

# Bus routes: ‘Hopefully, this is temporary and not long term’

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route 13 through Astoria and route 21 from Cannon Beach to Seaside. The Seaside Streetcar will be suspended on weekends.

When the transit district initially announced the potential cuts, route 16 through Warrenton, another weekend route, was on the list. But Hazen said that was an error and the route will be reduced to mornings from 7:42 to 10:52 a.m. and evenings from 2:22 to 5:35 p.m.

Route 17 through Cannon Beach that operates on weekdays will also be cut. Additionally, route 15 through Warrenton, another weekday service, will only operate in the mornings from 6:40 to 10:43 a.m. and in the evenings from 3:50 to 7:03 p.m., a slight change from the original proposal.

Route 101, which runs from Astoria to Cannon Beach, will be cut from four



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

**A driver shortage has led to cuts to bus routes.**

buses a day to two.

All remaining routes will be shut down for an hour each shift so drivers can take lunch breaks.

Hazen and several board members expressed sadness over the decision to cut routes, but recognized it was the only option.

“Hopefully, this is temporary and not long term,” said

Debbie Boothe-Schmidt, the board chairwoman. “But if we don’t have drivers, I’m not sure exactly where we go.”

The cuts will go into effect on Sept. 6.

“This reduction will get us to the point that we hopefully can continue the service we provide,” Hazen said.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

**Camp Rilea will host testing for the coronavirus.**

## Testing: A centrally-located place

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The Oregon Health Authority reported 29 new virus cases in the county on Friday and 19 new cases on Thursday. Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 1,796 virus cases

and 13 deaths as of Friday.

The county reported that 15 people had been hospitalized for the virus in the county over the past week — 13 who were unvaccinated and two who were vaccinated.

As of Friday, the county

said 23,502 people — 59.6% — were fully vaccinated. The county has set a goal of having 27,533 people — 70% — vaccinated to try to achieve herd immunity against the virus.

*Erick Bengel contributed to this report.*

# Commissioner: ‘I really feel like this conversation should not be a political conversation’

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of overarching mandates that will eventually do more harm than good.”

In an interview with The Astorian, Bangs said she has fielded a lot of phone calls and emails from constituents — some who work in health care, some in education — who are concerned about the vaccine mandates. Some people are “really wondering, what can they do — highly concerned individuals that are, sadly, thinking about quitting their jobs,” she said. “And when I look at our current job situation here in our county, we really can’t afford to lose good employees in any sector.”

Her letter follows a similar appeal last week from the school board in Knappa to the governor, the Oregon Health Authority and the state Department of Education asking for local decision-making over virus safety protocols at schools.

“The governor is responding to a public health crisis,” Charles Boyle, a spokesman for Brown, told The Astorian in response to Bangs’ letter. “Her goal is to save lives and keep our schools, businesses and communities open. We have two safe and effective tools to protect Oregonians: masks and vaccines.”

“It’s unfortunate that some local elected officials are playing politics while the people they are supposed to represent are filling our hospital ICUs (intensive care units). Our hospitals are full, and our doctors, nurses and health care workers are being stretched beyond their limits.”

“As of this morning, there are 12 staffed ICU beds left in the hospital region that serves Clatsop County, along with everyone living

in Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington, Columbia and Tillamook counties — 96% of the staffed ICU beds for the region are full.

“Hospitalizations have increased nearly 1,000% since July 9. The vast majority of Oregonians hospitalized for COVID-19 are unvaccinated. People are dying right now when we have safe, effective and free vaccines readily available.

“Commissioners should be calling on their constituents to wear masks and get vaccinated.”

### ‘Agree to disagree’

The letters from Bangs and the school board were issued as Clatsop County experienced a record number of virus cases in August.

For the first time during the pandemic, local health care leaders warned about their ability to care for virus patients and people who need other medical treatment. Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria has canceled elective surgeries and said some patients who did not have the virus have died because they were unable to be transferred to other hospitals for specialized care.

Mark Kujala, the chairman of the county Board of Commissioners, who also serves as the director of the Columbia Memorial Hospital Foundation, said in a text message that he spoke with Bangs about her letter. “We have an understanding and agree to disagree on this one,” he said.

Kujala, via text, wrote that the letter “reflects her opinions and does not speak for the entire commission.

“Having been a member of the county EOC (Emergency Operations Center) and the vaccine task force and witnessing the impact of COVID-19 over the last 18

months at Columbia Memorial Hospital — I have a unique perspective.

“It breaks my heart to know unvaccinated individuals are now extremely sick or dying from this virus. And to see the spread in assisted living facilities and the workplace. I understand the actions some organizations are taking because the vaccine has made much of this preventable.

“Others may feel differently, but in my opinion the benefits of getting vaccinated far outweigh any costs.”

In a letter to The Astorian, county commissioners and the Public Health Department said the surge of new virus cases driven by the delta variant presents “unprecedented challenges.”

“The official tally of new confirmed and presumptive local cases is now averaging more than two dozen per day, and this number likely represents only part of the virus’ true spread through our communities,” the county leaders wrote. “Local hospitals are seeing more COVID-19 patients than at any other time.”

### Local decision-making

Brown lifted most government restrictions to contain the virus at the end of June and turned over decision-making to counties. School boards were also preparing to make local decisions about masks and other safety protocols for the upcoming school year.

But Brown changed course after the rapid spread of the delta variant in July and August, restoring mask mandates and requiring vaccines for school staff and health care workers. The governor said she took state-wide action because counties and local leaders failed to

take steps to respond to new virus cases that are overwhelming some hospitals.

Over the past several days, the Astoria City Council and the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board in Seaside have embraced vaccination requirements for city and park district employees, with exceptions for religious or medical reasons.

Bangs emphasized that her stance is neither anti-vaccine nor anti-mask. “I really believe that if choices are going to be made, that they need to be made at a local level,” she said.

In Astoria, she said, “they had the conversation, people had the opportunity to weigh in. And I think my big issue

with the state-level, top-down mandate is that we weren’t part of the conversation at any point, and that in itself is hard. You know, you’re looking to a community that wants to be heard — you’re looking at people who deserve to be heard.”

Asked if, hypothetically, Brown were to lift vaccine mandates and the question were to come before the county commission, Bangs said she would default to “the freedom of choice when it comes to medical decisions.

“For me, I want to be able to support all individuals in their choices that they make, even though I may or may not disagree with that choice,” said Bangs,

who has been public about the fact that she has gotten vaccinated.

Her message to constituents: “Speak to your primary care doctor.”

“That is my largest message to folks who are finding themselves in a position of vaccine hesitancy or looking to quit their jobs,” Bangs said. “Speak to your primary care physician, discuss your concerns, find out if it’s a good choice for you or not. And then make that choice.”

“I really feel like this conversation should not be a political conversation,” she added, “and I’m so sad that it is. This conversation should be occurring in your doctor’s office.”

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