

# Ferry Operator Best Practices Review

DRAFT



---

*Date:* February 10, 2023  
*To:* Island Institute  
*From:* KPFF Consulting Engineers  
*Subject:* Strategies to Enhance the Sustainability of Year-round Transportation to Maine's Islands Served by the Maine State Ferry Service

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

---

### INTRODUCTION

Island Institute, in coordination with the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT), is conducting a study to explore strategies to inform future operations of year-round transportation to the six islands served by the Maine State Ferry Service (MSFS): Frenchboro, Islesboro, Matinicus, North Haven, Swan's Island, and Vinalhaven.

To support development of service scenarios for future assessment, as well as potential strategies for long-term improvements to MSFS operations, the study included best practices research from peer ferry operators. The ferry operations reviewed will inform long-term MSFS operations and potential adjustments in three key areas:

- **Funding and Governance Models:** Primary models used to acquire federal, state, and local funding for both operating and capital costs of ferry services, and opportunities for more narrowly-defined benefit areas for community participation in funding, expenditures, service levels and operations decision making
- **Emergency Transport Options:** How emergency transport needs are met by ferry-serviced islands
- **Encouraging Modal Shift:** Strategies used by ferry operators to shift passengers from driving on in single-occupancy vehicles to walking or biking on, or carpooling

This memo summarizes the findings from the peer review of ferry services focused on these three important areas to support future planning and decision making for Maine State Ferry Service and the communities it serves.

### SUMMARY OF OPERATORS REVIEWED

The ferry services reviewed for best practices were selected because they have comparable characteristics to MSFS, such as system size, areas served (especially those serving rural, coastal islands), service levels, and their role providing emergency transport. The following operators are included in the review of best practices:

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

System	Operator	Location	Best Practice(s) Reviewed
Beaver Island Ferry	Beaver Island Transportation Authority	MI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emergency Transport Options</li> </ul>
Casco Bay Lines	Casco Bay Island Transit District	ME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding Models</li> <li>Emergency Transport Options</li> </ul>
Fisher Island Ferry	Fisher Island Community Association	FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunities for Community Contributions to Funding and Service Planning</li> </ul>
Fishers Island Ferry	Fishers Island Ferry District	NY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunities for Community Contributions to Funding and Service Planning</li> </ul>
Mackinac Island ferries (private operators)	Three private operating companies	MI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunities for Community Contributions to Funding and Service Planning</li> </ul>
Madeline Island Ferry	Madeline Island Ferry Line	WI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emergency Transport Options</li> </ul>
Pierce County Ferry	Pierce County	WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding Models</li> </ul>
Southern Gulf Islands	BC Ferries	BC, Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emergency Transport Options</li> <li>Encouraging Modal Shift</li> </ul>
Washington State Ferries	Washington State DOT	WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encouraging Modal Shift</li> </ul>

A summary of each service is provided as they are introduced in the following sections.

### FUNDING MODELS AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

The mechanism through which ferry services are funded, owned, and operated is known as governance. Typically, ferry services are delivered by private entities or public agencies, or through partnerships between the two. How a ferry system is governed affects what funding sources are available to the system, as well as how decisions are made regarding service levels and future planning.

#### *Funding Opportunities*

Services provided through direct agency delivery or public-private partnerships have potential access to state, federal, and local sources of funding for capital improvements and operating costs. Eligibility for specific funding opportunities may depend on service characteristics such as location (urban or rural) and system route miles or annual ridership. Additional state and federal funding opportunities may be available for services that qualify through application of electric or hybrid-electric vessels or use of alternative fuels, or designation as a marine highway system (vehicle ferries only).

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

Capital costs, including construction and improvements to vessels and terminals, can be funded through grants from state and federal agencies, such as state department of transportation agencies, regional or metropolitan transportation planning organizations, and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) or Federal Highway Administration, in combination with other local funding.

Grant funding is generally more readily available for capital projects than for annual operating funding support. For most services, operating costs are covered in part by farebox and other revenues but require ongoing annual subsidy. Available sources for operating cost funding vary by state and may include special tax districts and levies, portions of sales tax or property tax, and state transportation funding including motor vehicle tax or gas tax. The FTA's Ferry Service for Rural Communities Program began offering funding support for operating costs for rural ferry services in 2022, with eligibility determined by minimum route segment length requirements (either 50 or 20 nautical miles).

Two examples of the mix of funding sources used to support ferry service are presented below.

### ***Casco Bay Lines***

Casco Bay Lines (CBL) serves six islands in Casco Bay, ME, with year-round populations. Ferry ridership increases during the summer months with seasonal residents and visitors. CBL service is provided by the Casco Bay Island Transit District (CBITD), a quasi-municipal, non-profit corporation, established by the State of Maine in 1981 to ensure the continuation of service to the islands of Casco Bay.

Casco Bay Lines operates two distinct routes which provide lifeline service to the islands of Casco Bay:

- Peaks Island, which provides direct passenger and vehicle service between Portland and Peaks Island. The Peak's Island route is CBL's busiest route, representing over 70% of total system ridership.
- Down Bay, a multiple-stop route providing passenger and extremely limited vehicle service from Portland to five islands in Casco Bay (Little Diamond, Great Diamond, Long, Chebeague, and Cliff).

Number of Routes	Distance of Routes	Fleet Size	Type of Service	Population of Island(s) Served	Ownership
2	15 to 104 minutes	5 Vessels	Passenger and Vehicle (vehicle service extremely limited on down bay routes)	Chebeague Island: 396 Cliff Island: 60 Great Diamond: 106 Little Diamond: <10 Long Island: 234 Peaks Island: 925	Public (Casco Bay Island Transit District)

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

### Funding Overview

CBL's farebox recovery level is higher than many ferry systems, at over 68% of operating costs in 2019.<sup>1</sup> Fares from freight represent roughly 20% of revenue from fares for the system. CBL supplements farebox revenue with other revenue-generating activities including mail delivery contracts, tours and cruises (offered seasonally), and vessel charters.

### Funding Sources

CBL utilizes a combination of funding sources to support operating costs and capital projects.

#### Operating:

- *FTA Urbanized Area Formula Grants (Section 5307)*: An urbanized area formula grant for operating costs. FY23 projected revenue: \$3.6 million.
- *FTA Formula Grants for Rural Areas (Section 5311)*: CBL receives pass-through funding from MaineDOT. FY23 projected revenue: \$300,000.
- *CARES Act*: Funding received in 2020 and 2021 provided significant operating cost support.
- *State Subsidy*: FY23 projected revenue: \$68,444

#### Capital:

- *FTA's Passenger Ferry Grant program*: CBL received \$3.6 million in 2022 for construction of a new hybrid-electric vessel, and \$6 million in 2018 for new vessel construction.
- *FTA State of Good Repair Grants Program*

### Pierce County Ferry System

The Pierce County Ferry, operated by Pierce County Public Works, serves Anderson and Ketron islands from the town of Steilacoom, located near Tacoma, WA. Pierce County owns the vessels and terminals, and contracts with a private operator to provide service including crew labor and vessel maintenance.

Number of Routes	Distance of Routes	Fleet Size	Type of Service	Population of Island(s) Served	Ownership
1 (2 stops)	3.5 miles	2	Passenger and Vehicle	Anderson Island: 1,571 Ketron Island: 20	Public (Pierce County)

<sup>1</sup> National Census of Ferry Operators (2020). <https://data.bts.gov/stories/s/National-Census-of-Ferry-Operators-NCFO-2020-Landi/5dgg-uz62/>

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

### *Funding Overview*

Between 2017 and 2021, Pierce County Ferry recovered between 37% to 50% of operating cost with farebox revenue and meets their remaining operating cost needs through several different revenue sources. One of the additional sources of revenue comes from an annual lease agreement with the state Department of Corrections for use of the county-owned dock. The county has identified the diversity of operating funding sources as a positive for the long-term resiliency of the system.

### *Funding Sources*

#### Operating:

- *FTA Urbanized Area Formula Funding program (Section 5307)*: The Pierce County Ferry system receives a portion of FTA 5307 funding distributed by the Puget Sound Regional Council to Pierce County Transit. Estimated revenue for 2022: \$1.1 million.
- *County Road Fund*: The county road department budget is funded by local property taxes, a share of the state motor vehicle fuel tax, federal and state grants, and other sources. The budget is shared by Washington State's 39 counties and used to fund operations and maintenance of roads and bridges. A portion of the annual budget is also allocated to the state's four county-operated ferry systems. Estimated revenue for 2022: \$1.1 million.
- *State Ferry Deficit Reimbursement Grant*: A state funded program that distributes state gas tax to county-operated ferries.
- *Motor Vehicle Fuel Tax (MVFT)*: The MVFT for ferries is a portion of the county's distribution of state gas tax. The state-derived formula distributes a share of the county's gas tax to ferry operations based on the ferry's share of all county roads. Estimated revenue for 2022: \$589,000

#### Capital:

- Federal capital grants

Pierce County has identified that current revenue levels will not be adequate for anticipated future capital needs. Potential sources for capital funding have been identified in a recent financial planning effort<sup>2</sup>, including creation of a ferry district to raise money through a tax levy, or addition of a capital surcharge to fares.

### ***Opportunities for Community Contributions to Funding and Service Planning***

Different governance models offer varying opportunities for ferry users and local communities to have a say in how the system is operated and the service levels provided. Typically, ferry-served communities or that contribute local funding to ferry services have increased opportunities to have a say in service planning. In cases where a private operator is contracted to provide service, their operating contract often includes stipulations for minimum service levels and performance measures.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/118367/3--Ferry-Comparison-Study-Final?bidId=>

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

While ferry users contribute to operating costs through the fares they pay, many systems are also supported through local funding such as special tax districts or dedicated distributions from sales, fuel, or motor vehicle taxes. Challenges with implementing local tax funding for ferry systems include:

- Depending on the boundaries of a taxing district, non-ferry users may be required to contribute to ferry service and may not be supportive.
- If the source of local funding is restricted to an island with a small population, the tax base may be too low to generate significant revenue.

The examples below discuss systems with different governance models and how their communities are involved in service planning.

- **Fisher Island Ferry, FL** – Ferry service to the small, high average household-income island off the coast of Miami is funded entirely and operated by the Fisher Island Community Association, which is the master homeowners' association of Fisher Island. The ferry is only accessible to island residents, guests of residents or the small hotel on the island, and contractors.
- **Fishers Island Ferry, NY** – Ferry service between New London, CT, and Fishers Island, NY, an island of less than 300 year-round residents, is owned and operated by the Fishers Island Ferry District. The ferry district also manages and receives revenue from Fishers Island property owned by the Town of Southold, NY (located on Long Island, NY). Decisions regarding financial and service planning for the ferry service are made by a board of commissioners and informed by members of the public.
- **Mackinac Island, MI (private operators)** – Mackinac Island, located on Lake Huron in Michigan, is an island of around 500 year-round residents that sees almost 1 million annual visitors during the summer and shoulder months. Three privately-owned passenger-only ferry companies serve the island, operating with a franchise agreement with the City of Mackinac Island which allows them to land at the city-owned dock. The franchise agreements set maximum fare levels for the operators. One of the three companies currently holds a five-year contract for exclusive rights to provide winter service (when fare revenue is drastically reduced from summer months) in exchange for a reduced franchise fee. The franchise agreement provides the city an opportunity to stipulate minimum requirements for the winter service schedule and set reduced winter fare rates.

## EMERGENCY TRANSPORT OPTIONS

To support study of emergency service options for the islands served by MSFS, best practices review included identification of emergency transport options used by other ferry-served islands. In addition to desktop research, the project team conducted informational discussions with representatives from several peer ferry operators, including Beaver Island Transit Authority,

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

Casco Bay Lines, and Madeline Island Ferry Line, with the goal of understanding their role in emergency response, other emergency transport options available to the island communities they serve, and how services are funded.

The ferry-served islands reviewed use a combination of various air and marine modes to meet the emergency response needs of island communities. Airplane or helicopter medical evacuation services are most often provided by private companies which bill insurance or the individuals who require transport or charge a monthly or annual membership fee for access to their services. An exception is the Dare MedFlight, a county-owned and funded helicopter that serves the Outer Banks Islands in Dare County, North Carolina. In 2021, Dare County budgeted \$1.7 million for operation of Dare MedFlight.

Marine emergency transport for coastal islands is often provided by public ferry service, both during regularly scheduled service hours (potentially resulting in a change of schedule or service levels to accommodate emergency trips, and outside of service hours (either by on-duty crew, or off-duty crew called in on overtime). Where available, contracted private water taxi, fire departments or USCG may also provide emergency transport.

In outreach discussions with ferry operators, various potential funding sources were noted, including subsidy on administrative costs for one vessel, state and federal grants, and tax-free vessel costs.

Summaries of emergency transport protocols to ferry-served islands, along with ferry service profiles, are provided in the following sections.

### ***Beaver Island Transit Authority (BITA)***

Beaver Island is a community located about 32 miles into Lake Michigan, with a year-round population of 650 and a summer population of approximately 2,000. Beaver Island is served by Beaver Island Boat Company (BIBC), as well as Fresh Air Aviation and Island Airways. BITA is a public agency that provides bus service on the island and provides a conduit for grant funding to support the ferry line.

Number of Routes	Distance of Routes	Fleet Size	Type of Service	Population of Island(s) Served	Ownership
1 Route	32 miles	2 Vessels	Passenger and Vehicle	Beaver Island: 657	Private

### ***Ferry Service Role in Emergency Transport***

The ferry does not play a significant role in emergency services to the island, as the nearest port in Charlevoix is 33.1 miles away.

## **Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT**

### *Other Emergency Transport Options*

Medical emergencies on Beaver Island are typically supported by the air carriers, with emergency response occasionally provided by the U.S. Coast Guard as well as specialty medical air transport companies.

Beaver Island has formally adopted an Emergency Operations Plan, created to document the unique emergency response needs of the island for incorporation into the Charlevoix County Emergency Plan, which outlines the process by which County emergency forces will respond to major emergencies or disasters. Emergency response plan elements identified in the plan include a transportation matrix which outlines available air and water transportation modes, policy and procedures for requesting transport, and emergency medical strategy. In the event of a major fire or environmental disaster, the island can rely on other responders such as the Michigan National Guard. The ferry is listed as a resource but has never been engaged for an emergency.

### ***Casco Bay Lines (CBL)***

Casco Bay Lines ferry service is summarized in the previous *Funding Models* section.

### *Ferry Service Role in Emergency Transport*

CBL is available to provide emergency transport service to the islands in Casco Bay. CBL bills the City of Portland for dedicated emergency runs that occur outside of their regular scheduled service.

### *Other Emergency Transport Options*

While the islands served by CBL share ferry service, CBL is not the best option for emergency response to all islands due to the long sailing times to the down bay islands, some of which are closer to mainland access from Cousins Island, rather than Portland. Instead, various emergency transport options are used for the different islands.

The City of Portland holds a contract with a private operator (Lionel Plant Associates) to provide on-call transportation services as needed. Air ambulance service is available from Portland.

Peaks Island, Little Diamond Island, Great Diamond Island and Cliffs Island are all incorporated parts of the City of Portland. Therefore, emergency services are primarily provided by the city's fire department, which includes a fast response boat asset. There is a fire call company on Peaks Island.

Chebeague Island receives emergency transport from the Chebeague Transportation Company, a ferry service run as a nonprofit corporation managed by a volunteer board of directors. Chebeague Transportation Company crew are on call to provide emergency transport off the island during all hours. Emergency transport service is provided at no cost to the Town or patients being transported.



## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

### *Madeline Island Ferry Line (MIFL)*

Madeline Island Ferry Line provides ferry service in Lake Superior between Bayfield, WI and Madeline Island (trip time of 25 minutes). The area has about 275 year-round residents and 3,000 residents in the summer. The island has an air strip, but no regular air service.

Number of Routes	Distance of Routes	Number of Vessels	Type of Service	Population of Island(s) Served	Ownership /Operating
1 Route	25 minutes	5 Vessels	Passenger and Vehicle	Madeline Island: 275	Private

### *Ferry Service Role in Emergency Transport*

MIFL vessels overnight both on the island and at the mainland terminal. MIFL charges a \$400 fee plus a separate ferry fare for emergency transport provided during regular operating hours. The fare increases to \$600 if the call-out is outside of normal hours (7:30 am to 9:30 pm in the summer). Labor hours are charged to the individual being transported if the vessel crew must wait for the island ambulance to return to complete the round trip. It was noted that MIFL does not work through insurance companies and relies on individuals to pay for emergency transport trips, but only around 25% of the fees owed are collected (they do not use a collection agency to push for payment).

The local utility company will also use the ferry for emergency trips to Madeline Island in case of an outage, with the same fee structure applied to emergency medical service trips. In case of a fire on the island, MIFL will transport additional equipment at no charge. Though MIFL is not part of any regional response plan, they have worked with USCG to respond to marine incidents (i.e., search and rescue and oil spill response).

### *Other Emergency Transport Options*

Madeline Island has an on-island ambulance service (paramedic team) and a volunteer fire department run by the Town of La Pointe, WI. The paramedic team coordinates with MIFL or an air medical evacuation service based in Duluth, MN, to request emergency transport when needed. The ambulance service is funded by a combination of grants, community fundraising, fees, and town funding.

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

### *Southern Gulf Islands (B.C., Canada)*

The Southern Gulf Islands are located between Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia, Canada. The islands of Salt Spring, Galiano, Pender, Mayne and Saturna are served by vehicle and passenger ferry service provided by BC Ferries.

Number of Routes	Distance of Routes	Fleet Size	Type of Service	Population of Island(s) Served (approximate)	Ownership
4 BC Ferries routes to the SGI (some with multiple stops), 25 routes system wide	25 minutes to 4 hours ( <i>including multiple stops</i> )	39 vessels (system wide)	Passenger and Vehicle	Galiano: 1,044 Mayne: 1,071 Pender: 2,245 Salt Spring: 11,635 Saturna: 350	Public/Private

### *Ferry Service Role in Emergency Transport*

BC Ferries is one of the transportation resources listed in the Salt Spring Island Emergency Program, which plans provision of emergency services in response to damaging winter storms, wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis, and other hazards. However, BC Ferries is not a regular provider for emergency transport outside of scheduled service hours.

### *Other Emergency Transport Options*

The Southern Gulf Islands are located in the service area of BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS), which has a dedicated helicopter and plane based in Nanaimo to serve Vancouver Island, Salt Spring Island, the Gulf Islands and Sunshine Coast. Until recently, emergency service was provided from Vancouver. The BCEHS air ambulance program is made up of a dedicated fleet of 16 air ambulances: six helicopters and 10 planes. Air ambulance fees are heavily subsidized for BC residents covered by the BC Medical Services Plan, with both ground and air ambulance transport costing a flat user fee of \$80.

Private water taxis are also available to provide emergency transport service. One company, Gulf Islands Water Taxi, has made over 8,000 ambulance runs from the islands since the service began in 1978.

## **ENCOURAGING MODAL SHIFT**

Vehicle ferry service operators often consider how to encourage passengers to walk onto ferries rather than driving on in vehicles. For services or routes where vehicle capacity is typically reached before passenger capacity, promoting this mode shift can help maximize the number of passengers carried without requiring capital investment in new vessels. Where supported by multi-modal connections at terminals, shifting passengers out of cars can also reduce the number of cars on roadways and associated vehicle emissions.

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

Common strategies used by operators to promote mode shift include:

- *First and Last Mile Connections:* Partnership with transit agencies to improve connections, including synchronization of schedules, can help move more passengers from vehicles to walk-on. Additionally, connections to terminals can be improved through coordination with private bike or scooter rental companies and improvements to pedestrian and bike connections.
- *Pricing Strategies:* Reducing the cost of walk-on or bicycle fares relative to vehicle fares can promote mode shift to increase walk-on ridership.
- *Parking Improvements:* For operators located in areas with limited transit connections to terminals where passengers may need their car to reach the terminal, supporting walk-on passenger ridership may require improvements to increase the availability or lower the cost of terminal parking.
- *Accommodation for Personal Freight:* Some ferry systems provide carts at terminals to make it easier for passengers who drive to a mainland terminal to carry personal goods, groceries or freight to their destination island without driving onto the ferry.
- *Preferential Loading for High-Occupancy Vehicles:* Operators can maximize vehicle deck space by promoting carpooling through preferential loading, pricing strategies, or other incentives.

In addition to the benefits listed above, encouraging passengers to shift from driving on to walking on can result in financial impacts to operators, resulting in tradeoffs for consideration:

- *Capital and Operating Costs:* Encouraging walk-on passenger ridership may require improvements to pedestrian and bike connections at terminals and new or improved transit connections, resulting in capital costs for construction of improvements and ongoing operating costs for new or increased transit.
- *Fare Revenue:* For most ferry operators, vehicle fares are considerably higher than walk-on passenger fares. Therefore, shifting passengers from vehicles can potentially result in reduced fare revenue unless vehicle ridership remains constant or passenger ridership increases significantly.

For some ferry services, especially those located in rural areas where most people are car-dependent, the potential to increase walk-on ridership may be limited without significant improvements to landside transit connections. An alternative (or supplement) to promoting mode shift may include demand management strategies that can be utilized by operators to spread peak demand, therefore maximizing the use of existing assets, including the following:

- *Enhanced user information:* Technological improvements such as cameras at terminals with live online feeds can allow the operator to provide real-time wait times, or passengers to monitor queue lengths to plan their trips, which can help spread the peak demand over the day.
- *Pricing strategies:* Implementation of demand-based pricing, where fares are higher during daily, weekly, or seasonally peak travel times can help spread and balance demand. Potential impacts to revenue depend on fare levels and ridership levels.

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

- *Terminal operational efficiencies:* Implementation of operational efficiencies such as multiple lane loading/unloading or use of double-ended ferries can increase how quickly vehicles are loaded and unloaded at the terminal, potentially allowing additional sailings to be added within the service day.
- *Vehicle reservation system:* Implementation of a vehicle reservation system can spread demand throughout the day by directing customers to sailings with available space.

Two examples of operators who have encouraged walk-on passenger ridership are presented below, including the goals of promoting mode shift and strategies utilized.

### *Southern Gulf Islands (B.C., Canada)*

Ferry service to the Southern Gulf Islands is summarized in the previous *Emergency Transport Options* section.

#### *Pilot Water Taxi Service*

Beginning in 2016, the Capital Regional District (the regional government serving the area including the Southern Gulf Islands) studied the feasibility of supplementing transportation to the islands with faster, passenger-only water taxi service. The goals of water taxi service are to link the five islands to help locals commute, increase tourism, and ultimately improve local economies. Planning and visioning for potential water taxi service included partnership and engagement with island representatives and municipalities, tribal representatives, community groups, and water taxi operators. In 2021, water taxi service was launched as a pilot program funded by the Southern Gulf Islands Tourism Partnership.

The operator selected to provide the service was Gulf Islands Water Taxi, a private water taxi who has operated service to the Southern Gulf Islands for over 40 years, with services including charter trips, school boat trips which transport over 100 students from the outer islands to the high school on Salt Spring Island, and emergency medical transport to the islands.

Pilot service ran in September 2021, running every Saturday and Sunday with one scheduled sailing in the morning and one scheduled sailing in the afternoon or evening including stops at all the islands, using a 45-passenger vessel. Ticket prices varied by distance, ranging from \$15.75 to \$21 per adult one way. By focusing on inter-island connections, the AquaLink service complemented BC Ferries vehicle service, rather than competing with it.

The initial pilot service was extended into October 2021 due to successful demand, and a limited schedule was operated in the winter months to allow passengers to book empty spaces on the water taxi on its way to pick up school kids, or after dropping them off. In 2022, AquaLink was again offered every Saturday throughout the summer. Prices were \$25 adult one way and \$35 round trip.

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

In October 2022, Southern Gulf Island residents voted on a referendum to create a transit commission across the islands which would offer grants to community bus societies and transportation safety improvements for bikes and pedestrians, recognizing that each island requires different transportation solutions. The referendum failed by three votes.

### Washington State Ferries

Washington State Ferries (WSF), owned and operated by the Washington State Department of Transportation, operates 10 routes and 20 terminals located throughout the Puget Sound in Washington.

Number of Routes	Distance of Routes	Fleet Size	Type of Service	Population of Island(s) Served (approximate)	Ownership
10 routes system wide	1.7-40 miles (San Juan Island routes are 10.8-14.3 miles)	21 vessels system wide	Passenger and vehicle	Lopez: 2,588 Orcas: 5,387 San Juan: 6,680 Shaw: 240	Public (WSDOT)

During the peak season, several of WSF's routes face vehicle capacity challenges, especially the Anacortes to San Juan Islands route where sailings often fill vehicle capacity but have plenty of remaining capacity for walk-on passengers. Because the high cost and lead time of vessel construction does not allow for additional vessel capacity to be added to the route in the near-term, WSF has identified the need to shift passengers from vehicles to walking on in order to increase the capacity of each ferry run to transport more people.

The Washington State Ferries 2040 Long Range Plan<sup>3</sup> identified the following strategies to support and encourage bike and pedestrian traffic:

- Implement technology to support passengers' ability to plan their trips, such as automated multi-platform service alerts, automated queue detection and wait time information, real-time parking information, and on-board Wi-Fi to facilitate real-time ship-to-shore communication and improve on-board customer experience
- Improve pedestrian, bike, and transit connections to and from terminals
  - Prioritize loading bicycles before and after vehicles to accommodate all bikes on each sailing
  - Look for opportunities to incorporate improved bike and pedestrian infrastructure in terminal preservation and improvement projects (e.g., provide separated passenger loading walkways to increase pedestrian safety and the efficiency of loading/unloading, and provide bike storage facilities at the terminal)
  - Partner with local transit agencies to synchronize transit schedules
  - Look for opportunities to partner with mobility-on-demand services such as bike shares
  - Assess potential for expansion of pick-up/drop-off areas at terminals

<sup>3</sup> <https://wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-11/WSF-2040-Long-Range-Plan-2019.pdf>

## Ferry Operator Best Practices Review – DRAFT

- Enhance parking opportunities to encourage walk-on ridership and carpooling
  - Provide real-time parking availability information
  - Explore shared-use parking opportunities with nearby privately-owned or agency-owned parking lots
  - Conduct a system-wide parking study
- Include consideration of flexibility in vessel design, such as future higher demand for walk-on passengers
- Look to make it easier for walk-on passengers to move larger personal items such as suitcases, groceries, boxes, etc. to and from the vessel to lessen the need for a vehicle to transport items.

In 2023, WSF will be completing a study to identify and recommend cost-effective strategies to maximize walk-on passenger ridership of the Anacortes / San Juan Islands ferry route, including identification of available public funding sources to support the strategies.

### SUMMARY

Review of best practices for funding the costs of ferry service, providing emergency transport to ferry-served islands, and maximizing the number of people carried on ferries by promoting modal shift indicates that ferry operators and island communities use a variety of strategies and solutions that meet local needs and realize opportunities provided by local and state funding. In cases where a group of islands is served by the same ferry system, such as the islands of Casco Bay (ME), the Southern Gulf Islands (B.C.) or the San Juan Islands (WA), island communities work together to advocate for ferry transportation and emergency transport service that meets their needs, even when the needs and solutions of individual islands may differ.

As MSFS and the island communities they serve explore options for future ferry operations, identifying ongoing and new funding opportunities to support ferry service, and reviewing emergency transport options both for each island and for the region as a whole will be key to developing strategies for long-term improvements.