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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Design of NEW Mason County Transit and Community Center Underway**

### **Mason County Transit Community Center Design Fair**

**September 10-12, 2008**  
Shelton Armory - 601 W. Franklin, Shelton, WA

Small but engaged groups of people participated throughout the three-day event, including state and local government, nonprofits, private business, youth and citizens in general.

MTA purchased the Armory Building in 2006, and it has remained home to SOCK, a non-profit organization serving Mason County youth. SOCK has been a tenant in the building since 1997. Many other local organizations are also expected to provide services in the site after the re-design of the site is complete.

It is expected that the site will include a transit waiting area, public restrooms, regional transportation information, transit lost and found, bus pass sales, bicycle lockers and an array of community services and activities for all ages.

The event opened with a presentation by Shelton Mayor John Tarrant, Shelton City Planner Jason Dose, and MTA General Manager Dave O'Connell. The presentation showcased a strong commitment between the city, county, transit to work together and make this project a significant asset for downtown Shelton and the greater Mason County area.

According to Mayor Tarrant, "The transit and community center will be a component of our plans to create a safe and walkable central corridor in downtown Shelton to spur more economic growth and tourist attraction to this area."

Later in the Design Fair, Lynda Ring-Erickson, County Commissioner and Chair of the MTA Board, noted, "This project is going to be an asset for all of Mason County."

According to County Commissioner Ross Gallagher, the plans for the center demonstrate, "You can go anywhere from here."

Design Fair participants agreed that the two buildings on the site should be retained. They were particularly energized by the idea that the concrete space that separates the two buildings should be transformed into a courtyard or "commons" area where a variety of public gatherings could take place. Participants preferred to create an open and attractive public courtyard on the site instead of a parking lot, which was one of the options.

According to Commissioner Ring-Erickson, "We need an inviting space where people can gather in downtown Shelton. It can become a central feature for public life in the region, connecting people to all of the beauty and assets of Mason County."

Options to minimize unwanted behavior in the courtyard area were considered during the Design Fair, including having law enforcement present, video surveillance in the courtyard, design features to discourage unwanted behavior (no places to hide, site lines created within buildings, etc.), increase hours of the MTA Field Services Representative to address problem behavior, and operating program activity over extended hours in the building.

The development of the site will reduce parking on Franklin Street. Current plans indicate that approximately eleven parking spaces will be lost in the near term. Options to improve parking availability range from leasing spaces from nearby parking lots to encouraging transit and other transportation alternatives.

According to MTA General Manager Dave O'Connell, "The population is aging and gas prices are rising, so more and more people are riding the bus already. These changes will most likely create more downtown parking availability for people who rely on their cars over time."

Development of the new transit and community center will also require one-way traffic on Franklin Street. Nearby businesses and city staff indicated that this change will be a reasonable change and will help to ensure pedestrian and driver safety in the area.

Design Fair participants also favored making the main building on the site a two-story building with room for office and other types of spaces on the second floor. On the main floor, most of the same types of activities that are there now can be accommodated, and an enclosed bus waiting area will be included. In the smaller building, some activities such as fitness and art classes could be held, and some retail space, such as a small café with outdoor seating area, would be included.

Len Williams of Foster & Williams Architects, a local architect who is leading the Design Team on the project, shared some ideas on how the new site and building could look when it is complete. Mayor Tarrant commended MTA for selecting a local architect to lead the project.

According to Mayor Tarrant, Mr. Williams' initial sketches of the building and site design "reflect the historical character of Shelton."

The Washington State Legislature appropriated funding for the design and planning phase of the project in the 2008 legislative session. FLT Consulting, part of the Design Team retained by MTA, will be drafting a business plan for financing the construction and maintenance of the facility in the next phase of the project.

More input from the public is needed to ensure that the project will meet the needs of Mason County residents. Representative Kathy Haigh encouraged everyone to participate as much and as early as possible. She said, "This is going to be a major asset to the community if everyone gets involved. We have to join together as a community to make this project what we want. When we do, there will be many opportunities out there to get state and federal funding to make this happen."

The Design Fair was only the beginning of this discussion, and much more public input is needed. Go to the MTA website at <http://masontransit.org/community/ctransctr.html> to for more information and give to your input on the project.

***For more information about the Mason County Transit Community Center design project, please call Dave O'Connell, Mason County Transportation Authority, (360) 426-9434.***