



Why I Ride

Stories from
Island Transit Riders

Bikes, buses and babies – California Couple Credits Public Transit for New Life on Whidbey

Janet Young and her wife Laura Bergman, both 35 years old, have never owned a car. They've always ridden the bus, bicycled or walked. Public transit played a big role in helping them achieve their dream of moving to Whidbey Island. Today, it's still a big part of their new life.

"We loved San Francisco, but Whidbey Island is the place we wanted to be," says Young. In 2016, the California couple needed a change. They both quit big jobs, moved to Whidbey and started a family.

Young says taking public transit helped them achieve their dream. "Instead of spending \$30,000 on a car when I was 21, I put money in the stock market and watched it grow. For ten years, I was able to save even more by avoiding car insurance, gas and maintenance costs."

People spend about \$8,000 a year to operate a car. "Eventually, that money became a sum we could live on," says Young. "Cars are not part of our cost of living. It's saved us a lot. In fact, it's changed our entire lifestyle."

The couple also uses the bike racks on the bus to combine biking with bussing. "Biking expands your reach by five miles, so with the routes run by Island Transit, it means you can go anywhere on the island without using a car. We've been completely astonished at how much we can do on the island by bus," she says.

"Before the state's stay home order, we took the bus a lot for everyday things like groceries, doctor appointments, visiting friends, and going out. I even took the bus to the hospital to give birth," says Young who adds that using the bus reduces her carbon footprint. "Some day when our kids grow up and they face a world that experiences wild fires every summer, when they turn to me and say 'Mom why didn't you fix this and combat climate change



Pictured left to right: Laura Bergman, Janet Young, Baby Quinn.

before it was too late?,' I want to tell them that we did everything we could. We absolutely did."

Before settling down to raise a family, Janet Young traveled extensively and experienced transit all over the world. When asked what the main difference is between other transit systems and Island Transit, Young boasts, "It's so clean! People are super friendly, and it's free. So, I actually think compared to lot of transit systems, ours on Whidbey is world class."

Young and Bergman will raise their children to take the bus. "It's a really safe place. I send my 81-year-old grandma on the bus alone. She's from Taiwan and doesn't speak English. The drivers remember her stop and remind her where to get off. So, if Grandma can do it, anyone can."

Island Transit, established in 1987, is a fare-free public transit system serving Island County with routes that cover most of Whidbey and Camano islands. The system currently runs 14 routes with 26 vehicles and 68 operators. For more information on Island Transit, go to www.islandtransit.org.

BITS 'n' PIECES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Why: The Southern Resident Orca Whales that call the Salish Sea (Strait of Georgia, Strait of Juan de Fuca, and Puget Sound) home are critically endangered. In 2019, three more Southern Resident Orcas died. Their numbers have been in steady decline, due mainly to a loss of food supply of their primary food source: Chinook salmon.

This fall, there have been two new births for the Southern Resident Orcas. Two baby boys were born in September. Survival rates for newborns and juveniles up to 3 years is very low, and it's up to us all to take recovery efforts and help these new babies survive.

Recovery for the Southern Resident Orcas will take a coordinated and ongoing effort by all who reside in watersheds that provide habitat for the Orca's primary food source: primarily Chinook salmon, which are also endangered. Improving fish habitat will also support sport and commercial fisheries in Washington that have an estimated economic impact of \$2.7 billion. These watersheds span every corner of Washington State and surrounding lands. Providing clean waterways that support fish health and overall improved water quality will benefit more than just the Southern Resident Orcas; doing so will benefit all life that call Washington State and surrounding lands/waterways their home.

Generous sponsors have already stepped forward to support Orca Recovery Day events including, but not limited to, One Tree Planted, Washington State Conservation Commission, Ruth Foundation: A legacy of the Gary E. Milgard Foundation, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, Boeing, Puget Sound Energy, and the Russell Family Foundation.

For more information: Local event details and information can be found at www.whidbeycd.org/orca. Regional details can be found at www.BetterGround.org/ORD.

[Submitted by Shannon Bly, Outreach Coordinator, Whidbey Island Conservation District]

Two Whidbey Island Neighborhoods Receive National Firewise USA™ Site Distinction

The wildfire smoke we experienced on Whidbey in early September may seem now like a distant memory with fall on fast-track. Its presence in our area was a reminder that although this time Oregon and California are the hot spots, wildfire sculpts all landscapes – including ours. On Whidbey, we have our own wildfire history and ecology worth learning and preparing for. Many of your fellow islanders are doing just that!

Congratulations to two communities – Whidbey Island Campers Haven in the Central Whidbey Island Fire and Rescue District and Pondilla Estates in the North Whidbey Fire and Rescue District – who were recognized by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) as Firewise USA™ sites. They represent Island County's second and third nationally recognized communities. Sierra Country Club in the North Whidbey Fire and Rescue District was the County's first, recognized in 2018. They

join the growing network of more than 1,500 communities nationwide who are taking action and ownership in preparing and adapting their homes and landscapes for wildfire. To view the network, visit bit.ly/2ShawUZ.

The Whidbey Island Firewise Program, is a free service available to any landowner and community on Whidbey Island, and is a partnership between the Whidbey Island Conservation District, local fire districts, and the Washington Dept. of Natural Resources Wildfire Division. This outreach and education program takes NFPA's national model on wildfire preparedness, tailors it to the unique characteristics of wildfire ecology on Whidbey Island, and offers support and guidance for landowners and communities interested in working together to reduce their risk.

Whidbey Island Campers Haven and Pondilla Estates, over the course of just over a year, worked collaboratively to accomplish several steps to become a national Firewise USA™ site. These steps included local agency fire expert consultation and presentations on wildfire ecology and hazards for community members, development and implementation of a community action plan that provided outreach and education on wildfire preparedness, and volunteer time investment in preparedness actions, like fuels reduction projects on individual properties and common-owned spaces.

"The work we have done to date has raised the awareness and cooperation of all members about fire safety and prevention. We each take responsibility for our own sites, and small work groups are working on the common areas," shared Joy Page, Firewise Committee lead for the Whidbey Island Campers Haven. "Our campground is located in a forest that surrounds our RVs. The spike of wildfires in the past five years in the U.S. and British Columbia energized us to reach out to the Firewise program to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce the potential for a wildfire, and mitigate risks in our campground."

Melanie Beckstrom of the Pondilla Estates Firewise team echoed a similar sentiment.

"I continue to learn strategies that will benefit my own property, and I look forward to promoting Firewise among the growing numbers of those in our community who are becoming more aware of the need to be prepared when it comes to the fire dangers around us," she said.

Beckstrom's neighbor and Firewise counterpart, Teri Jo Summer Reiger, added, "My sense is that the Firewise program has shown how many hands can work together, and that taking care of where we live generates connection among neighbors."

If you are a landowner or community interested in proactive wildfire preparedness support, visit www.whidbeycd.org/firewise to learn more.

[Submitted by Kelsi Mottet, Natural Resource Planner, Whidbey Island Conservation District]

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"Riding the bus
let me achieve
my dreams."

—Janet & Quinn

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