

WASHINGTON STATE FERRIES

PUBLIC HEARINGS - JANUARY 2009

Port Townsend, Washington

Monday, January 5, 2009

5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Reported by: Linda M. Grotefendt, CCR
License No. 3013

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 1: Thanks for being here. I really appreciate you coming, of course, and we feel very strongly that we've had a good partnership with you. We thank you for that, for your support, for your outreach, for continuing to keep us informed, and considering all that we've talked about through our partnership with Keystone.

On that note, I would just say that the City of Port Townsend is giving this a good, thorough review. At the same time, we do feel that we're part of a three-legged stool; you being one of those legs, the City of Port Townsend being another, and, of course, our partners over on Keystone/Whidbey.

So with that, we would like to be able to speak with our partnership members before we actually provide some sort of official response to Plan A and Plan B, because we feel that it would be inappropriate without consulting one of the legs of our stools.

So I'll just say, as an aside, that I'm very grateful that you're considering the reservations. I know that you're going to get push-back from other communities, but we're very thankful that you implemented that as a pilot program here. That was one of our successes that we felt, as a partnership, that we put forward; you listened. And though I think there was some skepticism at the beginning, we're very grateful that you put it through, and we know that it helped with our traffic on our streets. So I'll just have that comment as an aside.

But we'll get more to you once we are able to consult with our partners. Thanks so much for your work. And, Rick, you look like you got in a fight with Dave Tinsley. You're both wearing slings. I don't know who won.

Thanks very much.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 2: I'd like to echo what Mayor Sandoval said about your responsiveness that State Ferries has had to our community and want to expand that thought about our community to include the whole peninsula.

I'm a member of the Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization, as the County representative, in addition to being the County Commissioner. And I do really appreciate the involvement of the Port Townsend and Keystone partnership of all this activity, because you really have listened, so I do appreciate that.

I do want to make a couple of comments about the plans, particularly Plan B. I do have some concerns as to the resiliency and the reliability of that system and the flexibility that you will lack compared to Plan A, particularly for our route here, going Port Townsend to Keystone.

With only one Island Home boat, we really don't have that flexibility we need, because things go wrong sometimes; problems happen. And I think having two island homes would be the minimum I would really expect to see in a long-range plan. And that boat can be one that can service other areas and provide backup there too. So I really hope that you consider that.

When you look at Plan B and look at involving transit more, you really need to be aware that transit has its problems too. Our Jefferson Transit System was able to not cut back service because they made some very creative scheduling changes. They looked at it in a new way.

We're not going to probably be able to do that again. So if you're relying on increased transit to work with passenger ferry service, you're going to have to work on increasing the transit funding too. So I want you to keep that in mind.

And, again, I really appreciate you coming to our community and listening to us. Thank you.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 3: Thanks for coming here. First, I should say that my comments here are my personal comments, not representing those of

the Jefferson County Ferry Advisory Committee, of which I'm a member. I have some little more-specific, rather than general, comments about the plan documents that I've reviewed. And, first, thanks for making those available well in advance of this; long documents, a lot of information there to digest.

There's some things that caught my attention that are a little confusing to me. For example, I notice that you're projecting that the route growth for Port Townsend/Keystone is going to be 96 percent by the year 2030. And yet neither Plan A or Plan B called for any increased vessel capacity. We're still going to have two 64-car vessels in 2030, with nearly 100-percent growth in demand. That doesn't make a lot of sense to me.

The second comment I have is: Regarding the information that you used to formulate this plan, I want to reiterate a concern that I've tried to express at previous sessions, and that is with respect to the survey that was conducted -- the surveys that were conducted to inform your decisions.

I find that the survey was rather flawed. For example, when people were asked -- or given a choice of "how much more would you be willing to pay for your reservation" and one of the choices was not "zero," that tends to slant the result of the survey, the outcome of the survey, as necessarily slanted in the direction of: Well, obviously, you must be willing to pay something; and the answer was "no." And it turns out you drew the correct conclusion: Basically, a no-fee reservation system, of which I heartily approve.

But my concern about the survey is: If that was one rather simple example of how flawed the survey methodology was, perhaps some of the rest of the survey questions and responses should be reviewed for reasonability, because I have some doubts about that whole process.

One final comment regarding the boat sizes that are proposed to be built, regardless of Plan A or Plan B. Your plan, as I understand it, is: When you replace a vessel, you're going to replace it with the same-size vessel. Like, the 202 gets replaced with a 202.

Well, how does that make sense on a route where you already are capacity-constrained? Why would you build a new 200-car vessel to replace an existing one when--for example, at Kingston--you could, or probably should, be going with a 250- or 300-car vessel? I just do not understand the logic or the rationale of doing that when you're building a vessel that's going to last for, supposedly, 60 years.

Thanks.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 4: My name is Paul Richmond. I'm a local attorney here. I'm giving you copies of my card. I want to thank you for being here today.

Look, you know, it seems like Plan A is the aspiration; Plan B is the backup. I think Plan A should be the baseline, and Plan B is just a flat-out disaster.

When you start cutting back on the amount of service that is to this area, cutting us back to one service, one ferry, cutting back the routes to Edmonds, cutting back the routes to Bremerton and what would be done to the island communities, that's going to just kill the local economies here.

I hate to sound like a broken record -- by the way, you can buy a record at Quimper Sound down the street here if we can preserve the ferry system and we don't let it tank. But we seem to be -- we need you guys -- and we all need to be being really strong advocates and saying: "Why are we, like, dumping all this money into this imaginary economy through things like these bailouts, through

things like chasing these bogeymen through programs like Homeland Security, where they're building these" --

There's money to build these enormous bases. There's money for Zodiacs to accompany these ferries, which -- some of which won't be here. That's madness. That's sheer, absolute madness.

When you look at the actual budget -- there's a book, "Bad Money," by Kevin Phillips, you can buy across the street at Imprint Books, which is still in business -- may not be if we keep cutting back the ferry service, but still in business. There's more money, according to the charts in that book, in the derivatives than there is in all the real manufacturing in this country, by several fold.

So we can't keep gutting the real economy, gutting back real basic services, like ferries, like roads. These are roads. These are lifelines. They're not talking about cutting down roads. They're not talking about shutting off sections of I-5. Why, in God's name, are the people who hold the power of the purse sitting by as we're talking about cutting off the basic roads, the basic -- most basic infrastructure, what we need to get to work, what we need to have real goods here, what we need to basically survive here, so that we can pay off things like imaginary debts and continue to have money to build programs that chase imaginary enemies?

We need you to be stronger advocates on that, and we need you to tell that to our federal government. Look them in the eye and say: "Why are you going to do this?" There's no end to the amount of money they can suck out of the real world to pay for the imaginary world. The imaginary world now has more -- is worth more money than the real one. Thank you.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 5: Good evening. My name is Harry Dudley. I think I'm loud enough without the microphone. If not, let me know.

I appreciate your being here. I'm a citizen of Jefferson County. I'm a mariner, used to traveling both on land and water. And my concern is an extension of what was just said, but instead of dealing with the federal government, I believe it's important that you be dealing with the state government.

And I know you do, but I am pressing you to be a stronger advocate for the concept -- in your executive summary, you point out that "allocating transportation funds that would otherwise support the highway system."

This is the highway system. To somehow or another segregate the floating bridges that happen to get underway from all of the other floating bridges and other bridges in this state is inappropriate. State Route 20 has a floating bridge. It starts right there, it goes over there.

It's very similar to the one that runs across Hood Canal. It's floating, it carries people and cars. There is a difference in operating expenses, but they are still bridges within the system.

So I would ask that you take to the legislature the concept that these bridges, called ferries, are just as important to the highway system. Highway funds should be used to pay for them. And to have one set of bridges within our state that are being required to have, now, 70 percent -- and what is the legislature mandating that we ultimately end up paying? I've forgotten the number.

But they're pressing you to have the users of the ferries pay a huge percentage. What other bridge in this state has the user pay 70 percent of the operating cost? Even the toll bridge across State Route 16 -- the money that's

being spent has to do with the bonding and building of the bridge. Once that's done, the operational costs of the bridge aren't going to be paid for by the users, as I understand the system. Why are the users of the floating bridges called ferries being mandated to pay such an exorbitant percentage of the operating costs of these segments of the highway system?

And to segregate the two, as has been done in this executive summary, I think, is inappropriate. I recognize that the legislature put you in that box, but you have the responsibility to us as users to fight your way out of that box, and I'm asking you to do that.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 6: I'm Robert Altman. I work and live in town here, and I have occasional work over on Whidbey. I travel the ferry, when it's running, relatively often. And several of my concerns have been addressed by Paul Richmond in particular. And I totally support what his statement was -- actually, and the last speaker, about just accepting the fact that this is a highway system, and to be able to consider Port Townsend and Keystone to be a separate case is pretty ridiculous, from the way that I look at it.

The one thing left that I want to address is the reservation system, and I would like to -- at some point, I'd like to know what the standard for success is. People have said -- it's been in the paper and statements from Washington State Ferries that the reservation system is a success; where, as often as I travel on the ferries and speak to people in town and over on the Whidbey side, everyone thinks, including some of the ferry employees that we speak to, that the reservation system is a bit of a joke if the goal of it is to make use of the ferry more efficient.

I think what's happened and what I see happening is that we basically, all

summer, had half-empty ferries, and it very rarely ran at full capacity. I have friends up in Bellingham, motorcycle friends up in Canada, friends in Seattle who are afraid to come to Port Townsend and afraid to go to Whidbey and afraid to make the loop and to visit towns because the reservation system does not work.

There is sort of a suspicion that the whole point of the reservations system was to bring down ferry usage to justify cutting ferry service. And that's just the poop that's in town, you know. But the idea that -- when we would see a line going on the ferry, those of us that work here and depend on the ferries, I look at those lines -- I look at the last year, I look at the 60 cars in line over at Whidbey, and I'm looking at dollar signs: these people who are coming over here to spend money.

All summer, I was on Whidbey. I drove right on the ferry twice a week. I don't think I missed one ferry last summer. And to be honest with you, it's fine; it's nice to get home when I want to. But the bottom line is: This town is basically dying because of it, because people are afraid to use the ferries.

The only people who are satisfied with the ferries were the Canadians who didn't even know about the reservation system at all. And it's just -- and I think what constitutes success needs to be defined. For the ferry system to say, "Oh, the system works" -- it might work for the ferry system in terms of managing traffic down the street, but it doesn't work for Port Townsend.

And, again, thank you guys for coming here. It's real important. Thank you.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 7: My name is James Fritz. I'm a semi-retired industrial engineer, so I look at things slightly different. I do have some friends that own a restaurant in town and, whenever the car ferry stops running, their business falls off 30 percent. Now, I don't think many businesses in

Port Townsend can survive with a drop of at least 30 percent. And in a town like this, with high overhead, that's especially important.

I think the reservation system should be abandoned. I think the previous system, where you got in a line, was much better. I think that the bigger the ferry the better, because, obviously, if you have a 60-car ferry and you have 80 people in line, then 20 of them are going to have to wait for the next ferry. On the other hand, it probably takes the same amount of crew to man a 60-car ferry as it does an 80-car ferry or something of this sort, or a 140-car ferry.

A couple things as far as efficiency. Making reservations obviously takes time, and time is money and, in a ferry system that's saddled with costs, you want to cut that down to an absolute minimum.

The second suggestion I have is totally different. Round everything off to even numbers. Like, don't have \$10.53, for God's sakes. Make it \$11. If it's above 50 cents, round it off to the next higher. If it's \$9.27, round it off to the next lower.

You can save 5 percent of your time -- of the people at the booths if you do away with change. And it's simple, it's straightforward, and you can increase your efficiency about 5 percent.

Okay, the second thing is: This is Highway 20. This is a road. We need that ferry. We need good ferry service. And as several people have already said, why -- they're talking about \$5 billion for the Spokane Street viaduct. \$5 billion? Nobody asks how we're going to pay for it or anything. It's going to be built. But somehow, the ferry systems are supposed to pay their own way.

They tie the far-flung Puget Sound together, and it's absolutely necessary. It's necessary for business, it's necessary for industry, it's necessary for people,

it's necessary for tourists.

So that's pretty much all I have to say. Number one, without ferries, Port Townsend will die. I can absolutely guarantee you. Number two, you can make ferries more efficient and, to do that, you do two things: forget the reservation systems and round everything off to the nearest dollar. That will save you probably 5 percent. And I think we need the concept that ferries are part of the state's transportation system.

That's it. Thanks.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 8: I'm Andrew Karagas. I'm a citizen of Port Townsend for 33 years. I'm very familiar with the demographics of Port Townsend, as a businessman, and as 13 years on the Port Townsend/Keystone ferry run as a doctor in Port Townsend. I was on the committee for this run and Clinton's run.

What I have seen this year is the town's businesses decimated and a great a number of them just going out of business, and it will soon expand with the closure of the Hood Canal Bridge in May and June for those people who were able to get through the winter without completely going bust.

I see the reservation system. On this system, it kind of works, but it did decimate the town. I liked it. It was easier on the employees. You didn't have to have the police, no cars on the street, but no one came to Port Townsend. They were afraid to.

I see the reservations, just from looking at the ferry terminals, with an 80-percent ridership. And then I hear of the outsourcing to India of the reservation system by, you know, the birdies that fly, and I'm a little bit confused.

And now, all of a sudden, I don't think the people in the Northwest really

realize, with Boeing having gone through two strikes and headquarters leaving to Chicago, no Boeing member on the board -- Boeing has less than 10 years in the Pacific Northwest.

And these are economic facts that I think we have to deal with, in our funding, to the legislature. And you can contact the legislature by [www.legw -- washington.com](http://www.legw-washington.com) (sic) and talk to your legislative hotline on each and every bill, and watch TVW.

Thank you.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 9: Thank you, guys. Thank you, Marta. I'm Tim Snyder. I'm a member of the Ferry Advisory Committee, but I'm speaking for myself.

For five years, many of us in this community have been very concerned whether the ferry system has been doing something, and we've been spending a lot of effort, because many of those things have not been explained to us. And David has been an absolute marvel, for the last year, coming on board and helping the communication. Ray is a marvel with facts and figures and numbers and charts.

However, I kind of have the same problem that Tom has tonight, where this is a list of items that I recognize the words, and many of these are things we've worked at for many hours and many meetings about these topics. But I don't understand how we got to this paper, and I don't buy this paper.

This document gives us bad choices. It doesn't give us good choices. I don't see the justification for some of these things going on. And I don't think this is a genuine document when, if we go for one choice, we can't have the ramp changes and the dock that doesn't work. But if we go for the other choice, we can

have it, with billions of dollars difference.

Come on. Let's play real here. We can spend \$15,000 on paving either way we go. Let's have a real document. I don't see the justification to the fare increases. There's just so much here that I feel was developed with a Ouija board.

So that's my question. Please, come back to us with real documents with real information.

I still am worried about the Island Home. The Island Home is designed as a 124-car ferry. It's built as a 124- car ferry. It's just we aren't building all of it on the boat. We're calling it a 64-car ferry, but you and I, as taxpayers, are paying an enormous burden to build a stupid boat, and I don't think that makes any sense when what we really need here is a boat designed for Port Townsend traffic and having real numbers about when do we need that boat and when we don't. And after years, we still don't have the right numbers on what the ridership is here, so I have a problem with that.

Oh, and then we're putting the engine for a 144-car boat in this boat, which we're calling 64, even though it's really a 124-car boat. That's like putting a Corvette engine in a Volkswagen. It's not going to be fuel efficient. It doesn't do the right things that we need it to do.

So with the boats -- when we get the boats, what we do here, can we please have real information that Tom, who is a real numbers guy, can understand, and I, who am just a boat guy, can understand?

Thanks, guys.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 10: I'm David Michael, and we've been hearing, with the new Obama administration, about shovel-ready projects, and I

just wanted to know if the Washington State Ferry has applied, or is thinking about applying, for that. I mean, it sounds like we have sort of a shovel-ready project here and we're mostly missing funds. So I just wondered what's been done about that or thought about that.

MR. MOSELEY: I'll just quickly respond that we have submitted a number of projects for submission in the State's stimulus package to the federal government.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 11: I do have a question. In reading the paper today, I also see a Plan C that seems to be invisible, and that is that: Is this an attempt -- you know, because of the funding issues and everything like that, is this an attempt -- and especially concerning Port Townsend and, it looks like, Point Defiance -- is it an attempt for the ferry system to own the facility and the vessel and then have it put into a -- privatize it, so-called privatization, of those two runs to begin with, as an overall act of going on down the line and trying to get enough support or not support out of the legislature to privatize the entire ferry system?

Because I'm reading something else into these papers here. Because I accumulate a lot of information over the years, and that's what it looks like to me, that that is, like, written in. Like, a Plan C, like, off to the side: Plan B, Part 2, would be this unit here, which has always been a popular route, as portrayed on television, but never a route that Washington State Ferries has paid a lot of attention to.

And so I'm kind of seeing this. I'd like to know if -- you know, in the back of your mind, if that's part of Plan B, because it kind of looks like it's a subchapter of the Plan B part. Thank you.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 12: I'm Mari Mullen, the executive director of the Port Townsend Main Street Program, and I also want to thank you for all your -- you know, your openness in coming to our community and listening.

And you know that we have a really special town. In my work through Main Street I get to sometimes travel statewide, but across the country. What we have here is really a treasure, and we have significant challenges ahead of us this year, with the economic climate, that actually carries through 2010 and beyond.

And we've got the Hood Canal Bridge closing for up to five weeks, and the reduction in ferry service, which has already impacted our small businesses. So we just ask you to support our community and support our unique, individually owned businesses, which depend on the ferry as a lifeline.

And whatever we can do through our Main Street Program, to communicate with businesses, we are happy to do. We can help, you know, with legislative inaction. If you, you know, need any voices of support from the trenches, we're happy to do it.

So we thank you for everything. We want to work with our Whidbey partners and make a solution that works, but we want you to remember the people behind the businesses. Thanks.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 13: Based on your public hearings that you're going to have here for the next month, or almost a month, is there a chance that there could be changes to the draft plan?

MR. MOSELEY: There could be.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 14: You're open to changing? Like, is there a chance that there could be a change to Plan A or Plan B?

MR. MOSELEY: We could certainly look at, probably, some

modifications to those; might very well be part of our recommendation.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 14: And then, my understanding is that the funding part of all of this really comes down to recommendations from the Transportation Commission.

MR. MOSELEY: Really, in the end, it comes down to --

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 14: You're not really involved in making suggestions for funding?

MR. MOSELEY: Yes, that's correct.

PUBLIC SPEAKER NO. 14: Because funding is really the crux of this whole puzzle.

MR. MOSELEY: Yes, it is.

(The public comment portion of the meeting
ended at 6:33 p.m.)

CERTIFICATE

STATE OF WASHINGTON)

COUNTY OF KING)

I, LINDA M. GROTEFENDT, a Certified Shorthand Reporter and Notary Public in and for King County, Washington, do hereby certify that I reported in machine shorthand the above public hearing; that the foregoing transcript was prepared under my personal supervision and constitutes a true record of the above public hearing.

WITNESS my hand and seal in Renton, County of King, State of Washington, this 8th day of January, 2009.

Notary public in and for the
State of Washington, residing
at Renton.

My commission expires 1-2-2012.