



# NEWS

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Ferry Service Heeds Science Team's Recommendation to Slow Boats in Narrowest Part of Rich Passage**

#### ***Two-and-a-half-mile slowdown will add 10 minutes to Seattle-Bremerton crossing***

Seattle, Wa.—August 31, 2001—Washington State Ferries (WSF) announced today it will follow the recommendation of a team of scientists and slow down its CHINOOK Class Passenger-Only Fast Ferry for a 2-1/2-mile stretch in the narrowest portion of Rich Passage. The slowdown is expected to add approximately 10 minutes to the average crossing time on the Seattle to Bremerton route.

"We are slowing the boats along this one portion of the route in response to the recommendations of a scientific team that's been studying the beaches for more than a year," said Terry McCarthy, Acting Director of Washington State Ferries. "The purpose of the slowdown is to address the problem of beach erosion."

"The issue of beach erosion was first raised by property owners in Rich Passage concerned about their bulkheads. Ironically, the scientific study found that these same bulkheads are a contributing factor to beach erosion," said McCarthy.

"It's not the fast ferry waves alone, or even the fast ferry waves in a narrow passage. It's the addition of fast ferry waves to a narrow

passage that's been armored with bulkheads that is leading to erosion in this one area," said McCarthy.

In a narrow passage with bulkheads, the fast ferry waves are prevented from dissipating. If the passage was wider, the waves would dissipate through the water before reaching shore. And if there were no bulkheads, the waves could dissipate by running up on a naturally sloping beach. "The waves from the fast ferry added to the unique characteristics along this stretch of the route (the narrow channel, shape of the bottom, currents, bulkheads, other vessel wakes) all combine to create erosion," said McCarthy.

WSF formed the Rich Passage Wave Action Study Team, made up of Puget Sound area scientists and engineers, to conduct an environmental review under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). The Study Team was advised by a scientific review panel of the nation's foremost experts on coastal processes.

In the fall of 1998, about six months after the CHINOOK began operations, WSF began putting together a team to conduct an environmental review of the potential impacts of fast ferry waves in Rich Passage. Before the review commenced, a group of Rich Passage homeowners filed suit, and in July 1999 obtained a preliminary injunction to slow the fast ferries. Because of the litigation, the environmental study was placed on hold. In March 2000, the State Supreme Court ruled in favor of the ferry system, overturning the injunction and allowing a resumption of fast ferry service. WSF decided to go forward with the scientific study.

"We wanted to get to the bottom of this," said McCarthy. "This is groundbreaking science. Waves from these types of boats have been primarily studied in deep, open waters, but there's much less understanding of how high speed vessels interact with narrow, shallow

waterways. We are relieved that the study indicates there's only a problem in the most narrow portion of Rich Passage, and not elsewhere."

The study team recommended slowing the boats from Middle Point on the eastern side of Port Orchard to Waterman Point on the western side of Port Orchard. Along this stretch, the boats will be slowed from 34 knots to 12 knots. Normal fast ferry operating speeds are 34 to 37 knots on the Seattle to Bremerton route.

WSF expects to publish a new schedule in mid-September and implement the slowdown beginning October 1. "We want to give our customers the opportunity to adjust their commutes to accommodate the added 10 minutes," said McCarthy.

Copies of the Executive Summary and the complete study are available from Washington State Ferries by calling 206.515.3402 or visiting the WSF website at [www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries).

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