



GUEMES ISLAND FERRY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2026



Happy New Year, Guemes Island!

The Skagit County Ferry Division hopes you all had a wonderful holiday season and enjoyed the time with your friends and family. We are looking forward to another great year at the Skagit County ferry!

We were disappointed to have to cancel our December community meeting due to staff response to the flooding in December. It has been rescheduled for **Wednesday, January 28th, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.** The meeting will be held virtually over Zoom and the link to join is below.

[Join Zoom Meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 895 4756 7039

Passcode: 187407

2026 Ferry Tickets & Fare Schedule Update

The County Commissioners adopted the 2026 fare schedule via [Resolution #R20250259](#), which took effect on January 1, 2026. The Commissioners and staff identified an error in the oversized vehicles calculations during the adoption process. A public hearing will be held for consideration of an updated fare schedule correcting the error. Once the public hearing has been scheduled, a notice will be sent out via the listserv. The only change that will be proposed is for oversized vehicle rates.

All tickets purchased in 2026 will expire after December 31, 2026. We are often asked why there is an expiration date for tickets and it is tied to the fare schedule adopted each year. Tickets purchased under the 2026 fare schedule, and costs therein, expire after 2026 because a new fare schedule will be in effect starting January 1, 2027.

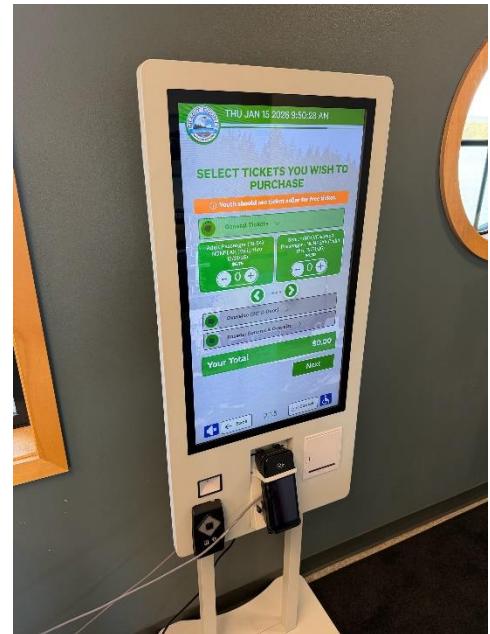
New Ticket Kiosk Coming in February

The Ferry Division is installing a new self-service ticketing kiosk inside the Anacortes Terminal in early February. Skagit County encourages all riders to continue using advance purchase options through the Guemes Island ferry app or the online website; however, once deployed, the kiosk will become the primary in-person ticketing purchasing method at the Anacortes terminal.

The self-service kiosk will offer several key benefits:

- Purchase of all general, oversize, and multi-ride passes,
- Ticket lookup to view remaining rides or validity,
- Kiosk availability throughout all ticketing lobby hours (when the terminal is open to the public), including crew break periods when the ticket office has typically been closed,
- Credit / debit card, Apple Pay, and Google Pay options supported, and
- Ticketing options available in both English and Spanish.

Ferry crew members will be available to assist riders during the transition to the new kiosk. As a reminder, cash is not accepted at the Anacortes ticket office but will still continue to be accepted at the Skagit County main office at 1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Appointments are not required, but helpful. Please call (360) 416-1400 in advance so we can be sure we have someone here to help you.



2025 in Review

We had an eventful year at the ferry in 2025! Check out a few of our favorite highlights below:



Two New Engines

During the spring drydock maintenance period, the ferry received a major upgrade that will benefit riders for years to come. We replaced the vessel's 20-year-old engines with new, more fuel-efficient Caterpillar C18 engines. These modern engines use less fuel, run cleaner, and help reduce operating costs. They also produce fewer emissions, supporting a healthier environment for our community.

The old Cummins engines served the ferry well, but after two decades they were becoming harder to maintain because replacement parts and service support were increasingly difficult to find. This upgrade ensures the ferry remains reliable, safe, and ready to serve riders every day.



Guemes Ferry to the Rescue!

On September 22nd, the Guemes Ferry rescued a pilot from a downed airplane in the Guemes Channel after a mechanical issue shortly after takeoff. Thanks to the quick actions of Captain Guy Mitchell, Jon Barrett, Emily Grober, and Kelsea Teel, the pilot was quickly brought back to shore after the crash with no reported injuries.

The ferry crew performs United States Coast Guard required man overboard drills every 90 days to ensure they are ready for any rescues that might be needed. Many of these drills happen during the lunch break!



Electronic Ticketing

The new ticketing system was the result of more than two years of work by the Ferry Division and our Information Services Department to launch the mobile ticketing app and online ticket sales! This has been requested by riders in the past, and we were very excited to be able to finally launch the new system this year.

Electronic ticketing offers our riders an easy, efficient way to purchase tickets online, prior to arriving at the terminal, saves

future rides in your app (no more losing your paper punch cards and the remaining rides with it!), and provides the Ferry Division with better data collection for financial reporting, auditing, and grant applications.

We will keep updating and working on the mobile app to ensure it provides the best service to our riders. If you have feedback, we're happy to hear it! Thank you to everyone who was part of the testing of the mobile app. We appreciate everyone who has taken the time to offer their thoughts on the process so we can keep improving.



New Staff

We were thrilled to welcome both Joe Greene, Chief Engineer, and Lee Fisher, Assistant Ferry Manager, to our crew this year. Joe and Lee have been instrumental to the success of the ferry since they joined Skagit County. Joe has worked diligently to keep the ferry on a consistent maintenance and repair schedule to reduce the number of days the ferry is out of service. He has been preparing recently for the upcoming pier-side maintenance period to ensure we can finish all of the projects that need to be

done as quickly and efficiently as possible. Lee has been a big help on the day-to-day needs of the ferry operations and crew management, including overseeing safety drills and training so we keep our U.S. Coast Guard certifications and requirements up to date!

You can read more about Joe and Lee in the August and September 2025 newsletters.



Ferry Ridership

In 2025 we welcomed 137,985 vehicles and 358,546 passengers! We greatly enjoy being part of your travel plans and daily commuting and we look forward to seeing you all throughout 2026.

Ferry Replacement Project Update

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) has now held three meetings to discuss next steps for the ferry replacement project. You can view agendas, materials, and notes from each meeting on our website [here](#).

Skagit County Resolution [#R20250207](#) defines the scope of the TAG. The scope includes a review of all ferry propulsion studies conducted to date by the County. The group covered those at the December 8 meeting. It also states the minimum propulsion systems to evaluate, as follows: all-electric, hybrid, diesel electric, green diesel, liquified natural gas, and hydrogen, which serves as the baseline list for the work to be done by TAG.

Other options include preserving M/V Guemes for another 15 years and potentially partnering with Whatcom County to build a new vessel identical to its new design. Additional alternatives can be added by the TAG. Per the resolution, the evaluation will include, at a minimum, the following criteria: upfront capital cost, life cycle cost, ongoing operating costs, complexity, year-over-year maintenance costs and intervals, emissions, and energy consumption.

The resolution clarifies that TAG is an advisory group and will not be responsible for value engineering for risk assessment. For more information on the TAG, including the charter and authorizing resolutions, please visit our [website](#).

Value Engineering

The Ferry Division is working to select a consultant for a value engineering study and risk assessment of the current all-electric vessel design and bid package to evaluate how to best reduce the cost of the project to meet our available budget and address risks. Once we have more information on this effort, we will share it.

Maintenance Updates



Outdrive Repair Effort – New Propeller Finished!

The ferry outdrive was removed from the vessel following the loss of its propeller in January 2025 and has now undergone an overhaul. While the overhaul would have eventually been part of routine maintenance, additional repairs were needed, including replacement of the corroded propeller shaft and a full rebuild of the lower unit.

A new propeller has been installed on the spare outdrive making it ready for replacement when or should the ferry need it. All related costs have been submitted to the insurance company for reimbursement.

As shown in the photo, corrosion on the propeller shaft was significant enough to require full replacement.

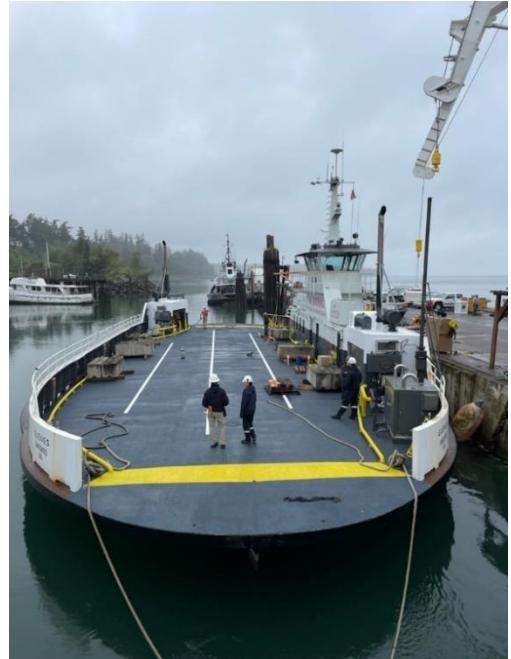
Outdrives on the ferry have been in service for over 35 years and are maintained with great care to ensure safe and reliable operation. However, some steering system components on the ferry are becoming outdated and increasingly difficult to source. Joe, Chief Engineer, is actively exploring modernization options to extend the life of these systems. Full replacement of the outdrives would cost well over \$1 million, which is not feasible within our current budget.

Additional maintenance period next spring

Please be advised, the Ferry Division is planning to have a pier-side maintenance period in spring of 2026. Staff are currently preparing the Request for Proposals to solicit bids to complete the repair and maintenance work. As the contractor has not yet been selected, exact dates are unknown at this time. We estimate the work will take place sometime between late April and Memorial Day. Pier-side maintenance means the vessel will still be in the water, at the Contractor's facility, while the work is completed.

The work will not require the vessel to drydock.

The U.S. Coast Guard is requiring the County to replace four small sections of steel on the vessel deck forward of the car deck. This was called out during the 2025 drydock; however, if done at that time, the ferry's return would have been delayed even further. Other maintenance items will be addressed during this time as well, including a full replacement of wiring connected to the engines that caused a shutdown in June of this year.



Given the vessel's age, there are times when annual maintenance periods are beneficial, and doing this work in 2026 should reduce the amount of time out of service for the next required drydock in spring of 2027.

The Ferry Division is also planning a project to replace the flaps on the aprons on both Anacortes and Guemes bridges. This work will take place sometime after the pier-side maintenance project and is expected to take 3 days total. It may require a partial day shutdown of passenger-only service for the work on the Guemes side. For the work on the Anacortes side, passenger-only service can run between Cap Sante and Guemes. More information on that project will be coming soon.

We will have more information on the specific dates of the maintenance period once we have selected a vendor to conduct the maintenance work. As soon as we have more information on schedule and details for passenger-only service, we will share them.

Feedback? We'd love to hear from you!

If you have thoughts, ideas, or feedback on our monthly newsletter, Jenn Rogers,

Communications Manager, would love to hear from you! You can e-mail her at jrogers@co.skagit.wa.us