

MEETING SUMMARY
SAN JUAN ISLANDS VRS COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MEETING
SAN JUAN ISLAND YACHT CLUB, FRIDAY HARBOR, WA
Thursday, September 18, 2014 11:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Note: This meeting summary represents notes from the Washington State Department of Transportation Ferries Division (WSF) Partnership Group Meeting, and is not a formal transcript or minutes. It is provided as a record for the staff, group members and public in attendance, and other interested parties.

Welcome & Meeting Overview

George Capacci, Interim Assistant Secretary WSDOT Ferries Division
Fauna Larkin, BERK & Associates

George welcomed the group and thanked them for their ongoing participation. He briefly discussed the budget for vehicle reservations (VRS), the new WSF Assistant Secretary Lynne Griffith, the status of out-of-service vessels, and mentioned that the summer outreach for VRS went well.

Fauna went over the agenda and handouts.

Outreach

Fauna Larkin, BERK & Associates

Fauna discussed the survey results, referencing the Analysis of May 2014 Customer Survey Results Executive Summary handout.

Questions & Comments

1. (Beverly Zapalac) This survey was not for the islands.
Correct, this was a survey of current reservation customers. We will do a similar survey here in the islands after reservations are rolled out. We will also poll the ferry lines for those that do not have access to online surveys. We want to be clear that we will perform the same survey up here; this was in no way meant to represent San Juan Islanders.
2. (Clark Johnson) I saw a report like this a year or so ago and I was not impressed; this one is much better. You have an excellent sample size and you have demonstrated an improving trend; good job. The outreach was supposed to be about reaching people in the San Juan Islands, and to raise awareness. Beverly, Ken and I performed a survey of about 100 Lopez Islanders on a Monday, a Tuesday and a Saturday, and I would like to give a summary of the results. There were six questions:
 1. What is the zip code where you receive your mail?
 - 75% local, 25% visitors
 2. How often do you use the ferries?

- 42% were weekly users
 - We found a difference in the travel patterns between locals and visitors; more than half the locals use the ferries on a weekly basis
3. When you use the ferries, what is your planning timeframe?
 - Locals were shorter term travel planners; visitors were more long term, but not always
 - 43% of visitors planned a day or two in advance, 25% a week in advance, 25% a month in advance
 - 60% of locals planned a day or two in advance, 33% a week in advance
 4. Have you heard that vehicle reservations are coming to the San Juan Islands?
 - 90% were aware of reservations
 - 75% of visitors, 96% of locals
 5. (Only for those that answered yes to question #4) How did you find out about VRS in the San Juan Islands?
 - 48% from WSF outreach efforts
 - 30% from rumors
 - 43.5% read something in print media (use of local paper seems to be better at reaching people than showing up in person)
 6. (Only for those that answered yes to question #4) Given what you know today, is your outlook on VRS positive, neutral, or negative?
 - 33% positive, 33% neutral, 33% negative
 - Does not seem to correlate with being local or a visitor or how often ferries are used, but length of planning seems to matter: short term planners were the most negative

Thank you Clark. Is there a correlation between how people heard about reservations and how they felt about it?

I don't have that, but I can get it for you. WSF missed half of the population on Lopez during the summer outreach. Media is a great way to reach the people on Lopez. There was also little indication that any form of media had reached the visitors. Thank you to Ken and Beverly for their work. This only took 12 hours of time; why aren't you doing more of this? Spend 15 dollars an hour and get a high school kid out there performing surveys.

3. (Gordon Jonasson) Clark, were you surprised that so many visitors knew about the system?
4. (Clark Johnson) Yes. The banner at Anacortes was mentioned quite a bit.
5. (John MacLeod) Something jumped out at me on the May 2014 survey results: only 3% of people indicated the website was difficult, but it was the area noted highest in needing improvement.

We interpret that as people being generally satisfied with the ease of use of the website, but they still see room for improvement. If someone wrote a specific

- comment about the website, those fell under that category. We will be looking at each comment and addressing them.*
6. (Bill Pike) Clark, did you get any sense that people were bothered by the fact that they will be able to make a reservation to Lopez but not back? I heard a lot of that in Anacortes when I helped with outreach. People get in line at Lopez thinking they will make it on, and then they get displaced by a commercial reservation user.
 7. (Clark Johnson) We did not pursue that subject specifically, but it did come up. When we started this process there was chaos on Lopez at the possibility of any form of reservations, and we carried that message to this group. We have since then worked hard to find a way to make it work. I believe that if the system is implemented correctly there will be room on Lopez for the idea of reservations off the island.
 8. (Ken Burtness) Of all the people I've talked to, it's rare that they objected to not having eastbound reservations.
During our outreach on Lopez we had a lot of people ask about reservations going both directions, with mixed reactions. This is why we think it's best to have knowledgeable staff performing this type of outreach rather than leaving it in the hands of high school students. We need to be able to address these types of questions. We would be happy to work with folks on other islands if they would like to do the same as Clark.

Fauna went over the Save A Spot Summer Outreach 2014 Report, beginning on page 16 of the emailed handout packet.

9. (John Brantigan) What time of day will you be releasing space? If you do it at midnight you will be keeping people up.
We have not decided that yet; we will let you know next month.
10. (Howie Rosenfeld) I have some skepticism about this 58% utilization you show on page 18. How much of that is the early and late boats? What would it look like if you took those out?
We don't have that information today, but the brilliance of reservations is that for those who can plan ahead and have flexibility, the system will shift them to the earlier sailings rather than the middle of the day, whereas there is no benefit to doing it right now.
You think that will be a significant shift?
Yes.
It will not appeal to locals.
11. (Margot Shaw) The most important way to spend your time from now on is not on surveys; this is happening whether people like it or not. Arrange your outreach more efficiently. The results from your outreach are important, and I don't see these top five questions being addressed in the media. When I helped on Orcas, the main thing people didn't know about was the tiered release of

space. You need to focus on spreading the word on these topics. I would like to know how we the public learn about these releases, how is it going to be marketed?

It's in our FAQs, on the website, and we will spell out the tiered release system during the reservation process online. You will be able to hold your cursor over an unavailable sailing and it will explain why it's unavailable and if/when more space will be released. We know it is important to get that information out ahead of rollout, and we will make sure it's apparent.

For those that will never go online, how will callers get that information?

Our customer service staff will walk them through it, and we will work with local media. We have a fall outreach plan to go over later in this meeting as well.

We also need people to realize this is a two-way street. We have to be ready to change our habits as well to accommodate this change.

12. (Pat McKay) I have to agree with Howie, I think a lot of these empty spaces are at 4 a.m. or 11 p.m. I don't think reservations will change that; tourists don't want to get to Friday Harbor at 6 a.m. when nothing is open.

We think it will drive them to the less full sailings, perhaps not the 4 a.m. sailing. It is true that those boats are mostly empty, but for there to be no space at all during the summer there would have to be an astronomical increase in ridership. It will be interesting to see how people change their travel patterns after reservations come into play. We will assess the changes as we go along. On the 4th of July we created a specific Best Times to Travel, showing space on the first three sailings. We asked people to travel early and we saw a 20% increase on those early sailings.

13. (Gordon Jonasson) I noticed anecdotally this summer that there was an increase of traffic in the islands, and the days are surprising. Thursdays are becoming as bad as Fridays. And who would think you'd overload on Saturday nights out of Friday Harbor—but the last three have. Awareness of reservations will trim the line at Anacortes and reduce those waits, but what are you going to do about the people who don't have a bank account or a credit card?

You cannot make a reservation without a credit or debit card number. We will monitor this to see how big of an issue this is for the islanders; it has not been an issue at Port Townsend / Coupeville. Customers can always purchase a preloaded Visa gift card and use that if they are not comfortable having a regular debit or credit card.

14. (Ken Burtness) People seem to think having this system where you can reserve up to 95% of the space will suddenly mean that all the boats are full. I like seeing these numbers because now I can tell people that this won't mean they won't get on the boat.

We will take out the early and late sailings and get you the adjusted stats as well. In talking to people, I have heard that they really like the 30% release two days prior for those last minute travel plans.

15. (Gordon Jonasson) Have you thought about changing the percentages?

- We have to start somewhere, and we will track and adjust as needed. For instance if we are not filling boats that are normally full, we would make an adjustment.*
16. (Sally Thomsen) Another factor I have not heard discussed lately is that you can choose which sailings to release space on at certain times, so you have the option to release less favorable sailings earlier so that people who are making plans two months in advance can take that space.
We have that option, and we tried that at Port Townsend / Coupeville when we first started there. We found that it created confusion and increased the calls to customer service. We plan to keep it simple and have the releases the same across the board at first, but we can change that if needed.
17. (Carol Anderson) My turnover rate this summer was up 25%, and what is interesting is that 50% of my customers walked on or came on bicycles because of the traffic in Anacortes. It will be interesting to see how many of them drive next year because they can make a vehicle reservation. You may see car ridership go up next year because of that. Also, if folks come in on the early boat they have nowhere to go. Nothing is open and check-in is usually not until 3 or 4 p.m.
18. (John MacLeod) A comment on your stats: they are based on the summer sailing schedule. Your stats are skewed because of using those dates rather than what most people would look at as summer as defined by the school year. You include several weeks as summer which really aren't. You may get a different result if you looked at the actual tourist season.
We will include stats from Memorial Day to Labor Day, and without the first and last sailings of the day included.
Yes, but do them each separately so we can see the difference. I agree that the idea of reservations is to spread the demand, and I think it will happen.
19. (Bill Pike) The devil is in the details with the tiered release system. Take this hypothetical situation: someone calls to make a reservation four days prior to a sailing. The boat is booked. You would like to encourage him to go for a different sailing, but if he knows that two days from now more space is going to open up on his first choice, how do you prevent him from waiting the two days and booking then rather than changing the time of day. It's like the 24 hour online check-ins for airlines; people wait until the exact minute and then jump online to print their boarding passes. This is the kind of thing that will not endear this system to the locals.
We will monitor this type of activity.
20. (Jim Corenman) I think the 58% number will confuse people; I suggest looking at how many of the sailings this summer were overloaded. Looking at the 2013 data, very few sailings were overloaded every day.
That's helpful; we can look at that as well.
21. (John Whetten) I agree with Ken. In our discussions with people, explaining the tiered release helped people a lot. I hear Brian say the percentages can be

changed if needed; I would ask that they not be changed until the FAC has a look and buys off on the changes first.

We will take that into consideration, thank you.

22. (Rick Hughes, San Juan County Council) I would ask that you look at having reservations on the interisland boat; we are having issues with county or commercial vehicles being able to go from Orcas to Shaw or Lopez in the mornings.

We will look into ways to accommodate county employee work travel.

Fauna went over the proposed fall outreach plan, beginning on page 19 of the emailed packet.

23. (Gordon Jonasson) Is the account for online the same as the one you would use if you called customer service?

It is the same account. If you setup an account ahead of time it will make your call to customer service go a lot faster because your information will already be in place.

24. (John Whetten) Is it the same as the Wave2Go account?

No. It is two separate accounts, but we are working toward combining the accounts when we get the new ticketing system down the line.

25. (Beverly Zapalac) When you have an event at the library, do you want help from Partnership members?

Our initial thought is no; setting up accounts is more of a one-on-one dynamic. We will see how the initial events go and keep your offer in mind and get back to you.

26. (Carol Anderson) How soon can people set up their accounts?

Now.

27. (Margot Shaw) A specific request for Orcas would be to schedule your senior center visit in October.

We want to wait until the system is up and running so that the information is fresh.

Sooner is better; most seniors have a lot of questions and have difficulty navigating online.

We can look at that; our focus in October is more for hospitality and the libraries.

Why not use us?

We can provide you a packet to take to the senior centers.

What do you define as 'hospitality'?

The Chambers and Visitors Bureaus will help us identify who we need to contact; Deborah is helping us to make sure we get everybody.

Monitoring Misuse

Fauna Larkin, BERK & Associates

Fauna discussed the Monitoring Customer Misuse of Reservations System information, starting on page 25 of the emailed packet.

Questions & Comments

1. (Howie Rosenfeld) Can you make a reservation for someone else and then give it away and just tell them what name to give or are you going to be checking ID?
We will not be checking ID because it slows down our operations. That could happen and we will monitor for that type of misuse.
2. (Jim Corenman) If you don't check ID then you have little assurance that there won't be abuse. Why even permit people to make reservations on behalf of others?
We already allow bulk reservations to be made to benefit our commercial users. Why not just have the people who are traveling make their own reservation? We have no way of policing whether someone is making a reservation on behalf of themselves or someone else. For commercial users, the truck driver may not be the one who makes the reservation; his dispatcher would do it instead. The other issue that ties in with this is the definition of bulk. Is it 2, 25, 100? We don't know yet and we will monitor for abusive behavior. We do not want to start off with punitive policies if we don't have to.
3. (Gordon Jonasson) I'm confused. When we started this it was clear that the person travelling would be the one making a reservation.
If I told you that you couldn't make a reservation on behalf of your son who is coming to visit you, would you think that was fair? It's also not enforceable because we can't tell who is making a reservation.
My concern is that hotels will make blocks of reservations on prime sailings.
We want to handle that behavior on a case-by-case basis rather than having a broad policy in place.
I'm concerned that by the time you make any changes a lot of people could have been hurt.
We have the ability to have the system ask anyone who is trying to make a large reservation call customer service. If we see misuse we can do that and guide them to the right venue which is our customer service center.
Why did this subject come up?
This is in response to an email from Jim listing concerns of misuse. We wanted to address this topic and let you know how we plan to handle it.
4. (Ken Burtness) As people have found out about reservations and how it will work the conversation has changed and the latest topic is how people will game the system. I'm glad to see this is being addressed.
5. (Sally Thomsen) I strongly agree with Gordon. I think there will be immediate misuse. Not just from lodging people but the kayak and whale watching people as well. I think looking at a weekly report will be too late; there will be abuse on day one. I like the idea of asking people with large reservations to call customer service. There also needs to be strong language on the site with penalties for



misuse. I understand the need to keep things simple and the PR of the personal approach, but bulk misuse will happen.

6. (Bill Pike) In the airline industry they have group desks, and if you plan to travel with a group you don't deal with the regular reservation system, you go to the group desk. Maybe you should put in your language that if they want to make a group reservation they should call customer service.
7. (Margot Shaw) Monitoring abuse is one thing, but the effects of people's abuse will screw up the system. If a group cancels at 5 p.m. the night before, I wonder if that will give others a chance to get that space; it seems close to the sailing.
8. (Pat McKay) Concerning group reservations for family reunions and weddings, if you were going to a state park you would need each individual's name and address in order to make the reservation. To me, if you had to have those criteria at least initially, it would cut down on abuse. Also, the prepaid card idea—people will keep reusing the card over and over even when it doesn't have any money left on it. How will you charge them a no-show fee?
We will monitor for that type of behavior. We have the ability to blacklist people if necessary.
9. (Susan Young via Skype) I am also concerned about bulk reservations.
10. (Deborah Hopkins) I want to add something since I'm the tourism representative here. No matter which way this goes I will be happy to communicate to our tourism folks what they need to do. They are not the bad people that you are making them out to be. They will do the right thing; as soon as a customer makes a reservation with them, they will ask their customer to go online and make their ferry reservation.
11. (Clark Johnson) My first observation is that Bill's idea is really great. We have talked at length about there being no bulk reservations, period. I know it's difficult to define, but we have talked about this over and over. This is just another example of us being blindsided. We have said we don't want this, and you're telling us, not asking us. You're saying you're concerned about making people angry; you've never been concerned with that in the past. You're inconsistent.
Do you have a recommendation for the definition of 'bulk'?
The burden of the reservation should fall on the person getting on the boat. If organizing a group, they should tell each person to make their own reservation.
If you make a reservation on a sailing each day for a month, is that bulk? Or is it only bulk if you are making multiple reservations on a single sailing? Perhaps we should follow up on this via email.
I'd be happy to discuss it further.
12. (John Brantigan) I think we need a reservation system, but I'm against this one. You still have not solved the problems in Anacortes. The primary question is what do we need to do to load that 95% efficiently. I'm against what you're doing.

We can discuss your concerns outside of this meeting; we will setup a time for you to talk to Brian.

Information Technology

Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations
Leonard Smith, WSF Operations Manager

Brian discussed accommodating last-minute reservations in Anacortes, referencing the information beginning on page 26 of the emailed packet.

Questions & Comments

1. (Jim Corenman) Why not put up blue signs that tell people to go to McDonalds?
Those are purchased and permitted through the DOT to be put in the right of way.
Well, you're DOT; do you think you could make that work?
What is it that you're looking for?
A sign that tells people to go to Safeway and make their ferry reservation. The problem we want to prevent is people driving all the way to the terminal in Anacortes and not being able to get on the boat.
We will do blue signs in Anacortes asking people to go to the library. Does that option work?
2. (Pat Mckay) The library's kind of out of the way.
We can check on this, but there is a public/private issue of us putting up signs asking people to go a business such as Safeway or McDonalds. It would be appropriate to ask people to go to a library, or perhaps the Visitors Bureau.
3. (Bill Pike) You're talking about last minute reservations; isn't the three-hour cutoff still in play?
You would make a reservation on the next available sailing.
The concept is still that at three hours ahead of the sailing, the only place to figure out if you can get on is at the terminal; you can't be giving out reservations at a kiosk.
4. (Deborah Hopkins) I want to make sure you're not forgetting about the Chambers; they are very interested in being involved.
Yes, thank you.
5. (Clark Johnson) I would consider signs that say reservations are required, not recommended. Your language is too wishy-washy.
When we first put up signage at Port Townsend / Coupeville we did exactly that, and a month later we were out there changing them to say "recommended."
People thought that saying reservations are required was driving people away. Also, reservations are not required. We would love to have smart signs that update with each sailing, but that is not in the budget. We hope to have signs someday that tell people exactly how many spaces remain.

I'm sympathetic to that, but my view is that the message is simple: either you need a reservation or you don't. Have a flashing light; it's simple.

6. (Carol Anderson) I would like to thank WSF for sending out alerts this summer when sailings were full; that was very helpful.
7. (Pat McKay) I would like to see Terminal Conditions become an app.
We are working on that as well as making it more visible on the website.
8. (Clark Johnson) Your assumption with the kiosk is that it has to be fully operational. It could just be a billboard that tells people how to use their smartphones and walks them through the process.

Leonard went over the ITS update handout.

9. (Jim Corenman) I understand the scanners on the tollbooths are gone and the new ones will read from mobile phone screens.
That is correct.

Public Comments

I would like to say that I think you've done a great job; you've made a quantum leap since the early meetings that I attended. I think it's a great idea and these little issues about how it will work will work themselves out. We should have a more positive attitude that it will work.

Conclusion

Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations

Brian thanked the group members for attending and said the next meeting will be in late January or early February to discuss how the rollout went and the plan for summer season.

There was not time for the group to get to the Implementation & Support Plan topic, for which there is an executive summary handout. Any questions around this topic can be emailed to Brian.

Meeting was adjourned.

Group Members

Present	Name of Group Member	Representing
	Adrienne Adams	Lopez Island
	Mike Aley	Orcas Island
X	Carol Anderson	San Juan Island

	Kathy Booth	Lopez Island
X	John Brantigan	Shaw Island
X	Ken Burtness	Lopez Island
	Cass Clark	Lopez Island
X	Jim Corenman	San Juan Island
	David Dubbell	San Juan Island
	Lance Evans	Orcas Island
	Tony Ghazel	Orcas Island
	Wally Gudgell	Orcas Island
	John Hess	San Juan Island
X	Deborah Hopkins	San Juan Island
X	Clark Johnson	Lopez Island
X	Gordon Jonasson	Lopez Island
	Mark Lione	Anacortes
X	John MacLeod	Orcas Island
X	Pat McKay	San Juan Island
X	Bill Pike	Mount Vernon
	John Poletti	Orcas Island
X	Howie Rosenfeld	San Juan Island
X	Margot Shaw	Orcas Island
X	Jamie Stephens	Lopez Island
	Mike Stolmeier	Orcas Island
	Terresa Sundstrom	San Juan Island
X	Sally Thomsen	San Juan Island
	Larry Vandermay	Orcas Island
X	John Whetten	Lopez Island
X (via skype)	Susan Young	Lopez Island
X	Beverly Zapalac	Lopez Island

Project Team

- George Capacci, Interim Assistant Secretary WSDOT Ferries Division
- Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations
- Marta Coursey, WSF Communications Director
- Trevor Sharp, Anacortes Reservations Planning Manager
- Dwight Hutchinson, WSF Reservations Manager
- Leonard Smith, WSF Operations Manager
- Fauna Larkin, BERK & Associates
- Rachel Waitt, WSF Communications