

Carpool Lanes for Paratransit



Problem:

In the 2019 legislative session, People First of Snohomish County presented their legislators with a problem - the inability for paratransit vehicles to use carpool lanes. For many members of the Intellectual/Developmental Disability (I/DD) community, paratransit is often their only means of transportation. Furthermore, often times this is their only way to reach life saving medical treatments and procedures, such as dialysis.

Access to these lanes of travel will greatly improve not just the drive times for these types of appointments, but the return times when the vehicle is also empty. This will allow for more rides to be scheduled for an individual bus, and greatly improve the timeliness of trips, as an easier commute will lead to less rides arriving late.

The legislators were shocked to learn this, as it was simply assumed paratransit vehicles were considered buses for purposes of the carpool lanes. However, per various RCW's, paratransit vehicles don't meet a number of requirements to be considered buses or municipal transit vehicles.

Solution:

A very simple adjustment to RCW 46.04.355 will allow for paratransit vehicles to be considered municipal transit vehicles. Unfortunately this solution was presented mid-session, and there wasn't an opportunity for it to be presented to the legislature at that time.

The final line in defining what a municipal transit vehicle is according to RCW 46.04.355 reads "[which] is used for the purpose of carrying passengers together with incidental baggage and freight on a regular schedule."

This is the specific wording that disqualifies paratransit vehicles, as they do not have a regular schedule they adhere to. Simply omitting the final four words "on a regular schedule" allows for paratransit vehicles to be considered municipal transit vehicles. Once they fall under this designation, carpool lanes open up for their use statewide.

Fiscal Impact: NONE

This extraordinarily simple fix will greatly improve the quality of life for all who use paratransit, not just the I/DD community. Further, it also accomplishes this with zero financial impact, an especially important distinction given our current budget crisis.

Modify RCW 46.04.355
Enable Paratransit to Use Carpool Lanes

For more information: People First of Snohomish County

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