

Transit Chat: Washington's Rural Transit Systems

I'm Alex Hudson I'm the executive director of Transportation Choices Coalition. We are a statewide advocacy and policy nonprofit that focuses on bringing more and better transportation choices to people across Washington. We are going to take a moment to acknowledge today that while we are gathered virtually our panel is joining us from the unceded lands across Washington state. So we're calling in today from the tribal lands of the Salish People, Squaxin Island People, Skokomish People, and the Wenatchis People (or "P'squosa). Indigenous people are still here many of whom are still fighting for federal recognition. Mobility cannot be achieved without recognizing and honoring those that first navigated these spaces. And as we work towards building a more accessible world let us be mindful that we do so on stolen land. Today we honor with gratitude the physical spaces with which we occupy and the native communities past present and future who live and thrive here We also need to acknowledge the senseless deaths of George Floyd Brianna Taylor Emmett Aubrey Tony McDade and other black Americans and recognize that the injustice of their lost lives is part of a deep and shameful history of anti black violence and white supremacy in Washington state and in the United states. Racism police violence and anti black violence and white ethnic inequity are also transportation problems and that transportation advocates planners engineers policy and decision makers. We cannot turn a blind eye to these issues. This moment requires us to take a special pause and self-reflection and it is past time for each of us to use our power to stamp out racism and injustice. It is more than past time to take an anti-racist approach to all transportation decision-making our webinar today each and all of you will be as listeners please provide Q and A Questions that you'd like to talk to our panel about in the chat function and you can see on your screen ways in which you can adjust speaker view to or gallery view for your convenience. We'll also be providing - sorry - what's the word I'm looking for here - along the bottom you'll be able to see the words that are being spoken here so we're lucky today to have a great panel to talk about a really important issue which is the success of transit agencies who are serving Washington's small urban and rural communities. Transportation in rural communities is different than how looks for folks - for those of us who live in urban communities and we're excited to hear about about their special conditions and needs. One thing that strikes me about

how important this issue is is that Statistically people who live in more rural counties are actually less likely to own cars than people in urban communities and are more likely to live in census tracts that have higher percentages of poverty. So rural transportation is a critical lifeline for people who live in places with fewer or fewer options and further distances to travel. So our panelists tonight. Today is Danette Brannin She is the general manager of Mason Transit in Mason County. Danette has been with the MTA for eight years first as the finance manager and then as the general manager. Her background is in finance and administration and she has worked in many fields in both the private sector and public sector before coming to transit. This variety gives her a great perspective in overseeing transit agency as she tries to see aspects from different angles of all the industry she has worked, transit is by far the most rewarding for her because it creates a sense of giving to the community also joining us is Richard DeRock. Richard is the general manager of Link Transit which serves people in Douglas and Chelan counties. Richard came to Wenatchee and to link transit after managing transit service says the Los Angeles area for 19 years. And he and his family enjoyed the beauty and the variety of activities that local area has to offer. So we all know that COVID-19 has had detrimental impact to public transit both in a decline of ridership as people are staying home if they can or isolating at home as well as to the underlying tax base that supports our transit agencies and in some instances the fares that agencies collect. In addition to that transit agencies have incurred new costs relative to cleaning their buses and also understanding that they've had to adjust some of their best practices to increase social distancing. While still maintaining critical service for people who really count on transit so I want to jump in and talk about where we came from. So when you listen a little bit about where your agencies were at before the crisis hit Knowing that both of you have been enjoying a real uptick in success in delivering transit for your communities so Danette tell us a little bit about where Mason transit was. So before COVID so - I think that we as our words are before COVID - we did spend two years on a large service review and implementation plan and we were We just implemented our major first changes in February of this year and immediately saw increase in ridership and we were so excited because we've been struggling to find new ways to serve the community. We also have been experiencing the highest sales tax ever and just you know our agency was very stable and so we had - We were very

encouraged bright future and were excited to see more ridership grow and to implement more of our changes Richard how are things going for you at Link transit. Well very similarly. We been on a path where starting by 2016 we started a community effort to talk about what the future for Link was gonna be and we'd gone through a major rebuilding of the system after really gutting the system in 2000, well, in 1999 after I-695. Our system was one of the ones that took the full cut that I-695 did. So we cut forty five percent the system in '99 and that ended up being a for us 79 percent loss of ridership and when I got to link in 2002 we started rebuilding the system and by '16 we'd gotten it back to a pretty rational level of service and I approached the community and the board and said we've done as much as we can with what we have. Where do you want to go for the future? And with your help and some other community efforts we went to the ballot in last year and approved a 50 percent expansion of service that would take us to seven day a week operation Provide the the shoulders essentially what we had identified with community was that we were a good Monday through Friday 8 to 5 system we could meet those needs but that our economy was very much driven by tourism and shift work in our fruit processing facilities and that's seven days a week - 24 hour day And we didn't do that. We didn't operate on Sundays we had limited Saturday service we didn't operate in the evenings. So with that additional resources we started expanding service so a little bit last summer even before the ballot initiative passed we were able to take some of the sales tax growth that we'd seen in the community and added some hours to our weekday service. And we actually saw some really significant improvements. January and February were record ridership months for us. We were up 14 percent over last year both in January and February we were on path to reach about 1.4 million boardings up from 1 million last year without the sunday expansion which was going to come in July. It was pretty impressive actually amazing. I don't know if we would have held up for the year but it was a great start. And the first half of March was right right on path to that until we had our shutdown on March 18. That had a fairly significant loss initially but it didn't but even then we didn't lose all the ridership right away. So Richard continuing with you and then we'll move to Danette. How did you start adjusting. In - March 18th as you said. Well we did a couple of things one was we knew we could see the situation was coming. So we had made some preparations beforehand back in January we'd actually ordered PPE for our employees. So we

had masks and goggles and so forth so we could deal with that side of the equation when that became necessary. So from that perspective I think we were ahead of the game. We've gone to our board and gotten the board to buy into a concept that we could provide leaves for our employees if we saw outbreaks and - So we sort of set that stuff up in a way that would give us some flexibility and got the board to understand we were a critical life need here and that it was important to keep our people working that we were a significant part of our local economy and that it was was not an appropriate response just to shut down that we needed to make sure that we kept the system going and and play that through And so when the governor's order came into place at non-essential workers we of course saw a drop in ridership we lost about 60 percent initially. And that really was our professional workers our college students and our school kids that rode the system that those functions all stopped and a course obviously they stopped writing. But our ridership that 40 percent that remained was still there. And I know we have a lot of conversations with board members other folks saying well why don't we just shut down when that easier. I keep saying Who do you think writes the bus. It's the people going to the fruit processing into the potato processing plants. It's the people who are going to the nursing homes that are cooking and mopping the floors and to the hospital that is had the facilities workers that keep those funky places operating and that's who that's who we're transporting every day and it's not huge numbers of them but that's what that 40 percent that was left is on the system there. And it really is a critical function. And so there is a recognition of that and I think we've gone through that. We had to cut service at the end of March because we started seeing a loss of operators and that was all something we'd also planned for our board. Given us direction not to cut office access to the community's so we kept frequency in our urban core. We left all our rural service to the various towns and we've had to back off of that ended up that many of the drivers that pulled out because they thought they had symptoms really didn't we don't think we actually had active cases in our case. And so they were able to come back and we discovered we needed to add service back in we eliminated about 30 percent of 35 percent of our service at that time. We've had to add service back because of social distancing needs that are busier routes. We could not keep the capacities down because a full bus now has 10 passengers. And so in order to keep social distancing we've had to reallocate urban resources

around. So that we take from the low low productive round put it on our busy routes so that we can keep no more than 10 people took our commuter buses which are the largest buses we had put them in downtown where we had the largest ridership which is not a great fit because commuter seats and single tour buses in downtown don't work real well. But at least we have the space for social distancing and that's how we've been managing that structure for the time being because we're more rural and we didn't have super crowd loads. We're actually able to do that and we're back in 85 percent of our pre-COVID service levels. We'll be back we'll actually be higher than where we were on July 6th. We're actually going to implement a little bit of what we have promised the voters in July. We're going to do our Sunday service. So about 20 percent of what we promised. And that's because we can see the sales tax has been impacted but between the the supplemental moneys the feds have provided and the fact that the economy was doing so well early on we think we have the reserves that we can cover probably 2 years of the depth. We've had and still go forward. So we're going to do that if we have to reset again we'll reset again but we're hoping that it won't be this this bad for two years at least. Your lips to God's ears on that one, Richard. How about you Danette, how is Mason transit adjusting? a lot similar to what Richard was saying early on we got involved we started planning early on because we same thing we find this This could go sideways pretty quickly if we don't have a plan And so we early on in it could talk about the end of February We started talking about what the what ifs and and then we also got heavily involved in the community so we had there was like a command center amazing county command center. We started attending daily phone calls with them and planning for you know I mean there's a lot of things you start thinking about What if we had to move people from a nursing home. And so we were that piece of the emergency preparedness and so we were we were very involved in that aspect and then we also same thing we went to our board and we said we got to pay our people we got to keep our people here, we got a policy in place real quick to be able to say basically authorize administrate - we have administrative leave policy anyway but we wanted it to be out front and aware that we might be paying people not to be working basically and that we wanted that to be transparent. So we had a good discussion with our board and same thing like we value these employees these when you look at the drivers and the the amount of time it takes to get a driver out on the road you have to place

value in that and place value in them and so and we were concerned we have our driver probably average. I mean we've actually brought it brought it down a little bit lower level but our average driver is still about 58 years old I mean that you know that that we have to plan for that because now we had drivers going to the doctor and the doctor say you need to you need to be off work. And so all of those things Richard's describing exactly what we went through to And then and then we saw. So we were ready and we saw the ridership drop - it seemed almost overnight Our first service adjustment was March 23rd and we dropped it down about 30 percent and then April 9th another 30 percent. So we're down about 60 percent our rate of service on the road ridership is down about 80 percent. And we had some other challenges that we had to adjust to and that is that we connect with two - well- we actually connect with four transits - all of our neighbors. So you know Jefferson transit we had to stop the route meeting up with them we just didn't have the drivers to cover it. There's Thurston County, Intercity Transit - they shut down service and all they do is scheduled rides. And so we - didn't want to send our drivers down there with no one at the transit center - they were having some other difficulties around downtown Olympia. So you know that connection our neighbors was also big. And and so we just -you know- we already had -thankfully- we had a lot of PPE already so we were prepared for that. We've definitely added rear door entering all of those different things that you know I think all of us I mean we Richard and I both are on a phone conversation every Monday morning and we're all sharing what we're doing And it's been really helpful to be able to see what everyone else is doing things like even though we are fair free already. But we still have out of county fares But just for driver protection also we you know we stopped the fares out of county and then did the rear entry doors. So those are some of things we did but yeah very similar to what Richard's describing. Keeping with you and kind of on this theme of recovery. Knowing Richard you sort of talked about this is like we've fundamentally changed the definition of what a full bus is. A full bus - I know at least here in Seattle - used to be like face to armpit with somebody else. Right. And now we're talking about 10 people it's a very different situation. So what is a return to normal service or normalcy in your - as it relates to operating a transit agency look like for you. What are your biggest needs and challenges and then How do you think those needs and challenges are unique to the context of rural or small urban agency. Well I think - you

know - we have our plan of when we are thinking we'll be back at full level of service but I don't think even though we might have the service hours our service is going to look different. And so that's the piece that we're working on right now. It's one - right now 10 people on a coach is a full bus. We have rows blocked out. We have "don't sit here" and everything to keep social justice distancing. And part of the challenge too when you're in an urban system the next bus is coming in 15 minutes. So if you miss the bus or if you can't get on that bus you are picked up 10 15 minutes. Not so in a rural system. So what we now have is basically ride recovery if a driver gets to a stop in there is too many people for the bus and that starting to happen as Mason County is in phase two. They radio in and another bus comes along because if not it's at a minimum a half hour possibly longer before that next bus is there. So that's a that's a new norm. I mean we have to now kind of build into our service ride recovery and or more frequent on the busier route. So we did just recently add back in a route be cut to help with the frequency and then there's also the challenge of the the riders standing there you know how do you communicate with them. There's a full bus? And so we've taken on some things like that are we our reader board says the bus is full. If the driver can stop and let them know that another bus will be along here that he or she'll call in or the ride. So those are all new things that are new challenges and new ways to actually have to look at things I think on connecting you know with our our fellow neighboring transit and we're still trying to work around that and how that works when they may be in a different place than we are as far as what they can put back into service and I think honestly the biggest challenge really is that frequency issue and how do you solve that when you no longer can put 20 people on a bus. Richard anything to add there about your challenges ahead? Well I think it's it's very much the same thing. It's - there's a political side of this. I mean we're a very conservative part of the state And the idea that we're going to spend you know next year theoretically if we spend all the money that we had budgeted 20 million dollars to move a third of the people that we had last year which is all we can do with the equipment we have at 10 people on a bus and that's that's a reality that I don't think anyone's really understood if we actually honor social distancing. We're not - I mean in the rural we might move a third of what we used to move, in the urban we might move a fifth of what we used to move. We don't have the operators or the vehicles to meet the needs of everybody out there.

And that's a real issue because in this state 34 percent the population doesn't have a driver's license and, yeah, a lot of those people are young and a lot of those people have other issues. But that's also a lot of people who just low income it's that it's that if you are a social justice question and if you don't have if your services are not reliable if you can't depend on me if we get on the bus you know I remember telling people if we're running less than ninety five percent on time that means we're late getting someone to work at least once a month. I would fire an employee for being late to work once a month and most of us are happy to be ninety five percent on time and transit. So if we can't keep our buses that have capacity how do how do we actually provide an environment that keep people employed. And that's one of our primary missions is to get people out to transition into employment. We give them that make make them have access so they can take care of themselves essentially. And if we don't provide the base to do that that's not there and we're going to have pressure to be "efficient." Well you can't be efficient if you can only put 10 people on a bus. You can't be efficient if you have to have - I have five operators that I've got station with buses to respond when the buses are full to go out do exactly what Danette's doing. Those are non-productive employees But I have to do that in order to get people to work on time. That's a non-efficient use of resources but it's a socially important use of resources and until we can get to a place where we can get frequencies and get writers back and get and get in actually get people in group situations which is not going to be next summer. I mean that's the other part of this that I think the community has not understood. We're talking 18 months to two years before we can get back to a level that we can get that armpits to -you know- shoulder to noses type of packing again on other vehicles and politically I think that's going to be a really tough thing. Particularly at a time when resources to communities are are so impacted. And so I think we're really going to have to think about who we're serving and what are the needs out there. And it's it's too easy to talk about coverage it's too easy to talk about some of the base issues we have to think about what is it's going to keep people employed what is it going to keep people having access to medical care and everything else that's important in life. Because in many ways their access to transportation is the access to that job it's the access to the doctor the access to continuation of the benefits they get. And we play an oversized role in many of these people's lives. And quality of service is every bit as

important as the efficiency of it. And that's going to be a really fascinating conversation when we cannot make efficiency questions. It has to be at a much higher cost unfortunately. Building off of that - and Richard, you spoke to this a little bit earlier. How are your agencies thinking and learning from who is still on the bus, right? We for a long time in transportation have been thinking about - or there's been an emphasis on ridership growth and that ridership growth comes from what we call choice riders people who have a lot of mobility options and are opting in to transit particularly around the commute. But knowing that the commute is only 20 percent of the trips that people take in their day time. And for many people, like you mentioned, don't have a driver's license for a variety of reasons. And also that you know AAA estimates that in the state of Washington and thirteen thousand dollars to operate and maintain a vehicle and that 7 million Americans are three months or more behind on their car payments before COVID and people aren't. Most people aren't getting richer. Right now so I'm just wondering on this issue of social justice in transit as an important and critical piece of providing a lifeline to people for economic mobility or to services or just to be with other people right. Which is a value of itself. What are you learning now about who transit is for. And how do you anticipate that kind of you'll respond. Well I think it's been fascinating my board. I mean I think I've sort of recognized that population for a long time but it's been convenient to talk about the choice rider because there's been this sort of belief in the transit world and knowing a lot of political sources that transit dependent riders will take whatever you give them because they don't have a choice. And I mean I know when I worked in Los Angeles that was absolutely the attitude we had and it was it was a joke then because what happened was that as soon as someone could find a way off the system they did because it was lousy service and a lot of urban systems have had that philosophy and I've always argued that's a mistake we should make our system we should strive for quality that a choice rider would have across the board because when you make the system work not only will you attract choice riders but you make it work for the people that are your primary riders anyway and you don't lose them then they stay because it works. We have a massive turnover in transit riders industry wide. We lose 25 percent of our riders every year because the minute they get an income where they can buy a car they do it If those can do it because most places transit service isn't particularly reliable it isn't particularly friendly it's not comfortable and

so people move out of it. But if we could provide a product that actually is on time, it works. And the it's not the comfort piece is not the big piece of what drives people - we've made that mistake that it's the niceties that people want no they want on time They want information they want it reliable. That's the important pieces. And if we can do that it benefits everybody. And in communicating those benefits and then as our ridership fell and talking to our Board about who we have left is like Okay those are really important functions that have to happen out there. We got approached by our school district because of the remote working with the schools We have Wi-Fi on our buses for commuters. What we discovered it's used much more in town by the low-income community because they can't afford data for their phones but they can download their homework assignments. They can download job applications they can download stuff while they're on the bus and it gets used by the low income population. And so the board cited they would provide more Wi-Fi as a support to the low income community and in the urban core because that actually is as much more significant benefit in the schools have been a huge advocate for that because you started understanding these benefits have a different role than we think they actually serve a different model out there. And it's not a bad thing that we're meeting these broader needs in society because they benefit all of us if we do it. What about you Danette? So what we're seeing is that definitely it's the people that need transit. And we've kind of weathered things even before COVID we started talking about - would you ride our system? If you had to depend on Mason transit would you ride our system. Because one thing is like nobody wants to wait for the bus if you have to wait for the bus and you can basically be out of your office or be or wherever and even back home before the bus even arrives to pick you up. I mean that that does not make it appealing. And so one of the things is having more frequency in the area where are most of our riders are. So we started we have active or rural transit I think we do great in our downtown Shelton area we have frequency of 15 minutes our ridership increased because you know now they mean we found that people were probably walking from these places instead of being on the bus for 40 minutes. And so now we have now are you know looking at those who's on our bus and what can we do to make sure that there that it works for them not for what we think but getting out there and really saying hey, what do you need from us? Because I mean we all we now know it's not necessary it's not as quick as being in your car.

So what are you going to do to make sure it is appealing that it is as quick and efficient and fast as it can be and that people are getting to where they need to get on time making their appointments not sitting on the bus two hours. That's another issue in our rural area. We had some routes that are - It's kind of a combination of dial-a-ride and fixed route- and going out to these places and a lot of times where people who are heading in for medical appointments you know maybe had some some disabilities or situations that being on the bus two to three hours just to get into town was too much. And so you know we are really starting looking at would what do we need to do for these people so that even though we're in a rural area and it may take a half hour to get into town but how fast can we get them into town. And so it really is- I think that COVID, one of the greatest things probably done for us is now we're doing a lot of that we are a lot of our service that was on fixed route or what we call a link route. We put back to dial-a-ride. So they're getting a little you know in the far - out in the father county areas are actually getting pretty quick service and door to door service and were I think you know as we start heading back into some adding service then we're going to probably continue a lot of that because it is serving them better and it's. And helping them get where they need to get in a more or maybe I guess comfortable way. Those are some of the you know similar to what Richard's talking about to me you know. The people that are really dependent on this It's amazing to be able to serve them during this time and and they're so grateful makes it so much more rewarding also to have you know your comments come up on the Facebook thank you for not stopping service. Thank you for this I couldn't have got to work when we stopped our fixed route into Olympia and decided to do it all by scheduling people were so appreciative and grateful they were still able to get to work. We had essential workers we were taking into Olympia. One of the things that we found initially and in data that came to us from Transit Center is that here in Washington State 87,000 people who are essential workers are also transit riders And I think this this thinking about a real illumination of the fact that society really depends on people who depend on transit. Absolutely. I mean it's if you look at who are the people that are actually cleaning our facilities who are sanitizing or doing those functions to a great degree. Those are the people that are that are using transit facilities or restocking our grocery shelves and working in the plants that are getting the apples shipped out. Those are all

critical functions to allow our lives to continue and those are our transit users. And I'm certainly grateful for the work that people are doing right now. Everytime I go to the grocery store and there's still food there. I'm like thank you transit for getting me to where I need to go. We're gonna cast a long gaze into the future and then we'll ask some questions from our audience before we close up here. What do you. You've all referenced this but what do you hope the legacy of learning is. From COVID-19. Wow, that's a good question. So in the beginning of this I started saying to my staff I'm like this is an opportunity - I don't - I mean as we all know we were all working through all the different issues of - day to day that you had to review. I mean some new thing came out you had to look at. You had to create a new policy. I mean there was it was just fast paced change change and so somewhere in there I said let's take that. This is an opportunity it is there's a lot going on it's a lot of stress but on some days in but it's also an opportunity it's an opportunity to refocus how his how we run our system how we serve our community are we really meeting the needs of the community. I mean this is like is a wonderful time to try things that you might not have been able to try otherwise because you know - you have certain obligations that you are you already had your system up and going in. And it's hard to sometimes do a pilot or try something new it takes a lot of planning and now it's like we can well you know let's do this and see how this works if this is successful we're going to bring that along with us as we as we start to reopen fully and add our service hours back. So I think that's the biggest thing is it is taking that opportunity to refocus and really look at your community and serve your community. I think that's the biggest part of the message and interestingly there has been this assumption along a lot of people particularly among people who don't particularly support public transit or think it's a bad investment that we've got people on the buses who are just riding around for entertainment sake. And I've always argued that while we have some folks particularly in the development disability community who really do ride around for entertainment I mean that's their socialization and that's how they know it. It's probably almost a therapy and in some ways for some of that community that's a very tiny part of our ridership in any system maybe a bit more in the rural than they are maybe a little higher percentage in our systems than in urban systems but yeah. But that's a tiny part of what's out there but the people who ride to the dollar store on a regular basis they going there to get off and on. If you look at

what's in their bags their grocery shopping and they only have a two or three bucks a day and that's how they're living because they don't have enough money to go to the regular grocery stores and buy for a week they're buying food every day. That's why they're on the bus two or three times a day because that's how they have to live. And that's a very different environment. It really changed the thinking a couple of my board members as we started talking about why these people were using some of our our fare free routes and why they were hitting some of these locations that were out there. And is it I took a couple of along with me and said watch what they're doing. This is how they're getting their food. It's not just - you know they're dropping around I said. I mean sure the liquor stores next door and maybe occasionally dropping off there but that's not what most these folks are doing this is because they don't have the resources to buy groceries the way you and I do it. They know they have to use the system on a regular basis and maybe there's other solutions that if you if we could find a way to deal with income equity issues then maybe they wouldn't be riding the system as much as they do. But until we deal with those issues were that part of that support system. And that's a different question and it was interesting as people that had not thought of us is that role is like OK well that's a different function than we gave you credit for and something that has a different role out there that we need to do. And you know maybe that is something that needs to be supported Now again it becomes that overall picture as we try to do to try to be everything to everybody and in COVID what we've ended up being is. It's that core of the people don't have choices because choice writers aren't coming back aren't here right now. And if you know when the CDC sends out guidance saying that employers shouldn't allow employees to write transit you know that's going to be a while before that part comes back. So we are we have to focus on our critical riders for a while and not assume that we can provide bad service for them because they don't have a choice. I think that that we have to take the right right answer for. Yeah I'd love that. This has been an awesome conversation and we just have time for one question. So I apologize to the people who have really amazing questions in here about disability access, federal and state funding. But I want to leave with sort of the the one question I think is on a lot of people's minds which is we are going to build a better system that makes it so that people who depend on transit like that is irresistibly good that they'll never leave us. Right. But a big

question is how are we going to get folks feeling comfortable back on transit as we return to a normal mobility world. So what is - in just a quick minute. What do you what are you doing to help people feel safe on transit - like transit is a good place to come back to. Well I think it's sort of the same way we've had to deal with outbreaks of violence or homelessness or other things that have made buses and transit centers uncomfortable places in the past. You have to you have to be a presence. So as I've had to add security which somehow I never thought I'd have to do in a rural community that had to do that to deal with some of those circumstances and make sure that not only security but also to create some social work stuff on one side for COVID what we've done is I've got very visible people that come down and they sanitize the buses midday. We've made it very clear that there's and we always did this. I mean this was something this wasn't new for us we'd always try to you know just some part of our culture we've always done this. But it's a visible presence saying we take this seriously and we're going to keep you safe and we have to constantly put that back because as I remind people where we're seeing outbreaks in our community is in the processing plants we're taking people too so it's entirely possible we're going to see it on our vehicle. So we need to provide the environment, we need to provide masks for people, we need to have sanitation and virucides out there and hand sanitizers and you know no-fare systems and we need to protect our operators and all those things have to be there. So that that initial message and then we need to show that we don't have infections and it's going to take some time. It's not people that have choices. It will take time it's not going to happen immediately. But if we can keep doing that and keep showing success that eventually people start saying OK. It's a lot cheaper or it's 70 miles from Manson to Wenatchee and it's snowing and I really don't want to drive. And you know what. I go get back on the bus again. I mean those decisions will happen in the future again for the people that have choices but not if they don't feel comfortable if they view this as an unsafe locat- place we've lost them. And I think we have to assume we've lost them right now We have to make the evidence that it's clear it is a safe place and we're as safe- I think we can make our place as safe as any place else in society if we do the right things. Danette, in our final minute anything to add to that? I think communication is key. A com- you know- we are running ads in the paper each week saying you know this is what we're doing to keep our buses safe, keep them clean. We have presence. They

are definitely at our transit Community Center in downtown Shelton. So we have supervisors there meeting the buses and - with you know - spray bottles and rags and hand and so that the riders see we really are going in and cleaning those buses You know we have - had took some of our fleet out. And so that we can clean more regularly we don't have as many vehicles since we don't have as much service on we actually check vehicles out as well so that we could just keep a smaller fleet clean. So now they're cleaned every night. And I think you know really the key whether it's out to the community or to your employees is communication. They need to hear from you. They need to see what you're doing. They need to see or hear what you're doing and see you doing it. And I think that's been really key for us here. Absolutely. Well thank you both for everything that you're doing for the people of your communities to be able to rely on transit to get where they need to go. Both during this crisis and in the years of service that you've provided to your community Thank you so much and thank you to everyone for joining us for folks who care about transit and care about our rural communities in Washington. We will be back on - join TCC for some - Here's where you can get all of our information stay in touch with us. We are in the middle of a virtual festival of honoring transit and recognizing its critical natures where I Heart transit Fest so thanks for coming to our first event here on the 10th we're going to have mobility justice power hour we're going to be talking about anti-racism and in transit advocacy spaces so join us for that and then our next transit chat is about the role of other mobility options and streets and public spaces as it relates to having healthy communities so thanks everybody for joining us and to our and to our panelists for your wisdom. Thank you.