



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

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WTA board approves deal to restore Sunday buses in Bellingham

JARED PABEN - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM - Transit authority leaders, without any debate, unanimously approved a draft deal with the Bellingham transportation district that will restore Sunday buses.

The Whatcom Transportation Authority board on Thursday, Feb. 10, voted 8-0 to approve the draft agreement. Bill Knutzen was absent.

The vote came minutes after WTA board chairman Mel Hansen, expecting a spirited battle of words, informed fellow board members he'd enforce Robert's Rules of Order, and nobody would be allowed to speak out of turn.

Through the deal, the Bellingham-wide Transportation Benefit District, which is governed by the City Council wearing a different hat, would purchase Sunday bus service from WTA. WTA cut the service last fall.

The benefit district plans to spend roughly \$1 million a year to restore Sunday service. The money comes from a two-tenths of 1 percent sales tax increase voters approved last November.

On Thursday, Pat Dunn, WTA's finance director, briefed the WTA board on the draft agreement, which still must be approved by the benefit district board. After members of that board objected to language in a previous draft that would have left the door open for WTA to pass a small sales tax increase of its own and still keep the benefit district paying, the language was changed in this draft. The version approved by WTA says that any WTA sales tax increase would result in the contract ending.

Before the vote, only three people spoke. One of them, Richard Johnson, owner of Ferndale-based Airporter Shuttle/Bellair Charters, urged the board to reject restoring Sunday service, or, if it wanted to restore it, contract with the private sector to do it. He previously proposed to WTA staff having his company provide buses for Sunday service in Bellingham, but they didn't like the idea, he said.

"The private sector could do it for far less," he said.

WTA also has a mandate to serve the entire county, not just Bellingham, he said.

Bellingham resident Ruth Voigt, a transit advocate, told the board that while almost everybody in the rural county has a car, that's not true in the city.

It's "really a cut in the heart to not be able to get to church," she said.

READ THE DRAFT [Here's a .pdf of the draft agreement](#) approved by WTA's board.

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Read more: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2011/02/11/1861295/wta-board-approves-deal-to-restore.html#ixzz1Dg5xC89c>