety. She requested bringing the topic forward for a future budget discussion and agreed that having complete ridership data will be essential before evaluating fare policy options.

0:27:25, Mayor Wheeler stated that if the Board is going to consider reducing or eliminating fares, it is important to first clarify the purpose. If the goal is to increase ridership, he questioned how fare changes compare to other factors such as reliability and frequency, and whether the system is convenient enough for riders to shift from their current modes of travel. He noted that small fare savings alone is unlikely to motivate such a shift. Mayor Wheeler added that other considerations such as operator safety or potential efficiencies in fare collection may warrant discussion, but he does not anticipate that lowering fares would significantly increase ridership.

0:28:41, Commissioner Rolfes asked whether the Board could agree to pause further discussion on fare policy until it begins developing its work plan for the coming year, stating that the topic arises frequently.

0:28:57, Board members agreed to pause further discussion on fare-free transit.

b. Presentation – Bus Shelters Installation and Process

0:29:21, Executive Director Clauson shared that this topic has been raised at previous board meetings and provided a brief overview of the process and costs involved in installing a bus shelter. He added that the agency has applied for a grant that, if awarded, would fund the purchase of additional shelters. He explained that the information presented is intended to give the Board a baseline understanding of what is required to install a shelter, and that the process is more complex than in the past.

0:30:00, Edward Coviello reviewed the process, requirements, ADA compliance, Public Right-of-Way Access Guidelines (PROWAG) and Title VI Civil Rights Act for the approximately 1,400 stops in the Kitsap Transit network, including 159 currently with shelters. He presented the bus stop shelter installation process including determination of need, location, requests, cost, design, feasibility, and whether a contractor is required. With the new ADA requirements, Kitsap Transit

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must hire a civil engineer to design access points, make sure the slope is correct, and measurements at the proposed site. The current Board approved budget included $100,000 for improving bus stops; Kitsap Transit's estimated cost per location is $36,000, not including the shelter.

Mr. Coviello provided an overview of the newly adopted PROWAG guidelines. These guidelines were issued by the U.S. Access Board and the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) in September 2024, and USDOT finalized them through regulation in December 2024. Under these requirements, an ADA-accessible path must be provided from the point of the bus stop to the shelter location and through the full extent of the bus stop area. Beyond that limit, responsibility shifts to the jurisdiction that owns the surrounding right-of-way. He emphasized the importance of connecting bus stops to existing ADA-compliant pedestrian circulation paths whenever possible. In many areas of our service region, Kitsap Transit can construct an ADA-compliant bus stop, but the adjacent jurisdictional right-of-way may or may not meet ADA standards. Compliance will therefore depend on local conditions and coordination with the jurisdictions responsible.

Mr. Coviello outlined several challenges associated with upgrading existing bus stops and shelters to meet ADA requirements. These include the cost and duration of concrete work, gaps in sidewalk connections, lack of accessible paths to certain stops, topography and grade constraints, right-of-way limitations, and stormwater or drainage ditch conflicts. He noted that staff are currently evaluating improvements at approximately 40 bus stops, a program expected to take two to three years to complete.

0:55:38, Mayor Moriwaki expressed concerns regarding the current design, which does not include bus stops at the roundabout on Bainbridge Island at High School Road and Highway 305. Mr. Coviello responded that the design team will be incorporating those stops into the project.

0:56:01, Mayor Stern inquired about the varying levels of bus shelters and noted that passengers' primary concern is protection from the rain. Mr. Coviello explained that all shelters must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, including providing sufficient space for a wheelchair to maneuver within the shelter.

0:57:14, Executive Director Clauson noted that standardization of shelters is beneficial for long-term maintenance, as it simplifies repairs and replacement. He added that, as Mr. Coviello mentioned, the shelter structure itself is not the most significant cost in constructing a bus stop. While shelters can be expensive, particularly larger models, the market offers a wide range of options from multiple vendors, as seen at the APTA Expo. He emphasized the importance of

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standardization, ADA accessibility, and providing basic weather protection. He also remarked that shelter designs can range from a standard structure to, at the most minimal level, the personal "shelter" many riders already carry: an umbrella.

0:58:33, Mayor Wheeler cautioned that each jurisdiction operates under its own budget structure, permit fees, and rate systems, and emphasized the importance of keeping these differences in mind.

0:59:48, Mayor Putaansuu commented that the fee charged for a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review is reasonable. He noted that, although this is a government-to-government transaction, some may question whether it raises concerns about gifting. Such concerns can lead to a slippery slope regarding where those boundaries are drawn.

1:00:44, Councilmember Mockler suggested exploring the option of retrofitting buses with hydraulic lifts that meet ADA standards.

1:01:05, Executive Director Clauson clarified that buses are already equipped with either hydraulic lifts or low-floor designs with fold-out ramps, so boarding the vehicle is not the issue. He explained that ADA requirements relate to accessing the shelter, remaining safely within the shelter, and transitioning from the shelter to the lift or ramp.

1:02:26, Mayor Stern suggested providing umbrellas in canisters at bus stops that do not have shelters.

1:03:02, Executive Director Clauson stated that, although staff had not previously considered that idea, Kitsap Transit could explore trying it.

a. Discussion – Passenger Only Ferry Dock, Pier 48 Seattle

1:03:50, Executive Director Clauson reported that progress on the development of a new passenger-only ferry terminal in Seattle has been paused due to uncertainty surrounding the removal of Pier 48, which is currently owned by Washington State Ferries (WSF). Kitsap Transit has been proceeding under the assumption that WSF would remove the pier and fund the demolition. However, WSF has twice requested legislative funding for this work, and those requests have not been approved. As a result, WSF has informed the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) that it is not currently planning to remove the pier due to lack of funding.

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Because the existing pier remains in place, Kitsap Transit cannot advance its terminal project as designed. Clauson explained that without a path forward, the project risks significant delay, and prior work dating back to 2018 risks becoming outdated. He outlined potential alternatives under discussion with WSF and FTA. The option that appears most viable would involve Kitsap Transit assuming responsibility for the environmental work required to remove Pier 48. The initial environmental phase is estimated at approximately $1 to $1.5 million. Full pier removal is estimated at $20 to $25 million. WSF has expressed interest in eventually removing the pier because doing so would provide environmental mitigation credit for future WSF projects, but it cannot commit without funding. If Kitsap Transit proceeds with the environmental work, that work would be structured so it can be transferred to WSF once funding becomes available. This approach would allow Kitsap Transit to keep its project moving and potentially use the environmental work as match for future grant applications. He also noted that, in a worst-case scenario where WSF funding does not materialize, Kitsap Transit could use the mitigation credit from pier removal to offset shading impacts associated with construction of the new terminal.

Executive Director Clauson reported recent discussions with state legislators, including the Chair of the House Transportation Committee, emphasizing the importance of securing funding for WSF to remove Pier 48 in the next legislative cycle.

Staff requested Board feedback on moving forward with the environmental phase, noting that doing so would require a financial commitment of approximately $1 to $1.5 million but would prevent the project from stalling indefinitely. Further meetings with WSF leadership are planned before any final commitment is made.

1:12:07, Mayor Moriwaki asked whether Kitsap Transit would be protected or covered if it chose to move forward under the proposed approach.

1:17:17, Executive Director Clauson reiterated that moving forward will require careful and creative budgeting. He emphasized that no expenditures will be made without returning to the Board for approval, as there are no discretionary funds available for this work. He added that, before making any commitments to Washington State Ferries, he wanted the Board to be fully informed and supportive of continued discussions.

Board members indicated agreement and support for continuing discussions.

b. Discussion – Salary Schedule
   - Resolution No. 26-14, Approve Implementation of Non-Represented Salary

00:01:37, Executive Director Clauson reported that this item is a follow-up to the current year's

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budget development. He reminded the Board that a compensation study for non-represented employees was completed last year and approved for phased implementation. Historically, phasing was necessary because prior salary surveys had revealed significant gaps between Kitsap Transit's pay ranges and the market, and the agency could not afford to implement all adjustments at once. As a result, some positions required multiple budget cycles to reach market rates, by which time the market had already moved ahead. After further review, staff now believe that when a salary survey identifies a position as below market, the agency should bring that position to market immediately rather than phasing it in over several years.

Executive Director Clauson, along with the directors of Finance and Human Resources, recommend adjusting the remaining phased-in positions to their full market rates as identified in the survey. The cost to complete these adjustments at this time is approximately $190,000. He requested that the Board adopt a resolution authorizing staff to implement the remaining salary survey adjustments so that all affected positions are brought to current market levels.

Discussion:

1:15:50, Board discussion included comments regarding the importance of fair and equitable pay for non-represented employees. Staff noted that 43 employees and positions would be affected by the proposed adjustments. The Board also discussed the importance of maintaining competitive compensation comparable to other organizations and services.

1:18:51, **Mayor Putaansuu moved and Mayor Moriwaki seconded the motion to adopt Resolution No. 26-14, authorizing staff to accelerate remaining wage adjustments of positions approved for increase in the 2025 salary survey, and each future salary survey, effective with the first full pay period following approval of this resolution and future salary survey resolutions.**

Motion passed unanimously.

5. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ITEMS

1:19:36, Executive Director Clauson briefed the Board on proposed reporting structure changes within the Marine Services Department. He explained that no new positions are being added; rather, several existing positions would begin reporting directly to the Marine Services Director. Board members indicated support for the change, and Executive Director Clauson noted he will proceed with implementing the updated reporting structure.

1:20:56, Executive Director Clauson shared photos and reported on the successful effort to transport fans to the Seahawks celebration in Seattle. He noted that the entire Kitsap Transit operation was well organized and received positive feedback from both passengers and staff.

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6. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None at this time.

7. FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER:

1:30:52, Mayor Moriwaki commented that he has seen Kitsap Transit advertisements on YouTube and praised their quality, offering compliments to the Marketing Department.

1:31:18, Executive Director Clauson expressed his appreciation for the positive comments about Kitsap Transit's recent video work and shared his pride in being part of the organization. He thanked Marine Services Director Nick Zylstra for his efforts during the Seahawks event, successfully bringing all three Bremerton vessels online and for staffing the Kingston and Southworth routes to ensure those sailings operated at full capacity.

8. ADJOURN: At 10:03 AM, Chairperson Commissioner Walters adjourned the regular meeting.

ADOPTED by the Board of Commissioners of Kitsap Transit at a regular meeting thereof, held on the 7th day of April, 2026.

Signed by:
Katherine T. Walters
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Kathrine T. Walters, Chairperson

Attest:

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Jackie Bidon
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Jackie Bidon, Clerk of the Board