

**MEETING SUMMARY**  
**SAN JUAN ISLANDS VRS COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MEETING**  
**SAN JUAN ISLAND YACHT CLUB, FRIDAY HARBOR, WA**  
Wednesday, March 18, 2015 11:30 a.m. – 1:45 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, WSF Deputy Chief of Operations & Construction  
Allegra Calder, BERK Consulting

George welcomed the group and apologized on behalf of Assistant Secretary Griffith, who was unable to attend. He mentioned his upcoming resignation and thanked the group for their work over the last two years.

Jim Corenman presented George with a gift on behalf of the group, and thanked him for his work on the reservations system.

George introduced meeting facilitator Allegra Calder and asked the group to briefly introduce themselves. Allegra went over the agenda and handouts.

**Reservations System Update**

Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations

Brian went through the reasons for a reservation system, the benefits and successes, and the lessons learned so far on the website and terminal operations (see Save A Spot PowerPoint slides).

**Questions & Comments**

1. (Bill Pike) Are you getting calls to cancel reservations on the day of travel?  
Yes.  
What happens?  
*If they cancel online they will be charged a fee. If there are unforeseen circumstances, they can call customer service and explain their situation. The customer service agents can pull up their account and see if that customer has a pattern of last minute cancellations. If they are not abusing the system, we will waive the fee and cancel the reservation.*  
So that space is made available for others to reserve?  
*Correct. We understand that things come up unexpectedly and we are very willing to hear you out and make a decision over the phone.*



2. (Margot Shaw) You made a statement that everyone would always be able to travel on the day they want even if it means an extra ferry.  
*That is true, the terminal supervisors have the ability to run an extra sailing based on need. We are also preapproving extra sailings on holidays such as Memorial Day weekend, so that those extra sailings are reservable as well. We're trying to be proactive about meeting demand based on last year's numbers. And of course if there is an emergency or a vessel breaks down we will run extra sailings as well.*
3. (Jamie Stephens) Do you have stats on the eastbound sailings from Friday Harbor and Orcas to see if there is a need to reduce reserved space from 90% to 80%?  
*Looking at the non-holiday week chart, you can see that most sailings are in green, which means they had at least 20% of space available for drive-ups. There are still many sailings where you can choose to drive up without a reservation. We realize that the Best Times to Travel charts online may not be 100% accurate all the time and we want to provide better communication tools. We understand that the Anacortes Terminal Conditions/Know Before You Go information is extremely useful to our customers, and we are looking at providing the same information from Friday Harbor and Orcas to help with travel decisions.*
4. (Bill Pike) The app is fabulous in Anacortes.  
*Right; currently in Friday Harbor and Orcas there is no way to show how many people are already in the holding area. There is no real-time drive-up data at this point, but we are working on that.*
5. (Bill Pike) On the website you are able to put in your 'favorite' vehicles, but then it never offers them to you.  
*That will be fixed in the next software update; the favorites were showing up at the bottom of the drop down menu. After the fix they will be at the top.*
6. (Pat McKay) I use my mobile device to show my barcode all the time and have no issues; I turn it sideways and enlarge it.  
*The printed barcode seems to be the fastest way at this point; the scanners can't always pick up the barcode from mobile device screens because it needs to be enlarged.*
7. (Jim Corenman) Once you have an app for reservations it should pull up the barcode on your screen at the correct size.
8. (Clark Johnson) The barcode is the same for every reservation on an account; just print it up and laminate it so it always works.  
*True, that is a great trick. We don't produce a new barcode for each reservation on your account. The barcode is associated with your account identification number. If you laminate it and put it in your window that works well.*
9. (Member of the public) If the reservation process shows the barcode in a printable format with a dotted line around it, that may prompt people to realize they can print it up, cut it out and keep it for repeated use.  
*That's a good suggestion, thank you.*

10. (Margot Shaw) Isn't there a problem at the toll booth when you present your barcode and they see all your reservations, not just the one you're trying to use?  
*The system will pull up that day's reserved travel from that terminal only. If there are multiple sailings reserved that day for that account, they will ask for a name or other details to narrow down which reservation to redeem.*
11. (Gordon Jonasson) I've always printed it out, and I heard a rumor that the barcode doesn't change, so I'm happy to hear that.  
*Yes, for those who have an account, but not for guest users.*  
Is the reservation number different than the confirmation number?  
*Yes, the confirmation number is your account identification number and will be the same every time, just like the barcode. The reservation identification number will be different for every trip.*
12. (Jamie Stephens) I think the difference needs to be clarified; I get this question from travelers all the time. We may know which is which but guests will not know the difference. Implementation is key for this system, and nine out of ten times at the booth they ask for my name, not the barcode.  
*That is a training issue, and different staff at different terminals do things the way they feel is easiest for them. We've tried to explain that scanning the code is the fastest way, but some may feel that searching by name is faster.*
13. (Member of the public) Some people have the same names; the reservation could be taken incorrectly that way.  
*We are aware of that and have a process in place to correct that issue.*
14. (Margot Shaw) The reservation barcode does not have a number; the ticket purchase discount barcode does and it's nice to have. Can you print the reservation number underneath the barcode?  
*We can look at that.*
15. (John Brantigan) It is my experience as well that they ask for my name, not the code. It would be nice if it was always the same process. It would also speed up the transaction if you could charge the card I have on file for my fare at the same time.  
*We need to focus on training the booth staff so that the process is the same everywhere.*
16. (Bill Pike) When you're in four-booth operation at Anacortes, is there a way to isolate non-reserved people to a certain lane?  
*We have tried doing specialized booths and have not had success.*
17. (John MacLeod) I've been told by the booth staff that the name is the fastest way; I question that. I typically use the scanner outside for my five-pack ticket; I wonder why we don't do the same thing for the reservation barcode scanning—use the scanner outside, why two scans?  
*We are looking at merging the two systems into one account; we will work on that.*  
That's a good goal for down the road, but for now please train them to use the barcodes.

- In the islands the scanner 'thinks' for 5-10 seconds when we scan the code from device screens, but when we put in the first two letters of the name it pops right up, although there is a margin for error. The paper scan is the fastest way, but only about 30% of customers bring the paper for us to scan; the name is the second fastest; the electronic scan is the slowest option. We will look into why the scanning is slower in the islands.*
18. (Gordon Jonasson) If you turn people away at the booth, where do they go to make a reservation?  
*They can call 511 or go to our mobile website. We are looking at getting the ability to make reservations at the tollbooths in Anacortes before summer as well.*  
I worry that the transaction times will get really long at the tollbooth when they start making reservation there.  
*We are conscious of the possible delays, and will closely monitor that and adjust our operations as needed.*
19. (Margot Shaw) In busier times why couldn't there be a designated booth for those with questions, those who need to buy a ticket, those who need to make a reservation, those who will cause delays basically.  
*That is an option we can look at. In our experience, separating traffic at the booths does not speed things up but actually does the opposite; we can look at that idea though.*
20. (Bill Pike) When will we see signage on the mainland approaching Anacortes?  
*We have advertised the contract twice and have not received good bids, so we have pulled the signage piece out and now WSDOT will be performing the work. You should see signs start to pop up within the next month.*

### **Customer & Staff Surveys**

Allegra Calder, BERK Consulting

Allegra went over the Customer Survey responses, starting on page 4 of the emailed packet.

### **Questions & Comments**

1. (Jamie Stephens) There needs to be better communication about the tiered release of space. Right now Memorial Day weekend shows every boat full even though there will be two more releases.  
*We understand; that is a great point. We are developing a packet to send out to hospitality folks as well as putting more information on our website. We have hired a consultant to improve the customer experience on our website so it is more user-friendly and informative.*
2. (Clark Johnson) Terminal Conditions is a web-based application that has inherent errors that are very confusing. On weekends the destination column is

completely incorrect, and the difference between reserved spots and drive-up spots should never be more than 10% of the vessel.

*We sat down with IT and learned about the flaws; we are working on fixing them.*

3. (Bill Pike) I've heard a lot of people say they've never heard of tiered release; that needs to be communicated better. On the weekend of the Seahawks playoff game someone had the forethought to send an email alert about the third release, that was great, kudos to whoever thought of that.

*Because of the concern we are hearing about Memorial Day weekend travel, we actually put out a press release; we understand the need to communicate the releases of space better.*

And I think it's too early to mess with the 30/30/30/10 percentages.

4. (Member of the public) I would like you to clarify how long in advance of your sailing you need to be in Anacortes in order to keep your reserved spot. Some of your written material says you have to be through the tollbooth 30 minutes prior, but I've also heard you just have to be in line for the tollbooth 30 minutes prior. It's causing confusion and stress not to know what the rule is.

*Good point; we are working on that from a communications standpoint.*

Allegra went over the Staff Survey responses, starting on page 6 of the emailed packet.

5. (Margot Shaw) Have you found with these surveys that you have enough phone staff?

*We extended our customer service center hours in the winter during rollout, and we found that people are not calling really early or late, but more people than usual were calling around midday. We will reduce the hours in the spring and add more staff to the middle of the day. It's hard to staff for peaks whether at the terminals or on the phones, so we strive to find the right amount of staff overall. The average call times have been about three and a half minutes, with a wait time of two minutes at the busiest times. Things are operating well in customer service.*

Does 511 get you to the same place as the 206 number on the schedule?

*Yes, all the phone numbers listed on the schedule take you to our customer service call center. We will be replacing our phone system this spring so that you will be greeted by automated questions that will help us process the calls faster; by the time you speak to a representative your information will be inputted already. We are excited about the new software and think it should speed up your calls quite a bit.*

6. (Clark Johnson) You didn't mention if the phone system will ask us if we have an account.

*That is a challenge due to the alphanumeric password; the phone rep will ask for your account and input it for you.*

I want to thank you, this survey effort is by far the best effort you have made so far, but I do have a critique. Some of your questions are very leading in the way they are phrased; be more careful about phrasing in the future.

*That's a good observation. We had too many open-ended questions as well; people have a lot to say. There were definitely some lessons learned during the survey process.*

### **Program Policies & Procedures**

Allegra Calder, BERK Consulting

Allegra discussed program policies and procedures, starting on page 8 of the emailed packet.

### **Questions & Comments**

1. (Jamie Stephens) You've already confused me. It reads 30 minutes prior to the sailing; is it through the booths or in line 30 minutes prior to the sailing? We don't know what 30 minutes in advance will be until we see the line. You can see why there is fear and confusion, particularly on Thursdays and Fridays during the summer. You need to make the arrival window clear, particularly when you have two sailings fairly close together.

*That's great feedback, let me clarify: we are asking you to arrive at the back of the line approaching the tollbooths 30-90 minutes prior to your sailing departure time.*

2. (John Whetten) The business rules say the end of the line; seems pretty clear to me.  
*There may be some old language floating around; we will make sure to sweep for that. We used to have a policy at Port Townsend/Coupeville that you needed to be through the booth 30 minutes in advance.*

The question is how will you determine that I got in line 30 minutes in advance and should get on the boat, while the guy behind me was 29 minutes in advance and shouldn't get on?

*We are monitoring that line all the time and clocking wait times. We're keeping tabs on that in Anacortes, but we don't have the resources to do that in the islands yet.*

I hope WSF can do everything possible to get us on the boat if we line up 30 minutes ahead, but I also hope you don't hold the boats to do so. That shifts us to the issue of on-time-performance which we really want to maintain.

3. (Gordon Jonasson) You want us in line 30 minutes ahead, but you start loading 15 minutes before you depart.  
*So far we only know of two sailings that have been impacted due to reservations; we may need to start loading earlier or later depending on the sailing. It can vary based on how many destinations the sailing includes. We have an agreement*

*with the vessel crews that if we have an issue with loading reservations we will discuss it; we're working closely with them and can negotiate as problems arise. I am just concerned with the 30 minutes when you're already loading halfway through that time.*

*There isn't a line up the road like there used to be; people are changing their habits. That is a valid concern though and we will be monitoring this issue closely.*

4. (Jim Corenman) I appreciate the clarification about the back end of the line. I see a couple of problems on the website in terms of communication. The agreement with the customers with the checkbox is called Terms and Conditions, but there are two different documents with that name that say different things. The agreement is only a tiny link to a nine-page document. It should focus right in on the tollbooth information. There is no reference to early standby, and Appendix A is truncated.

*Thank you.*

5. (Margot Shaw) The solution to the 30 minute squeeze is to change it to a 45-90 minute window now, not after summer. When you see a speed limit sign for 20 you go 25; if you say 45 minutes people will still be late but not as late as if you say 30 minutes, so it won't be as hard on the staff.
6. (Sally Thomsen) My comment is similar to Margot's: 30 minutes means 25 ahead to most people. Perhaps switch it to read 'between 90 and 30 minutes ahead' to shift the focus.
7. (Bill Pike) On the Friday of President's Day weekend, we had three boats leave within an hour of each other and all three were full. We had four booths open and the line never got halfway back to the light. As people came down the hill I was asking them where they were going, whether they had a reservation, which boat, etc. About 20% didn't know about reservations, but talking to them put them at ease. I was also able to weed out the walk-ons who needed to get out of line and drive to the parking lots. It worked beautifully. I don't know if you can afford to have someone walk the line during heavy traffic, but it worked really well. Also, I want to point out that arriving 29 minutes ahead doesn't mean you will lose your reservation; only once all reserved cars are loaded and they start to load the standbys would you lose your spot.
8. (Pat McKay) Getting people through the tollbooths is pivotal, and we haven't gotten through summer yet. That will be the test.  
*We are making the promise to our customers that we can process them in 30 minutes.*
9. (John Brantigan) I frequently watch how your crews load the boats, and I'm amazed and have full respect for how they manage it. The delays are caused by people not listening to them. They really do an amazing job, thank you.
10. (John MacLeod) I have an alternate view to the 45 minute suggestion. Keep the 30 minutes and try to make it work. The advantage of the reservations system

to customers is that you don't have to sit in the line forever. Let's try to make this work and look at it again after summer.

11. (Clark Johnson) Instead of burying the 30-90 minutes in a document somewhere, spell out exactly when you need to arrive during the reservation process.

*Yes, we agree that communications is key in making the system work.*

12. (Howie Rosenfeld) I think things are coming together beautifully; everyone has done a great job. There is a perception that we are fighting, which is that reservations favors visitors over locals. There needs to be a balance. I see that 81% of reservations are made within seven days of the sailing; maybe more space should be available later rather than earlier.

*The 30% release two days prior also includes any unreserved tall space, so it's actually about 50% of the space being released later. We need to take that into consideration when we're looking at making a change.*

13. (Ken Burtness) The idea of reducing the amount of the third release I'm really against.
14. (Melissa Johnson) I want to remind everyone that we will be under construction at Orcas this summer. There will be some confusion and the employees will not know everything about what's going on at every moment.
15. (Jamie Stephens) I would like another meeting of this Partnership after summer schedule is complete.
16. (Bill Pike) I agree, lets meet again in September.

### **Public Comments**

No public comment.

### **Conclusion**

George Capacci, WSF Deputy Chief of Operations & Construction

George thanked the group again for their dedication over the last two years, and asked that they continue to focus on making the system better. The group returned the compliment and thanked George for the work he has put into this project.

Meeting was adjourned.

### **Group Members**

<b>Present</b>	<b>Name of Group Member</b>	<b>Representing</b>
	Adrienne Adams	Lopez Island
	Mike Aley	Orcas Island
	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
X	Larry Vandermay	Orcas Island
X	John Whetten	Lopez Island
	Susan Young	Lopez Island
	Beverly Zapalac	Lopez Island

**Project Team**

- George Capacci, WSF Deputy Chief of Operations & Construction
- Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations
- Trevor Sharp, Anacortes Reservations Planning Manager
- Dwight Hutchinson, WSF Reservations Manager
- Allegra Calder, BERK Consulting
- Rachel Waitt, WSF Communications