



Hermiston Herald, File

The Hermiston Area Regional Transit bus leaves a bus stop on Southwest Third Street on Tuesday, Jan. 22, 2019 in Hermiston. The vehicle has since been upgraded to a larger bus as ridership increases.

Public transit options grow in Hermiston

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

It may not be a big city subway system yet, but Hermiston's public transportation system has grown with the city's population.

During a Monday, June 14, city council work session, Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan reminded councilors of how options have increased in recent years.

Senior & Disabled Taxi Program

The city's oldest current form of public transportation, the Senior & Disabled Taxi Program, began in 1962, according to Morgan.

Under the program, residents over the age of 60 or those with disabilities can purchase subsidized taxi cards from city hall and use them to catch rides around town.

Morgan said out of the approximately 20,000 rides per year the service provides, about two-thirds are to Walmart, Lifeways or Good Shepherd Medical Center.

Currently, participants pay \$2.50 for a one-way ride anywhere in the city, while the city uses taxpayer dollars to pay another \$4.25 to the taxi company. Morgan said the city has been receiving an increasingly small allocation from the state's Special Transportation Fund for the service — \$45,000 in 1993 compared to \$18,000 in 2020 — in large part because the money comes from a statewide cigarette tax and fewer people smoke now.

The HART

In January 2018, the city began the HART, which stands for Hermiston Area Regional Transit. The public bus system offers free rides around Hermiston and connects to the Hermiston Hopper, which offers free rides from Hermiston to Umatilla, Stanfield and Pendleton.

The city pays Kayak Public Transit, the transportation system run by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, \$150,000 a year to run the bus system completely, and the tribes leverage that money to obtain additional grant funding.

"It really has been a turn-key operation," Morgan said.

The HART makes 10 loops around Hermiston per day, running Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Bus schedules are available on the Kayak Public Transit website, but Morgan said the easiest way to plan trips is to simply input a starting point and destination and desired time of arrival on Google Maps and hit the "public transportation" option to let Google plan the best route.

WORC Taxi Program

Revenue for public transportation increased after the Oregon Legislature passed a major transportation pack-

LOOKING FOR A RIDE?

For information about bus routes and schedules for the HART and Hermiston Hopper, visit ctuir.org/departments/tribal-planning-office/kayak-public-transit/bus-schedules or call the bus dispatch line Monday through Friday, 4:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

For information about the WORC or Senior & Disabled Taxi Program, visit hermiston.or.us/transit/page/taxi-programs or call 541-567-5521.

age in 2017, adding a payroll tax to create the Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund.

Morgan said Umatilla County has a \$1.1 billion annual payroll, which generates \$1.1 million for public transportation in the county each year.

The city has used part of that money to create WORC, or the West-End On-Demand Ride Cooperative.

The taxi program is similar to the Senior & Disabled Taxi Program, but is meant to help workers get to and from their jobs. Anyone who brings proof of employment into city hall can purchase a punch card good for 10 rides at \$2.50 per ride inside Hermiston city limits, with higher prices available for rides to and from Stanfield, Umatilla and the areas inside the Hermiston ZIP code but outside city limits. The subsidy for the rides comes entirely from the state STIF funds, with none paid directly by the city.

Riders can use the cards to go from anywhere to their place of employment, and to anywhere from their place of employment. Morgan said the program provided 600 subsidized rides

in April, and the majority of riders using the program were riding to and from jobs at grocery stores and restaurants.

He said the addition of WORC as an option works better for some people's schedules than riding the HART, which only runs 12 hours a day.

"A large amount of our workforce doesn't just work bank hours, 8-5," he said.

Other options

Morgan said for those without a vehicle of their own, there are a few other options that the city isn't involved in.

That includes the Care-Van program by Good Shepherd Health Care System, which will provide free rides to medical appointments to the hospital and any of Good Shepherd's affiliated clinics.

A more recent addition was Bird Scooters, a private company that offers paid use of electric scooters stationed around town.

Morgan said Morrow County is also partnering with Umatilla County to plan a new bus route similar to the Hermiston Hopper, that will create a bus loop that travels between Hermiston and Boardman.

Hermiston judge retires from military service after 33 years

By BRYCE DOLE
STAFF WRITER

Umatilla County Circuit Court Judge and Oregon National Guard Brigadier General Daniel Hill retired from his position in the National Guard on Saturday, June 5.

Hill's military service ended with a small ceremony at the Major General George White Headquarters of the Oregon Military Department in Salem, according to a news release.

"It was nice to see folks I hadn't seen for a while and go through the ceremony that I missed last year," Hill said.

He was scheduled to retire a year ago, but the ceremony was delayed due to COVID-19. The ceremony, which was brief and small due to COVID-19 restrictions, included an introductory statement from Adjutant General Michael Stencel.

Hill then received the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit and the Oregon National Guard Exceptional Service Medal, he said.

Hill, of Hermiston, served in the military for 33 years, mostly with the Oregon National Guard, before he finished a tour as assistant to the chief counsel of the National Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C. He added that he would have served longer had his tour not ended in May 2020.

"Had I been given an option and a promotion, I would have stayed," he said. "But I had a great ending. It was natural timing to retire at that point."

Before then, he served as state judge advocate, the Oregon National



Contributed photo

Umatilla County Circuit Court Judge Daniel Hill will continue serving in the court. He has retired from the military after 33 years.

Guard's top legal position. He was appointed to the position in 2015 while maintaining a role as circuit court judge for Umatilla and Morrow counties.

Hill went into active duty for the Army as a

"IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE YOU'RE WORKING WITH, THE PEOPLE YOU'RE HELPING, THE PEOPLE YOU'RE SERVING."

Daniel Hill, Umatilla County Circuit Court Judge and Oregon National Guard Brigadier General

lieutenant with the Judge Advocate General's Corps in 1987. Four years later, he joined the National Guard, according to news reports. In 2005, Hill was the task force staff judge advocate during Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. A year later, he deployed to Camp Phoenix in Kabul, Afghanistan, where he served on the task force Phoenix Five. Working with French, British and

Mongolian forces, as well as the U.S. Navy, Marines and Air Force, the task force trained the Afghanistan National Army.

As staff judge advocate, Hill gave legal advice to U.S. forces, handling military justice claims, providing legal assistance and advising on operational law. The legal personnel supporting the task force also worked with Afghan judge advocates and gave legal training to Afghan troops, according to news reports.

Hill said the people he served with is what he will remember most about his time in the military.

"You remember certain things," he said, "like large dust storms in Kabul, Afghanistan, traveling through Kabul in a small convoy of Ford Rangers. Or sitting in the New Orleans area area post-Katrina as Rita was coming in. But it's the people around you. It's all about the people you're working with, the people you're helping, the people you're serving."

Hill attained degrees from Blue Mountain Community College and Oregon State University, a juris doctorate from Willamette University College of Law and a master's degree from the U.S. Army War College in 2014.

Hill received several awards for his military service, including the Bronze Star Medal for his work on crime and corruption issues in Afghanistan, according to news reports. He also received a Meritorious Service Medal with three Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters and the Army Commendation Medal, the press release said.

Hill said he will continue to serve as a circuit court judge for the indefinite future.



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(next to transfer station)
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