

Shelton School District taking on after-school bus service in 2016

By Arla Shephard Bull
Mason County Life

Mason Transit Authority's nationally recognized program offering after-school bus service to Shelton students will end in January.

The Shelton School District voted to terminate its contract with Mason Transit, electing instead to absorb the cost of the service itself.

"Based on school safety we made the decision that it would be for students only, not adults on the bus, it will come out of the general fund," said Shelton Schools Superintendent Alex Apostle. "We investigated all the options and this seemed it would be a good option."

For the past 16 years, Mason Transit Authority had been subsidizing the cost for the Shelton School District to run an after-school bus service, paying the district \$66,000 a year to operate the service.

The district used school buses and school employees, but because transit authority dollars were used, the service had

to be open to the general public, in addition to students, said Mason Transit General Manager Brad Patterson.

"Sixteen years ago, a need was identified after some event that happened," Patterson said. "There was a need for extra service. Mason Transit didn't have the staff to address this, but we had the money. Mason Transit hired the school district to provide the service, using their school buses."

The service received positive national attention and recognition from the Community Transportation Association of America in 2006, as well as when the association awarded Mason Transit with the 2015 Rural Community Transportation System of the Year.

The service operated with four fixed routes originating at Shelton High School, with regular bus stops that non-students could use to access the bus, until two years ago when a route was eliminated due to lack of ridership.

About 85 percent of the riders were students,

with many of the rest being former students, said Patterson, adding that the service encountered no reported incidents over the last 16 years.

Mason Transit will absorb the riders into its regular routes and through the Dial-A-Ride service, while the Shelton School District will use funds from its general budget to operate the service for students.

Apostle estimated that the cost to the district for the rest of the school year would be \$44,000 to operate after-school bus service.

"We're in pretty good shape," Apostle said. "On behalf of the Shelton School District I would like to recognize and thank Mason Transit for their service, cooperation and understanding regarding the school district's decision on this matter."

For more information on routes, contact Mason Transit Authority's customer service office at 427-5033 or 800-374-3747 or the Shelton School District at 426-8231.