



PHOTOS BY ARLA SHEPHARD

Mason Transit Authority's transit-community center is slated to open in February. The center will include a transit hub, recreational youth opportunities and retail space.

# Mason Transit gets grant for finishing Shelton center

By ARLA SHEPHARD  
MASON COUNTY LIFE

Mason Transit Authority officials received a more than welcome surprise late last month when they learned that the rural transit agency had been tapped to receive nearly \$1.5 million in federal grant funding.

The U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration's Ladders of Opportunity Grant received nearly 450 project proposals from 282 applicants requesting a portion of the \$100 million available. Twenty-four recipients in 19 states received funding, including two in Washington: the Muckleshoot Reservation, for a new transit system, and Mason Transit Authority, for the agency's transit-community center project on Franklin Street, slated to open in February.

Mason Transit applied for the grant in July, after waiting for the go-ahead from the state Department of Transportation, said Kathy Geist, transit-community center manager.

"With rural transits like us, when we hear about these initiatives, we can't just automatically apply for them, we have to wait to see if DOT will manage it for us," Geist said. "Rural transits can't directly apply. We only had a couple weeks to put it together by the time we got notice."

The agency didn't expect to hear back from the federal government until November, but was excited about the news, Geist added.

"The really amazing part for us is that the federal government saw this project, in this tiny little town in this small county, as cutting-edge," she said. "Combining transit with a community center, I think everybody needs to do this."

The Ladders of Opportunity grants support modernizing and expanding bus service across the country, with the goal of connecting disadvantaged and low-income people, including veterans, seniors and youth, with centers of education, employment, health care and other services.

U.S. Rep. Denny Heck of the 10th Congressional District, which includes the city of Shelton, congratulated the transit agency on their successful grant request.

"Seniors need to get to their doctor appointments, veterans need access to job training and kids need a place to play ball and get safely home," Heck said. "This project demonstrates the value in allowing community members of all backgrounds, ages and interests to gather together in an accessible, central facility."

The \$1,474,999 that Mason Transit received will be used toward final completion of the project, including finishing the interior of the 63,000-square-foot facility.

The community center will house a gym in the renovated Shelton Armory, as well as a commercial kitchen, retail space, a computer lab and offices that serve Mason Transit.

Eighty percent of the funds for the \$7.5 million project came from outside dollars, Geist said, with a 20 percent local match.

"That's unheard of and that's the most impressive part," she said. "All of our tax dollars as citizens go to the state and federal government, and agencies like us have to work hard to bring that money back. It's really amazing the amount of money that we have parlayed back."

Mason Transit is looking forward to expanding its scope beyond simply "moving people," Geist added.

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## ON THE COVER

From left, Mike Oliver, development manager at Mason Transit Authority, Chris Pleasant, project superintendent with Forma Construction, Drew Hicks, project engineer with Forma, and Kathy Geist, transit-community center manager, are working together to build a new transit community center in downtown Shelton. Mason Transit received nearly \$1.5 million to complete the project.

Photo by Arla Shephard



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