

Guemes Island Ferry Operations Public Forum
Minutes from March 24, 2011

Introductions:

Ron Wesen, Commissioner

Welcoming comments and introductions,

Henry Hash, Skagit County Public Works

Here to answer any questions and be of service.

Rachel Beck, Guemes Island Ferry Manager

Staff introductions:

Jim Martin, Accounting

Paul Randall-Grutter, Design Section Manager

David Walde, Acting Construction Section Manager

Rachel read the purpose of the public forum:

The purpose is to provide opportunities for collaborative discussions between the County and the public on issues relating to Guemes Island Ferry Operations; and to provide the County and the Guemes Island Ferry Committee, other organizations, and citizens at large with a public venue to discuss issues relating to Guemes Island Ferry Operations.

Rachel shared that the general purpose is to receive input and information from those who ride the ferry. Please feel free to talk about anything concerning the ferry. Agenda prepared and shared. Meeting will be recorded. Please state name and address.

- **2011 Work Plan**

Developed with the input from the Guemes Island Ferry Committee.

- 1) Level of service standards. Plan is to develop this service standard as a work in progress. Rachel requests assistance and input. Ideas, comments, suggestions are welcomed. Send to Ferry Committee or to Rachel. This is to establish performance measures that reflect the Level of Service of ferry service between Anacortes and Guemes Island. This plan should take into consideration things like seasonal demand, capacity, wait times, congestion, sailing schedule, and demand management needs. Should also focus on times when we are not so busy, because if we are making runs across the channel without cars onboard, it might be seen as inefficient. We are trying to make things as efficient as possible. She explained that the plan is to review other ferry operations service standards and set something up for us that would establish our steps, and that would review and address the issues. Levels of service does not mean when I show up at the ferry, the ferry leaves. It is really more of a management system that takes into consideration cost containment parameters. Customer service vs. level of service – two different things, but work together to provide a good level of service standards.
 - *Comment received from Carl Cady: Stated he noticed Rachel is considering other ferry systems, but that got excluded from written plan; and shouldn't that be in the plan? Rachel stated that we could put it in, and the plan is to consider other ferry systems, since they are similar.*
 - *Another comment received from Bill Warmuth: Parking and enforcement, ticketed or towed at Cap Sante during the ferry outage? Rachel stated she would comment later in program.*
- 2) Ferry Schedule including Sunday nights
Rachel stated that Henry Hash and she are working on a plan with the Commissioners. She asks for suggestions or comments. The hope is to have a plan by June to clear up the congestion that the ferry experiences on Sunday nights.

- *Comment received from Jodi: Try to push before the memorial day holiday for a decision. Rachel stated that was a good idea.*
- *Comment received from Carol Pellet: Weekends and late runs (Friday and Saturday) so that islanders can see all of the theatre play / movies rather than leave early so that they can catch the last ferry. Rachel commented that it would be reviewed.*
- *Henry discussed the cost, and how services could be supported. Rachel asked for comments to find out if people would be willing to pay a little more?*
- *Question was received to clarify – would it be just those late night riders or spread the rates to accommodate the runs. Rachel commented that the late run is \$100 and no one does this. So, if the cost was increased, would there still be the desire to have these runs with the additional cost?*
- *Comment and suggestion was received from Glen Veal: Their research states that it costs about \$7,000 for every hour on an annual basis for continued service. Maybe take ridership, for example, on the midnight ferry run over a period of time to see how much revenue that would bring in. Rachel stated that she actually calculated that if late runs were made Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, Memorial Day through Labor Day, one hour extra on each of those days, the amount would cost about \$12,000 for added service; or the amount of money that the mechanic works on deck one day a week.*
- *Comment from Larry Pike: Regards to bringing back midnight runs, and the ferry schedules were drastically changed over a short period of time; suggests that rates be raised for runs after 6 p.m. Why penalize only the weekend riders? Is this a year around or summer concern on Sundays? Rachel stated she has found it is both.*
- *Comment received from Steve Orsini: Interesting to explore the concept, in order not to increase costs, and not to move to a differential fare, but needs discussion. He would like to receive comment from other Islanders' opinion to cut back on weekday runs and increase runs on weekends. Rachel suggests that maybe a survey would be a good idea. Steve said he'd like to add to the survey – what are the cost benefits?*
- *Comment received from Judith Horton: Second what Steve said. Feels frustration that the comments that have been passed on to the County go unrecognized. Henry Hash stated that when suggestions or comments are received, that the County needs to be responsive, even though it may not be implemented, the suggestion should receive a response.*
- *Comment received from Jodi: Asks that the comments received at the public forum be included in the minutes.*
- *Comment received from Emma: Wonderful effort, but the level of trust has to be earned, and they have not had good dialog or trust. So it will take a while to believe things will change in a positive way. Henry Hash states it is upon the County to communicate more frequently, but the County needs to hear from the Islanders. Rachel feels strongly that the priority and focus is to address concerns in a positive manner. Henry stated again that this is a partnership. Commissioner Wesen stated that you can call, write a note, e-mail. He will respond or follow-up. Rachel stated that the idea to provide more feedback is a good idea and she will try to be better about that.*
- *Comment received from Rob: Survey idea is good. Be careful about how to word the questions. Honest and direct questions; do not shift around to get the answer you want. Henry stated that the survey would be reviewed by the committee before the survey is sent out.*
- *Suggestion received from Dyvon: regards to survey and suggests that the County contact Kay Holland at WSU; states she is an expert on how to word questions so that they are not biased in one direction or the other.*

- **Ferry Ticketing**

Develop a ticket structure that will deliver a fare schedule that will meet the fare recovery requirement. Rachel stated that on March 15th a public hearing was held to consider a fare increase. The fares were approved and a handout with the new fare schedule is available at this meeting. Rachel reviewed how the fares were arrived at. Henry thanked the ferry committee for their input.

- *Comment received Ann: Passenger punch card when you bring a bicycle over, which category? Per Rachel, there is no charge for the bicycle when using the passenger punch card.*
- *Rachel commented that one of the things discussed with the Ferry Committee is the transferability of passes. This is one area that opinion was divided. Rachel asked the opinion of the audience.*
- *Comment received from Larry: How do you define transferability? Rachel stated that currently the ferry runs on a point of sale transaction process. That means that anyone traveling on that trip, if there is a punch for the car and the car directly behind, then both cars can be punched. But to punch a car coming later is not possible. The ferry crew will not also be responsible for holding a pass and transferring it to another.*
- *Comment was received: Regards to one punch per rider, rather than a full group (like bicycle clubs) purchasing a 25 card punch and using it for the full group. Rachel states that they do not advertise that you can save money...and rarely does she see an abuse. Typically, each bicycle/passenger pays separately.*
- *Comment was received from: Better efficient ways to collect money. Rachel stated thanks Larry, lead us right into next topic...*

Ticket machine:

Rachel stated that in response to a Request for Proposals sent out in 2010, only one vendor responded at a cost of \$95,000. Rachel stated that it was discovered that the County wanted more than the proposal had asked for. A new proposal is out with more features, such as taking money, credit cards, and possibly on-line sales. The new proposal is more of a broad scope. The idea is to have a ticket machine in the terminal, ability to take credit cards, and also an on-line sale method. There is also a bar-code method which requires a scanner. County is currently reviewing three different proposals from three different vendors. She stated that the automated ticketing does not replace a person. She hopes that everyone realizes that the reason is to provide a service for the customers; the County wants to be able to provide more convenience in purchasing tickets. Someone from the ferry crew still has to review and verify the payment.

- *Comment received from Steve: Not replacing a person...move more cars more quickly onto the ferry is the motive. The motive is to replace cash handling, and reduce the possibility of theft. County staff stated that there are other costs, including software and maintenance costs. Henry stated that this is a customer service issue and not necessarily a cost savings. Rachel stated there will likely be a transactional fee for on-line sales.*
- *Second comment from Steve: Has the County looked at partnering with the state ticket system? Rachel stated that it costs more to buy into the state system than if we do our own system. Rachel said she looked at the Pierce County system. Although a good system, the bar coders did not work well and they were looking for another system. Hopes that other small ferry systems might partner with the County.*
- *Comment from Jodi: Has the County looked into a bus type system? Rachel states that the County has looked at the SKAT system and smart cards.*
- *Comment from Michael Brown: Makes sense to do an add-on to another Skagit County system. Rachel states that this is looked at but the problem is still how to print out and get the ticket to the ferry crew.*

- *Comment from Glen Veal: Suggests the County start a relationship with SKAT and open the discussion of ticketing machine.*
- *Comment from Larry: Seems a natural transition and just need to find a way to track the money flow.*
- *Comment received from Bill: ATM machine discussion. Rachel does not like the idea of a machine that holds money that is not manned. Henry suggests discussing with some banks as to how to handle this.*
- *Question from Gloria: how long are the punch cards good for? Per Rachel, the punch cards you purchase from now until Monday, March 28th are good through the end of this year; however, no cards will be sold while the ferry is out of service.*

- **Temporary Passenger Ferry during construction period**

Passenger-only ferry service will be free of charge.

Temporary passenger ferry schedule is available on line, on the Mystic Sea vessel, at the Guemes Island store, at the Guemes Island ferry terminal, Cap Sante Marina office, at the meeting. Schedule is subject to change, based on operational needs. Some runs may be cancelled due to tide and weather, especially wind. Skagit Transit shuttle schedule is included while they are on the Island. Rider guides are also included for SKAT.

Rachel also discussed the parking lot and the security. She requested that people park in the long term parking when not using the ferry daily.

A shelter will be provided, benches, and port-a-potty. She discussed staging passengers at top of dock, rather than at the ferry. Ferry crew will be available to assist. Discussed loading and unloading on the Mystic Sea. Pets need to be on the back deck, enclosed with canvas except where you get on/off, heated, and seating for 45 people out on deck. Motorcycles are allowed on a space-available basis. First come, first serve. No wheelbarrows allowed, carts okay.

There are two ADA parking spots on A dock. The Port of Anacortes has also added six additional ADA in gravel parking lots as close to the dock as possible. There is also a loading zone. No time restriction can be placed on ADA parking spots; it is illegal. Ramp onto the boat is wide enough for a wheel chair.

- *Comment from Bob: Stairs vs. ramp. Mobility issues may be a problem due to slope. Just be aware.*
- *Comment from Emma: No wheelbarrows. Per Rachel you can use a wheelbarrow to get items down to vessel, but not on-board the boat. Folding carts are good.*
- *Comment from Bill: Costco has cart for \$59 and very good.*
- *Question regards to insurance. Per Jim Martin, Risk department handles to ensure adequate insurance is provided.*
- *Comment from Ann: Where is the information when ferry does not run? Per Rachel, the information will be posted on line, the store will know, the Port, SKAT will know, and also it will be posted at the shelters, AND you can also call Rachel on her cell phone.*
- *In closing, Rachel and Henry thanked everyone for their comments. She stated that Paul and Dave would be available for questions regarding the Asphalt Overlay and Skagit Transit service at the Anacortes terminal after the meeting.*