

Island Transit RTIP Projects 17 and 18

Island Transit's Todd Morrow updates us on RTIP projects 17 and 18: Island Transit has two new projects to be added to the RTIP: the South Whidbey Transfer Center and the Transition to Zero Emissions Vehicles. The South Whidbey Transfer Center has been in the RTIP before, in the form of examining the need for it. This new part of the project is moving into planning and design. The project includes the creation of a Transit Center that makes it possible to move to zero emission vehicles and improves the service on the south end of the island, including the possibility of having some on-demand service to possibly supplement or replace some of the fixed routes we have. We need a new facility to do both projects. With the on-demand service, we need a place where vehicles can come together and transfer people off the street and into a safe environment. That means we need a larger footprint area than we currently have at the south end of the island. With regard to transitioning our fleet to zero emissions, if we choose to go electric, we'll need a place to charge our vehicles. We're hoping to have a site that's on or close to SR 525, within two to five miles of the ferry landing. This will also be a park and ride facility that adds capacity to WSF and Island Transit. If there is a passenger-only ferry service, people could park at the new Transfer Center and we would have a bus service that is cost free to take people directly to the dock, so they could have a place to leave their car behind and walk on the ferry. We would also include charging stations, and a small building to serve our operators and the public. We are about to kick off our property acquisition, and we anticipate using federal dollars. Senator Murray has asked that our project get three million dollars in Congress' annual appropriation process; this is not the infrastructure bills that are currently being talked about, this is the normal yearly appropriations bill. We also have local funds to help us, but we will be asking for additional funds along the way, including for the zero emission buses. The other project is just to show on the RTIP that we are moving to zero emission buses. Early next year we will undertake a process that will help us to determine which technology will be the predominate one for our agency. There are several options out there, including battery, electric, and hybrid fuel cells and we need to find which option works best for Island Transit in the unique operating environment we have in Island County. We want to make sure the RTIP and STIP and other plans show we're moving in that direction, so when funding opportunities become available we can take advantage of them.

Question: Did you figure out how much it's supposed to cost to charge each bus?

Answer: No, we don't know. Those are things we'll figure out in our feasibility study. Most people will tell you if you go the electric route, the electric charge will be a little less than fuel cost. There are other infrastructure costs that will add up, so we're not doing this for financial purposes - it's to meet climate goals - goals most people in Island County share.

Question: Do you have any specifics about what area you're looking at [for the Transit Center]?

Answer: Property acquisition hasn't started yet. It makes the most sense to be on our main north-south route where the buses can easily and safely access SR 525 and be close to the ferries. Once we complete the negotiations, I'll obviously be able to tell you where that is.