



GUEMES ISLAND FERRY NEWSLETTER

AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2026



Thank you for joining us!

Thank you for attending the annual ferry meeting on August 19th at the community hall! We appreciated seeing you and hearing your feedback on ferry operations, projects, and fares. We will be reviewing comments and posting additional responses to our website over the coming weeks.

This edition of the newsletter is for both August and September, so we have a bit more content than usual. Please reach out to us if you have any questions or comments to either Jenn Rogers, Communications and Engagement Manager, at jrogers@co.skagit.wa.us or ferrycomments@co.skagit.wa.us.



Bulletin Board Updates

[Recent Meeting Files and Recordings](#)

Recordings and PowerPoint presentations for the August work sessions, presentations, and community meeting have been posted to the [ferry 2027 budget and fare proposal website](#) for your review.

[Labor Day Holiday Schedule](#)

On Monday, September 7th, the ferry will operate on a Saturday non-peak schedule with service ending at 10:00 p.m. The remainder of the weekend schedule will be the normal peak sailing schedule, available on our website: www.skagitcounty.net/ferry

Car and Driver Tickets Do Not Include Passengers

As a reminder, when you purchase a car & driver ticket, that fare covers only the driver and the vehicle. Any additional passengers who are 18 and older need a passenger ticket to board.

A couple of helpful notes:

- Youth (18 & under) ride free; no tickets required.
- Senior (65+)/disabled discounts are available for eligible riders.

To avoid delays during boarding, please ensure everyone in your vehicle has the correct ticket before arrival.

Second 11:15 a.m. Runs Not Guaranteed

Please remember the second 11:15 a.m. run is not guaranteed and only occurs at the discretion of the on-duty ferry captain. The midday break ensures our staff receive required lunch breaks and offers time for the crew to run safety drills and perform any necessary maintenance. We ask that you do not rely on the second 11:15 a.m. run being offered and to please arrive early if you need to reach the island before lunchtime.

2027 Drydock Period

The ferry is required by the U.S. Coast Guard to undergo a drydock in March 2027. Please be advised the car ferry will be out of service early next spring. We plan to offer passenger service during this time. More details will be shared in early 2027.



Anacortes Bridge Apron

Apron Flaps Project

Construction Expected Early October

The Ferry Division will be replacing the flaps on the Anacortes and Guemes Island bridge aprons. These are the parts of the bridge at the very end that raise up and down to meet the ferry and help load and unload cars and passengers.

Skagit County Public Works released a [Request for Bids](#) to solicit a contractor for the Apron Flap Replacement Project and the results have been posted on our [website](#). **We were hoping this project would be completed by the end of September, but**

it looks like the contractor will not be able to schedule construction until early October.

We expect this project to take five working days to finish. **We are planning for the flap replacement work to occur overnight, so we can continue offering passenger-only service during the days. We will confirm passenger-only ferry service later in September.**

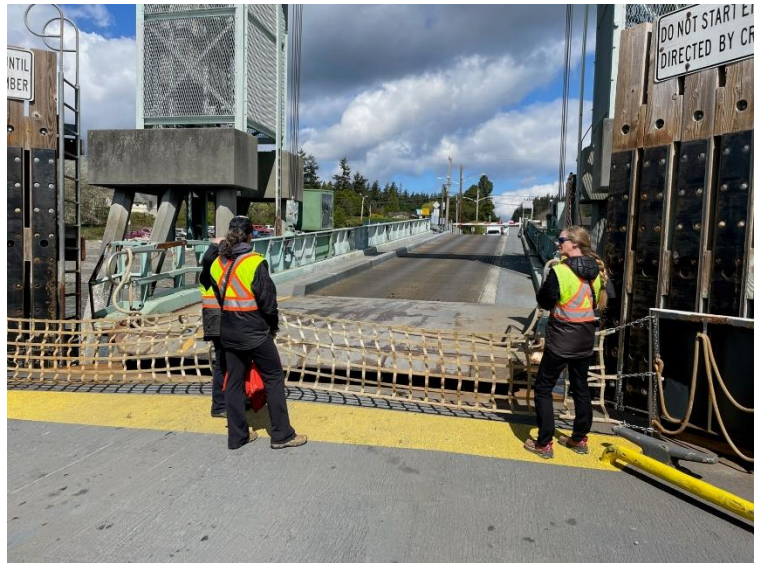
This is a maintenance project to replace the flaps due to age, corrosion, and wear. The aprons still need to be replaced, as they were constructed in 1979-1980. A capital project for the full replacement of the aprons will also include recoating the bridges and updating the hydraulic and electrical systems at both terminals. The county has received a federal grant for \$5.79M. This year, the county will contract a design and environmental consultant, with construction possibly by 2028.

Ferry Ridership Code of Conduct

Skagit County Public Works is developing a Rider Code of Conduct and Rider Guide/FAQ for the Guemes Island Ferry. Both will be posted to our website in early September. These materials are meant to bring clarity, not to change the spirit of our ferry service, and to help everyone feel safe, respected, and comfortable while traveling. The expectations outlined are the same types of guidelines used by transit and ferry systems across Washington and throughout the country.

Most of what's included simply puts long standing safety practices, state laws, and common sense courtesy into one place. Things like staying in designated areas, keeping pets leashed and under control, following crew directions, and observing basic driving and safety belt rules are standard everywhere ferries operate. These aren't new restrictions. They are familiar practices that help protect riders, crew, and service reliability.

The updated FAQ pulls together many frequently asked questions, from boarding and ticketing to hazardous materials, pets, bicycles, spill responsibilities, and weather considerations. Much of this information reflects requirements from state and federal regulations that all ferry systems must follow. Our goal is simple: to ensure everyone has the information they need for a smooth, safe crossing.



Thank you for being part of a community that cares about keeping this small ferry system running well for all riders.

2026 Annual Community Meeting Recap

We want to share our genuine appreciation for everyone who joined the community meeting on August 19th, provided comments, and asked questions about the ferry. The presentation and meeting recording can be found on the [2027 ferry budget and fare proposal website](#).

During the meeting, staff presented information on the following topics:

- Sandy McKean, Chair of the temporary Technical Advisory Group (TAG), shared the TAG findings and recommendations to the County Commissioners for refurbishment and replacement of the ferry.
- Design and upcoming work on the Guemes Island and Anacortes parking lots.
- Upcoming maintenance work, including replacement of the bridge flaps this fall.
- Skagit County budget process, financial considerations, and 2027 priorities.
- 2027 fare proposal, fare setting process, and opportunities for public comment.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, we heard the following questions and feedback:

1. Why were the senior/disabled motorcycle fares eliminated?

During the 2023 rate study, the County reviewed fare categories that were very rarely used. Motorcycle tickets overall represent a very small share of total tickets sold. One goal of the rate study was to simplify and reduce the number of fare categories:

- For example, oversize vehicle thresholds moved from 5 ft to 10 ft.
- The senior/disabled motorcycle ticket was eliminated because of low sales and for simplification.

2. Why is the apron flap replacement considered a “maintenance” item and not capital?

The flap replacement is needed due to wear and tear (pins are worn, producing a loud noise when vehicles board). The project does not extend the useful life of the aprons and bridges as a whole. The main aprons and bridge structures are still scheduled to be replaced in a larger future capital project.

Additionally, the County sought guidance from the County Road Administration Board (CRAB), on how to classify this expense. CRAB confirmed this is routine maintenance, not a life-extending capital project. Therefore, it is treated as an operations expense and not included in capital for farebox calculations.

3. What happened to underspent budget in 2025 and 2026? 2025 Actuals came in under budget by about \$1M, where did this money go? As of June 30, 2026, the repairs and maintenance budget appears to be under budget by nearly \$1M as well. Are we planning to spend the rest of the money in 2026?

The main drivers of the 2025 budget savings include:

- Salaries, wages, and benefits were \$150,714 under budget. Staffing levels were intentionally reduced in response to reduced ridership during the nonpeak season.
- Fuel was under budget by \$113,886. This was due to lower fuel prices in 2025 (the average price per gallon was \$3.43), the 10-week drydock, and the installation of more fuel-efficient diesel engines.
- Insurance actuals were under budget by \$277,059, due to changed policy dates.
- Repairs and maintenance actuals were under budget by \$342,700.

All budget savings are dollars that remain in the Road Fund for our yearly ending balance and roll into the next year. They are not diverted into other departments and are restricted for road or ferry purposes.

In 2026, we still have several maintenance items which will use some of the remaining dollars in the repairs and maintenance budget. Those include the apron flap replacement project for both Guemes Island and Anacortes, addressing ongoing electric and hydraulic issues on the Guemes Island side, and maintenance on the bridges, towers, wing walls, and aprons. This budget line item also include maintenance on the vessel, ferry terminal building, and parking lots.

Budgets are intended to be our best estimates for costs in the following year. We are never sure how much a project will cost until we accept bids from qualified contractors and then receive final invoices for payment.

4. How are fare changes affecting ridership and revenue?

- *Has the County analyzed how fare increases are affecting ridership by category?*
- *Are you concerned that higher fares will continue to cause fewer trips and vehicles, and dropping revenue further?*
- *Is there a sweet spot of fares where revenue is maximized without driving away use of the ferry?*

The County recognizes that ridership has been impacted by fare increases. 2025 was particularly hard to analyze because multiple changes happened at once:

- 30% increase in fares.
- Elimination or reduction of punch-card discounts, especially peak season.
- Far fewer people are buying multi-ride punch card passes.
- Many have shifted from driver/vehicle to walk-on.
- There was a 10-week drydock instead of the planned 6 weeks.

Staff acknowledge the need to understand and manage fare elasticity and stated it is an ongoing concern mentioned in the revenue target report.

Ferry staff will post the fare modeling tool used to calculate fares for each year on the website by the start of the 2027 fare proposal public comment period on September 3. We will also post the ridership data we have collected and analyzed during the nonpeak season from October 2025 – May 2026.

5. How do you classify what is O&M vs capital and what is included in the farebox recovery? How exactly was the \$2.5M 2027 revenue target derived? Why is the 2026 adjusted budget for O&M so high compared to historic actuals?

How do you classify what is O&M vs capital and what is included in the farebox recovery?

Expenses are classified as “operations and maintenance” (O&M) or “capital” based on definitions set by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Washington administrative code (WAC). O&M includes:

- Crew wages/benefits.
- Fuel, supplies, utilities.
- Routine inspections and repairs.
- Routine dry docks required for Coast Guard COI.
- Routine engine repair/rebuilds.
- Routine facility repairs that **do not extend life or capacity**.

Capital expenses include:

- New vessel purchases.
- Major refurbishments that **extend life or capacity**.
- Major terminal/dock rebuilds.
- Larger system upgrades (e.g., complete replacement of bridge aprons and hydraulics), not routine fixes.

How exactly was the \$2.5M 2027 revenue target derived?

The revenue target is set by resolution adopted by the Skagit County Commissioners. The Commissioners have stated that fare box recovery should cover 65% of the operation of the ferry, excluding capital expenses, by December 31, 2028. They decided to gradually increase the cost of fares each year to reach that target by the end of 2028. The goal for 2026 fares was to recover 55% of the costs and in 2027 to cover 60% of the operations of the ferry.

The ferry fare revenue target report explains the calculation for the annual fare schedule. Per the methodology prescribed by resolution, a five-year average is used for 2024 through 2028. The revenue target calculation includes actual expenditures for 2024 and 2025, the adjusted budget for 2026, as of June 30th, and projected expenditures for 2027 and 2028. The Motor Vehicle Fuel

Tax, WSDOT deficit reimbursement, and the youth ride free reimbursement are subtracted from the operating and maintenance expenditures, which are then multiplied by 60 percent to produce the recovery target of \$2,524,069.

Why is the 2026 adjusted budget for O&M so high compared to historic actuals?

The 2026 operations and maintenance budget is higher than in previous years because the cost for goods and services has risen significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2024 O&M expenditures were lower than 2025 and 2026 because there was no drydock or pier-side maintenance performed that year.

The ferry division must take the ferry out for a drydock maintenance period every two years to maintain our U.S. Coast Guard certifications to sail. Public Works has recently decided to take the ferry for pier-side maintenance in the years when there is no drydock, to perform maintenance activities that can be done while the vessel is in the water. This will help reduce the time the ferry will need to be in drydock every other year and help level out our maintenance costs year over year.

6. There were multiple questions and comments regarding the proposed parking lot design and process for community input:

Why are you considering reducing the number of spots available for the Guemes Island parking lot when the current lot is often full? Where will people be able to park after the lot is smaller?

The initial design of the parking lot is not final, there will be several changes to the design given land use regulations, stormwater requirements, A.D.A. standards, and safe pedestrian and vehicle separation expectations. All engineering and safety standards, laws, and guidelines must be met for the final design of the parking lot.

Why would you design the parking lot to include a raised seawall which will limit the ability for people to use the only publicly available barge landing on the island?

The proposed seawall is set back farther from the shoreline than the current curb and sidewalk area. Skagit county has no intention of eliminating the boat ramp and a turning-movement analysis was done to keep the barge access viable.

What kind of public engagement will be done to ensure public input is considered for the Guemes Island parking lot design?

There will be a public engagement process of during the design phase of the project with the County's consultants. Staff encourages the public to write to ferrycomments@co.skagit.wa.us to let us know what type of public engagement you would like to see for this project. Public Works is in the negotiation process with the new consultant on final scope and expected activities for the contract, so understanding the public's interest in engagement activities will help us finalize those expectations for the consultant.

These questions are a summary of the meeting, but do not constitute all questions and comments we heard from attendees. The Ferry Division will post a more thorough summary in the coming weeks, but interested residents can also watch the recording of the meeting on our website.

2027 Budget and Fare Setting Schedule

Budget season at Skagit County officially kicked off on July 13th with our annual budget call. Skagit County is continuing to face a significant budget imbalance. If the 2027 budget were adopted with the same service levels as 2026, grown with inflation, current projects indicate there would be an approximate \$10 million deficit in the General Fund for 2027.

This deficit is not the result of a single decision, department, or economic event, rather it reflects a continuing trend in which expenditure growth is outpacing sustainable revenue growth. The County will be evaluating long-term sustainable changes to services and programs to ensure financial stability.

To learn more about the County Commissioners' priorities for the upcoming budget season, read the Commissioners' full message on our [website](#).

The County Commissioners also launched [Euna OpenBook](#) this month, which provides a live, interactive view of the County's financial information. You may now visit our OpenBook website to view county-wide revenue and expense reports from 2024 - 2026, budget messages from the Commissioners, as well as monthly updates to our current year financials. We have created separate visualizations for the Guemes Island Ferry Division so you can view a comparison of 2024 – 2026 expenses and revenues.

We have several upcoming meetings, public comment periods, and work sessions that the community can join and provide feedback. See the schedule below for upcoming events to keep an eye out for! More details will be shared throughout the summer and early fall.

September 3 – September 22: Formal written public comment period on the proposed 2027 ferry fare schedule.

September 22: The County Commissioners will host a public hearing on the proposed 2027 ferry fare schedule from 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room. You may join the hearing and provide comments in-person or via Zoom. The hearing will be televised on TV21, and if you choose to watch it on TV, you will not be able to provide public comments.

October: The Commissioners will host the annual series of budget work sessions throughout October. The schedule has not been set yet, but the dates will be shared later this summer. We will keep you updated on when Public Works will be discussing its budget.

October 20: The Commissioners will consider adoption of the 2027 ferry fare schedule at 8:30 a.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

December 7: The Commissioners will host a public hearing at 11:00 a.m. to consider testimony on the 2027 budget. There will be a published written comment period for the draft 2027 budget.

December 14: The Commissioners will consider adoption of the 2027 budget at 2:00 p.m.

Please be advised, these dates and times may change due to the Commissioners' schedule. If meetings are changed, we will send you an updated schedule.

If you have any questions about the upcoming meetings, please email ferrycomments@co.skagit.wa.us.

Contact Information for Customer Support and Services

Guemes Island Ferry Business Office
500 I Avenue, Anacortes, WA 98221
Phone: (360) 416-1466
Email: ferrycomments@co.skagit.wa.us
Website: www.skagitcounty.net/ferry

The ferry business office is open Monday through Friday, 7:30:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Please note, our phone number has recently changed. If you call our business office outside business hours, or if there is no answer during business hours, please leave us a voicemail. We return voicemails by the next business day.

Feedback? We'd love to hear from you!

*If you have thoughts, ideas, or feedback on our monthly newsletter,
Jenn Rogers, Communications and Engagement Manager, would love to hear from you!
You can e-mail her at jrogers@co.skagit.wa.us*