

Two years into program, Yakima-Ellensburg commuter use still rising

Lauren Takores

Yakima-Ellensburg Commuter

Riders climb aboard the Yakima-Ellensburg Commuter bus at Central Washington University on Monday afternoon. The service started two years ago and, as of Friday, has provided 40,101 rides so far this year. (Lauren Takores / Daily Record)



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BY LAUREN TAKORES staff writer | [0 comments](#)

Nearing its two-year anniversary, the Yakima-Ellensburg Commuter bus continues to roll with a steady, loyal passenger base.

Karen Allen, marketing and program administrator for Yakima Transit, called the service “one of the premier routes of its type in the state.”

“We’ve done some tweaks and refined the service and as the service grew, we had to grow into a larger size (bus), too,” she said.

Commuter bus service began almost two years ago on Nov. 28, 2011. It operates weekdays in Yakima, Selah, and Ellensburg. In 2012, the commuter bus logged 39,471 rides. As of Friday, the service has provided 40,101 rides so far this year.

Fares increased on Sept. 1, 2012 by \$1 per one-way ride to \$4 and by \$25 for a monthly pass to \$125.

“The operational cost for the project is challenged by maintenance and repair of the fleet of buses” as well as the fluctuating price of fuel, said Bob Richey, transit manager at HopeSource, a human services organization which provides local transportation services. Plans for a new proposed stop in the town of Selah were tabled, according to Richey, after several delays. However, there are plans to improve and expand the Mini Mart parking lot, a Washington State Department of Transportation Park and Ride near the commuter bus’s Selah firing center stop.

Rider survey

A rider survey last spring showed 32 percent of riders used the service for employment purposes and 56 percent for traveling to educational institutions, with Central Washington University creating the largest source of student riders.

“I see those numbers being pretty similar” to current ridership numbers, Richey said.

While students constitute a large number of riders, many are commuting to and from work.

Linda Lea works in the financial aid office at CWU. Lea lives in Selah and is a daily commuter to the campus, usually riding the first bus in the morning and the last bus in the evening. Early Monday afternoon, she caught the Yakima-bound bus at the Ellensburg Safeway stop.

“I think it’s been good,” Lea said. “The drivers are nice, the riders are nice, everyone’s considerate.”

CWU student Eva Chavez rode the bus from campus to Yakima on Monday afternoon to work at her custodial job at Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences. Chavez transferred to CWU this quarter with an associate’s degree from Yakima Valley Community College. Friends at YVCC told her about the commuter bus, which she has been using for three months. By not driving back and forth, Chavez saves about \$100 a month.

“So far I like the service,” she said.

“They come on time, they leave on time.”

Saving money on gas

Randy Couch is a business major, also in his first quarter at CWU after transferring from YVCC with an associate’s degree. He paid close attention when he heard about the possibility of a Yakima-Ellensburg bus service.

“I knew it was going to happen before it happened,” he said.



“I was concerned, before that, because I thought, how am I going to get from Yakima to Ellensburg, sometimes daily.” He said he saves a substantial amount of money on gas and maintenance on his van.

The original commuter buses were 18-passenger vehicles. Six weeks into the service, larger coach buses were needed due to overwhelming demand. Richey said that number of people using the service was “a pleasant surprise.” “And we continue to grow,” he said.