

# Washington State Ferries Virtual Public Meeting Summary

Fall 2019

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Washington State Ferries (WSF) hosted the first ever virtual community meeting series using GotoWebinar. There were over 200 people registered for the two meetings, held on Saturday, Dec. 7 at 9:00 a.m. and Tuesday Dec. 10 at 6:00 p.m. In terms of demographics, attendees indicated the routes they used most frequently during an in meeting poll.

## Responses to the prompt “*Please select which area of the ferry system you typically use the most.*”

Overall response	Routes used most frequently
35%	Anacortes/San Juan Islands/ Sidney, BC
30%	Mukilteo/Clinton, Port Townsend/Coupeville, and Edmonds/Kingston
23%	Seattle/Bremerton or Seattle/Bainbridge
10%	Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth or Pt. Defiance/Tahlequah

After a brief presentation from WSDOT Assistant Secretary for Ferries Amy Scarton about the key highlights of 2019 and projects coming up for WSF in 2020, members of the WSF Executive Team and senior staff members answered questions from the audience. During the meeting, a poll asked the audience about prior attendance at WSF community meetings. Over 50% of the overall audience indicated they had never participated in a WSF community meeting.

## Public comments

### *Mukilteo Ferry Terminal*

The majority of attendees indicated they used the Mukilteo/Clinton, Port Townsend/Coupeville, and Edmonds/Kingston routes. Many comments were about current and future operations at the Mukilteo Ferry Terminal.

- I appreciate your awareness of the parking or lack of, at the Mukilteo terminal. However, please keep in mind that recent changes from Mukilteo with regards to parking options have decreased. Your desire to have more people walk onto ferries rather than drive would suggest that you not have Mukilteo take the lead in the parking situation but rather be a partner with WSF. Mukilteo likely does not have Whidbey Island travel high on their priority list. There is only two hour street

parking, and no paid lots, in Port Townsend. Might increase walk-ons, but given Coupeville's remote area on Whidbey Island, it would require a ride or bus connection.

- Why is a large and quite expensive "waiting room" being built at Mukilteo when the reason for the failure to build the promised parking at Mukilteo for use by Whidbey residents and visitors was rescinded "due to cost?"
- Why is there so much parking at Southworth and it all being eliminated at Mukilteo?
- Why do you keep mentioning the Sounder train in relation to the Mukilteo/Clinton run? There are only four runs each way, each day. It is not a transportation option for the vast majority of Whidbey residents and visitors.
- Why do you have law enforcement and line verification (Kingston) and none at Mukilteo to prevent line cutting?
- Among the goals of the state are to encourage people to use public transit, to get out of their cars and to utilize walk-on options. The actions of WSF on the Mukilteo dock project fly in the face of that mandate because the project includes no parking. Only those who travel during commute hours when there are mass-transit options such as the four-times each way daily Sounder or express busses that run commuter hours are able to walk on. Others are being forced to drive on. Why is the ferry system forcing riders to drive on?
- Your goal to "Reduce customer wait times" are subverted by eliminating parking at Mukilteo. It is the main priority of people on Whidbey Island and our needs were completely dismissed, resulting in very, very long lines.
- What are the plans to reduce the wait times on the Clinton/Mukilteo route given the absence of parking in Mukilteo?
- How about the residents? Our children no longer come visit with their small children as they have to drive through Seattle traffic and then must wait in very long lines because they can no longer park and walk across, with us picking them up. Because of this we are moving off island after 49 years!
- There used to be three boats on the Clinton/Mukilteo route. Now the wait times are hours. How do you plan to mitigate this?
- How many feet of sea level rise are the terminals designed to handle at Clinton/Mukilteo or Coupeville? What would be the impact if those limits are exceeded?
- What are the provisions for parking at the new Mukilteo terminal? Will all services be ready at the fall 2020 opening?

### *Fares/passes*

Many participants asked questions about fares. The panel talked about the Washington State Transportation Commission's fare setting process and current ideas to explore easier ways to charge passengers using new technology.

- Do discounted fares do not work with a pass?

- Wait times and vessel capacity are valid measures for routes without reservations. However, those don't work for the San Juan Islands and perhaps not for Port Townsend/Coupeville. On those routes reservations do a good job of avoiding overloaded boats and long wait times. How does WSF plan to measure the need for additional service for those routes?
- Half of the passenger fare (discount for seniors) is of little use to islanders, such as from Clinton, because the lack of mass transit options on the other side. Many seniors are forced to travel for medical procedures, such as radiation which is unavailable on-island.
- What percentage of the WSF budget is covered by passenger fees? Why does WSF not charge Canadians and other foreigners the full fare? The senior discount is currently given to nonresidents of the United States whereas when I travel on Canadian ferries as a senior I do not receive their senior discount.
- What actions is the ferry system taking with regard to ferry fares to promote multi-modal ridership to reduce traffic?
- Regarding fares and traffic, will WSF propose to allow fare credit for transfers between transit and ferries? What about higher fares during peak periods to incentivize carpooling, transit?
- For other WA transit systems, what percentage of operating costs come from user fees (tickets) and what percentage from government funding?
- Where can you purchase tickets to use on smartphone?
- Has there been any thought into ditching paper schedules to save printing costs, and automating tollbooths to scan Good-to-Go accounts,? Saving money on personnel that could otherwise be used on maintenance or Olympic Sun Decks?
- We are happy for the ability to send along some comments that come to mind. We moved from Snohomish County to Kitsap County over 16 years ago and are very dependent upon the ferries. We have used them for commuting to work, attending all types of Seattle area entertainment, medical visits and for visiting family and friends. As ferry rates increase ferry use becomes fairly cost prohibitive. We believe the ferry system should be funded just as the entire roadway system within the state versus asking the residents of Kitsap County to foot the largest percentage of the bill. We have dealt with unreliability for years; broken down fleets, workers not showing up causing sailing cancellations, slowdowns due to construction, etc. Yet we receive no break in price as compensation. Certain ferry routes cannot handle the demand during the summer, or for big entertainment events in the Seattle area. We have suffered through major wait times for years.
- With regard to funding, we would request that Kitsap residents be given a discount on ferry travel since we are dependent on this system. This is done in other areas with regard to park admission fees, golf course fees and the like. The ferry system is a great attraction for tourism and we believe that if fees are increased for tourists they will still continue to ride the ferries for the experience. This revenue can be used to offset the discount that residents would receive. We

have traveled in other parts of the country where some type of ferry/boat is used to transport people and vehicles and the fees were substantially less. Yes they are subsidized and that is what is needed here. Bellevue, Redmond has two bridges with high maintenance financial demands and money is poured into this road system. The ferries should receive equal treatment. It would help bring much more economic growth to our county, which is really just a stone's throw from Seattle.

### *Hybrid Electric Ferries and sustainability*

After the presentation on WSF's plans to convert the Olympic and Jumbo Mark II class vessels many participants had follow up questions. The panel reiterated the current timeline for the project as well as upcoming milestones.

- Please explain how you would convert the Jumbo Mark II ferries to hybrid electric?
- I love the plan to go hybrid-electric! What is the backup plan to provide full service if something goes wrong during the conversion and new building?
- Is there any plan to upgrade the new fleet of Olympic Class ferries, or will they be the same capacity as the current four, just hybrid?
- Will the new hybrid Olympics mainly be used on Bremerton and Mukilteo with the current four in the San Juan's, or will they be mixed throughout the system?
- How long is the battery life on the hybrids? Will they need to be charged each time at the dock, or can they run for a day or two?
- Follow-up question on hybrid/electric: Puget Sound Energy is apparently 40% coal-generated. Is there any way for ferries to ensure that the additional power for electric ferries comes from renewable sources and not coal?
- Can you provide details on the design specs for the Mukilteo, Clinton, Coupeville and Port Townsend terminals; specifically what is the maximum sea level rise that each terminal is designed to withstand? And what are the consequences of having that maximum exceeded either from the rise of average sea level or indirectly from storm surges or similar events?
- I was excited to see the progress on the new hybrid Olympic class ferries, and can see a strong commitment towards a lower carbon footprint and shift towards sustainable energy from WSF. However, I like most of my neighbors feel that we have to start making plans for mitigation of the effects of the changing climate. Sea level rise, along with impacts to our shoreline bluffs and habitats are the ones that concern me the most.
- After the Jumbo Mark II's and new Olympics, what boats are next to become hybrids? Or will only new boats be electric? Will all terminals be upgraded to handle electric boats? What was the thought behind limiting the amount of Classes of boats in the Long Range Plan? (I think you plan for only three to four different classes compared to today's seven?) I personally dislike this because right now, all boats are within about 20 cars and 500 passengers from the next

size down. If there's only three classes, then if a bigger boat breaks down, the capacity difference will be noticed a lot more than now.

### *Terminal projects*

Director of Terminal Engineering Dave Sowers took questions about a number of terminal projects include the Bainbridge overhead walkway, improvements to the Anacortes Terminal, and the Fautleroy Ferry Terminal project. The panel also spoke about current budget challenges with funding terminal improvement projects.

- What are the plans for upgrading the Bainbridge Island terminal, particularly the covered pedestrian walkway which seems unlikely to survive an earthquake of any magnitude?
- Any plans to improve the Anacortes terminal facility?
- Any plans to modernize the Anacortes terminal? I.e. Wi-Fi, etc.
- What is the solution to the traffic queueing problems at Fautleroy?
- What are the near term plans for traffic management at the Kingston ferry terminal?
- When will proper restrooms be provided at the Lopez Island ferry terminal?
- Any plans for relocating the hazardous Keystone Terminal?

### *Reservation system*

Many participants asked questions about plans for updating the San Juan Island sailing schedule and if WSF would also be looking at the reservation program. Additionally, many asked questions about implementing reservation systems on other busy routes. Staff from WSF's Community Service and Planning division shared the current timeline about updating the San Juan Islands' sailing schedule and how work to improve on time reliability is a part of WSF's 2040 Long Range Plan.

- The Anacortes/San Juan Islands route has an old schedule that does not seem to be possible in the busy summer season. Is the schedule being updated so the boats won't be so late?
- If you implement reservations on Edmonds/Kingston, how would you address the traffic that shifts to Bainbridge when people can't get a reservation?
- Also a reservation system off Lopez?
- Good job, thanks for including the 30-min question. This still needs discussion however, particularly as boats seem to be getting progressively later. Thanks for being there!!
- Why can't you figure out a way to take reservations for eastbound vehicles from Lopez?
- When will we see a reservation system for the weekends on the Kingston-Edmonds Route?
- For routes with reservation arrival 30-min prior to sailing time is required. If we get stuck in traffic and are late, we lose our reservation and travel standby. If the

boat is late, we still have to arrive on time. Why can't the reservation cutoff be delayed?

- Is there any plan to extend the reservation system? Or get an app, where tickets can be bought/accessed on a phone?
- When will a reservation system be deployed to get off Lopez there is surely enough traffic to justify it. We have no problem paying higher rates if we could see the same level of attention placed on Lopez as other locations in the SJI but currently Lopez is far behind.
- The reservation system has worked well for us these past few years with the exception of the 30 minute rule voiding the reservation, especially when sailings are delayed and posted via email. I request that reservations be honored to sailing time. If actual sailing is delayed, reservations should be honored to sailing time. You send emails for delayed sailings and we should not be required to arrive earlier than necessary for actual sailing times. The whole idea of reservations means that I have a sure spot on the ferry scheduled. Arriving 45-60 minutes before scheduled sailing and not having reservations honored to actual sailing times returns your "reservations" to meaningless. We may as well just return to the old way of arrive and wait. The tier systems should be modified. 1st tier 2 month should be decreased because it is for commercial traffic only and should be limited to what is necessary. 2nd tier should be decreased because it caters to preplanned vacations and events and not to residential traffic. 3rd tier should be increased due to most residential traffic is not usually planned very far in advance. We should have better access.
- Vehicles seeking to cross Puget Sound on the Kingston-Edmonds route on weekends frequently have long waits because of high peak period demand. Reservations are frequently cited as a way to reduce the peak wait time. Please explain the when and how for implementing a weekend reservation system on the Kingston-Edmonds route. What legislation, funding, or other factors are required to make weekend reservations happen?
- I fail to see any reason why riders with reservations should have to be in line one half-hour before the scheduled departure time. Without causing delay or disruption, I believe it would be every bit as efficient to change the rule to the following: Drivers holding a reservation who are in line prior to the actual initiation will have their reservation honored for that sailing. Drivers with reservations for a specific sailing who fail to get in line prior to the initiation of vehicle loading will be placed at the rear of the standby lane. To put it simply, if the driver is in line prior to the start of vehicle loading, that person's reservation is honored. Given the WSF's dire need for additional revenue, I believe the peak season surcharge could be raised considerably without a concomitant loss of ridership. I realize there is a point of diminishing returns that would require adjusting the precise amount of surcharge, but say the surcharge was raised 100% (doubled) and ridership dropped by 5%. I am reasonably sure that the loss in ridership would be more than compensated for by the gain in revenue.

## Operations

The panel took questions about operations on and off the vessel. Questions and comments about crew performance were brought up during each meeting. Staff from WSF's Operations team addressed questions about loading and shared information on the Ferry Riders Opinion Group (FROG) encouraging customers to share feedback with WSF.

- Are the workers uniformly trained in loading/unloading signals for drivers? Not infrequently. Some crew use contradictory, vague or confusing hand signals and then yell at drivers who are unclear what they are asking.
- Why are so many crew members so rude and dismissive of the riders? One performance metric is how helpful and on the BC ferries, during the trip, crew circulate on the passenger deck in case passengers have questions or need help. On WSF runs, the crew disappears once underway, and the mostly ladies in the cafeteria are left to deal with riders' concerns. Why is this?
- Crews loading cars leave too much front/back space between cars. Each sailing on a 202-car ferry could carry at least six or more additional cars if two feet spaces were used. That would give a lot of extra revenue on the Bainbridge route alone.
- Ferry workers that direct loading and unloading don't use consistent hand signals. Does WSF have a formal, consistent training program to improve this situation?
- Could you talk about employee training, retention, and morale? Increasingly ferry terminal workers have incomplete or inaccurate information about sailings. Workers also seem unhappy, surly, or (occasionally) a little rude. What are you doing to involve and empower the folks working at the terminals and on the boats?
- What are WSF salaries/total benefit packages compared to private industry?
- Can't WSF make an effort to better inform the public of the importance of leaving as little space as possible? How about an illustrated handout, given out at the tollbooth?"
- Many commuters have to work and make phone calls during a ferry trip, but cell phone connection on current vessels is spotty. Will future vessels take connectivity demands into account?
- Please, can we make the carpooling requirement TWO people (like the rest of the state highway system?). This would not cost any money, in fact would increase it, as there would be more room potentially as people would carpool more. Keep it three days minimum per week, but PLEASE consider two instead of three occupants. Thank you.
- Can ADA access being left unblocked on the car deck be made a point of emphasis; on all routes but especially on the Point Defiance/Tahlequah run?

- When you reduced the frequency of the Port Townsend/Coupeville route, your press release advised travelers to use public transit. Please tell me what public transit would take me from Freeland to Gig Harbor?

### *Performance metrics and customer satisfaction*

There was some discussion on how WSF measures success. Staff explained how WSF works with other ferry organizations like B.C. Ferries, Clipper, and Kitsap Transit to continue to improve overall performance by sharing best practices.

- Do you understand the negative impact your management choices have on islanders?
- Have you compared your satisfaction metrics with those of B.C. Ferries? How do you compare in satisfaction?
- Just wondering if there exists a similar ferry system anywhere in the US, or anywhere in the world, that WSF admires or that we could learn from?
- How often does senior management get out and visit each of the terminals and have each of you used public transit to do so?
- What are you going to do to please fight for grants for small transit agencies to better connect to WSF like Skagit Transit and such?

### *Seattle Ferry Terminal at Colman Dock*

Questions about Colman Dock focused on the changing operations surrounding construction and questions about WSF's coordination with Kitsap Transit.

- Will the new piers at Colman Dock handle the expected sea level rise of two to four feet this century?
- How was the early new pile corrosion issue at Colman Dock mitigated? What is the projected lifespan of these pilings?
- Seattle terminal: why no reader boards inside to notify boat it still loading? Employees not always inside to guide.
- For the new terminal building: why do exiting passengers have to share a walkway lane with cross traffic? This should be revisited.
- Are you planning to put cover over walkway to Passenger Only Ferry Terminal to the boats?

### *Vessel Maintenance*

A fairly consistent topic in both meetings focused on the *Elwha*, international service, and sun decks. Many had questions about how WSF prioritizes maintenance work which staff were able to speak to.

- What's the status on the *Elwha*? Is retirement on the table, or is the focus repair and maintenance right now?
- Are you considering Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) certification for any other boats?

- Is there an update on the Olympic Sun Decks? Will they be open this summer, and is there any plan to open them permanently?
- Is there a plan for the Jumbo Mark II's to have a midlife upgrade in 2030?
- Both the *Elwha* and *Hyak* had steel issues. Is there any fear it might show up on the *Yakima* or *Kaleetan*?
- Why didn't you take the "deeper dive" concerning the *Elwha* before you spent millions only to find out there was more work to do?
- If funding cannot be found to get *Elwha* back in service, will another vessel be upgraded to meet SOLAS requirements?
- Have all the steering issues on the 64 car ferries be solved?
- Have you considered SOLAS certification for the *Tokitae*? This would give the *Elwha* a good break, the *Chimacum* could fill in at Mukilteo, and the *Kaleetan* and *Walla Walla* could operate Bremerton. The current Olympic vessels have very few seats with tables that fill up fast in Bremerton and San Juan Islands.
- Is there a plan to add more tables, or improve the passenger cabin so they're not boring brown like the current Olympics.
- Why did you choose to keep the *Tillikum* and retire the *Klahowya* instead of keeping the *Klahowya*? What's going to happen with the *Hyak* and *Klahowya*, will they be sold or scrapped? Why was there no community celebration for the *Hyak*? There was the last sailing, and then she was gone, no celebration or community event at all?

### *Future planning*

After a presentation on the 2040 Long Range Plan many participants had specific questions about vessels, growth projections, and climate change. A number of questions focused on the recently passed I-976 and how that would impact future plans.

- How much growth do you project for ridership to *Kitsap*? And how fast?
- What is WSF doing to mitigate the negative impact on the communities that host the ferries? In our small town, we have been extremely frustrated with traffic management, which makes doing normal chores on weekends quite difficult, and it is impossible for some of us to even get to our homes.
- Did your growth projections include the impacts of tourism?
- Sorry, number of boats full does not come close to measuring wait times. There are lots of technologies, many in use within WSDOT, that are available today. Why not use them?
- As you are doing these modernization projects, what will be done to insure cyber-resilience, especially for all the "Internet of Things" devices that will be added to the terminal infrastructure?
- The long range plan includes a recommendation to prepare for climate change and sea level rise with an evaluation and plan. What is the time line for a plan to specify the specific mitigation actions?

- Thank you for response on sea level rise. A follow up on question: Is there a timeline for the task force to complete their work and issue a report?
- Many of your responses refer to funding issues. Where can we find the WSF budget details for review?
- Another question: Can we have a Sound Transit funding package for properly funding Washington State Ferries? Just a thought.....
- Are there any specific projects that have been put on hold due to I-976?
- When are you going to tackle the procurement cost problem? Paying 500 percent over average costs because of State Contracts is hugely wasteful.
- I am very concerned over the potential impact of I-976 on WSF and on Washington State's total transportation future. I continue to be concerned over funding sources from the Legislature. I believe most people would agree that it takes a proper level of funding, and planning to sustain and execute a service level that meets public needs. The fact, as brought out in the Webinar session that mid-life rebuilds have not occurred for over 15 years speaks volumes. If vessels are not properly maintained, they are going to experience mechanical failures, and likely will not last their full economic life. I've noticed with concern the frequent number of vessel mechanical incidents, ranging from engine component failures, to lifeboats that somehow are not serviceable, resulting in reduce passenger capacities or service cancellations. I've noticed where runs have had to be canceled for the lack of replacement vessels. All of these factors result in service degradation. And it seems that the "noose" is getting tighter and tighter in attempting to protect the service. The fact that the "*Elwha*" is sitting in Anacortes awaiting special funding appropriation by the State Legislature is serious. It seems questionable to make a judgement to retire the "*Elwha*" and build a new ferry instead is fraught with problems. It will take almost 3 years to build a new ferry. Service requirements can't wait three years, at least as I understand the situation. I appreciated the discussion items of the 2040 Long-Range Plan. But again, many of the worthwhile projects were advised to be "on hold" awaiting funding authority. Again, the funding issue, and couple that with I-976 implications, and it looks like a pretty grim picture for the future. I was curious over the 96% on-time performance that was reported during the Webinar. I see numerous operational delays on multiple runs daily, therefore, question the on-time performance number.
- The WSF 2040 Long Range Plan, in Appendix K, cites a requirement for WSF to propose methods of reorganizing terminal holding areas to maximize space available for customer vehicles. Please describe what you will be proposing for better utilization of the Kingston Terminal's holding area specifically on weekends. What improvement in capacity, or service standard might be expected from those reorganizing efforts and when will they be implemented?
- A couple of questions: How will all the transportation growth be handled when the new Raceway is built near the Bremerton Airport? We hear it is supposed to attract 50,000 – 60,000 people per event. Once it is built all the support

employees/businesses will need homes and supplies. Our roads are already becoming very congested. The ferry system can't possibly handle much more demand than already exists. Likewise, there is discussion about expanding the Bremerton Airport into a regional asset. Is the Ferry Administration involved in these talks and what is being forecasted for ferry ridership if this takes place in the future?

- We frequently travel between Lopez and Anacortes my questions. When will proper restroom facilities be built at the Lopez ferry dock the outhouses there now are absolutely deplorable last week there were only two on the property and one had been vandalized with human waste it appears no one is paying attention to the situation.

### *Webinar feedback*

Many had comments and suggestions about the webinar format.

- Please consider these comments in the spirit in which they're offered – not as criticism, but as suggestions for improvement. First, thought, I want to say that the participation seemed better than I had expected, so congrats! I'm looking forward to seeing the transcript and participation counts. Comments: the sound quality was uneven and speakers were difficult to understand at times. This could be improved greatly by reducing room echo one way to deal with this is to use moveable fabric (soft surface) covered dividers placed at odd angles to the room walls to soak up the sound. Use two mics for better coverage of the 5 staff at the table; not necessarily stereo, but just two (or more) mics mixed together and placed closer to those speaking.
- Thanks for hosting the public meeting on Saturday. I found it informative and well run, a great experience. I thought all the panelists were clear and helpful with their responses and look forward to hearing more in future meetings
- Put large-font nameplates (like those we use for Ferry Advisory Committee meetings, or larger) in front of the staff seated at the table. Most people have no idea that WSF doesn't set its own budget. In her discussions about funding... explain why the Governor's budget is so important, and that the legislature sets the WSDOT budget. In addressing on-time questions, saying "96%" might be factual, but perception is reality. Look at just the last 48 hours, with numerous "late" alerts for *Yakima, Chimacum, Kaleeten, Issaquah, Walla Walla*. Answering the question about keeping the sun deck open, saying that funding is needed to keep deck open could be clarified by explaining that it's the coast guard's extra crewing requirements which add costs and that those requirements are for passengers' safety.
- Thanks for doing the Webinar! It was super helpful. If I could get an in-depth response to these questions, that would be great. Thank you for your time.
- Just an observation. Is the Webinar designed to be a replacement for the previous Community Meetings across the System? I thought WSF did a good job

of disseminating information and providing a venue that allowed people to call in with questions. It also gave a comprehensive overview of the ferry system so that all participants could learn of the global situation, somewhat discouraging/challenging as it is. Thanks for letting me offer my observations.

- I participated in the 12/7/19 Webinar and found the approach and meeting content of interest.