

# Summary of Transportation Needs

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*To:* Island Institute  
*From:* KPFF Consulting Engineers  
*Subject:* Summary of Transportation Needs

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## INTRODUCTION

Island Institute, in coordination with the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT), is exploring 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. The purpose of this memo is to provide a summary of the key transportation needs and priorities for service improvements for six islands served by the MSFS, as identified through engagement with project representatives, island representatives and the general public. The information gathered through engagement will inform future phases of the study where alternative service scenarios will be assessed.

The project team conducted engagement including a public survey and Service Assessment Workshop held with a focus group of island representatives. The public survey invited feedback from island residents, visitors, and other MSFS users, and received 1,120 total responses. The survey was available online in June and July 2022, and was also distributed at terminals and to island community representatives. The Service Assessment Workshop was held on July 25, 2022, and included discussion with representatives from all six islands. The public survey and Service Assessment Workshop focused on gathering feedback on the following topics:

- *What are the transportation needs and service priorities of each island community?*
- *What works well in the existing service?*
- *What improvements are needed to support to livability of the islands?*

Findings from the Service Assessment Workshop and public survey will be used to inform service recommendations and the service scenarios that will be considered in this study. For this assessment, transportation needs are defined as access which is needed to support the livability of island communities, including island residents and businesses and those that travel to the islands for work. Priorities for service improvements were identified in areas where the current transportation system, with a focus on MSFS service, falls short of meeting these transportation needs, or a lack of access creates a burden for island communities. While the MSFS-served islands are currently facing short-term challenges in reduced reliability and missed trips due to staffing issues, this analysis is focused on identifying strategies that will improve future service over a long-term (approximately 30-year) timeframe, with the understanding of these current challenges.

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Many of the needs and priorities identified are shared by all islands; however, some are unique by island or by user groups based on differences in geography, community and economic characteristics. Additionally, MSFS service levels and operational procedures are different between islands.<sup>1</sup> The following sections outline the top three priorities for service improvements and key transportation needs and challenges by island, as identified through public survey responses and discussion with the focus group of island representatives, including:

- Service schedule adjustments
- Improved connections to terminals and expanded terminal parking
- Reliable emergency transportation

## SERVICE SCHEDULE ADJUSTMENTS

One of the top priorities for service improvements is to address gaps in current service schedules that impact island residents, businesses and workers. Challenges include limited access to the mainland due to infrequent service, or the need for earlier morning and/or later evening runs to support commuters or allow residents to access services in Portland or Augusta with the option to returning home (as is the case for some islands).

The mainland terminal locations, especially Lincolnville and Bass Harbor, provide limited options for services and shopping. For residents of islands with daily MSFS service, the window of time available to depart their island to complete shopping, utilize services, and return to their island in the same day includes the time needed to drive from the mainland terminal to another location. The limited window of time for island residents to complete mainland activities can be challenging, especially in the winter when the service day is shorter on several of the routes.

The ferry service schedule also impacts access to the islands for construction and other service providers. Limited service windows may make it impossible for mainland residents to complete a full day's work on the islands without an overnight stay, or infrequent service may make it difficult for contractors and service providers to work on the islands at all.

Because of the variety in service levels and travel times for each MSFS route, specific needs and challenges were identified by individual islands:

### **Schedule sailings to accommodate same day travel between the islands and airport**

- **Frenchboro:** Since the later run on Sunday was moved to 9:45 a.m., there is no day when a passenger could fly into Bangor and travel to Frenchboro in the same day.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Summary of Existing Transportation Service Memo for more specific information as to demographics and service frequency by island.

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## **Extend the service day to support workers and service providers commuting to the islands and to the mainland, and students participating in after school activities**

- **Islesboro:** Increased levels of on-island construction have led to year-round large volumes of construction workers and materials. The first sailing to the island sees high levels of demand for both vehicles and walk-on passengers due to construction.
- **North Haven:** The current ferry schedule does not provide a long enough service day to allow commuters, either to the mainland or to the island, to work a full 8-hour day.
- **Swan's Island:** With the latest sailing returning to the island at 5:15 p.m. on most days and no air service to the island, participation in after school activities or sports typically requires families to spend a night on the mainland.
- **Vinalhaven:** The current ferry schedule does not provide a long enough service day to allow commuters, either to the mainland or to the island, to work a full 8-hour day.

## **Increase service frequency to support the livability of island communities**

- **Frenchboro:** The limited service schedule coupled with a lack of on-island accommodations makes Frenchboro an undesirable location to work for construction workers and other service providers.
- **Matinicus:** Matinicus is dependent on ferry service for all freight deliveries. The island occasionally contracts the Island Transporter when need is present. Because MSFS service to the island is limited by the legislature to no more than 36 annual trips, each sailing represents a crucial opportunity to move freight including propane to the island, and trash off the island.

## **IMPROVED CONNECTIONS TO TERMINALS AND EXPANDED TERMINAL PARKING**

Terminal access was identified as one of the challenges faced by MSFS users. Transit and multimodal connections are not available at island or mainland terminals, and ferry users typically rely on either driving onto the ferries or parking at the terminal, both of which face capacity constraints at times of peak demand.

Parking at the mainland terminals of Rockland, Lincolnton and Bass Harbor is limited, and street parking or other nearby options are not typically available. When ferry users are unable to find a space in the terminal lot, there are limited other options to leave their car on the mainland. Regular ferry users can purchase seasonal parking passes, but passes do not guarantee that a space will be available. Island residents that leave a car on the mainland in order to be able to walk on the ferry (which is not financially possible for all) report having to time trips carefully based on parking availability during the peak summer season.

Additionally, the cost of parking was identified as a high additional cost for islanders already burdened with high transportation costs.

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## Address lack of terminal parking capacity to support walk-on ferry passengers

- **Islesboro:** Parking at Lincolville (130 stalls) is frequently full during busy periods and the summer season, and no close satellite lots or alternatives are available.
- **North Haven / Vinalhaven:** Parking at Rockland (251 stalls) is frequently full during busy periods and the summer season.
- **Swan’s Island / Frenchboro:** Parking at Bass Harbor is frequently full during busy periods and the summer season.

## RELIABLE EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION

To support the transportation of island community members during medical emergencies outside of scheduled service hours, MaineDOT operates MSFS crew quarters located on Vinalhaven, North Haven, Islesboro, and Swan’s Island. Crew quarters provide lodging and amenities for crews when off-duty or on-call, allowing the ferry to serve as an emergency transport option outside of scheduled service hours for those islands. When a ferry provides an emergency trip outside of scheduled service hours, service cancellations often occur the following day as vessel crew members must adhere to the USCG 12-hour rule (crew members may not work in excess of 12 hours in any consecutive 24-hour period) and are unavailable to crew the vessel.

All four of the islands that receive emergency transport service from MSFS noted that the ferry has become less available as an option for after-hours emergency trips. Island representatives noted that requesting after-hours ferry transport has become more difficult, and now requires a string of calls for USCG approval, including a first call to LifeFlight air ambulance service. Around 80% of survey respondents indicated their support for reviewing alternatives for emergency transport as part of this study.

## Provide a guaranteed, reliable emergency transport option outside of scheduled ferry service hours

- **Islesboro / North Haven / Swan’s Island / Vinalhaven:** The island representatives and survey respondents identified reliable emergency transport service as a key element needed to support the island communities. Challenges around emergency transport provided by the ferries outside of scheduled service hours include the difficulty in getting a trip approved, the costs incurred to patients, and the likelihood of service cancellations the morning following an emergency trip due to crew availability.

## SUMMARY

Through public engagement, the project identified transportation needs varying by island and by specific user groups, as well as common themes which emerged around expanded service schedules to support livability and enhanced connections, as well as parking capacity and maintenance of emergency transportation options. In addition to the top three priorities described above, other common priorities for service improvements identified by MSFS users included a more equitable, user-friendly system for vehicle reservations, and the maintenance in transportation costs. Table 1 provides a summary of transportation needs and considerations identified by user group and by island. The identified needs will inform future phases of work—including future service scenario development.

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Table 1 – Summary of Additional Transportation Needs by User Group *(As Identified in the Service Assessment Workshop)*

User Group	ISLESBORO	SWAN'S ISLAND	MATINICUS	FRENCHBORO	NORTH HAVEN	VINALHAVEN
<b>Service Schedule Adjustments</b>						
<b>On-Island Construction or Other Service Providers</b>	<p>First boat of the day transports roughly 75-100 construction workers. Other options for early morning commute include Equinox Water Taxi or Quicksilver.</p> <p><b>NEEDS: Early morning and late evening runs for construction crews and vehicles traveling to and from Islesboro. Increased reliability.</b></p>			<p>Frenchboro is an undesirable location to work due to infrequent service and no place for workers to stay</p> <p><b>NEEDS: More frequent service.</b></p>	<p>Early morning commuters present excess demand.</p> <p>Construction window is mostly year-round (exterior work in summer, interior work in winter).</p> <p><b>NEEDS: Additional early morning trip. Potential use of faster vessel to accommodate added trips.</b></p>	<p>High demand for early morning trip.</p> <p><b>NEEDS: Earlier trip / additional capacity on early trips</b></p>
<b>Commuters</b>					<p>The current ferry schedule does not provide a long enough service day to allow commuters, either to the mainland or to the island, to work a full 8-hour day</p> <p><b>NEEDS: Expanded service schedule</b></p>	<p>The current ferry schedule does not provide a long enough service day to allow commuters, either to the mainland or to the island, to work a full 8-hour day</p> <p><b>NEEDS: Expanded service schedule</b></p>

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User Group	ISLESBORO	SWAN'S ISLAND	MATINICUS	FRENCHBORO	NORTH HAVEN	VINALHAVEN
Students / School Staff		Participation in after school activities requires an overnight stay on the mainland  <b>NEEDS: Later sailing to accommodate students</b>				
<b>Terminal Access / Parking</b>						
Passengers with medical conditions / limited mobility		Terminal queuing provides limited access to restroom.  <b>NEEDS: Priority loading lane for people with medical conditions or limited mobility</b>			All island routes: Slippery/icy decks in the winter makes it difficult for those with mobility issues to access cabins.  <b>NEED: CG Exemption to run car heating systems for those with mobility issues.</b>	Many users with limited mobility  <b>NEEDS: Parking garage or other easy access to terminal. Wheelchairs provided at the terminal.</b>
Residents with Freight	Walk-on passengers travel with carts, but there is a lack of storage space on the vessel. Many drive on to ferry as a means of transporting and storing freight.  <b>NEEDS: More space on the vessel to accommodate freight/cargo/luggage.</b>		CHALLENGE: Island depends on MSFS for all freight deliveries (including propane to the island, trash off the island)  <b>NEED: Reliable ferry service and additional freight capacity.</b>			



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User Group	ISLESBORO	SWAN'S ISLAND	MATINICUS	FRENCHBORO	NORTH HAVEN	VINALHAVEN
<b>Other Information Provided</b>						
<b>Seasonal Residents</b>	Large number of seasonal residents impact transportation demand, and are important to the local economy.	Large number of seasonal residents impact transportation demand, and are important to the local economy.			Large number of seasonal residents impact transportation demand, and are important to the local economy.  <b>NEED: Additional run during summer season</b>	Large number of seasonal residents impact transportation demand, and are important to the local economy.
<b>Year-round service</b>			Vehicle reservation system doesn't account for rescheduled trips  <b>NEED: Updated vehicle reservation system so number of vehicle spots on trips both directions is accurate</b>			Difficulty completing mainland trips (especially medical or other appointments to Portland) before last run  <b>NEED: Later last trip</b>
<b>Visitors</b>	Day-to-day tourism is a small part of the economy. Not many attractions/accommodations on the island to draw tourism.					NOTE: 50% of the island's annual income is from tourism (50% from lobsters which has variable price)