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Public Comment Sought for Fare Increase Proposal

The Washington State Transportation Commission gave approval at their January meeting for Washington State Ferries (WSF) staff and members of the Tariff Policy Committee (TPC) to begin collecting public comment on the 2006 WSF Tariff proposal. The proposal is developed by the TPC, whose membership is made up of ferry riders, legislators, and transit operators. TPC members are appointed by the Transportation Commission. WSF holds one seat on the TPC.

Public Meetings Scheduled

Eight meetings are scheduled between February 15 and March 1 to gather public comment on the proposal. In mid-March, the Transportation Commission will hold a public hearing in Seattle to take formal testimony concerning the proposal, review customer comments that have been gathered throughout the process, and make decisions based on the TPC's final recommendations.

"The gathering of public opinion on the proposal is very important to the overall tariff process," says Traci Brewer-Rogstad, Director of Operations at Washington State Ferries. "The Tariff Policy Committee worked long hours to develop this proposal. After we gather public comment, at the meetings, via e-mail or the other ways we have to communicate, they will meet again and review their proposal based on the comments. Public involvement in this process works, people do listen and changes have been made to past proposals based on comments. Customers should be comfortable that their opinions will be heard."

Following the Transportation Commission public hearing and finalization of the TPC's recommend-

tions, the final approved tariff plan will go into effect on May 1, 2006.

Key Elements of the 2006 WSF Tariff Proposal

General Fare Increase: A one-year general fare increase of 6% plus nickel rounding, effective May 1, is suggested, consistent with WSF's strategic financial plan developed and approved by the Transportation Commission in 2002. As an example, the Cross Sound Passenger Fare goes from \$6.10 to \$6.50 full fare. The car and driver fare goes from \$10.60 to \$11.25.

Continue to Phase in Tariff Route Equity (distance-based fares) on San Juan Inter-island and oversized vehicles on Anacortes/Friday Harbor: Fares on the San Juan inter-island route and oversized vehicles on the Anacortes to Friday Harbor route continue to be phased into the appropriate Trip Route Equity/cube relationship with an extra 5% above the general fare increase. Inter-island phase in will continue until May 2009 and Anacortes/Friday Harbor oversized vehicle phase in will continue until May 2007.

Motorcycles: The proposal also recommends changing the standard vehicle-to-motorcycle fare ratio from 5-to-1 to 4-to-1 (calculated on the vehicle portion of the fare). This proposal is based on space equity principles and would result in motorcycle/driver fares increasing from 11 to 16 percent, depending on the route.

In-Need Organizations: The proposal suggests that WSF implement a new discount program for in-need organizations. This new discount would miti-

gate the financial impact from the loss of frequent user ticket books (and the ability to divide and distribute those tickets among individuals) as a result of electronic ticketing. This program would offer a volume-based discount and organizations would qualify for this discount at the recommendation of the appointing bodies of the local Ferry Advisory Committees.

Commercial Accounts: The proposal recommends the implementation of an upfront, non-refundable maintenance fee of \$50 per year, which will help eliminate low-volume accounts and help cover the cost of administering the commercial account program.

Monthly Passes: Limit monthly passes to 31 round trips per month, while noting that the passes are non-transferable, cannot be reproduced, and are intended for a single user.

Overheight Surcharge Waiver: Tariff Policy Committee recommended extending the overheight surcharge waiver for vehicles 20-30 feet in length, with wheelchair lifts.

Delay of Tollbooth Surcharge: Delay the implementation of the 5% surcharge (up to \$2.50) for multi-ride products purchased at the tollbooth until the next tariff review, to be no sooner than six months after successful completion of implementation of the electronic ticketing system. Multi-ride products will be available at kiosks at the terminals and on-line over the internet.

The public may comment on all or any aspects of the proposal by e-mail at tariff@wsdot.wa.gov or at open houses, which are scheduled as follows:

- **Wednesday, February 15**, at Vashon Island High School on Vashon Island, 6:30-8 p.m.

- **Thursday, February 16**, at John Sedgwick Jr. High at Port Orchard, 6-7 p.m. The tariff meeting will be followed by a public Ferry Advisory Committee from 7-8:30 p.m.
- **Wednesday, February 22**, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Freeland, 6-7 p.m. with a public Ferry Advisory Committee Meeting from 7-8:30 p.m.
- **Thursday, February 23**, at Flounder Bay Café in Anacortes from 9-10:30 a.m. and will include the public Ferry Advisory Committee Meeting.
- **Thursday, February 23**, at Orcas Center on Orcas Island from 2-3:30 p.m.
- **Thursday, February 23**, at Mullis Senior Center in Friday Harbor from 5:30-7 p.m.
- **Monday, February 27**, at the Norm Dicks Government Center in Bremerton, from 6-7 p.m. with a public Ferry Advisory Meeting from 7-8:30 p.m.
- **Wednesday, March 1**, at the Bainbridge Commons on Bainbridge Island from 6:30-8 p.m.

The Transportation Commission will hold a Public Hearing in March to hear public testimony. Customer input from the eight meetings will also be given at that time. The specific date and time for that hearing is not yet set.

Customers may comment at the open houses listed above, via postal mail to Tariff Proposal, Washington State Ferries, 2901 Third Avenue, Seattle, WA 98121; e-mail at tariff@wsdot.wa.gov; fax 206-515-3773; or phone 888-808-7977.

Information about the proposal will be available at the terminals and on the ferries soon. ■

'Vital' Vessel Maintenance Performed in 2005

2005 was a busy year for many of us. If you're reading this newsletter, you probably use Washington State Ferries to help navigate your busy life — whether getting to work, school, or other important appointments.

Washington State Ferries (WSF) customers enjoyed a 99.87% trip completion rate in 2005. That is the actual number of scheduled trips that were completed, not including weather or tidal cancellations; and includes those trips that WSF was able to complete by replacing one vessel with another.

The Lifecycle Model

To keep our service so dependable, WSF's Maintenance Department plans vessel maintenance and preservation work years in advance. This advanced scheduling system helps our Maintenance Department stay ahead of problems and is the reason for WSF's high trip completion rate.

The Lifecycle Model involves scheduling "vital" equipment and parts for maintenance according to their useful lifespan. Vessel parts are classified into two categories — "vital" or "other." Vital parts are those designated by the U.S. Coast Guard as vital to the protection of people, the environment, and the

vessel. Other parts of the vessel may be important, but not "vital" as defined by the Coast Guard.

Every piece of equipment and every part have their own defined lifecycle, which is closely tracked and then scheduled in advance to either be replaced or preserved according to its lifecycle schedule. By doing this, the ferry system can allocate its resources in a way that makes sense for the entire system and keeps our operation running smoothly.

Equipment Maintenance is a Shared Responsibility

The responsibility of maintaining a vessel is shared among the vessel's engine room crew, machinists at our Eagle Harbor maintenance facility, and contracted shipyards. The engine crew monitors and maintains the ferry's propulsion system and auxiliary machinery; performs planned maintenance procedures; and maintains virtually every piece of equipment onboard the ferry. Many of these tasks are performed while the vessel is underway. Crews use nighttime hours to accomplish heavier repair and maintenance functions. This is what is known as "basic" vessel maintenance.

"Intermediate" vessel maintenance includes activities that require removing the vessel from service. Most intermediate maintenance activities are accomplished at the Eagle Harbor maintenance facility or at contracted shipyards. Often this work requires a shore-based infrastructure that is not available aboard ship. Examples of this maintenance include rebuilding engines, hydraulic component overhauls, and upholstery repair.

Workers providing intermediate vessel maintenance for the ferry system had their work cut out for them in 2005 — and they delivered.

Continued on page 3.

WSF Employees Honored for Saving Lives 2005

In 2005, Washington State Ferries (WSF) crews did more than just perform their daily duties on the job. They saved lives.

There is nothing we do at WSF that is more important than saving a life. Our crews are trained in firefighting, first aid, CPR, emergency communications protocol, and the use of our onboard Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs). Since life-threatening emergencies can take place on the vessel or out in the water, WSF crews are trained to operate the vessel's rescue boats and to respond swiftly in the event of a "man overboard" emergency.

Every year the value of this training — and the competence and professionalism of WSF crewmembers — is proven, as lives are saved on WSF vessels and at the terminals. When a life-threatening incident occurs, our employees are usually the first responders. They are on the scene quickly, and respond professionally and compassionately, whether it's rescuing stranded boaters, administering medical assistance to injured customers, or providing a calming presence during a scary situation.

In 2005, WSF crews saved the lives of seven people — in the water and onboard the ferries. Sometimes crewmembers put their own safety at risk to save someone. They brave freezing waters, possible injury, and drowning. WSF commends the crewmembers who were part of the following lifesaving rescues in 2005.

The following is a brief description of the rescues in 2005:

January 13 — M/V KITSAP crew saved an attempted suicide victim in his vehicle during offloading at the Mukilteo Terminal. They stabilized the victim until emergency medical technicians arrived.

April 30 — M/V CATHLAMET crew rescued boaters who had run out of gas and were drifting toward rocks north of the Mukilteo Terminal.

June 11 — M/V KALEETAN crew resuscitated



Crewmembers of the M/V KITSAP received a Life Ring Award.

an unconscious passenger onboard the vessel from Seattle to Bremerton.

August 6 — M/V WENATCHEE crew rescued a man who jumped overboard en route from Seattle to Bainbridge Island.

August 9 — M/V PUYALLUP crew saved an overturned kayaker in distress near the Edmonds Terminal.

October 6 — Colman Dock staff discovered and assisted a man who had jumped into the water. A terminal staff member called 9-1-1, and used a life ring to get him safely out of the water.

December 4 — Bainbridge Island Terminal staff and the M/V PUYALLUP crew saved a heart attack victim. Terminal Staff ran to the victim's aid, called 9-1-1, and stabilized him. Vessel crewmembers administered first aid, and used the Automatic External Defibrillator to resuscitate the man and sustain him until emergency medical technicians arrived.

To honor these heroes, the ferry system gave Life Ring Awards to employees who helped with the rescue efforts.

WSF would like to thank all employees involved in these rescues. We commend their professional and caring actions, and honor each one of them for their efforts. ■





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2005 WSF Facts/Trivia

- There are currently 28 vessels in our fleet.
- There are 20 terminals in our system.
- We have 10 routes in our system.
- The shortest route in the system is Point Defiance/Tahlequah at 1.7 miles across.
- The longest route in the system is Anacortes/Sidney, British Columbia, at 39.9 miles.

While traveling on Washington roads and highways, be sure to watch for construction and maintenance crews!



Do you have a question, comment, or a story idea for Sound Crossings?

Send it to:
 SCEditor@wsdot.wa.gov

or mail to:
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WSF Installs Elevators on Remaining 5 Vessels

Washington State Ferries (WSF) has finished the huge task of installing elevators on the five remaining elevator-less ferries in our fleet. WSF vessels are now completely accessible ...

Well, almost. The M/V Klickitat, a Steel Electric Class vessel built in 1927, cannot accommodate an elevator because the configuration of her passenger cabin does not provide enough space. The vessel was refurbished in the early 1980s before passenger cabins were reconfigured to accommodate elevators.

But the good news is that every other vessel in our fleet is now accessible to customers in wheelchairs or those with limited mobility.

Over the last year and a half, the WSF Maintenance and Vessel Engineering Departments worked with our contracted shipyards to get elevators installed on five remaining vessels. At the end of 2004, the ferries Spokane and Kaleetan were the first to receive



A new elevator is lowered into the M/V KALEETAN.

elevators. Then, in February 2005, the M/V Yakima was retrofitted, followed by the M/V Walla Walla, which went back into service in October 2005. To complete the project, the M/V Hyak joins the ranks of these updated vessels when she resumes service February 2006.

WSF maintenance staff and shipyard employees also completed other preservation work on the vessels (see article "Vital Vessel Maintenance Performed in 2005"), and made other ADA improvements including installing signage, grading slopes, and making accessible upgrades to restrooms.

WSF is excited about what this means for our customers. Those who formerly had to remain on one level, usually the car deck, can now get to other areas of the vessel safely and freely and enjoy all that our boats and our beautiful Puget Sound environment have to offer. ■

WSF Begins Limited Launch of New Electronic Ticketing System



In January, Washington State Ferries (WSF) began a limited launch of **Wave2Go**, a new electronic ticketing system, to prepare for system-wide deployment later this year. The new ticketing system will offer customers more convenience while enabling the ferry system to more effectively control and manage funds.

The new **Wave2Go** system features bar-coded tickets and cards that are redeemed by a scanner at the vehicle tollbooth or by a handheld scanner for walk-on passengers.

Under the new ticketing system, customers can purchase a **Multi-Ride Convenience Card** that provides the same benefits as the Frequent User Ticket Book. The new **Convenience Card** offers a 20% discount off the regular single ride fare; is not subject to the peak season surcharge; and is valid for 90 days from the date of purchase, just like the old ticket book. (Frequent User Ticket Books will be phased out, but WSF will continue to honor them according to their stamped expiration date.)

An easy-to-read electronic display provides the details of your ticket transaction and tells you how many rides remain on your **Convenience Card**. Although **Car and Driver Convenience Cards** can only be used for one car per passage, **Passenger Convenience Cards** may be shared among a group traveling together.

Another perk of the new ticketing system is advance purchasing. Single-ride tickets can be purchased up to seven days ahead of travel. During the limited launch on the Port Townsend/Key-stone route, advance-purchase tickets will only be available at the staffed ticket booths. Internet and kiosk ticket purchases will be introduced later during this start-up period. With advance-purchase ticketing, customers reduce the time they must wait in line at the terminal.

Wave2Go will add additional features in the near future to improve your travel experience. To find out more about **Wave2Go**, visit www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/, e-mail wave2go@wsdot.wa.gov, or call WSF Customer Service at 1-888-808-7977. ■



Wave2Go ticket kiosk coming soon to a terminal near you!

Community Advisory Group Will Help Plan Bainbridge Terminal Improvements

Washington State Ferries (WSF) is improving the Bainbridge Island Ferry Terminal to increase the safety and reliability of service at one of WSF's busiest facilities. Major repairs to the facility were completed over 20 years ago, but key structural components of the terminal need to be replaced. Safety and circulation improvements are needed for transit, autos, pedestrians, bicyclists, and persons with limited mobility.

As a first step to the Bainbridge Island Ferry Terminal Improvement Project, WSF is updating the 1998 Master Plan to reflect changes in WSF operations and community initiatives. WSF will also look at opportunities to generate non-farebox revenue at the facility. The update will include re-examining original data, looking at past options and reasons for selection, and revising the plan to reflect new information and requirements.

In order to ensure that the interests of the Bainbridge Island community are incorporated into the updated plan, WSF worked with local elected officials to recruit and select a group of 12 Bainbridge and Kitsap County citizens to help with the process.

WSF received nearly 50 letters of interest and selected the final 12 Community Advisory Group (CAG) members with the help of Bainbridge Mayor Darlene Kordonow, Kitsap County Commissioner

Chris Endresen, and State Senator Phil Rockefeller. CAG members were selected to represent a broad cross-section of geographic locations, interests, and community organizations. The CAG includes nine members from the City of Bainbridge, three members from off-island Kitsap County, and one member from Jefferson County.

In addition to the 12 members, the CAG includes a standing position for a representative from the Bainbridge Island Ferry Advisory Committee (FAC).

The CAG will assist the WSF project team in reviewing and updating the 1998 master plan, to address new security requirements, operational changes and community planning efforts. The group met for the first time in January, and will continue their work with WSF staff over the next year.

CAG members will assist the project team with informing the community about the master plan update and by ensuring that the community's perspective is addressed during the planning process.

The CAG meetings are open to the public. For more information on the project, please visit the project website at <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/projects/bainbridgeterminalMPU/> ■

Most Ferry Terminals Not Accepting Canadian Currency

Beginning January 1, 2006, most Washington State Ferry Terminals stopped accepting Canadian currency. The exceptions are the Anacortes, Sidney, B.C., and San Juan Island Terminals.

"Washington State Ferries deposits \$12,000 annually in Canadian currency which is less than 1/10th of a percent of our total deposits," explains Sam Kuntz, chief financial officer at Washington State Ferries. "Of this, more than 40% of the Canadian currency is deposited by the Anacortes Terminal so we obviously want to continue to accept Canadian currency at terminals that support our International service."

By not accepting the currency on the other routes, Washington State Ferries will not have to continue to separate Canadian currency before making a deposit. None of the terminals currently accept Canadian coin. ■



CAG members take a break at their January meeting.

Continued from page 1.

In 2005, intermediate maintenance was done on several vessels. The work included engine overhauls, safety and security upgrades, ADA improvements, interior refurbishments, and more.

M/V WALLA WALLA

Vessel Class: Jumbo Class

Year Built: 1972

Usual Route(s): Replacement vessel

The largest project in 2005, most customers have ridden the "Wally" at one time or another. This vessel usually fills in on various ferry routes up and down Puget Sound to replace vessels that need emergency repair, annual inspections, or scheduled maintenance.

According to the Lifecycle Model, the Walla Walla was due for significant preservation and maintenance work when she went into Everett Shipyard at the end of March 2005. (In 2003, the WALLA WALLA received four new engines; but her 30+-year old electronics and propulsion controls needed upgrading to keep her going strong.)

In addition to the new engine propulsion control system, she also received a new emergency generator, a new exhaust system, a new fuel system with overflow prevention, a replacement emergency power battery charging system, modifications to the vessel electrical systems, and a state-of-the-art alarm and monitoring system. The engine and propulsion motors are now good for about another 40 years.

The vessel's interior also received a much-needed refurbishment, and the pilothouse was equipped with all new controls, steering gears, searchlights, and new satellite compass. The vessel was also equipped with security upgrades, including surveillance hardware and access controls.

ADA improvements included new guardrails, accessible tables and drinking fountains, ramp slope and threshold improvements, and Braille signage. And, of course, one of the most notable additions and improvements is the new elevator.



M/V CHELAN

Vessel Class: Issaquah Class

Year Built: 1981

Usual Route(s): Anacortes/San Juans/Sidney, B.C.;

Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth

The M/V CHELAN is now set to sail the international waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca to take customers to Sidney, B.C. In 2005, the vessel was brought up to SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea) standards for international service.

"SOLAS'ing" a vessel is no small task. The International Maritime Organization sets the standards that a vessel must meet to achieve SOLAS status and sail international waters. For vessels in the United States, the Coast Guard inspects the vessels to ensure all requirements and approves them for service.

First, a voyage data recorder is installed. Similar to the "black box" in airplanes, it records important information while the vessel is in service. Every system (steering, engine, propulsion, etc.) feeds information to the data recorder so that a complete record is kept.

Bringing a vessel up to SOLAS standards also includes installing a fire protection system, including an alarm system that monitors all spaces on the vessel, fire doors, a passenger cabin sprinkler system, an upgraded ventilation system, and upgraded "A60"-coded insulation. A60 is a code that is used to classify materials that are able to withstand fire for 60 minutes. The vessel's floor and bulkhead are also made to A60 code.

The vessel also gets extra emergency life rafts, watertight doors, and of course a new emergency generator to support all these new systems.

In addition to the SOLAS upgrades, the CHELAN also received new main engines, ship service generators, and new interior furnishings.

M/V KALEETAN

Vessel Class: Super Class

Year Built: 1967

Usual Route(s): Seattle/Bremerton;Anacortes/

San Juan Islands

Work actually began on the M/V KALEETAN in 2004, and was finished on February 11, 2005, with a commemorative ride from Foss Shipyard through the Ballard Locks to Colman Dock (Pier 52) in Seattle. The vessel received a new elevator and other ADA improvements, new ship service generators, new main switchboard, and security system upgrades.

M/V YAKIMA

Vessel Class: Super Class

Year Built: 1967

Usual Route(s): Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth;

Anacortes/San Juan Islands

Shortly after the KALEETAN left the shipyard, the M/V YAKIMA went in. The vessel received the same treatment as her sister ship, including a shiny new elevator and other ADA improvements, new ship service generators, new main switchboard, and security system upgrades.

M/V HYAK

Vessel Class: Super Class

Year Built: 1967

Usual Route(s): Seattle/Bremerton; Anacortes/

San Juan Islands

The M/V HYAK is slated to return to service on February 17, 2006, when she goes to the San Juan Islands to relieve the M/V KALEETAN.

The work done on the HYAK is an example of ways that WSF tries to address vessel maintenance needs while minimizing cost. Rather than receiving all new parts, many of the vessel's old systems were replaced with parts from other vessels that had been refurbished or completely rebuilt and were good as new, but without the new price tag.

The HYAK received four refurbished engines that were rebuilt by Marine Systems, Inc. at Todd shipyard. Three of the engines came from the M/V SPO-KANE, and one from the M/V WALLA WALLA. The HYAK's old-model engines had logged over 260,000 hours. She was the last vessel in WSF's fleet to have the old model replaced.

The ship service generators, which had been overhauled at our Eagle Harbor maintenance facility, came from the KALEETAN, and the vital generator was replaced.

The engine room's alarm and monitoring system was modified so that it could be upgraded easily if needed, and the propulsion generators were cleaned.

The pilothouse got new radar, navigational equipment, and searchlights. Windows in the passenger cabin were replaced, and approximately 1,000 square feet of the decking was repaired, the interior was professionally cleaned, and damaged upholstery was replaced.

The vessel received the standard security system upgrades, including surveillance and access controls.

The HYAK was the last in the lineup of vessels to receive an elevator in 2005. She also received other small but modernizing features, such as self-illuminating Exit signs that will work even when there is no power to the vessel.

M/V KITSAP

Vessel Class: Issaquah Class

Year Built: 1980

Usual Route(s): Seattle/Bremerton; Fauntleroy/

Vashon/Southworth

The M/V KITSAP received new Control Pitch Propellers (CPP) five years ago. In 2005, the CPP were inspected and approved for several more years of service. The vessel also received additional keel coolers for the ship service generators, and security system upgrades.

This work was done while the vessel was in its dry dock period. The Coast Guard requires that vessels receive dry dock inspections and/or maintenance twice in five years time. In addition to vessel preservation work in 2005, WSF also completed these Coast-Guard required inspections for many vessels last year.

Examples of dry dock work include painting the underwater hull, inspecting propellers and rudder, and inspecting sea valves.

The following vessels received dry dock inspections in 2005: M/V Sealth, M/V Elwha, M/V Klahowya, M/V Evergreen State, M/V Tillikum, M/V Quinalt, M/V Skagit, and M/V Kalama

Washington State Ferries thanks our maintenance staff, machinists, engine crews, port engineers, and shipyard workers who worked hard to keep us up to date, safe, and reliable in 2005. ■



The M/V HYAK's new engine is lowered onto the car deck prior to installation.

Make a Connection to the Ferry Terminal!

What if you could make a wish that would improve your commute ... what would you wish for?

Would you wish for a free parking space right next to the ferry terminal so you could get off the boat and zoom on to your final destination? Well, if this sounds like you, stop wishing and check out VanShare!

The VanShare program bridges the gap between home and ferry, or between the ferry and the workplace by providing a van near the ferry terminal with free parking.

Ferry commuters utilize VanShare to connect from the ferry to the workplace; commuters simply walk off the ferry to the parked van and drive it to the work site destination. At the end of the day, the group drives the van back to the parking site and catches the ferry for the commute home. VanShare is also a convenient option for a group of commuters with a similar home origin to connect to the ferry terminal when other transportation options are not available.

Start a VanShare group with just 3 ferry riders who share a similar commute and split the \$50 monthly fare, plus fuel costs. VanShare is limited to a maximum 20-mile round trip commute. The monthly fare covers the maintenance, insurance and roadside assistance. Many employers offer transportation programs that include subsidies for the VanShare program, please check with your Human Resource Department.

King County Metro currently has over 21 VanShare groups successfully using this program to simplify connections to the ferry terminal. To find other commuters to start a VanShare or find a VanShare group near you, log-on to www.RideshareOnline.com or call 1-800-427-8249.

Get started today; explore an easier way to make connections with the ferry terminal. ■

WSF Representative Sharon Van de Carr presents customer Molly Clawson with a framed print of the 2005 Shaw Island watercolor by artist Alex Young.

Molly won the signed and framed print in a drawing that was held at the Artist Reception event at Seattle's Pier 52 in December.



A Tour of Whidbey Island – Historical and Artistic Gem of Washington

Less than an hour from Seattle with a short ferry ride from Mukilteo, Whidbey Island is an island gem worth visiting. This diverse natural setting with beaches and old growth forest makes a great day trip or weekend getaway.

A leisurely drive up Whidbey Island takes a couple of hours and will take you through winding roads and charming small towns. The main roads, Highway 20 to the north and Highway 525 to the south, make for easy reference when venturing off to explore. You are never lost on Whidbey Island, only seeking out all that it has to offer. Each of the towns along the way has their own style and flavor.

Langley

Langley is just 4 miles from the Clinton Ferry Terminal and boasts an internationally-known artist community. Flower-lined walkways and pocket parks make for enjoyable walks during the spring, summer, and fall. The quaint village-like downtown boasts quality handmade clothing, art galleries and shops, antiques, and gourmet restaurants.

One of the most recent additions to achieve national acclaim is the Chocolate Flower Farm. From April through October, visit the garden just outside Langley to see the amazing “chocolate” flowers that are earning this small farm national attention. Be sure to visit during the Red Wine and Chocolate event on February 19 and 20, when the three Whidbey Island wineries converge at the farm. Visit “The Garden Shed” in downtown Langley year round for gifts, plants, and garden art. For more information, visit www.chocolateflowerfarm.com.

Also, add a little mystery to your life at the Langley Mystery Weekend February 25–26. This is a two-day interactive improvisational mystery game. Live actors, mystery newspaper, and clues are fun for the whole family from 10 am–5 pm both days. Visit www.southwhidbeychamber.com to uncover the details.

Freeland

Freeland is a fishing village with amazing views of both the Olympic and Cascade Mountain ranges. Located at the narrowest point of Whidbey Island, Freeland is nestled between Holmes Harbor and Mutiny Bay in an area less than a mile wide.

Nature lovers who visit Freeland will want to check out South Whidbey State Park, a 347-acre camping park with 4,500 feet of saltwater shoreline on Admiralty Inlet. Park features include old-growth forest, tidelands for crabbing and clamming, campsites secluded by lush, forest undergrowth, and breathtaking views of the Puget Sound and Olympic Mountains. The park offers a unique outdoor experience. Located on Whidbey Island, 7 miles north of Freeland, on Smuggler’s Cove Road. For more information, visit the Washington State Parks website at <http://www.parks.wa.gov>.

If golfing is your idea of the perfect getaway, then Holmes Harbor Golf & Beach Club is your answer. This executive-style 18-hole course boasts that a golfer will “use every club in their bag” as they play through magnificent views of the Cascade Mountain range. For information on fabulous golfing and dining, visit www.holmesharbor.com.

Greenbank

Along Highway 525 is another Whidbey Island gem. The town of Greenbank at first glance appears to be only a couple of shops on the side of the road. What you don’t know yet is that this is actually a 100-year-old authentic country store and local hangout for coffee or a light meal. Eat in or take with you for an outdoor picnic. Stay and shop at the antique store or travel just a short way up Bakken Road and you will find Greenbank Trading Post & Antiques and Greenbank Cellars, a farmhouse and barn that are not your average country road attraction. The simple century-old barn door hides an amazing soda fountain bar back from 1905 in the tasting room. And everyone will enjoy the dramatic flare of the authentic 1906 peepshow projector machines while sampling the award-winning wines. For the lowdown on Whidbey wines, visit www.whidbey.com/wine.

Greenbank Farm: Wine Tasting, Pies, and More

Just a few minutes north of the town proper is the Greenbank Farm. A town unto itself, this 522-acre historic farm has a wine shop and wine tasting room, art gallery, berry farm, antique store, garden, and much more. Not to be missed is the Whidbey Pies Café, well-known for award winning loganberry and marionberry pies — although sandwiches and other fare are also served. Be sure to visit during the Wine Tour, Art & Gift Market, February 18–19. For more information, visit www.greenbankfarm.com.

Coupeville

The seaside village of Coupeville on Penn Cove is the half-way point for travelers. From here you can head out to Keystone to catch the ferry to Port Townsend on the Olympic Peninsula. Be sure to stop at the historic Fort Casey, a previously active Army fort that protected the shores of Puget Sound. Admiralty Head Lighthouse, built in 1861 and rebuilt in 1903, is an architectural treasure. Though it was decommissioned in 1922, the lighthouse is still alive and active with visitors and special events.

Concerts on the Cove, Coupeville Farmer’s Market, and the Arts Center make sure that every visit to Coupeville is new and unique. Coupeville is also the home of the Island County Museum. Be sure to visit during the Penn Cove Mussel Festival, March 4–5, for fun fair activities, including the Arts & Antique Walk from 5–8 pm on March 4. For festivities information, go to www.centralwhidbeychamber.com.

Oak Harbor

Oak Harbor, the largest town on Whidbey Island, has diverse shopping and family activities year round that make for a great getaway. Your family will love the Roller Barn with roller-skating, bowling, and miniature golf. Experience the local celebration of Dutch heritage in April at “Holland is Happening Days.” The 37th annual event, April 29–30, celebrates the rich 1860s Dutch heritage of Oak Harbor and includes a grand parade, street fair, Klompen Canal Race, and International Dance Festival. Visit www.oakharborchamber.org to learn more. The website www.whidbeycamanoisland.com offers more information.

Deception Pass

At the peak of Whidbey Island is one of the most breathtaking spectacles of Washington State. One of the most visited parks in the state, Deception Pass State Park and the Deception Pass bridge provide stunning views of rugged cliffs and deceptively calm waters that churn through the narrow passageway. The two expanses of bridge that connect Whidbey Island to Fidalgo Island were completed in 1935 and tower over the water at 182 feet.

Deception Pass State Park is located 9 miles north of Oak Harbor and 9 miles south of Anacortes on Whidbey Island in Puget Sound.

The final leg of the drive takes you 8 miles up Fidalgo Island toward Anacortes. Just turn right and you will be back on I-5 in 20 minutes and heading home. Unless you can’t resist turning around and seeing Whidbey Island all over again. ■



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