

**MEETING SUMMARY  
SAN JUAN ISLANDS VRS COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MEETING  
SAN JUAN ISLAND YACHT CLUB, FRIDAY HARBOR, WA**

Tuesday, June 17, 2014 11:30 a.m. – 3:10 p.m.

*Note: This meeting summary represents notes from the Washington State Department of Transportation Ferries Division (WSF) Partnership Group Meeting, and is not a formal transcript or minutes. It is provided as a record for the staff, group members and public in attendance, and other interested parties.*

**Welcome**

George Capacci, Interim Assistant Secretary WSDOT Ferries Division

George welcomed the group and thanked them for their ongoing participation. He briefly discussed the upcoming vessel changes in the San Juan Islands as the new ferry Tokitae comes into service and the Evergreen State is retired.

Kathy Booth was able to attend for the first time as school is now out for the summer; Kathy introduced herself and George introduced all the WSF staff.

**Meeting Overview**

Fauna Larkin, BERK & Associates

Fauna went over the agenda and handouts, some of which were revised based on feedback from the group.

**Questions & Comments**

1. (Susan Young) This meeting was originally scheduled to go until 4:00 p.m. and has been cut down by 2 hours. It concerns me that you say we need to hurry to get through the agenda today when you have chosen to shorten the meeting. I arranged my schedule to be here for the originally posted time period.  
*We understand your frustration. We realized that with the summer schedule now in effect, the inter-island folks would be stuck here until 6 p.m. unless they make that 2:15 sailing. We adjusted the meeting length to accommodate the schedule change. However, WSF staff will be here until 3:30 if anyone would like to stay later. Let's try to get through as much of the agenda as we can before 2:00, and then if anyone is able to stay longer we can certainly continue the discussion.*

**Tiered Release**

Fauna Larkin, BERK & Associates

Fauna asked the group to go around the table and state the criteria that they believe would make the reservations system a success for all customers.

### Questions & Comments

2. (Wally Gudgell) Reduction in wait times and congestion, and a system that is robust and easily adjusted. We need to have the flexibility to make adjustments seasonally and based on usage data. We don't know enough yet to be able to decide tiered release percentages; we need to be prepared to make changes to the system and communicate them well.
3. (Bill Pike) I don't want to see tourist dollars disappear from the islands, so success would be the ability for hotels to fill their rooms and the tiered release giving tourists the ability to book the sailings that they need to get there. It should be easy and convenient for tourist and local travel, and give tourists the ability to reserve their ferry when making their other travel plans, on their preferred day and at their preferred time.
4. (Deborah Hopkins) I agree with those first two and would like to request that tourists receive their first or second, maybe third, choice of sailing in order to minimize their travel days; locals should get their first choice.
5. (Carol Anderson) I agree with everyone so far, but want to make sure we don't forget the elderly folks on the islands who are not used to making reservations to travel on the ferry. Locals should have the ability to drive up if they choose and have space available eastbound for last minute travel.
6. (Jamie Stephens) I agree with Deborah, and think we really need to think about that last release, especially during the rollout. Locals have no drive around option. From a tourist's perspective, any reservation system will be better than what we have now.
7. (Howie Rosenfeld) I agree with the ability of locals to travel last minute, and I think we need to remember the technology-challenged people who have no drive around option. Imagine a person who lives in a yurt in the woods; that's who we're dealing with here. It should be accessible to all customer types. Also, it should be immune to people who want to game the system by making multiple reservations or selling their reservations. I'm also concerned that ridership is going up, and we are doing this to reduce congestion, but what if ridership goes up enough that we cause more congestion? That could be a PR problem.
8. (Dwight Hutchinson) Predictability, the ability to plan ahead, spreading demand.
9. (Brian Churchwell) I wanted to speak on behalf of Jim Corenman, who couldn't be here today: he requests that the additional operating costs of the system not exceed the additional revenue earned by the system.
10. (George Capacci) It needs to work for our customers, our communities, and for WSF. A success factor for me is to increase revenue by increasing ridership.
11. (Trevor Sharp) The ability to plan ahead, and spreading demand.
12. (Clark Johnson) I would like the system to be transparent so an interested customer could figure out how it works. I would like the initial implementation to reflect the decisions made at these meetings; that tiered release of space document you sent us was blindsiding. Also, on high volume days, I want

- customers with reservations who arrive in the correct window of time to be able to make it through the tollbooths in Anacortes. I would like you to publish the percentage of customers who held reservations that you were successfully able to reach during a service disruption, to tell them that you are now on a first come, first served basis. I think you should err on the side of locals rather than tourists initially, and then change if needed. Start with a larger third release biased toward locals and then shift it later on based on the data.
13. (Margot Shaw) I agree with the transparency and the flexibility; pretty much everything so far except for what Carol said. The whole point of having reservations is that we all will get into the habit of making reservations. It's important to get people comfortable with what is happening by explaining it to them many times before this goes into effect. It is our job to change our habits in order to make this work to give us what we want. There needs to be a lot of training to avoid a negative response.
  14. (Larry Vandermay) I agree with everything, but the most important thing is reducing congestion and getting people through the tollbooths.
  15. (John Whetten) Success would be a system that is easy to use, reduces congestion, and favors locals over tourists in terms of sailing preference.
  16. (Gordon Jonasson) Success is reduction of congestion at the terminals, having the public accept the system and giving all parties equal access to the system.
  17. (Kathy Booth) I'm a technology educator and I worry about those who have no smartphone and aren't tech savvy, especially for westbound travel. I think all parties should be able to access the system, and I agree with what Deborah said and the gaming comment.
  18. (Beverly Zapalac) Speaking for Lopez, success would be that every car that shows up makes it onto the sailing they arrive for in Lopez and Anacortes.
  19. (Ken Burtness) It would be a success if all parties are treated fairly: tourists, locals, commercial users and WSF. There will have to be compromises, but I would like to see you balance the needs of all four equally when there are conflicts of interest.
  20. (Susan Young) I agree with most everything that's been said. One sign of success for me would be to see adequate funding. A lot of this will not be successful without appropriate signage, staffing and communications. I agree that the system should start out with a bias for locals and then shift if needed.

Fauna moved into discussing the ideal percentage of space for each tiered release, and went over the charts on the first two pages of the Release of Reservation Space Discussion Document. She then asked the group to go around and state which percentage they believe should be released for each tier, and in what timeframe.

21. (Susan Young) Release 30% of the space when the schedule comes out, then release another 35% one-two weeks out from the sailing, then release 30% two

- days out. This may need to be adjusted, but is in the spirit of having an initial bias toward locals.
22. (Ken Burtness) I agree, and would like to make the point that if long term planners don't get a spot in the first release, they have two more chances; the opposite is not true for short term planners.
  23. (Beverly Zapalac) I agree with those percentages and timeframe.
  24. (Kathy Booth) I agree. Can you tell me what those numbers mean for travel to Lopez from Anacortes?  
*It is first come, first served for whoever makes reservations on multiple-stop sailings; those spaces are not split equally amongst the islands. We will maintain the allotments eastbound.*
  25. (Gordon Jonasson) I agree with those percentages and timeframe.
  26. (John Whetten) I agree with those percentages and timeframe.
  27. (Larry Vandermay) I agree but I don't think it will make a difference what you select; you will have to make changes based upon usage.
  28. (Margot Shaw) I would say release 40%/40%/10% in the same timeframe, which increases the drive-up/emergency vehicle space from 5% to 10%.
  29. (Clark Johnson) I agree with Susan, but have an alternative. Define a segment of the schedule that is the busiest; say 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The sailings outside of that you can release all 95% of the space right away. Within the busy range, release 50% upfront, and once that 50% is consumed, selectively release additional space in sailings that don't usually fill up right away. The second release would be data driven. That way anyone that comes to look at the schedule at any time would see space available, but you would be driving people toward the less full sailings and using the data to make decisions.
  30. (Howie Rosenfeld) I like Clark's suggestion; being data driven is key. I think at least to start we need to have more spaces available at the last minute; err on the side of not meeting our success criteria until people get used to it. Winter probably won't tell us much; maybe spring will. I think the same day release for drive-ups should be higher; I'm not going to name a number, just higher. I also think we want more than 30% on the first release.
  31. (Jamie Stephens) I would go with 30%/35%/30%. I think Clark's idea is too complicated. According to Clark's data that he provided us at the beginning, off-core sailings at Orcas are filling up also, so I'm not sure this new idea would accomplish what you're trying to do.
  32. (Carol Anderson) I would go with 30%/30%/30%, and I want to emphasize that 10% left for drive-ups at least initially. You need to make sure that your staff is able to communicate service disruptions to those with reservations. You can use Clark's ideas after rollout to make data driven changes based on usage.
  33. (Deborah Hopkins) I would go with what Carol said, 30%/30%/30%.
  34. (Bill Pike) I would suggest 30%/30%/35%. I don't want to encourage people to buck the system by making it easy for them to just drive up.

35. (Wally Gudgell) I was going to start with Clark's idea myself, but I have detected a pattern, which is that locals tend to use the early and late sailings more than tourists. I like the idea of pushing people out to the off-core sailings, perhaps you could communicate that locals are encouraged to make reservations on the early or late sailings. I think you should start with whatever percentages you choose, then eventually go Clark's way.

Fauna asked the group to go to page 3 of the handout, to read over the risks of a large release two days prior to the reserved sailing date. Brian said the timeframe of the last release being two days prior to the sailing was chosen based on feedback from this group; does the group still agree that two days is the right time for the last release of space? (The group agreed that two days will work) Brian thanked the group for their feedback on tiered release of space, and said he would work with it to come up with an initial strategy.

### **WAC Changes**

Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations

Brian went over the Summary of Changes to Washington Administrative Code handout.

### **Questions & Comments**

1. (Howie Rosenfeld) I was talking to a member that has not been able to attend many meetings, and they were concerned about revenue generation. The suggestion was that certain types of reservations, such as those made over 30 days ahead, should be charged a fee. Should there be language in the WAC for that?  
*The Legislature has been very clear that we will not be charging a fee to make a reservation; the only fee will be the no-show fee.*
2. (Kathy Booth) What is your idea of a no-show fee?  
*We can send that information out to the group as a reminder; it has been awhile since we discussed it.*
3. (John Whetten) Who approves the WAC changes?  
*It's a complicated process; we will send that information out to the group along with the date of the public hearing that we will hold in Seattle, in case anyone would like to comment.*

### **Communication Plan**

Fauna Larkin, BERK & Associates

Fauna went over the Draft Communications Plan handout and proposed marketing materials. She invited the group members to participate in the summer marketing events, and/or to request copies of the materials for distribution in their communities.

### Questions & Comments

1. (Gordon Jonasson) Your weekly report is sent out to about 3,000 people. I suggest that you increase that distribution. Encourage people to sign up for that when you go out; it's a very useful mailing.  
*We will be offering to sign people up for that at these marketing events.*
2. (Clark Johnson) As we know from your experience with us over the last ten meetings, this will be a challenge to launch. I wonder if it is wise to start right before the busy January 1<sup>st</sup> weekend; why not start on January 8<sup>th</sup> and ease into it?  
*We can look at that.*
3. (Deborah Hopkins) I would suggest visiting the Senior Centers in the islands this fall.  
*That is part of our plan for fall.*
4. (Clark Johnson) You are using these marketing events to acquire information from people, have you thought about what would prompt you to change your communications plan? How will you measure whether your message is getting out there?  
*We are doing an initial assessment now to see how aware people are of the reservations system; that is our baseline. After the summer campaign we will reassess and see where we are.*  
It would be nice to see that reflected in the plan.
5. (Howie Rosenfeld) A good way to reach people is at the markets; that is something people from this group could do.
6. (Margot Shaw) I second that, put us to work.  
*We are open to any suggested events that you think we should include, and group members are more than welcome to join us.*
7. (Deborah Hopkins) At the tollbooth you catch everyone; that is a good place to hand out the brochure there.
8. (Bill Pike) It might be helpful to remind people of the things that will not be changing: reservations will not affect the interisland boat, walk-ons, departures from Lopez and Shaw, or the fares.  
*We will have a document that talks about misconceptions; that is a good point, we can emphasize the things that are not changing.*
9. (Deborah Hopkins) The Visitor's Bureau's and Chambers will be promoting reservations as well.
10. (John Whetten) What worries me the most is the congestion at Anacortes; I'm not sure the public education will be adequate to solve that problem. There needs to be some way of notifying them prior to them reaching the tollbooth that they need a reservation. You don't want the tollbooth to be the first line of defense when you're fully booked. There is no mention of kiosks or variable message signs here, so I assume they are cost prohibitive.  
*We appreciate that need, and will add that to our ongoing communications plan. This plan is just for implementation to show people that reservations are coming.*

11. (Margot Shaw) I like the format of the most commonly asked questions with the answers. The question I get the most is what a reservation will cost, followed by the comment that they would be willing to pay for one. The other comment I get is that the five-ride Wave-to-Go card should stay the same. People listen when you present a special topic at a group meeting; you should send representatives to speak at groups in the fall, such as Kiwanis.
12. (Clark Johnson) I support John's concern that you need to put some energy into prevention at Anacortes; it doesn't have to be fancy, just "Reservations Required" on a sign. I would suggest that you keep some of these materials in the purser's office on the boats so that we can access it to spread the word on the boats. In terms of misconceptions, Jim's email is wonderful, and should give you a good idea of what's being said out there.
13. (Ken Burtness) Thank you for taking action on our comments; I'm very impressed, you've done great.

### **Anacortes Operating Plan for 4<sup>th</sup> of July Holiday Travel**

Dwight Hutchinson, WSF Reservations Manager

Dwight discussed the plans for improving the handling of heavy holiday traffic at Anacortes (see Holiday Communications & Vehicle Throughput on the Ana/SJI Route handout).

### **Summary and Next Steps**

Fauna Larkin, BERK & Associates

Fauna noted that those who wanted to make the interisland sailing would need to leave, but WSF staff would stay for another hour for any additional discussion topics. The next partnership meeting will be in September.

### **Public Comments**

No public comment.

### **Conclusion**

George Capacci, Interim Assistant Secretary WSDOT Ferries Division

George thanked the group members for attending and announced that he had withdrawn from consideration for the Assistant Secretary position, but will remain in the interim position until it is filled.

### **Additional Discussion**

Fauna Larkin, BERK & Associates

All group members departed except for Bill Pike, Howie Rosenfeld, Susan Young and Kathy Booth.

Fauna asked if the remaining members had any questions for Dwight on 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday travel.

### **Questions & Comments**

1. (Susan Young) The plan focuses mostly on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup>; do you not expect much traffic on the 4<sup>th</sup>?

*Our past stats show that it tends to die down by midday on the 4<sup>th</sup>; we will pull the stats and put them on the Best Times to Travel.*

Fauna and Brian went over the tiered release of tall space (see page 3 of the Release of Reservation Space Discussion Document). They asked the group whether they thought the space for commercial users should be released in tiers or all at once.

### **Questions & Comments**

1. (Susan Young) I know this is a huge concern for Jim Corenman and John Whetten. Everything I hear from business people is that the commercial system works great. It makes sense for them to be able to book out as far as possible, so I see no reason for a tiered release. However, I don't fully understand Jim's concerns.

*Our understanding of Jim's concern is that 95% of the space is available for commercial users right up front while everyone else will have a tiered release, so what if all the tall space gets booked and someone with an RV isn't able to get a space. Our answer to that is that commercial users want sailings that are undesirable to locals and tourists, such as the very first sailing in the morning.*

2. (Howie Rosenfeld) The commercial system works great the way it is now; everybody loves it. However, if we leave it in place we are giving them a preference, so I think you may have people signing up to be a commercial user just for that reason.

*We believe that type of abuse would have happened already because commercial users can make reservations when nobody else can, and have been able to for the last ten years. It is quite a serious process to become a commercial user; a credit check and so forth. We had that concern when we implemented at Port Townsend / Coupeville and it has not been a problem.*

3. (Susan Young) I would feel better if we could have an email conversation with Jim about this so he can present his case.

*We can do that; does anyone feel comfortable presenting an option right now?*

4. (Bill Pike) Keep it the way it is now.

*So release all of the space right at the beginning, and all tall space will be first come, first served.*

5. (Susan Young) I think it works well now, but Jim and John need to have an opportunity to articulate their concerns through email.

Fauna discussed monitoring of the system after rollout, and the triggers that would show the need for modifications of the tiered release of space (see page 4 of the Release of Reservation Space Discussion Document).

### **Questions & Comments**

1. (Susan Young) You need data; you don't know how many medical preferential loadings you've got going from Anacortes to the Islands.  
*So track the number of medical preferential loadings, and if there are more than we expect, increase the amount of space that is not available to be reserved.*
2. (Kathy Booth) Would there be data for those who tried to make a reservation and couldn't because the space has not been released?  
*It is very difficult to track that. We can see how people navigate the site, but some of what we decipher from that is assumption based. We can count the number of verbal complaints to customer service, and we can track how full reservations are for each sailing and assume that people had trouble reserving certain sailings.*
3. (Susan Young) I would use the email addresses you collect from people who make reservations to send out a follow-up survey. Ask them how they heard about reservations, and if they had any trouble.
4. (Bill Pike) I don't think you should adjust anything until you have at least a year's worth of data. Track how full each sailing is across a season, and see if there are any trends. You could also make changes based on the complaints in customer service.
5. (Susan Young) If you look at Clark's data, you already know which boats are overloading and which are empty. You could compare that existing data with what happens after rollout. You could also gain information from seeing which tiers fill up quicker, and on which sailings.
6. (Howie Rosenfeld) It might be useful to track whether or not drive-ups get on; the average boat wait.

Brian referenced holiday travel in the San Juan Islands, and asked the group if there should be a different tiered release for those especially busy days; perhaps opening up more space sooner.

### **Questions & Comments**

1. (Susan Young) I think it comes down to educating people; encourage them to walk on or carpool. Put the responsibility on the customer.
2. (Kathy Booth) I agree; people need to figure out how to get there.  
*Locals may want to plan ahead for those special weekends; there may be less last minute travel and more demand for the ability to plan ahead.*

3. (Susan Young) I would see what happens; don't complicate anything yet. Clark's idea of adjustable release is great for down the road, like changing tolls based on highway demand. But start simple.
4. (Bill Pike) You can look at your data and see if the first tier is completely booked, and even the second tier, and then at that point see that you may need to allow more people to make advance plans on those weekends.
5. (Howie Rosenfeld) I think it makes sense to open up more on the first tier for holidays. I don't want to complicate things, but I think that would be good to do.

Brian thanked the remaining group member for staying. Meeting was adjourned.

### Group Members

Present	Name of Group Member	Representing
	Adrienne Adams	Lopez Island
	Mike Aley	Orcas Island
X	Carol Anderson	San Juan Island
X	Kathy Booth	Lopez Island
	John Brantigan	Shaw Island
X	Ken Burtness	Lopez Island
	Cass Clark	Lopez Island
	Jim Corenman	San Juan Island
	David Dubbell	San Juan Island
	Lance Evans	Orcas Island
	Tony Ghazel	Orcas Island
X	Wally Gudgell	Orcas Island
	John Hess	San Juan Island
X	Deborah Hopkins	San Juan Island
X	Clark Johnson	Lopez Island
X	Gordon Jonasson	Lopez Island
	Mark Lione	Anacortes
	John MacLeod	Orcas Island
	Pat McKay	San Juan Island
X	Bill Pike	Mount Vernon
	John Poletti	Orcas Island
X	Howie Rosenfeld	San Juan Island
X	Margot Shaw	Orcas Island
X	Jamie Stephens	Lopez Island
	Mike Stolmeier	Orcas Island
	Terresa Sundstrom	San Juan Island
	Sally Thomsen	San Juan Island

X	Larry Vandermay	Orcas Island
X	John Whetten	Lopez Island
X	Susan Young	Lopez Island
X	Beverly Zapalac	Lopez Island

**Project Team**

- George Capacci, Interim Assistant Secretary WSDOT Ferries Division
- Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations
- Trevor Sharp, Anacortes Reservations Planning Manager
- Dwight Hutchinson, WSF Reservations Manager
- Fauna Larkin, BERK & Associates
- Rachel Waitt, WSF Communications