

MEETING SUMMARY
SAN JUAN ISLANDS VRS COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MEETING
SAN JUAN ISLAND YACHT CLUB, FRIDAY HARBOR, WA
Wednesday, February 12, 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

George Capacci, WSF Deputy Chief of Construction & Operations
Michael Hodgins, BERK & Associates
Dwight Hutchinson, WSF VRS Manager

George welcomed the group and thanked them for their ongoing participation. Michael apologized for David Moseley's absence due to the Legislative session.

Dwight introduced Trevor Sharp, a new addition to the WSF VRS team, who will be helping to coordinate operations at the terminals.

Meeting Overview

Michael Hodgins, BERK & Associates

Michael went over the agenda, the meeting objectives and the handouts, which included updated information from what was originally sent out to the group.

Service Disruptions

Dwight Hutchinson, WSF VRS Manager

Dwight discussed proposed operations during service disruptions in the San Juan Islands (see Reservations and Service Disruptions handout).

Questions & Comments

1. (John MacLeod) Why does the international route have so much of a better track record than the others?
That's a good question; we can look into that more for you. Part of it is that there are fewer international sailings.
I don't agree with the fewer sailings idea; it's a percentage. There must be some difference you could look at for answers.
It's a good question, and we will look into it for you.
2. (Bill Pike) One thing this chart doesn't show is trips that departed but weren't anywhere close to being on schedule.

3. (Jim Corenman) All the boats don't have the same level of reliability; maybe the boats on the international run are just better boats.
4. (Susan Young) I would like to see this information shown day-by-day rather than quarterly. How do the disruptions play out—four sailings in one day or is it one or two and then you're back on track? That is important information in terms of knowing what the impact will be on us in the islands. I want to know what will happen on a given day if a boat goes out in the summertime when we have reservations in place.
That's a good point. We have that day-by-day information in a very large spreadsheet. We will go back and look at it and continue to work to answer those questions for you.
5. (Jim Corenman) Statistics are helpful, but they fail when $n=1$ and 1 is that you have to be somewhere and the boat doesn't run. If you're sitting on the dock it matters to you when the boat doesn't get there how WSF is going to deal with it.
6. (Bill Pike) Just to clarify, in a situation with multiple destinations, when you refer to a trip being cancelled, is it the whole trip with multiple stops, or is it just one leg of the trip?
Each link of a multiple-stop trip is considered one cancelled sailing, point-to-point. That's why the numbers add up so fast.
7. (Ken Burtness) That helps explain why the international run disruption numbers look so low.
8. (John MacLeod) Under causes, is 'Vessel Maintenance' unscheduled maintenance?
Yes.
9. (Ken Burtness) From what I've always seen when there are service disruptions in the islands, by the end of the day everybody is off the dock. I've never seen people left sitting there by the end of the day.
That's good to hear. It could happen theoretically, and we will discuss that scenario.
10. (John Whetten) Your second key principle, Stop Accepting New Reservations, when you say 'route' do you mean only the islands?
Yes, if service was disrupted up here we would not stop taking reservations for Port Townsend / Coupeville.
11. (Bill Pike) Say it's two in the afternoon and you stop accepting reservations because of a service disruption. What will people be told? Someone who doesn't have a reservation but is thinking about travelling, will you turn them away when there is potential space?
We will give priority to reservation holders.
12. (Pat McKay) So you will turn people away at the tollbooth?
With the reservation system in place, we will have a high level of predictability as to how many people will be showing up for the day's sailings. We can map out the whole day's expected travel schedule, and calculate the amount of space that is available for drive-ups.

13. (Bill Pike) Are we not still working toward the scenario that there would be few if any drive-ups in Anacortes?
Let's look at page six of the packet. What we have seen from our data at Port Townsend / Coupeville is that more than half of the riders have reservations, and that number gets consistently higher when it's busier.
Do you then presume that if someone shows up at the tollbooth in Anacortes without a reservation, they will be given one before being allowed through? Or is that not true in the case of service disruptions?
Yes, when people are processed through the tollbooths they will be promised a space; we assume most people will have planned ahead and made a reservation during busy travel times.
14. (Susan Young) We talked about everybody having 'confirmed space' and not calling it a 'reservation.' There's a huge difference there.
That's true; we are working on finding the correct terminology. During normal operations, if you show up without a reservation, you will be given confirmed space before being allowed through the tollbooth. The terminal staff will know what space is available because of the reservation system. In the case of a service disruption, they will turn people away if there is no space for them.
15. (John MacLeod) The difference between us and Port Townsend is they have another option; you can't translate their numbers to the islands.
That is correct, but this is the information we have to work with on how the public will engage the system. The majority of them are using the reservation system. Also, the international route is at nearly 100%.
16. (Jamie Stephens) Looking at your key principles, it seems the last two are at odds with each other. During a service disruption there could be a huge line that people without reservations are stuck in, having no idea that they will be turned away when they get to the booth.
The word 'may' is missing from the handout. In the case of a service disruption we may stop processing drive-up customers at the terminal. We will know if there is no space for them. If there is space, then we will stage drive-ups separately from reservation holders and load them as space is available.
There is no parking in Friday Harbor, should people just drive around?
We are trying to plan to operate in a way where reservation holders are given some priority over drive-ups in the event of a service disruption. The last option is to just go back to the first-come, first-served method we have now. The worst case scenario is that we go back to operating the way we do today. We will prioritize reservation holders as long as we can; it will be different terminal to terminal based on the amount of space we have to work with.
That's a big assumption that you can organize two groups of cars during a service disruption.
We will look more at terminal operations in the next meeting. Again, our first key principle is communicating to our customers, those with and without reservations, so they can make their travel decisions based on that information.

We will message early and often, and space will free up as some people decide not to travel that day.

17. (John Whetten) I'm confused about the terminology. 'Reservation' vs. 'Confirmed Space.' If I'm in Anacortes and I want to go to Orcas, and my boat is cancelled but there is space on the next one, can I assume I will get on with a confirmed space?

People sometimes assume we can operate like the airlines, where if the service comes back everyone is golden, but airlines have multiple planes and multiple gates. We are only working with one slip in some cases, and we don't have the room in our holding lanes to turn trucks around. We will accommodate those who were reserved on the missed sailings first, then get to those with reservations on later sailings, so you may be affected even though your reserved sailing travels as scheduled. We see that you are looking for a definition of 'confirmed space.' In a normal operating situation, we will provide reservations ahead of time, and if someone shows up without a reservation we will give them a confirmed space if space is available on the next sailing, or a confirmed space on a later sailing and ask them to return at a specific time. During a service disruption situation we will not give confirmed space, but rather stage those who do not have reservations separately from those who do, and take them on a first-come first-served basis. Each situation will be different; sailings may include unscheduled stops in order to assist people to get where they need to be, and that will need to be assessed before we decide to take standby folks or not.

18. (Clark Johnson) I want to follow up on John's example and point out that you know before you depart whether you're stopping at Shaw. Someone is making decisions during these service disruptions; I don't see why you can't handle standbys at that time and issue confirmed space.
19. (John Whetten) I want to avoid the situation where a boat is cancelled and then you have boats leaving half full because cars are stacked up at the tollbooths because they can't be given confirmed space. Build the system with the flexibility, not just an on-off switch, but the ability to turn each one off individually. Make it flexible for the person making the decisions.

20. (Susan Young) I read in your materials that one thing you would cut off right away is the web notification about available space—I think that's a critical time to use that tool. Don't cut off a valuable tool right when you need it the most. I think a lot of this is coming down to semantics; I don't think it should ever be called 'reservation,' it should always be 'confirmed space.' And the operations of staging people in certain areas and turning people away at the booths—it seems so customer unfriendly. Telling people to go away and not knowing when they should come back is not good.

We see your point. The challenge of this topic is that we want to give reservation holders some sort of priority over those without reservations when we have a service disruption, rather than just immediately reverting back to first-come, first-

served. These principles are about trying to respect the commitment to your reservation.

I think in the process of doing that it needs to translate to not making things worse.

We want to strike a balance of operating as smoothly as possible during disrupted service, while respecting our commitments. If trying to do that makes things worse, then we can always go right to first-come, first-served and operate as we do today. We will not give you something that works less well than it does today.

21. (Gordon Jonasson) We have talked about the operational constraints in Anacortes. There is a reference in here to queuing; where in Anacortes would people queue?

Our experience at Port Townsend / Coupeville tells us that you have a group inside the booths and a group outside of the booth, and during a service disruption you have to figure out how to manage everyone. If you are through the booths and stuck in a queue in our holding lanes we will serve you, and try to sort people as they come through the booths as best we can.

What happens if reservation holders are stuck in the line?

We will try to avoid that situation.

22. (John MacLeod) I think you've done well thinking this all through. One thing that bothers me is in the situation where service is disrupted, and you have some reservations, but you know space is available to take standbys—but you say you can't because the software can't handle it. That bothers me. To say the software can't do it is unacceptable.

In some situations we may lose one sailing but then we are back up quickly; that's different than a mechanical issue where we may not know for hours what our capacity may be.

You said you would know that you had space but the software wouldn't be able to handle changes.

We don't yet have the ability to do that, that's why the current plan is to process everyone with a reservation as soon as possible.

When you do get to the place where you know that you have space available, I think the system should be able to accommodate that.

23. (Margot Shaw) Historically speaking what percent of reservations across the board are no-shows?

About 6%.

Was it higher before?

Yes, it was at about 40% before we added the deposit.

It seems to me that if there is a delay or a cancellation, there will always be a way for me to get home that day.

We seem to be able to accomplish that now, so we don't expect that to change.

- What about from Anacortes when I have a reservation; you know when I show up that there is a disruption, and how many people are reserved for the next sailing. I would be in the front of that line, correct?
You would be staged with the other reservation holders in the order that you arrived, and you would be given the next available space.
24. (Susan Young) Are we teaching people they should show up early because they can get bumped?
It will not behoove people to show up early in most cases, so no.
25. (Howie Rosenfeld) If we have a reservation, one way or another you will accommodate us. For those without reservations, if things are shut down and you're turning them away, do they get anything? An overload sticker, a standby number? If not, that is a change from what you do now. If you make it all the way to the booth as a standby and are turned away, you should have priority over those who are behind you in line.
That is a good point; we will look at that and bring it back to discuss at the next meeting.
26. (Bill Pike) This is much more complicated than I thought it was going to be. The problem is the multiple destinations. What I think this points out is, in order to get a handle on this you need a game plan. Each situation will be different, each sailing affects other sailings; there are so many moving parts. I see why you would have to block reservations for an entire day.
We agree that we have to have a game plan in place, and be able to adjust to each situation as it occurs.
27. (Clark Johnson) I urge you to think about flexibility in your software development. I hear too many of your decisions are dominated by what happens at Port Townsend; we've got really different conditions here. Please stop thinking that you're going to tell people to go away; you need to have something to offer every person who drives up to the booth. Figure it out, be proactive.
28. (Deborah Hopkins) I think at the end of the day you will need to help those people who drive up without a reservation by giving them confirmed space, even if it is the next day. We at the Visitor's Bureau can help you arrange accommodations for them if needed.
29. (Sally Thomsen) During a disruption, when you communicate that out to us and some people who have reservations choose to stay away, it would benefit you to know that so you can plan your space. Is there a way to incentivize people to communicate to you that they will not be coming.
30. (Susan Young) I'm concerned that we have lost ground in this area from where we were in the September and November meetings. This sounds awful, turning people away—we have disruptions now and people aren't stuck staying overnight somewhere.
31. (Pat McKay) Yes they are. They may not sleep in their cars on the dock, they're going and staying in hotels. It's just not tracked now.

32. (Susan Young) I just think people shouldn't be turned away.
If they wouldn't be turned away now, they wouldn't be turned away under this scenario.
33. (Ken Burtness) When service disruptions happen and Glen or Debbie are there in Anacortes, they know what to do. The issue is when you have a relief terminal agent who doesn't know the terminal well, then you have reservations and a service disruption on top of that. You need to have a plan for that like having Glen or Debbie on call.
34. (Margot Shaw) What is the real time gap between when you know what's going on and you letting the terminal people know the changes?
When service disruptions happen communications are flying; it's rapid. We will have a system in place that will work any time of day or night no matter who is there. We will learn from every situation and get better each time.
35. (Beverly Zapalac) If I'm flying in to go to my son's wedding in Friday Harbor, and I call WSF to ask if I need a reservation, you have to explain to me how it works. Have you thought about how long that would take?
We do it now, it doesn't take long. We wouldn't run you through all the scenarios of what happens a small fraction of the time when service is disrupted, just the main points.
But will I be able to get to my son's wedding.
You will always be able to get there if the boats are running, as a walk-on.
36. (Jim Corenman) I want to echo the need for specific planning for vessel breakdowns. You need a playbook. It's complex up here. Take that and play it against the service disruption plan; tell us if this scenario happens, then this is what we would do.
We think it will be helpful to walk through some scenarios at the next meeting.
37. (Margot Shaw) Your second key principle, where you stop accepting new reservations, I would suggest relaxing that a little bit. If someone is going online or calling to make a reservation, couldn't their information be held and then they could be given the next space? Rather than just telling them to check back later?
A waiting list of some sort.
38. (Pat McKay) Is there a time cutoff for reservations for the new Phase 2 plan?
We are planning on that being three hours in the San Juan Islands; that is on the agenda for a future meeting.

Communications Plan

Marta Coursey, WSF Director of Communications

Marta discussed the proposed Communications Plan (see Communications Plan Overview handout).

Questions & Comments

1. (Jamie Stephens) In Phase 4 of your plan it says you will check in with the hospitality industry; why not schools, businesses and residents? Why not more inclusive? Also, please include island businesses among your target audiences, not just Anacortes businesses.
We already have an ongoing relationship with schools and local businesses through the existing commercial reservations system, which is why they are not listed there; we will add the island businesses to our target list.
What is a Universal Account holder?
That is someone who has stored their information in the system in order to make their transaction time faster.
2. (John MacLeod) I see Facebook and Twitter on here, but no mention of a mobile app. Are there any plans for that?
We are focusing on a mobile version of our website, rather than an app. It's a little different; it means our site will be accessible and easy to use from any mobile device. An app is more specific to a device such as the iPhone or Android. We do have an existing WSDOT app that will be linked in the future to our mobile website.
I think an app is easier than a bookmarked site, I think you should look to that in the future.
It is possible in the future, but with our current budget for this Phase we are focusing on the mobile website piece.
3. (Clark Johnson) I've always felt the communications part is critical to the success of the program. This is a big job—do you have enough budget?
There is no specific budget identified for the communications plan. We have existing resources, and we are working to eke out some budget for this. We will do everything we can with the community marketing group. If we're not hitting the mark with our existing options we will have to revisit that. In house printing is something we can do, and we would appreciate this group's help with distribution.
This is the kind of thing you need to make money available for; the system depends on this. It is as important as the infrastructure in my view; please make sure that Marta has the budget she needs. I love that you're rebranding the terminal conditions site, but it is too complicated to handle on a smart phone. Please make it simpler. I would request that your evaluation piece needs to run the full length of this timeline. For each phase it would be nice if you could structure it in a measurable way. How will you know you have succeeded? Choose a baseline and name what you would like to achieve. If you feel you haven't managed it during Phase 1 then you still have time to accomplish it later; I would be happy to help you with planning.
Thank you.
4. (Gordon Jonasson) I agree with Clark; this is going to be a huge component of your success. Customers will be able to change or cancel reservations online, but what about those without computers? I've used your online tool, which is

flawless by the way. The direct mail on here refers to PO boxes, what about those with direct mail, did you mean that also?

Yes.

What is this about training volunteers to staff information stations?

We had an issue during rollout at Port Townsend / Coupeville where we trained our own staff but not the volunteers from the community; we want to make sure we are able to do that this time.

5. (Pay McKay) Go to the High Schools and get the kids involved; they know more about this stuff than we do, they're a good resource.
6. (Deborah Hopkins) I want to confirm to everybody that we are ready to help Marta with media relations; the media will be interested in this. Also, our hospitality industry contacts, and the Chambers, and local media.
7. (Sally Thomsen) Selling it to the locals is the challenge; there are some key community events that you would benefit from attending, such as the San Juan County Fair in August.
8. (Susan Young) Community outreach is really important, rumors are flying. I want to echo Clark that this is not a bake sale; please make sure Marta has the resources she needs, its important.
9. (Bill Pike) At the minimum when the fall schedule comes out there should be a blurb in there.

It will be in there.

Perhaps having a celebrity record an overhead announcement about it, similar to the welcome aboard messages you have already.

Review of Issues / Decisions to Date

Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations

Brian discussed the emerging business rules, proposed terminal improvements and parking lot items (see Review of Issues/Decisions handout).

Questions & Comments

1. (Jim Corenman) What happens if reservations don't end up being covered by the Legislative budget?
We will need to reprogram and take a look at some other expenses.
If we can't do a good job of staffing at Anacortes, you need to look at that. You can't do a half effort or it will fail.
2. (Susan Young) If you can't staff Anacortes that's going to be a problem.
To illustrate how important we think this is, we were not given budget for the cameras you requested, and we went out and found the money.
If we could see your documents ahead of the meeting next time that would be helpful.

Public Comments

1. You are all great, thank you for your service. This is a big deal that is important to me personally. I don't want to sit on the dock in Anacortes any more than I have to. WSF staff are by and large cordial and customer service oriented. If Dwight can just write up a book for the staff to use, they will be able to figure it out. People make good decisions based on good information. It's not bad to tell people that they might not get on, if that's the truth. Give Marta more money.

Conclusion

Brian thanked everybody for coming. The next meeting date is yet to be determined, sometime in early April. Brian thanked everyone for coming. Meeting was adjourned.

Group Members

Present	Name of Group Member	Representing
	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

X	Terresa Sundstrom	San Juan Island
X	Sally Thomsen	San Juan Island
	Larry Vandermay	Orcas Island
X	John Whetten	Lopez Island
X	Susan Young	Lopez Island
X	Beverly Zapalac	Lopez Island

Project Team

- George Capacci, WSF Deputy Chief of Construction & Operations
- Marta Coursey, WSF Director of Communications
- Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations
- Dwight Hutchinson, WSF VRS Manager
- Trevor Sharp, Anacortes Reservations Planning Manager
- Michael Hodgins, BERK & Associates
- Rachel Waitt, WSF Communications

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