



# ASK Transit

## Inquiry on Ear Plugs

Information compiled on April 6, 2010

**The Question:** We have had our annual audio logical testing done recently for our drivers. The Audiologist recommended, based on some hearing loss by some of our drivers, that we provide ear plugs to our drivers. The ear plugs that he is recommending are legal to be worn while driving. Does your agency provide ear plugs to drivers?

**Asotin County** says ...No.

**Columbia County Public Transportation** says... We do not supply ear plugs.

**Community Transit** says... I would be very careful on this topic. Hearing protection is required for certain jobs with noise levels exceeding permissible exposure limits. Driving a bus is not one of them. That doesn't mean those employee's don't experience hearing loss. That could be from a lot of different sources from listening to loud music, power tools at home, or just plain aging. Probably what they need is a good hearing conservation program that identifies those areas in the company where hearing protection is required. Don't do it just because an audiologist recommends it. That's bad advice.

**Everett Transit** says... No, however, if there was a request I believe we would see it as a reasonable accommodation provided the operator could hear the passengers and emergency vehicles. We don't test our operators hearing outside of the DOT biannual physical. The City of Everett does have audio logical testing periodically but it is rarely taken by our bus and paratransit operators. Our vehicle sound levels, which have been tested, do not reach the levels that require ear protection. This issue has been brought up several times over the years by drivers, and all tests have come back negative for ear protection. If they are experiencing hearing loss, it is not from our buses.

**Grant Transit** says... We do not provide earplugs for drivers.

**Grays Harbor Transit** says... No, we do not. This is the first I've heard about it.

**Intercity Transit** says... No we do not.

**Island Transit** says... No we do not. If they ask for some we will give them some. We have earplugs for the maintenance crew because of the noise while working on the buses or bus washing. We are at the end of the Navy outlying field and have navy jets flying over so we do have earplugs on the site and available.

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**Kitsap Transit** says... Currently we do not provide ear plugs of any type to our drivers, however, we are about to conduct a sound level test on several of our coaches and we will see what information that generates.

**Link Transit** says... No, Link Transit tested our operators over at least a three year period and found no changes or additional hearing loss during the testing period. Original testing found some of our operators did have some loss of hearing; however, medical professionals concluded the loss had more to do with aging. Our facility and shop workers showed higher loss on original testing.

**Mason Transit** says... No, we do not supply earplugs for our drivers. We have not had a request by the drivers to wear them, if we did receive such a request we would review the issue at that time.

**Pierce Transit** says... Not at Pierce Transit.

**Skagit Transit** says... At this time we do not provide earplugs to our drivers. I would be interested in hearing more about the annual audio logical testing that is be performed.

**Spokane Transit** says... No, we do not. I would use caution in providing PPE to employees based audiograms versus documented on-the-job hazardous exposure levels. Why is the agency doing annual testing? All of our driver noise surveys conducted through LNI have come back under well under thresholds requiring protection, training and testing.

**Valley Transit** says...No.

**Whatcom Transit** says... No we do not. We also have had a similar test done albeit a long while ago. We found there were no noise spikes loud enough to be considered harmful but more of a nuisance for operators. Also, we have found adjusting the open window adjacent to an operator, operating speeds, and gears chosen can help lessen the wind and/or engine noise. I would be interested to know what the audiologist determined the cause of the sound was, the audio db levels resulting in such a recommendation, the type of vehicles tested and under what situations, and the type of earplugs suggested.

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