

PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

4. PLANNING PROCESS

4.1 Technical and Policy Review Teams

The process for developing this Plan was designed to meet the participation requirements included in ESHB 2358, and to ensure that the best available internal and external technical resources were brought to bear on the analytical needs of the project. Toward this end, the plan development effort included four distinct groups:

- **Technical Work Teams.** Technical work teams were organized around subject matter expertise, including: travel demand forecasting, terminal design standards, operating strategies, pricing strategies, and finance. These teams were comprised primarily of WSF staff and augmented with consultant support where appropriate. Given the importance of the demand forecasting effort, an expert review panel was also integrated into that work element.
- **JTC Staff Group.** ESHB 2358 called for a high degree of review and participation among the key participants in the study efforts. To ensure effective communication and collaboration, the JTC Staff Group was formed and met bi-weekly beginning in the summer of 2007. The Staff Group was comprised of representatives from the Governor's Office, House and Senate Transportation Committees, the JTC, WSDOT, WSF, the Office of Financial Management, and the WSTC.
- **Transportation Commission Ferries Subcommittee.** There was a particular need for coordination between WSF and the Transportation Commission, given the Transportation Commission's role in fare setting and the shared responsibility to make pricing and operational strategy recommendations to the Legislature. As a result, a three-member Subcommittee of the State Transportation Commission met monthly with the WSF project leadership team on policy and technical issues.
- **JTC Ferry Policy Group.** ESHB 2358 created a policy oversight committee comprised of members of the Senate and House Transportation Committees and the Governor's Office. This group met on a bi-monthly basis for progress briefings and to provide feedback on the work products as they were developed.



2008 Public Meetings:

Mar. 24, Bainbridge
 Mar. 25, Kingston
 Mar. 26, Southworth
 Mar. 27, Coupeville
 Mar. 31, Bremerton
 Apr. 1, Anacortes
 Apr. 2, Friday Harbor
 Apr. 3, Vashon
 Jun. 17, Whidbey Island
 Jun. 18, Port Townsend
 Jun. 19, Anacortes
 Jun. 23, Bainbridge
 Jun. 24, Kingston
 Jun. 25, Vashon
 Jun. 26, San Juan Islands
 Jun. 30, Bremerton
 Jul. 1, Southworth
 Sept. 24, Bremerton
 Sept. 25, Edmonds
 Oct. 2, Bainbridge
 Oct. 6, San Juan Islands
 Oct. 7, Keystone
 Oct. 13, Vashon
 Oct. 14, Mukilteo
 Oct. 15, Anacortes
 Oct. 16, Southworth

2009 Draft Plan Public Hearings

Jan 5, Port Townsend
 Jan 6, Whidbey Island
 Jan 7, Vashon Island
 Jan 8, Bremerton
 Jan 12, Southworth
 Jan 13, Bainbridge
 Jan 14, Kingston
 Jan 15, San Juan Islands
 Jan 15, Anacortes
 Jan 21, Fauntleroy

The work of these groups and the participation of stakeholders was critical to the development of this Long-Range Plan, and WSF appreciates the time and effort of everyone involved. For a complete list of participants, please see Appendix C.

4.2 Public Outreach and Stakeholder Involvement

As part of the long-range planning process, WSF consulted with ferry customers, planning organizations, agency stakeholders, and the general public. The following groups and resources provided input into the planning process, and encouraged stakeholders and the public to submit ideas and stay current on the planning process.

- **Local Agency Review Team.** The Local Agency Review Team is a consultative body comprised of individuals from agencies and organizations with a vested local interest in the ferry system, and convened for the purpose of advising WSF on technical and policy issues associated with the development of a Long-Range Plan. The Local Agency Review Team's role included keeping WSF's agency partners informed about technical and policy work, and helping WSF understand the local community and agency needs.
- **Public Ferry Advisory Committees.** WSF met with the chairs of the Ferry Advisory Committees quarterly to provide an update on the development of the Long-Range Plan, solicit feedback, and consult on public meetings in ferry-served communities.
- **Public Meetings and Workshops.** Twenty-six public meetings were held in ferry-served communities in 2008. These meetings, held in the spring, summer, and fall, were to solicit input from the public as WSF was developing the foundational concepts for the Long-Range Plan. Ten additional public hearings were conducted in January 2009 to gather input on the Draft Plan. See the sidebar for a comprehensive list of public meetings.
- **Briefings to Community Groups, Local Leadership, and Regional Planning Organizations.** WSF staff attended over 60 meetings regarding the Long-Range Plan, not including the public meetings and workshops mentioned above. These meetings were requested by community groups, city and county councils, and regional planning organizations.
- **Web Page.** WSF maintained a web page connecting the public to the latest information on the Plan. Users could download materials and public comment summaries from all of the public

meetings, including a video feed of the presentation used during the fall. The web page made it easy to submit public comments and get in touch with WSF staff. It also connected the public to related web pages, including the WSTC and JTC sites.

The webpage address is:

www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/planning/ESHB2358

- Email List Serve. WSF maintained an email list serve of those who expressed specific interest in learning more about the long-range planning efforts. This included a quarterly e-mail from the Assistant Secretary for Ferries regarding progress on the Plan, and a weekly update from him that addressed current ferry issues, including updates on the long-range planning process.

5. DRAFT PLAN OUTREACH

The Draft Long-Range Plan (Draft Plan) was released for public review and comment on Friday, December 19, 2008 that was to close on Wednesday, January 21, 2009. Given the overwhelming response to the Draft Plan, the public comment period was extended through Monday, January 26, 2009 to ensure that all interested parties had an opportunity to participate. This section summarizes the following:

- Outreach approach, process, and public hearings
- Major themes heard during public comment period
- Changes to Revised Plan Scenarios (A and B)

5.1 Public Involvement

The Draft Long-Range Plan was developed with extensive public input at 26 public meetings and workshops in ferry-served communities between March 2008 and October 2008. The focus of the meetings was on the requirements of ESHB 2358 and the building blocks of the Plan, including ridership demand, level-of-service standards, pricing and operational strategies and baseline funding challenges.

WSF conducted a total of ten public hearings between January 5 – 21, 2009, to present the Draft Plan and to listen to public testimony. The public hearings were well attended, with over 1,300 individuals that signed in, and nearly 400 that chose to testify. Please see Appendix D for a verbatim transcript of each hearing.

In addition to the public testimony at the official public hearings, WSF collected feedback through emails, letters, and news accounts. In total, WSF received more than 800 comments on the 2008 Draft Long-Range Plan between December 19, 2008 and January 26,



2009. Please see Appendix E for copies of the emails and letters submitted by affected jurisdictions and other stakeholders.

5.2 Key Themes

As indicated above, WSF reviewed hundreds of comments and listened to public testimony from the ten public hearings. The comments touched on a range of subjects. The comments heard most frequently at each of the ten hearings and in reading through the written submissions were grouped into themes. The following key themes emerged:

- WSF should be treated as part of the state highway system
- Economic impacts should be considered
- The Draft Plan had not adequately addressed ridership growth
- The Draft Plan raised concerns about a vehicle reservations system
- More information was needed on what WSF is doing to reduce costs
- WSF should consider building vessels out of state if it saves money
- Scenario B included an unfunded state mandate for locals to provide passenger-only service

WSF considered all of the themes surfaced during public outreach and where appropriate has revised the Plan to reflect public input.

WSF Should Be Treated as Part of the State Highway System

A major theme that was heard at all of the public hearings was that the ferry system is a part of the state highway system and, as such, should be a fully-funded state responsibility. Among the comments heard during the public hearings was that the State was funding other “mega projects,” such as the Viaduct or SR 520, but not ferries.

A variation on this theme addressed fares: that ferry customers are already paying twice – once in the form of state gas taxes and a second time when they pay their fare – and that this is not equitable since most of the rest of the highway users do not pay tolls. As a result, the State should fund ferries without looking to local taxes or additional fares to address the funding challenges.

Discussion. WSF is a division of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Under state law, all ferry routes are designated as extensions of State Highway Routes and WSF is

funded in part through gas tax collections which are constitutionally-restricted to highway purposes.

The State cannot fully fund the “mega projects” mentioned above from current state resources. All of these projects are partially funded by non-state resources.

WSF is an expensive part of the highway system. The operating costs are much higher, since the State must provide labor and fuel to operate the vessels and terminals. The capital costs are also higher, mostly due to the large, ongoing preservation capital needs of the system. For example, over the next 20 years WSF needs to replace approximately half of its fleet.

Since the 1970s, ferry tolls have been used exclusively to defray a portion of the operating costs of the ferry system. Fare revenue does not fund the capital needs of the system. However, there were two instances in recent years where some of the gas tax revenues from the operating account were transferred, including immediately after the MVET repeal when \$67 million of the operating reserve was transferred from operations to capital.

Economic Impacts of the Plan Should Be Considered

There were many comments that touched on the idea that the proposed service reductions in Scenario B (and to a lesser extent the lack of service improvements in Scenario A) would have had negative economic impacts on ferry-served communities. For some, the focus was on the economic impacts that ferry communities have already experienced as a result of higher fares. For others, the goal was to better understand and present the case for why ferries are a vital contributor to the economic well-being of the Puget Sound region and the State. Perhaps the greatest concern raised was related to the potential damaging effects of a reduction in accessibility for ferry communities and businesses, such as home and property values, particularly in communities with few or no other options.

A number of comments suggested that the Plan should have addressed this issue directly and that decisions about the future of the ferry system cannot be made without a thorough understanding of the economic impacts of the potential changes in service and investments.

Discussion. We understand the concerns outlined above. An economic impact analysis was outside the scope of the legislative direction contained in ESHB 2358. However, economic issues were considered as part of the evaluation of pricing and operational strategies, though not in detail and only as part of the broader evaluation of customer and community impacts.



This is particularly difficult because avoiding the impacts of a service cut would require dedicating more tax revenue to ferries, since there is not enough dedicated funding to maintain current service levels. If these funds were to come from existing resources, then the impacts would need to account for the negative impacts of not spending that money on other state projects. This issue was given consideration by the State Legislature, whose recommendations helped form the Final Long-Range Plan.

Growth Was Not Accommodated In the Plan

Some comments suggested that, even in Scenario A, the Long-Range Plan did not propose a solution that addressed the growth expected in the next 22 years. There was anxiety expressed in many of the communities about the ferry system's inability to meet future, potential growth without having a more robust expansion of capacity.

Discussion. While the current plan does propose fewer capacity improvements than previous plans, the smaller capacity improvements are combined with a significant shift in how WSF is going to do business.

Growth will be accommodated through small capacity improvements and adaptive management strategies. The approach to addressing future growth in Scenario A included a combination of a modest capacity increase over time (related to replacing old vessels with newer and larger vessels), and a focus on operational strategies designed to better fit the demand with available capacity.

A key strategy in this regard is the proposed vehicle reservation system. The primary objective of the reservation system is to better utilize existing assets, which will allow WSF to meet growing demands without growing capacity in a proportionate way.

This approach to meeting growth is not unique to WSF. Throughout the transportation system, there has been a significant shift away from building capacity to a policy of managing demand. In both the United States and throughout the world, there is a greater focus on managing transportation demand either through improved transit or other high capacity systems (HOV lanes) or through congestion pricing (or increasing parking costs or reducing parking availability) to reduce demand during peak periods.

Concern About a Vehicle Reservation System

While there was support for a vehicle reservation system from some, there were also concerns expressed from others. Many of the concerns were related to how such a system might actually operate and how it would require customers to plan their trips in advance. There were some who thought that a vehicle reservation system

would make terminal congestion worse and not better. Others felt that a vehicle reservation system was a costly extravagance when basic ferry services were under threat due to funding challenges. Others commented that reservations were not required on the landside highway system, such as crossing SR 520.

Discussion. The proposed vehicle reservation system is the primary demand management tool proposed in the Plan. A vehicle reservation system will have a significant impact on WSF's ability to better align demand with available supply of auto capacity on ferries. WSF has gained valuable experience with vehicle reservations on two of its existing routes. WSF also looks to learn from other domestic and international ferry systems, most of which have reservations systems in place. In addition, the cost of implementing a reservation system is much lower than the investment needed to provide additional holding capacity where vehicles queue outside of terminals.

There has been additional information added to the vehicle reservation section of the Plan to address the specific operational concerns raised during the public comment period.

For more information on this topic, please refer to page 62.

More Information Was Needed About What WSF Is Already Doing To Reduce Costs

Given that much of the focus of the Draft Long-Range Plan was on the long-term funding needs of the system, it was not surprising that there were many comments and questions about how WSF was spending the money it already has. In particular, there was concern that the focus was too much on needing new revenues and not enough on cutting costs.

Discussion. In response, we included a more detailed discussion of cost containment, and cost management has been added to the adaptive management chapter to better explain what WSF is doing in this important area.

For more information on this topic, please refer to page 15.

Consider Building Vessels Out of State If It Saves Money

Another theme expressed at several meetings was the suggestion for the State to consider building vessels outside of Washington to help alleviate some of the funding challenges facing the ferry system. In some cases, there were specific references to the recent bids for new WSF vessels that came in over the state estimate. Many also commented on the need to include ferries in the federal stimulus package.



Discussion. The Plan did not address this issue as it is a state policy issue. The issue is a complicated one that involves both cost and benefit implications for the State.

Federal maritime law requires that WSF use U.S. flagged vessels for service between United States ports, which means these vessels would still need to be built in the United States. There is an option to use a foreign flagged vessel on direct service to Sidney from Anacortes. The 2009 legislature directed WSF to pursue purchasing a foreign flagged vessel for that route.

Passenger-Only in Scenario B was an Unfunded State Mandate

Customers and local elected officials in several communities affected by the potential service reductions described in Scenario B were concerned that identifying the potential for locally-funded passenger-only services to mitigate the impacts amounted to an unfunded state mandate.

Discussion. Under Scenario B, there was a description of how, in the event that services needed to be reduced as a result of a smaller available fleet, there were potential passenger-only routes that might be poised to provide services that could mitigate some of the impacts of these reductions. Scenario B was not premised on the availability of these services, but clearly customers would be better served if these services were available. Under that Scenario, WSF would have engaged local governments in a dialogue about how the reduced WSF service could have best been mitigated.

5.3 Summary of Changes to Draft Plan

The Revised Draft Long-Range Plan was modified based on the feedback from the public outreach in two distinct ways. The first type of changes were revisions to the Plan text to improve understanding of key plan elements by adding additional details, and to clarify areas where there might have been confusion. Some of these were mentioned earlier in the discussion of general themes from the outreach effort.

The other category of changes that were made included several revisions to the Plan Scenarios designed to address some of the concerns and comments heard.

Exhibit 4 summarizes the specific changes that were made to the Plan Scenarios between the Draft and Revised Draft versions of the Plan, in response to public feedback. A summary description is included below.

Exhibit 4 Changes to Draft Plan Options

Changes to Scenario A since Draft Plan	Changes to Scenario B since Draft Plan
<p>Operating Program Break-up Fauntleroy triangle by adding the Hiyu: Run 2-boats Fauntleroy-Vashon Run 1-boat Vashon-Southworth Run 1-boat Fauntleroy-Southworth Add reservation operating costs (\$500K/yr)</p> <p>Capital Program Remove dock widening at Fauntleroy Eliminate exit lane straightening at Port Townsend Add a replacement vessel to procurement plan to replace Hiyu (2027) Add a new tie-up slip at Southworth to support service expansion</p>	<p>Operating Program Reinstate the Bremerton night service that would have been cut ('11-'13) Add reservation operating costs (\$500K/yr)</p> <p>Capital Program Eliminated several terminal projects, including: Point Defiance Tollbooth improvements Point Defiance increased holding Port Townsend relocate tollbooths New exit lane to Tahlequah Clinton walkway connection to park & ride Minor reduction to Bainbridge transit improvements</p>

Modifications to Scenario A to address Public Input

WSF concurred that the draft Scenario A did not adequately address the growth and operational issues associated with the Fauntleroy-Vashon-Southworth route. The revised proposal added a fourth, small vessel to the route, operating as a shuttle between Vashon and Southworth. This allowed the other three vessels on the route to operate in direct service between Fauntleroy and Vashon and between Fauntleroy and Southworth, better utilizing the capacity on those vessels and increasing overall efficiency on the route. It also increased capacity for Southworth, which is one of the areas slated for high growth.

Based on comments heard at the Fauntleroy public hearing and comments received by the City of Seattle, the concept of expanding the Fauntleroy dock (as proposed in the Draft Scenario A) was not viewed as feasible. As a result, the project was removed from the Revised Draft Plan, and WSF will investigate all possible roadway and right-of-way options, if expanded vehicle holding is needed.

Modifications to Scenario B

Night/evening service on weekdays for the Seattle/Bremerton route was reinstated. The importance of evening and night service for major military employers such as Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and swing/night shift workers in Seattle led to the restoration of service in those time periods.



