



Mt. Adams Transportation Services driver Daniel Fritz updates his log at the end of a late afternoon circuit in Klickitat County.

## Klickitat County Residents get a Lift

*Volunteer drivers ensure locals have transportation when they need it most*

**By Jeanie Senior**

Mt. Adams Transportation Service has served Klickitat County since the 1970s, when it began with a single wheelchair-accessible van.

Since then, the agency's services and fleet of small buses and vans—all wheelchair accessible—have grown into an extensive public transit network. Countywide, dial-a-ride trips in 2017 reached a total of 17,000.

In September, Mt. Adams Transportation expanded its coverage by adding fixed route services from Goldendale to The Dalles and White Salmon-Bingen to Hood River.

The east end service has four round trips a day. There are eight round trips a day between White Salmon and Hood River. Both operate five days a week.

Mt. Adams Transportation Director Sharon Carter says the continuing challenge is getting people to understand that the bus service is available to everyone.

"Seniors are a very big priority, but we still come across non-seniors that don't know they can access our service," she says.

A regional mobility grant from the Washington Department of Transportation, plus matching funds from Klickitat County, pays for the fixed routes. Getting to the bank, the doctor or the grocery store can be difficult for people who live in the large and sparsely populated county.

Sharon says the fixed route project is aimed at creating better connections between rural counties and regional market centers, which increases access to employment, medical services, education,

shopping and other aspects crucial to quality of life.

The agency's dial-a-ride service has been around for more than 30 years. It regularly transports dozens of residents to senior meals in Goldendale, White Salmon, Lyle and Trout Lake. It also takes cancer patients to chemotherapy treatments, and six people use Mt. Adams Transportation three days a week to get to kidney dialysis. When someone needs daily chemotherapy, it can be hard for family or friends to take that much time off work.

"We emphasize that we're there to provide that service," Sharon says.

There have been times during brutal winter weather that the transport service has curtailed service. But drivers chained up the bus to get patients to dialysis.

Dial-a-ride is door-to-door service.



**Mt. Adams Transportation Director Sharon Carter says she hopes more people will volunteer to drive as older drivers retire. Locals of all ages make the most of the service.**

Photo at top right by Sharon Carter

Drivers help passengers from their home onto the bus when needed. Passengers are urged to call in advance to arrange for a ride.

Sharon predicts rider numbers for the fixed routes will grow as more people get acquainted with the service. The cost is \$1 in each direction—exact fare required. Passengers are advised to get to a bus stop early. Sharon says the buses won't wait.

Stops are listed online at the MATS link on <http://www.klickitacounty.org>. Signs designating stops are in the works.

Riders pay for bus passes for both fixed routes online through an app called Hopthru that can be downloaded to a smartphone.

In White Salmon, the first bus leaves Pioneer Center in White Salmon at 6:57 a.m. The last leaves at 6:15 p.m.

Employees of Bingen-based aerospace company Insitu, which has offices in Bingen and Hood River, regularly use the White Salmon-Hood River service. There were 200 boardings in November.

Daniel Fritz started working as a driver in October. He spends half of his day providing dial-a-ride service. In the afternoon, he drives the White Salmon fixed route. Daniel says he has met many incredible people while driving.

The Goldendale route includes a stop at Wishram Heights. In The Dalles, the bus stops at two medical facilities, the

community college, the transit center and a shopping center. The first bus leaves the Senior Services office in Goldendale at 7 a.m. The last leaves at 4:15 p.m. and returns at 6:50 p.m.

The service “connects Goldendale to all the hot spots in The Dalles,” Sandy DeMent wrote in a breezy report of her first ride on the new bus run, published in the Goldendale Sentinel.

“You can't afford not to test the service—it only costs \$1 to board the bus (each way), and no reservation or advance notice is needed. Just like a real bus, only friendlier,” she wrote.

“The drivers report that half of riders are seniors and half are younger. Since the bus stops at the Columbia Gorge Community College, riders include students as well as young commuters going to work.

“My first trip was like a sightseeing tour—I saw areas of The Dalles I'd never seen before and was introduced to new ways to get to places I regularly visit. Two other women climbed on the bus with me, all of us first-timers. The driver was very pleasant and knowledgeable, and we spent the first 20 minutes asking questions. In no time at all, we were crossing the bridge into The Dalles.”

The Klickitacounty transportation service is part of Gorge TransLink—an alliance made up of four Mid-Columbia counties, including Klickitacounty, Skamania,

Hood River and Sherman. Through TransLink, riders can make connections to Vancouver and Portland.

Because it has no tax base and there is no transportation district, funding for Mt. Adams Transportation comes from a variety of sources: state and federal money, contributions and fares, support from Klickitacounty solid waste revenues and United Way. State and federal grants recently paid for several new vans.

Sharon hopes for more volunteer drivers to replace those who retire. Volunteer drivers are a vital component. The agency has about 10 volunteers who use their own vehicles to take people to medical appointments in Vancouver, Portland, Yakima and the Tri-Cities. Volunteers must commit to being available two days a week. Sharon advises prospective volunteers to call Mt. Adams Transportation to discuss what it entails.

Requirements include a clean driving record, passing criminal background checks, owning a vehicle in good condition and completion of a defensive driving course and passenger assistance training.

The current group of volunteers, who range in age from 30 to 75, are reimbursed for mileage. Some opt only to provide local rides, but all of them want to help out, Sharon says.

“The volunteers are definitely special people,” she says. ■