

Parking lot makeshift relief for commuters

By **BRIANNA LOPER**
brianna@masoncounty.com

A new public parking area in Belfair opened last week, giving drivers a short-term solution for their parking concerns.

Mason Transit Authority renovated and opened a temporary lot Friday off Northeast Roy Boad Road behind Safeway and Union River Grille. The lot has 85 parking stalls — including handicap-accessible spots — a bus-loading and passenger-waiting zone, and LED lighting.

“There’s a dire need for it in Belfair,” said Mike Oliver, development manager for Mason Transit Authority (MTA).

MTA is leasing the property from Northridge Properties LLC, a national property management company, for three years with the option to continue the agreement month-to-month following the three-year agreement.

The public parking is just a Band-

Parking: Lot is part of \$10 million grant MTA received

continued from page A-27

Aid for now, Oliver said. During the next three years, MTA plans to install a permanent park-and-ride facility somewhere along state Route 3 between Belfair and the Kitsap County border.

In 2015, MTA was awarded 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.

The temporary parking area was already striped and had LED lights, Oliver said. MTA added the waiting area shelter and had to level the lot in some places before it was ready.

Oliver added that MTA is excited about the partnership between it and Northridge Properties.

Public parking in Belfair has long been an issue for North Mason residents. Many people commute to Bremerton to work at the naval shipyard, often using MTA's worker/driver



Herald photo by Brianna Loper

Mason Transit Authority added waiting shelters to a parking area to serve as a temporary park and ride for North Mason.

program, which allows naval base employees to get certification to drive an MTA bus to Bremerton. Oliver said four buses regularly run

the route, and each bus holds about 50 people.

"Those people have to have somewhere to park," he said. "This is a very large concern for the area."

MTA does not yet have a location for the permanent park and ride, but it has hired SCJ Alliance, a civil engineering and transportation planning company in Lacey, to help find the right land.

The park and ride has to adhere to very specific state and federal department of transportation codes, Oliver said, so finding the right property is important.

"Location is key," he said. "Being close to a state route or a highway is important. The last thing we want is a park and ride 5 miles off the highway."

In addition to about 100 or more parking spots, MTA plans to build a facility on the property as well, which could store buses when not in use, serve as a public meeting place, and host office space and break rooms for bus drivers.

MTA estimates the new park and ride will cost about \$3 million and be finished by late 2019 or early 2020.