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SERVICE from page 1A

Haring is determined to make the Connector an affordable transportation option for those who are unable to drive or simply prefer not to drive.

His company was selected to operate the connector service by LTD after a bidding and vetting process determined the company was best suited to operate the route, due primarily to work Haring's team had done running operating the Rhody Express.

"So far, rider numbers have been pretty good, and we are getting first-time riders all the time. The new bus has been great, we have the bike rack on the front, and it

has seen a lot of use already," Haring said.

Lane County purchased a brand-new vehicle for the Yachats service, which

for mobility challenged riders and state of the art emergency equipment on board.

One nice safety touch

Alan Haring, Josh's father, is the regular driver on the connector route and he has seen ridership levels fluctuate but slowly increase over time.

"I have some regulars that come down to Florence to do some shopping or to go to Old Town with friends. I also have some riders that go to Yachats more now that they don't have to worry about driving there on 101,"

Alan said. "And, because of the higher sight line, I really try to keep the windows clean, which can be a challenge with the ocean and the weather. But everybody seems amazed when they see how much more they can see riding up higher."

The combination of the comfort and safety elements, and the higher vantage point of the bus, make for a noticeably different ride than a traditional passenger car.

The weekday service from Florence to Yachats has been gaining ridership since its inception but still often leaves with empty seats. There have been some increases in regular passengers on the route, but ridership numbers have not been as high as organizers hope.

This is meaningful as any future determination related to extending the connector service will ultimately be decided by the number of individual riders using the line.

Haring hopes the addition of a Saturday option for riders will further expand the customer base for the connector service.

"Saturday service has been one of the most requested changes when we have surveyed riders. I also collect feedback from some of the committees I work with and Saturday is always the first thing people ask about," he said.

Saturday's trip on the connector service was the first where I felt free to observe, from literally a new perspective, the beauty and rugged nature of the coastline from Florence to Yachats.

The height of the vehicle and the large viewing areas allow riders to see above the traffic passing between drivers and the ocean traveling north and over the guardrails and the shrubbery on the trip south.

Many people make the short but visually stunning journey to Yachats a regular part of their lives. They look forward to the views of sweeping ocean waves rolling towards the shore and eagerly anticipate dining at one of the numerous restaurants that are tucked into the shops and stores adjacent to the bay.

Now, thanks to the Florence-Yachats Connector, they can do so without the concern of driving home after a meal and a bottle of wine and they can sit back, enjoy the view and leave the driving to others.

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— Josh Haring,

Operator of the Florence-Yachats Connector Service

was delivered earlier this year. The vehicle has large windows on both sides that run from front to back with viewing obstructions at a minimum. The new bus is equipped with a heavy-duty suspension package and the seats are comfortable and roomy. There is also a lift

which is often lacking on commercial buses is seatbelts. The twisting and turning inherent in the trip along the coast are minimized significantly when using the seatbelts and makes enjoying the amazing views, seemingly around every corner, much more enjoyable.

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