

Grays Harbor Transit Could Ask for Sales Tax Increase, Cuts Still Likely

Local News

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Public meetings to be held at the Aberdeen City Hall, June 20th at 2 PM, and 25th at 6 PM.

ABERDEEN, Wash. - The Grays Harbor Transit Authority was presented with two grim options to cut service yesterday, as the board works to correct an \$800-thousand budget deficit. General Manager Mark Carlin told a packed house at their regular board meeting last night that eliminating weekends is only part of the option that we reported last month "In order to get to that number that we needed, along with the weekend service we also had to eliminate the Centralia run Monday and Friday, and 3 days of para-transit service in between there. This plan would also eliminate the Westport dial-a-ride, and it would affect about 150,000 customers annually." Carlin said that plan would eliminate 6 drivers, 1 shop position, and the customer service representative at the Aberdeen station.

A second option would thin out the transit's 7-day schedule "So what I did was take the number of hours that eliminating weekends would give me, and I went through and eliminated the amount of runs to come up with the same amount of hours," Carlin said details of this option included cutting the frequency on many routes in half, and because they wouldn't be closing the doors on the weekends, the holes in service would be more noticed. The "thinning plan" would eliminate 8 driver positions, Carlin said making these cuts would affect about 205,000 riders.

Several people spoke out during the public comment period, Hoquiam resident Bob Nakutin hinted early on to a third option, a sales tax increase "I think it's only fair that the people get to decide this, at least this way the people have a chance to decide what's going to happen to in their lives." As a taxing authority, Grays Harbor Transit already collects %0.06 of the county's sales tax, and could ask voters to approve up to %0.03 more. By comparison, the city of Aberdeen just passed a hike to their sales tax that is four times that amount, for their transportation benefit district. However, Carlin said the problem with that idea was that they'd have to dip into a \$1.3 million reserve, and hope that the increase passed in November. To get onto the November ballot, they'd have to submit a request to the County Auditor's office by July 8th. Carlin recommended that the board cut weekend services instead of thinning down the 7-day schedule, mostly because they'd see the financial benefits sooner but also because it would affect about 50,000 less customers annually. He planned to review a few more options to present at two public meetings that are scheduled for June 20th @2, and 25th @6, locations for those will be announced later today.