Ferry Terminal Development and Partnership Opportunities Study

Why is WSDOT studying joint-development and innovative partnership opportunities at public ferry terminals?

The 2007 Legislature directed the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Public-Private Partnerships Program to study opportunities for joint-development and innovative partnerships at public ferry terminals. The study will also examine the potential for partnership opportunities with local government entities such as cities, port districts, and local transit agencies.

The Legislature chose the Public-Private Partnerships Program (PPP) at WSDOT to conduct this study because the PPP Program’s primary mission is to advance important transportation projects and priorities by exploring and engaging the private sector and other public partners in joint ventures that benefit the citizens of Washington.

One type of joint venture is joint-development. In this context, joint-development means a real estate development project that includes coordination between multiple parties to develop sites near the terminal, usually on publicly owned land. This study will examine whether a joint-development project near a ferry terminal has the potential to provide cost sharing agreements, system improvements, or other potential revenues or benefits to the ferry system.
Major Milestones for the Ferry Terminal Development and Partnerships Opportunities Study

The Public-Private Partnerships Program hired a consultant to conduct the joint-development opportunities study.

September 2007
Consultant Hired

September to December 2007
Phase I: Completed

Phase I: Each of the 19 ferry terminal locations was documented for existing conditions, operational deficiencies, local real estate and regulatory contexts, property ownership, and definition of potential outcomes.

January to March 2008
Phase II: Completed

Phase II: Joint-development opportunities that were identified in Phase I were evaluated in light of a list of goals/criteria. A matrix of factors was developed and each terminal was rated. The terminals with the most near term potential for joint-development were selected for further analysis.

March to September 2008
Phase III: Currently Underway

Phase III: The highest rated terminals from Phase II are being examined in depth, and a financial feasibility analysis is being developed for each terminal and presented to the Legislature.

September 2008
Study Results Released

The results of the study will be available in fall 2008 and ready for Legislative review and action in the 2009 Session.

Why is this study necessary?

Ferries serve an important role in the daily transportation of people and goods across Puget Sound. Also important is the role ferries serve as a major component to Washington State’s tourism industry. The projected growth in regional population, coupled with the anticipated location of where those people will be employed, translates into additional customers for the ferry system. As a result, baseline ridership for WSDOT ferries is expected to continue to grow over the next 20 years. Most of the current terminal facilities for passengers and vehicles are inadequate to serve the current peak period level of ridership.

Aging Facilities Have Safety and Capacity Issues

The majority of the terminals serving the central Puget Sound were built in the 1950’s and 1960’s, long before seismic, electrical, and other building codes were adopted. Additionally, the terminal facilities were built to address a now outdated profile of ferry customers’ accessibility and mobility needs. For example, many passenger loading structures are often undersized, nonexistent, or in need of system upgrades.

Need for More Efficient and Safe Multimodal Connections

At many terminals, pedestrians and bicyclists are mixed in with vehicle traffic, posing safety hazards and causing unnecessary loading and unloading delays. Current ferry operations often create congestion on local roads near the terminals due to inadequate holding facilities and an influx of people and cars during vessel loading and unloading. An increasing number of walk on riders will also require better inter-modal connection facilities to move efficiently from the terminal to alternate modes of transportation.

Insufficient Funds to Meet Terminal Improvement Needs

Current capital funding levels for the ferry system cannot meet the needs for both new vessel construction and terminal preservation/improvement. The study will identify whether any terminals have the potential for innovative joint-development or finance partnerships, which will provide the Governor, State Legislators, and other key decision makers with options for financing terminal construction.

Ferry System Route Map

Ferry System Key Facts in Washington State

- 19 terminals
- 500 trips a day
- 28 vessels
- 24 million passengers per year
- 11 million vehicles per year

Source: 2007 WSDOT Key Facts

Who do I contact to learn more about this study?

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Ferry System Route Map

Deficiencies at the Bainbridge Island Terminal

Lack of a separate passenger loading structure forces walk-on passengers and vehicles to use the same loading facility, which is both inefficient and a potential safety concern.

Deficiencies at the Bainbridge Island Terminal

Rotting Structures

Too Narrow

Inadequate Holding

Bicycle/Car Conflict

Pedestrian Conflicts

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