

MTA presents possible locations for Belfair park and ride

North Mason residents list safety, ease of access as some top priorities for location

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Officials from the Mason Transit Authority heard suggestions and concerns from North Mason residents last week about the placement of a future park and ride facility.

The public meeting, which took place Aug. 22 at the HUB Center for Seniors, showcased

four possible sites along state Route 3 between downtown Belfair and the Kitsap County line.

The MTA said it is considering five criteria, which it will use to rank the plots of land.

“We’re looking at what is going to be the best bang for the buck, specifically for users,” said Patrick Holm, deputy project manager for SCJ Al-

liance, a civil engineering and transportation planning company from Lacey. The MTA hired SCJ Alliance to help choose the right land.

The criteria, in order of importance, are: access configuration, or flexibility of entry and exit locations; operations flexibility, or how ready the land is to build on; proximity to a future Belfair bypass; proximity to downtown Belfair; and economic development possibilities.

Mike Oliver, development manager for MTA, said those criteria are tentative, but a

close estimation of the transit authority’s priorities.

A team made up of local elected officials and MTA employees, as well as SCJ Alliance members, decided upon the criteria. That same team will rank the plots of land based on the criteria.

Oliver said he is still looking for more volunteers to sit on that team; his ideal candidate would be someone who utilizes the MTA worker/driver program in North Mason to get to work in Bremerton.

About 20 people — including area residents, MTA cus-

tomers and county commissioners — attended the meeting to share opinions.

Security of the potential lot was a big concern for some. Frank Gilger, who works on the naval station in Bremerton and utilizes the worker/driver program to get to work, said he’s had gas siphoned out of his car while he’s commuting, even when he’s parked in public areas.

“If you’re talking security, there is none,” Gilger said. “All the worker/drivers know that.”

MTA: Transit authority will host another public meeting

continued from page A-28

Gilger added that access to state Route 3 for the commuter buses is a big concern because those trying to turn left out of parking lots across multiple lanes of traffic often have to wait for a long time. On high traffic days, Gilger said, buses often take alternate routes such as Old Belfair Highway.

"The only thing that cuts that down is the Safeway light," Gilger said, referring to the stoplight at Old Clifton Road and state Route 3.

One issue that divided the group was whether to involve agencies outside the county, including Port of Bremerton or Kitsap Transit.

Belfair resident Herb Gerhardt said there could be a benefit to including multiple agencies to provide what is best for all riders.

Brian Petersen, who owns Petersen Chiropractic in Belfair, disagreed, saying that since the funding comes from a grant to MTA, it should be a Mason County-only project.

Oliver said the meeting was a good start to the discussion process.

"It was good; I wish there had been more public there," Oliver said, adding that he distributed about 200 fliers on windshields in Belfair the previous week to try to get the word out about the meeting.

Public parking has long been an issue for North Mason residents.

Many commute to Bremerton for work on the naval base. Often, commuters use MTA's worker/driver program, which allows naval base employees to get certification to drive an MTA bus to Bremerton.

Four buses regularly run the route, each holding about 50 people.

"You have a huge number of people going to Bremerton for work, and they need somewhere to park," said Holm.

In 2015, MTA received a \$10 million grant through the Washington State Department of Transportation's Regional Mobility Program. The grant will help MTA enhance and enlarge existing park and rides throughout the

county, as well as build a new facility in Belfair.

Earlier this summer, the transit authority opened an 85-spot park and ride behind Safeway in Belfair as a temporary solution to the parking problem.

During the meeting, MTA also announced a timeline for the project.

During the next month, the team will analyze feedback from last week's meeting.

The team will then rank the plots of land and present the scoring at another workshop in September. No date has been set for a second meeting.

For more information on the project or to see updates, visit www.masontransit.org/parkandrideproject.



A map singles out four land plots in North Mason that could potentially house a park and ride location in the future.

Photo courtesy of Mason Transit Authority

PAGE 2 OF 2