July 13, 2017

Dear Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth ferry riders and Fauntleroy terminal neighbors,

As you are aware, WSF is testing changes to vehicle processing at the Fauntleroy ferry terminal this summer with the goal of getting more vehicles safely through the tollbooth and onto ferries. What you might not know is how we arrived at this point. These changes are the result of a recommended “quick fix” made by the Triangle Route Task Force. The task force is a volunteer group of ferry users and neighbors from Fauntleroy, Vashon and Southworth. We use the route to commute, to send our children to school and to travel in our daily lives. We wait in the line with you, and we experience the difficulties of long backups and weaving traffic on our neighborhood streets. At its very core, our committee’s prime objective is the improvement of this vital service to meet our respective communities’ diverse needs – whether that is the ferry riders’ experience, our neighborhoods, or, just as importantly, the safety of WSF employees.

The task force had a daunting assignment. WSF tasked us with identifying “quick fixes” we could implement in time for the 2017 summer schedule and was transparent that there was no funding available for additional staff or improvements to the dock in that timeframe.

As we went through our process, we asked questions of WSF and learned the extent of constraints at Fauntleroy: the dock is too small for loading 124-car ferries; the single holding lane on Fauntleroy Way makes it difficult to pull out cars who need to get on the boat; even small disruptions to the schedule can negatively impact the system at large; and traffic, terminal layout, and limited WSF staff make the by-pass lane too hazardous. These restrictions proved to be very limiting, but we worked through a range of ideas to find something acceptable to each task force member that WSF could implement in order to make things a little better this summer and beyond. WSF staff, including employees who work on the dock, reviewed our recommendations and agreed they had the potential to work.

So is the new procedure working? Bluntly, we don’t know yet. We will base our judgment on performance data from the terminal. What is known, is that year after year ridership continues to increase, and the Fauntleroy neighborhood continues to grow. As a critical piece of our state’s transportation system, marked improvements to the Triangle Route must be made, and made immediately. We remain committed to doing just that.

This ongoing process of evaluating the new Fauntleroy terminal procedures requires at least 30 days to gather data so we can observe how many vehicles got through the tollbooth at rush hour every day. If it turns out the dock moved even a few more vehicles than previous years, we will have achieved an incremental improvement. Perhaps not a final, complete fix, but a small step in the right direction — indeed a foundation on which to build future success. The task force is also aware that while the changes may (or may not) make an improvement, any change might not be readily visible during the busy summer season. With the large seasonal increase in the number of vehicles using the Triangle
Route this time of year, vehicle wait times will increase regardless of improvements made to the management of traffic, ticketing procedures, or vehicle queuing.

As riders and neighbors of the ferry route, we share the experience of delays getting home and our streets being crowded, and we see the empty spaces on the vessels. When we started our work back in January, many of us thought there was a silver bullet that could fix these problems, but over the course of the past six months, we have learned the problem is more difficult than we knew. We are hopeful the recommended changes will make an incremental improvement for both the users of the Fauntleroy ferry dock and its neighbors, and we remain committed to finding more ways to make Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth ferry experience better for everyone.

If, after evaluating the data from the first weeks of this process, the changes are not found to have helped, then we will make the necessary adjustments. If, however, the changes succeed in making things a little better, we will use them as a springboard for additional improvements. For now, we ask for your patience while we and WSF evaluate the data from this new system. This isn’t the end of the road, but a first step in a larger process to improve efficiency on the Triangle Route.

Sincerely,

Your Triangle Route Task Force