



PRESS RELEASE

Olympic College to pilot Kitsap Transit bus pass for students *State legislative grant will cover costs for 2026-27 academic year*

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BREMERTON, Wash. – All Olympic College students will be able to ride Kitsap Transit buses and local ferries with a free bus pass during the 2026-27 academic year under a \$200,000 grant from the state.

Earlier this year, the Legislature set aside one-time startup funds for Kitsap Transit and King County Metro to pilot affordable bus pass programs with their local community colleges.

With Fall Quarter classes set to begin on Sept. 21, Olympic College will invite students to take a survey on their travel needs and patterns and develop a marketing program to educate students on how they can easily obtain and use the Olympic College ORCA bus pass. The pass will be valid starting on Sept. 1 on Kitsap Transit buses and local foot ferries, though not on the fast ferries.

“Reliable transportation to and from campus is essential to the success of our students,” said Olympic College President Dr. Chantae Recasner. “When students cannot get to class, access becomes a barrier instead of a promise. We are grateful to the state Legislature for funding this pilot project, and we look forward to continuing our partnership with Kitsap Transit to make this much-needed resource available to students during the 2026-27 academic year.”

“Public transit helps broaden access to higher education and the jobs that students often

need to support themselves while in school, and it's become more urgent with higher prices for essentials like food, shelter, and fueling a car," said John Clauson, Kitsap Transit's Executive Director. "We're proud to partner with Olympic College to pilot a student bus pass and find a financially sustainable model that will support current and future generations of students."

Under the budget proviso, Kitsap Transit and Olympic College must monitor bus pass usage and submit a joint report with King County Metro to the state Legislature by January 30, 2027. The goals of the budget proviso include assessing the impact subsidized and low-cost bus passes have on enrollment and attendance and determining the cost structure and funding model for regional bus fares that support community and technical colleges in Washington. Highline College in Auburn, Wash., is also participating in the pilot program.

Olympic College and Kitsap Transit previously partnered on a student bus-pass program. As Kitsap Transit transitioned from paper bus tickets to the One Regional Card for All smart card, known as ORCA, the administrative requirements became more complex, and the student bus-pass program was eventually phased out.

In the years since, the two agencies have collaborated on short-term bus pass programs, including a 2019 campaign that offered free bus passes to OC students. This new pilot project creates an opportunity to expand that work with dedicated funding and administrative support during the 2026-27 academic year. Transportation can be a barrier for OC students to enroll in, or stay enrolled in, classes. Kitsap Transit's full fare for a monthly bus pass is \$50, while reduced fare is \$25.

Last September, as part of its Week Without Driving campaign, Kitsap Transit and Olympic College leaders met and shared research findings, including:

- In a Fall Quarter 2024 survey of 672 students, 54% said they had missed class or a campus activity due to transportation issues. Among those who said they travel to/from campus using a transportation mode other than bus, 87% said they would use the bus if it were free to them.
- In a survey of 25 in-state community colleges, nearly all had a bus-pass partnership with transit authorities. Some have a student-approved bus pass fee, others tap into parking fees or other funding sources. The fees range from \$13 to \$22 per quarter, per student.

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