

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

Board of Commissioners Present:

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

Staff Present:

Sanjay Bhatt, Marketing & Public Information Director; 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; Mary Pauly, Human Resources Director; Charlotte Sampson, Executive Assistant/Deputy Clerk of the Board; Nick Zylstra, Marine Services Director

Also Present: David Weibel, Legal Counsel; Jen Covino, Federal Lobbyist; Dylan Doty, State Lobbyist

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/3Ip8l0WUeI46THWS7ozGoyNrVoJoY-TnFh5NE7B4Hlo70dpMKCzndjA47uoeiypy.SczwnW66vb1-7lfK> Passcode: w@+i@0Gz

1. CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Walters called the meeting of the Kitsap Transit Board of Commissioners to order at 8:31 AM.

2. AGENDA REVIEW

Upon review by the Board, the agenda remained unchanged.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S COMMENTS

0:00:39, Commissioner Walters reminded those in attendance that March 18, 2026, is Transit Driver Appreciation Day and to take the opportunity to thank the drivers.

4. FULL DISCUSSION / ACTION ITEMS

a. Introduce Federal Lobbyist – Jen Covino

0:01:06, Executive Director Clauson introduced Kitsap Transit's federal lobbyist, Jen Covino of Covino, Smith, and Simon.

0:02:04, Ms. Covino, president of Covino, Smith & Simon (formerly Simon & Company Incorporated) provided a brief overview of her background and her firm's experience representing local governments. She also highlighted recent work performed on behalf of Kitsap Transit, including efforts to secure federal funding for the agency's FY2027 projects and engagement related to the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization bill.

Discussion:

0:05:37, Executive Director Clauson noted that Covino, Smith & Simon also represents both the Washington State Transit Association (WSTA) and Pierce Transit. He added that he has observed her strong organizational skills and effective advocacy work.

0:08:46, Commissioner Rolfes inquired about the earmark they had asked Ms. Covino to help with.

0:08:48, Executive Director Clauson noted that Congressional discretionary funding earmarks are currently available. He reported that Kitsap Transit has submitted a request for funding to support major maintenance and replacement work needed on the Port Orchard Ferry dock.

b. KPFF Presentation – Intra-County Ferry Services Study

0:10:47, Service and Capital Director Steffani Lillie reported that staff have been working over the past several months on the intra-county study. She noted that several working groups were convened to review and discuss the various route options. The report presented today reflects the team's assessment of what is operationally feasible, along with preliminary cost and infrastructure considerations. She introduced Kelly Lesoing of KPFF, who proceeded with a presentation of the study findings.

0:11:21, Kelly Lesoing presented findings of the Intra-County Ferry Services Study that evaluated the feasibility of a new passenger-only ferry service within Kitsap County, focusing on two potential routes: Bremerton to Bainbridge Island and Bremerton to Silverdale. The study concluded that the Bremerton to Bainbridge Island route generated the highest projected demand, with an estimated 670 riders per day, while the Bremerton to Silverdale route was modeled at approximately 390 riders per day. She noted that key implementation challenges include the need for substantial Capital investments estimated to be between \$40 million and \$82 million depending on vessel type and Kitsap Transit's current fleet limitations, which prevent operating these routes as a pilot service. Recommended next steps include developing a high-level Capital and Operating funding plan, followed by preparation of a detailed business and implementation plan.

Discussion:

0:24:56, Mayor Wheeler noted that Kitsap Transit's long-range plan includes bus rapid transit (BRT). He explained that as the City of Bremerton continues to develop its infrastructure plans, it is becoming increasingly difficult to envision removing an existing traffic lane or constructing a new one to dedicate solely to BRT service, particularly as population growth increases roadway demand. He stated that while such a project is not impossible, there is currently no clear path for how it would be implemented. He observed that the fast ferry system offers an opportunity to provide direct, point-to-point service without the need for new or reallocated roadway capacity, which would otherwise be cost prohibitive or operationally challenging. He then asked whether the next phase of the study, or the feasibility analysis completed to date, accounts for fast ferries serving as a viable alternative to BRT within the broader transportation network.

0:26:30, Executive Director Clauson explained that bus rapid transit (BRT) is a long-term service concept and remains far into Kitsap Transit's future. He noted that to qualify as BRT, service must operate at 15-minute frequencies, which Kitsap Transit does not currently meet and existing demand does not support. He added that the BRT corridors identified in the agency's long-range plan, primarily along SR 303, Wheaton Way, and extending into Silverdale, were included as part of the Vision 305 planning effort. Executive Director Clauson stated that new passenger-only ferry service could reduce future demand for BRT along both corridors. He noted that the Bremerton to Bainbridge Island route would likely divert a meaningful share of current and future trips destined for Bremerton. While this would not address travel demand to Poulsbo, Kingston, or Silverdale, he emphasized that it would still have a notable impact on overall corridor demand.

0:29:10, Mayor Moriwaki commented on the cost estimates presented for the potential routes, noting that the Capital requirements particularly for the Bainbridge Island option were strikingly high. He observed that vessel costs alone are estimated at approximately \$25 to \$28 million, with additional substantial Capital expenses required for terminal facilities. He expressed concern about whether such an investment is feasible given ongoing pressures to expand bus service on Bainbridge Island and questioned what alternative transit improvements could be achieved with comparable funding.

Mayor Moriwaki also raised concerns about the physical feasibility of locating an additional ferry facility on Bainbridge Island that would allow for convenient transfers. He stated that, based on the initial assessment, the site constraints make the concept difficult to envision. Regarding the potential route between Liberty Bay and Bremerton, he noted that the waterway is significantly narrower than Rich Passage and is lined with waterfront homes. He questioned whether a passenger-only ferry could operate at competitive speeds without creating wake impacts and whether travel times would be slow enough to undermine the service's viability compared to bus travel. He added that if technology existed to operate at low wake in such a narrow corridor, it would presumably already be in use in Rich Passage. He concluded by stating that, while he supports completing the study, his initial impression is that the Bainbridge Island route may not be feasible. He requested clarification from the consultant regarding a reference to a "250%

higher" figure mentioned during the presentation and asked what that percentage was comparing specifically, whether it referred to ferry costs relative to bus service.

0:32:01, Kelly Lesoing shared that the figure referred to the cost per rider compared to the actual cost per rider experienced on other Kitsap ferry routes. The figure is driven by the lower estimated demands.

0:32:47, Mayor Moriwaki stated that Kitsap Transit is already challenged to enhance existing bus service, making it difficult to consider additional major capital projects of this scale. He emphasized the importance of continuing to improve and ensure the reliability of the current fast ferry service before pursuing new routes. He noted that the cost estimates presented were sobering and, at this stage, he views the concept as a likely non-starter. While he supports completing the study, he expressed significant reservations about the feasibility of moving forward.

0:33:17, Executive Director Clauson emphasized that Kitsap Transit is not currently able to support additional passenger-only ferry service. He explained that all existing vessels are fully committed to current routes, and the agency does not have surplus staffing capacity to operate additional boats. He further noted that Kitsap Transit is not financially positioned to absorb the operating costs of new service without securing additional revenue. He stated that he wanted to ensure the Board clearly understood the agency's present operational and financial constraints should any future decisions be considered.

0:34:18, Mayor Putaansuu expressed support for continuing the study, noting that it took more than a decade to launch the original fast ferry service and that it is valuable to have this information for long-term planning. He stated that, looking ahead a decade or more, the study provides a useful picture of what future service could look like. He emphasized, however, that if Kitsap Transit is to pursue any near-term improvements, the focus should be on enhancing existing fast ferry service. He shared that when attending PSRC meetings, he often rides one of the state-funded sailings and observes that the vessel is nearly full, demonstrating strong demand. He noted that these additional sailings will end in August and anticipates that the community will be disappointed when they are discontinued. Mayor Putaansuu concluded that, if the agency is to invest in service improvements, priority should be given to increasing frequency and expanding availability on the routes Kitsap Transit already operates.

0:35:36, Councilmember Rosapepe stated that the study was not a wasted effort and emphasized the importance of continually evaluating future transportation needs. He noted that the projected ridership figures were particularly striking and, while based on current conditions, they should also be considered in the context of future growth. He shared that he and Executive Director Clauson recently spoke at an event attended by individuals interested in public service, and many of the questions he received focused on ferry service and its impact on Port Orchard and Bremerton. He explained that while Port Orchard has limited interaction with the state ferry system, its connection with Kitsap Transit and surrounding communities is significant. Councilmember Rosapepe said that the study serves as a valuable first step and should not be dismissed. He recommended

identifying an appropriate timeframe such as one or two years to revisit and update the analysis. He concluded by noting that Kitsap County is a growing region, and continued review of long-term transportation options is both necessary and beneficial.

0:37:28, Executive Director Clauson clarified that although it was noted earlier that it took a decade to launch the fast ferry program, much of that time was spent studying wake impacts in Rich Passage rather than building the service itself. He stated that, in his view, community support for the program did not materialize until Kitsap Transit demonstrated that fast ferries could operate at speed without causing shoreline damage. He also emphasized the significant environmental and permitting work that would be required before any new passenger-only ferry service could begin. For example, constructing an additional dock adjacent to the Washington State Ferries terminal on Bainbridge Island would likely require the full two-to-three-year permitting timeline referenced in the presentation. He noted that preliminary discussions with Washington State Ferries indicate they are open to the concept, but as with the Southworth project the responsibility for advancing the permitting and construction process would rest with Kitsap Transit.

Executive Director Clauson reminded the Board that the agency's current passenger-only ferry funding structure does not provide capacity to support new service or to replace the state-funded sailings that will soon expire. He noted that Kitsap Transit will soon need to address Capital replacement needs for its existing ferry fleet, which will place additional pressure on available resources. He concluded by reiterating that, under current law, Kitsap Transit may seek voter approval to increase its sales tax authority up to four-tenths of one percent; the agency is currently at three-tenths. Any additional funding beyond that would require legislative action. He stated that he wanted to ensure the Board had full context regarding both current constraints and future considerations.

0:42:32, Commissioner Rolfes stated that, in addition to transportation, infrastructure, workforce, and housing challenges, the region also faces significant financial constraints. She emphasized that it is important for the Board to consider long-term possibilities, and to view the study as a useful tool for prompting discussion about how to sustain the existing system, making incremental improvements to meet current and near-term needs, rather than pursuing new major projects. Commissioner Rolfes then asked when the study would be completed so the Board could have a final discussion on how to proceed.

0:42:41, Executive Director Clauson shared that this phase is completed and for Kitsap Transit to go beyond this would require allocating additional resources to support it.

0:43:53, Commissioner Walters asked if the allocation from the legislature includes Phase 2?

0:44:05, Executive Director Clauson shared that the funding was for this model study.

0:44:20, Commissioner Walters stated that she remains supportive of exploring future ferry service, acknowledging that any expansion would require a substantial long-term investment. She noted that Kitsap County is currently developing the Silverdale Regional Center Plan and working to

meet Growth Management Act requirements to increase density in Central Kitsap. A potential Silverdale to Bremerton ferry connection has been a significant component of that planning effort, particularly as the County considers how to attract new residents, support workforce housing, and improve mobility between the region's two largest employers, the hospital and the shipyard. She emphasized that transit-oriented development around both ferry and bus service is central to the County's long-range strategy. Commissioner Walters also highlighted the importance of shuttle service, noting that parking constraints in Silverdale were evident during the recent pop-up ferry pilot. She reported that the shuttle between the mall and the temporary ferry landing was well-received and demonstrated strong public interest.

Commissioner Walters added that she recently participated in a panel at the Mosquito Fleet Festival, where there was considerable enthusiasm for restoring historic water-based transportation. She observed that Kitsap County has a strong "ferry culture," and many residents who may not choose to ride a bus are willing to ride a ferry, an interest reflected in the success of the pop-up ferry program. She stated that as the County plans for the next 20 years, she appreciates having this study inform the broader conversation, while recognizing that any future system expansion would ultimately require voter approval and likely significant federal investment. She concluded by asking for clarification on the projected travel time between Silverdale and Bremerton, noting that current travel on the Carlisle ranges from 30 to 45 minutes depending on tides and wake conditions.

0:47:17, Kelly Lesoing reported that the projected travel time between Silverdale and Bremerton is approximately 19 minutes. She stated that this estimate assumes the use of a low-wake, hydrofoil-equipped vessel capable of operating at 24 knots. Through discussions with maritime experts, 24 knots was identified as the maximum safe operating speed given the vessel traffic, bridge clearances, and narrow conditions along the route.

A copy of the presentation will be sent to Board members.

0:49:34, Executive Director Clauson noted that, while bus rapid transit remains a long-term concept, there are interim opportunities to improve service quality. One such strategy is traffic signal preemption, which Kitsap Transit already employs in some locations. He explained that providing buses with priority at traffic signals wherever feasible can give transit riders a meaningful advantage over private vehicles. He added that these types of incremental improvements help make bus service more attractive and can serve as important steps toward higher-capacity transit in the future.

c. Discussion – 2026 Session Update Kitsap Transit State Lobbyist

0:52:38, Kitsap Transit Lobbyist Dylan Doty provided a summary of the recent legislative session, highlighting key outcomes and potential impacts on Kitsap Transit. The session concluded with the passage of an income tax bill on earnings over \$1 million, which may affect sales tax revenue for cities, counties, and transit agencies starting in 2029. A pilot program with Olympic College to provide transit passes was approved, with \$200,000 allocated, including \$15,000-20,000 for

administrative expenses at the college. House Bill 1923, which aims to expand passenger-only ferry district authority, passed the House but faced opposition in the Senate Transportation Committee, with amendments proposing requirements that could impact Kitsap Transit's operations, including a build-in-Washington requirement, prohibition on new state funding for passenger-only-ferry (POF) starting in 2028, and a requirement for zero-emission vessels.

Discussion:

0:56:45, Commissioner Rolfes asked if Kitsap Transit has a plan for the Olympic College program.

0:56:47, Executive Director Clauson shared that Kitsap Transit is working on a plan with the interim college president.

d. Discussion – Transit Representative on Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)

1:14:46, Executive Director Clauson reviewed the status of PSRC's Transportation Policy Board representation, with Mayor Putaansuu and Councilmember Mockler agreeing to continue in their current roles.

Discussion:

None.

e. Discussion – Safe Parking

1:17:04, Executive Director Clauson reported that Kitsap Transit continues to work on the safe parking issue, though little has changed regarding the permissions required to use agency park-and-ride lots. He explained that approval is needed from the Federal Transit Administration for federally funded lots, from the State for state-funded lots, and from private property owners, often churches, when lots are cooperatively managed. He shared that he recently met with the Bremerton Police Department Captain and a company experienced in administering safe parking programs. The company described the varying levels of homelessness, noting that the population most likely to use safe parking programs often consists of "working homeless" individuals who are employed but temporarily without stable housing and living in their vehicles. He emphasized that implementing such a program would require extensive screening, oversight, and clear operational standards, such as requiring vehicles to leave the lot during daytime hours. Executive Director Clauson noted that homelessness is not an issue confined to a single jurisdiction. While the City of Bremerton initiated the recent discussion, he stated that the challenge is countywide, even statewide, and would benefit from a coordinated regional approach. He suggested bringing the issue to the Kitsap Regional Coordinating Council (KRCC) for broader consideration, including consistent rules and shared responsibilities across jurisdictions. He added that the company he met with is preparing, at no cost to Kitsap Transit, a list of considerations and best practices for administering a safe parking program. He reiterated that while staff continue to explore what may be possible within Kitsap Transit's own lots, obtaining the necessary permissions will be

challenging. He concluded by providing this update to assure the Board that the issue is still being actively evaluated, though from a broader perspective than originally anticipated.

1:21:34, Commissioner Walters noted that the topic of homelessness is scheduled for discussion at the upcoming KRCC Executive Committee meeting; she will add the topic of safe parking programs to that conversation.

1:21:53, Councilmember Mockler shared that she has a contact in Pierce County at Safe Park and is willing to share that information for the KRCC meeting.

5. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ITEMS

1:22:53, Executive Director Clauson reported that staff are preparing for the Board retreat in July. Topics identified for discussion include:

- Review and potential revision of the agency's mission and vision statements
- Goal-setting processes and alignment with long-term objectives
- Strategic planning efforts
- Service and service expansion considerations
- Capital needs, match funding requirements, and related financial planning
- Reaffirmation of the agency's historical practice of using grant funding for capital projects rather than service expansion

Board members were invited to suggest additional topics for inclusion on the retreat agenda.

Executive Director Clauson shared that the Board previously authorized the purchase of all-wheel-drive vans for the Vanpool program. The original resolution assumed the vehicles would be subject to sales tax. Staff have since confirmed that rideshare vehicles are exempt from sales tax, resulting in cost savings sufficient to purchase one or two additional vans.

Board members agreed to the purchase of additional vehicles for the Vanpool program.

Executive Director Clauson reported challenges in recruiting for the half-time safety and security position created when the marine safety role was expanded to full-time. Two strong candidates have applied but are only interested in full-time employment.

Board members agreed to expand the position to full-time.

Executive Director Clauson provided an update on potential IRS tax credits related to the agency's electric buses. An attorney has advised that the agency may be eligible to claim credits on the full cost of the vehicles, not only the local match portion. The attorney is willing to pursue the claim on a contingency basis, receiving payment only if the agency successfully recovers the credit. The estimated credit is approximately \$800,000, with a 15% contingency fee (approximately \$132,000). He requested Board approval to proceed with the contingency arrangement, pending legal review.

Board members agreed to proceed with the attorney to potentially recover tax credits.

Executive Director Clauson noted that the agency’s federal lobbyist, Jen, provides weekly reports on federal activity, including items beyond transportation. Staff recently forwarded a report to the Board and asked whether members would like to receive these updates regularly.

The Board indicated support for receiving the reports, and staff will begin forwarding them on a weekly basis.

Executive Director Clauson shared a recent comment posted on the Port Orchard Community page. He noted that the comment serves as a strong example of how staff are effectively navigating and responding to the challenges of today’s world. He read,

“I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the incredible support and protection I received from your staff today during a very distressing incident. While at the Port Orchard Ferry Dock, I was repeatedly harassed and followed by an individual. I want to specifically commend the following people for their immediate intervention and care. Justin, bus driver, for stepping in when I called for help and instructed the individual to move away. Joe, security officer in Port Orchard, for confronting the individual and, with the captain's permission, riding the ferry with me to ensure I arrive safely. the security team in Bremerton for meeting the ferry and escorting me safely to my bus. my friend, ferry worker, for providing emotional support and comfort while I was having a panic attack during the crossing. I've never experienced being followed before, and the quick action of your team made me feel safe during a terrifying situation. Please ensure that these individuals are recognized for the professionalism and kindness Thank you again for looking out for your passengers.” Shawna Brinkley.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

7. FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER:

None at this time.

8. ADJOURN: At 10:02 AM, Chairperson Walters adjourned the regular meeting.

ADOPTED by the Board of Commissioners of Kitsap Transit at a regular meeting thereof, held on the 5th day of May, 2026.

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

Attest:

DocuSigned by:
Jackie Bidon
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Jackie Bidon, Clerk of the Board