

MEETING SUMMARY
SAN JUAN ISLANDS VRS COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MEETING
SAN JUAN ISLAND YACHT CLUB, FRIDAY HARBOR, WA
Wednesday, June 12, 2013 11:30 a.m. – 2:10 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

David Moseley, WSDOT Assistant Secretary

David welcomed the group and gave an update on the Legislative session.

Meeting Overview

Michael Hodgins, BERK & Associates

Michael went over the agenda.

Premier Program Draft Recommendations

Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations

Brian discussed reasons for a Premier Program, as well as key assumptions and account eligibility (see Final Premier Program Description handout).

Questions & Comments

1. (Gordon Jonasson) Multiple people in the islands use the Anacortes route to go down to Port Townsend. If I am a Premier Program member in the islands with priority on the Anacortes route and I want to go Port Townsend, my membership would not work down there?

Correct; you could qualify for both programs if you are a frequent user of both.

I probably wouldn't be. I would have to do two transactions to reserve both?

You would have to make two different reservations.

You could get tripped up on that second one.

You will need to make two separate reservations, but you could do it in one "shopping cart" experience online; you would not have to do two separate transactions.

2. (Susan Young) I have some serious concerns about this. It is going to disenfranchise island residents; particularly Orcas and San Juan Island residents. On Lopez it won't be as big a deal, but many residents of Friday Harbor and Orcas won't qualify for the Premier Program. They think they are going to get special access and they're not. *We looked into a residency program to see what it would take to manage it, and the costs were a lot higher. We are looking at more automated systems rather than staff reliant systems.*

It would also be illegal according to the Attorney General's office.

3. (John MacLeod) I'm ok with the usage based approach; the part that bothers me is the two trips a month. We have the usage card which works out ok because of the 90 days; I think basing it on monthly usage causing you to get kicked out is too extreme.
So you like the 5 trips in 90 days better.
Yes, that is more consistent with the 90 day card.
The reason we weren't leaning toward that option was out of concern for island residents; if someone wants to access the program but they are not a frequent user all year round they could do it just for the summer months and take up space that would have otherwise been reserved for you. A show of hands, who prefers the 5 trips in 90 days rather than 2 trips per month? (14 of the 18 attendees raised their hands)
4. (Jim Corenman) I want to echo what John is saying; our travel plans are sporadic and if we get kicked out of the program we would be unhappy. I think it's more workable if it's 5 trips over 90 days.
Ok, let's just say that is a done deal; we will base the Premier Program eligibility on 5 trips in 90 days. That will be on a quarterly basis, not a rolling 90 days.
5. (Howie Rosenfeld) One concern about the Premier Program: you will open up spaces 48 hours in advance but you still can't access reservations with a multiride card?
We want to allow people to use any form of payment they want; we will be discussing the deposit vs. no-show fee. Basically, if we as a group decide to approve the no-show fee over the deposit option then customers would be able to use any form of payment.
6. (Bill Pike) Back to the point about the 90 days not being a rolling 90 days, it will be on a quarterly basis? So we will not be able to have the 90 days match the rolling 90 on our multiride tickets?
That is correct. Once you are enrolled in the Premier Program we will not be monitoring your multiride number.
7. (Sally Thomsen) I'm a different type of user; I may use the multiride card for 5 trips in 90 days but not on a quarterly basis. When I first read through your package I thought all I would need is a new number to be part of the account. I could see myself buying a group of tickets in November and using them twice in that period, making reservations and then passing on the rest of the tickets to other people. If they didn't use them my account would close and then I would open up a new account. People will do that; there is space for abuse of the system.
If you don't travel enough during certain times of year to stay in the Premier Program, you can downgrade to Universal and then change it when you need to; that may be a seasonal change for some island residents.
8. (Clark Johnson) I'm a user that would qualify, but only just. Please clarify the words "with reservation"—imagine a scenario that I make a reservation but I get stuck in traffic in Everett and I miss it. I get home but didn't travel on my reserved sailing; will I be kicked out of the program?
If you make a reservation but miss your sailing, as long as you travel in the same operational day it will count toward the 5 trips in 90 days and will not affect your Premier Account status.
That's not specified in your materials.
We can make that clearer. A no-show is defined as not traveling at all on that day from that terminal.
9. (Howie Rosenfeld) A common practice is for us to buy the 5 ride book and toward the end of the 90 days we give away what we haven't used. That drives more traffic onto

the boats at a reduced price. If the unused portions of the multiride cards could somehow be redeemed, so any that we can't use could be sold back to WSF, we end up spending about what we would have without the discount and it would benefit WSF as well.

We can look into that.

10. (Carol Anderson) 8:25 is our last sailing during the week. What if I fly into Seatac and try to make my reservation on that last sailing and I don't make it? I would be considered a no-show and incur a fee?

Correct.

That's a problem for people who commute. They will get dinged for not making the boat because of things out of their control.

11. (Sally Thomsen) Another piece of Carol's scenario is that she could get booted from the program for that.

If that trip is the 5th one that she needs to qualify, then yes.

12. (Clark Johnson) I want to reemphasize my concern for the residents of the islands not being taken care of. There is a real concern for the residents here and their experience. They have no other choice; you're putting them in a position of not qualifying financially and in a lifestyle sense. I want the record to show that I believe this system will disenfranchise them.

13. (Susan Young) I would also like my name attached to that comment.

14. (Sally Thomsen) I'm hoping we can talk about how you will accommodate non-frequent resident users, as well as how much space is allotted to the Premier Program.

We will be discussing both of those items.

Do you know how many people will use the Premier Program?

We have approximately 100 commercial users now; we don't know how many people will take part in the Premier Program. There are only 42 at Port Townsend / Coupeville, although they have more restrictions. We are going to look at relaxing those restrictions so the program works the same way on both routes.

15. (Howie Rosenfeld) The problem for me is that your attempts to get people to use less congested trips, like the Best Times to Travel information, does not work for a lot of island residents. We don't have the flexibility.

As we talk about the percentages of space on the vessels we can address that. The Best Times to Travel information is for the folks who do have some flexibility so that they can make informed travel decisions.

16. (Susan Young) Another problem is that we are not comparable to Port Townsend / Coupeville. They have a drive around option; they have an option if there's an emergency.

We understand that.

17. (Ken Burtness) I disagree with Howie when he says that for most people travel flexibility is not an option. I know when the best times to travel are and I use that information all the time.

18. (Clark Johnson) In addition to acknowledging the detail about no-shows in your documents, please acknowledge that the burden for explaining the program lies with the employees in the ticket booths rather than just expecting us to know.

That is a key point and we will make sure of that.

19. (Carol Anderson) To clarify, when you say the sailing space will open up 48 hours in advance, will I still be able to make a reservation as a Premier at that time?

Yes, everyone has the same access to the remaining space: you, guests, Universal users. The space will no longer be held only for Premier users.

20. (Clark Johnson) A key point: early in the game when there are general spaces available and I book space as a Premier user, does my booking affect that?
Once we have filled the general space only Premier users can access what remains. That should be made clear.

Deposits and No-Show Fees

Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations

Brian discussed the difference between taking a deposit vs. charging a no-show fee, and the proposed WAC language changes (see No-Show Fee and Proposed Changes to Tariff WAC Language handout).

Questions & Comments

1. (Bill Pike) Are you suggesting a no-show fee in both directions?
Due to how confusing it could be if it was one-way, we are proposing the fee in both directions.
And regardless of how we make the reservations there would be no deposit?
Correct. Operationally that would be more efficient. You could pay with a multiride card, and we don't have to track remaining balances that people would need to pay at the tollbooth with the deposit system.
I really like that; it makes sense.
2. (Carol Anderson) Except if you miss that 8:25 sailing; you would be adding more money to the issue. A lot of people can't afford that. We use the ferries like a highway, not an airline.
Are you ok with the idea of a no-show fee and you're just concerned about that last sailing?
My concern is the fee and the amount of the fee. You'll be racking up bills for people who can't afford it. A drive from Bellingham to Seattle doesn't cost me extra if I'm late. That's my basic concern.
3. (Sally Thomsen) Can we cancel the reservation in Carol's scenario?
You have the ability to make one change within 24 hours of departure. If you know your flight is late you can move your reservation. There is the 2 hour lockdown period prior to departure when no changes can be made, but outside of that you can make a change. Or if you know you need to change it prior to 5 p.m. the previous day you can freely cancel your reservation.
I do support the no-show fee, but I would like to hear how it will change eastbound reservations.
On Orcas and San Juan Islands there will be a person with a handheld device in the holding lanes who will scan your barcode or use other information to check you in. And if you don't have a reservation you just drive in like normal. The checkpoint person will tell drive-ups where to go.
4. (Pat McKay) I would like to address Carol's issue about the no-show fee. They have to have it or there will be so much abuse of the system that it would take away from what they are trying to accomplish. I understand your concern about the cost; if one of my

trucks break down I have many costs but I still think there needs to be a deterrent for abuse.

5. (Bill Pike) Carol has a good point. In the airline business we have a policy that if you have pre-purchased a nonrefundable ticket and you don't make it on time, you become a standby passenger and you're not charged an additional fare. The question is what to do about that last sailing of the day. Could there be a provision for that so that if I miss that last boat, even if it involves a face-to-face resolution at the terminal, my reservation could be applied to the first trip out the next day?
We can look at that.
That way the no-show fee is a non-issue. I don't know if your software can handle that or if it would mean a manual override to give us a break on that.
This is the kind of feedback we need so that we can plan these things. Show of hands, who likes that idea? (All participants raised their hands)
6. (David Dubbell) To Sally's point about going east, where you will have someone scanning, I live in a place where I have to come down Warbass Way on San Juan Island and the backup in the summer is so bad you can't move. I would urge that at some point in time you address the issue of the traffic flow in that area.
We want to make sure the transaction time will be short so there will be no impact on the traffic.
In a few years when people are used to it sure, but with a brand new system I'm sure there will be much discussion happening between customers and that scanner person, at least in the summer.
We have been talking to the terminal staff about this issue; we will be directing people to Lot B rather than Lot A to avoid the impact on the community.
7. (Jim Corenman) Could the no-show fee only kick in if you don't travel within 24 hours of your reserved sailing rather than the same business day?
The rolling 24 hours is difficult; we are hearing that you would like to redefine the no-show rules for the last sailing of the day, so we will look at that.
8. (Susan Young) A lot of times you may not know when you're on a flight that you will be late, and you're not able to use your phone to cancel.
9. (Jim Corenman) It says you can set the no-show rate between 25-100% of the fare; so you could charge less.
We can't go lower than 25% of the fare. Our concern is that if we set the no-show fee too low a tourist would be willing to pay that fee in order to assure themselves a spot on the boat by making extra reservations. It might be worth paying \$10 to someone to get that certainty, so it should be set high enough to deter abuse. We can look at the impact of the no-show fee and see how it works for a while and then increase or decrease it accordingly.
10. (Bill Pike) The multiride card allows us to maintain the same fare all year round; is there any possibility of the no-show fee being the same all year round rather than changing seasonally? To keep things simple.
We can look at that, it would be slightly higher but that is an option. We will discuss actual amounts at a later time.
11. (Clark Johnson) When you're designing your software please include the ability to inform the customer their card is about to expire.
We will notify you three times; you will receive emails and text messages.

Anacortes Terminal Operations

Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations

Brian discussed plans for operations at the Anacortes terminal, including queuing, holding area layout and tollbooth processing (see Anacortes Terminal Operating Plan handout).

Questions & Comments

1. (Pat McKay) The 70% at Port Townsend worked well, but how many people did you have that showed up and had to wait because they didn't know about reservations?
We don't have that information, but we can find out for you.
My concern in the islands is that a large group will not or cannot make reservations and they will cause overloads.
We will catch some people as they go through Anacortes; we can suggest that they reserve their return sailing.
You will have people like my mother who will absolutely refuse to make a reservation; you won't catch them all.
2. (David Dubbell) My concern is about the rollout for tourists; communicating to them. That's our lifeblood up here and this is not a simple system. We rely on happy groups of tourists coming here every day. Reserving 80% of the boat needs to be talked about. We need to see what the impact is to the tourists who come here, how will they know about this and plan for it.
Yes, we agree.
3. (John MacLeod) I think this is a positive thing for tourists; they will like it.
4. (David Dubbell) The first time I rode a ferry I had no idea what was going on. We don't want to piss off the tourists.
5. (Deborah Hopkins) I will be working with the Visitors Bureaus and Chambers of Commerce; we are working hard on that.
We know that communicating to tourists is a challenge and it is very important to get the word out. We will be bringing our communications plan to this group at a later date.
6. (Jim Corenman) I'm not concerned about getting the word out; anyone who comes and rides a ferry looks at the schedule. If the schedule states that a reservation is required then that should make it clear enough.
7. (David Dubbell) At least one person who's ever ridden hasn't; I never looked at a schedule.
8. (Bill Pike) This may sound callous, but we are not doing this in anticipation of an increase in demand; we are trying to spread the existing demand. If we have 65% of the deck space available for reservations, we are not using less space for more people. People can choose to wait in line for hours, or they can wait for 45 minutes.
9. (Clark Johnson) I am concerned about getting the word out, and the failure of your system to assess and provide information on how your system works. Send teams out to talk to people and ask them how they heard about needing a reservation, and how they made their reservation.
As we develop our communications plan we will look at that.
This needs to be tantamount. I've read through these documents and your work is impressive, but if you fail to get people to know about it, it fails. You need a system to assess your communications policy. If your techniques aren't getting information out

now, they won't help get reservations information out either. It's not acceptable to say you don't have the money to evaluate how you're doing; you're spending State resources on a plan that has consequences and you're not assessing your efforts.

We're not sure exactly what you mean.

Marta said you don't have any money to conduct surveys.

We have told you about the FROG surveys that we have conducted.

Those are volunteers; you need to talk to the people sitting in your ferry line.

We have surveyed Port Townsend twice.

Your report does not mention a survey of people in line, only those who had made a reservation.

We handed out cards to standby customers and asked them to go online, we got about 30 responses, and Dwight spent several days talking to people in line in Port Townsend. We have changed our policies based upon what we heard from our customers, we want you to know that.

This is a critical period coming up; you have done lots of great stuff with the Best Times to Travel, you've changed the schedule, but if no one knows about it there is no impact. You need to proactively get to those lines and talk to people.

10. (John Whetten) We have had eastbound allocations for years to make sure all the islands get service; with reservations will there be westbound allocations?

That is on our minds and we will discuss that at a later meeting.

11. (Beverly Zapalac) If you do turn people away where do they go?

They would go back into town and come back within their arrival window. We don't have the space during peak times to stage them.

12. (Bill Pike) If I show up 2 ½ hours early and there is no space to stage me, and the next ferry going out isn't full, can I change my reservation and become a drive-up for the earlier boat?

Yes, if we have room to accommodate you we will redeem your reservation, and you would give up your assured spot to go standby on the earlier sailing.

13. (Susan Young) I'm trying to wrap my head around this idea of: welcome to the islands, now go drive around the block for an hour. Shouldn't we be looking at what should be done to the facilities to be able to handle these peak times? I'm having trouble understanding how it's ok to send people away; do you do that in Port Townsend?

Yes, if they show up too early and we don't have the space for them we ask them to go into town.

In Port Townsend the downtown is right there; in Anacortes it's a four mile drive. I think it will upset people and clog the neighborhoods which will cause more issues for you.

This policy is dependent on our communications; we will communicate to people that we are not able to process them too early.

We should be making facilities that can handle the peak traffic.

14. (Pat McKay) My problem with the idea of turning people away is that they may not come back. It may defeat your purpose; you're trying to utilize your infrastructure to its fullest. If you start making people angry you will lose ridership; it will give WSF and the San Juan Islands a black eye.

15. (Ken Burtness) I see turning people away as a big issue. If people are early for their reserved sailing sending them away is one thing. But telling drive-ups to go away and come back later is a problem. It would be better to send them away with some certainty that they will get on a later sailing.

16. (John MacLeod) The question is, will it be worse or will it be better. I've been in Anacortes on a sunny summer afternoon where it's so backed up you can't get near the tollbooth. It seems like with reservations it will be better for us all because the line will be shorter; it will be an improvement over what we have now.
17. (Bill Pike) So 2 hours before a sailing, reservations are closed?
Yes.
At that point you should know how many spaces are available, and you can fill them in with standby people.
Yes, that is the purpose of the lockdown.
The staff at Anacortes will learn how to manage it. In Friday Harbor they have enough room to stage 2 boats and when they have people showing up for the 3rd boat they give them numbered tags that tell them when to come back. That way they can come back and not be at the end of the line.
Correct. Friday Harbor is our only terminal that does that right now.
It's been really helpful for me, it gives me certainty. That's what we're talking about for Anacortes; can you give people a voucher or something that tells them they have a spot in the drive-up line?
That "virtual queue" idea is something we can look at for certain times of the year at Anacortes. A lot of the queuing issues will get cleaned up as people adjust their habits. This is worst case scenario planning.
18. (Carol Anderson) I suggest a sign at the light in Anacortes where people turn to go to the terminal that tells people if the staging area is full.
That's a great suggestion; we are looking at that.
Or even have it say which sailing you are staging for; communicate to the people who are driving up with no reservation or idea of how things work. To sit in that line only to find out they are turning people around is awful.
BC Ferries has signs just for that purpose. That turn in Anacortes would be a good place. We will also communicate through the Highway Advisory Radio. Our IT team is also looking at ways to show overloads on our website, and we are looking at changing the width of the holding lanes to allow more staging capacity.
19. (John MacLeod) Are you looking at smartphone apps as well?
Yes.
20. (Jim Corenman) You will need to separate the two classes of folks showing up in Anacortes: drive-ups vs. reservations. People with reservations have no motivation to show up 2 ½ hours early; it will be the drive-ups doing that.
21. (John MacLeod) I have been overloaded at Anacortes where I was the 3rd car that didn't make it on the boat. There was a whole lane behind me filled with those who didn't make it. When the next boat came the terminal staff didn't realize we should have been the next to get on for Orcas. After waiting 5 hours, only 4 of us got on after somebody alerted them that we should have been next. The other 30 cars didn't make it, and this is not unusual. I hope you can lay it out so that the terminal staff understand not to do that anymore.
We need a lane management person who will take care of that; we will make sure that issue is addressed.
22. (Susan Young) Everyone's talking about summer, which is only 10-12 weeks out of the year. If we banned summer here we wouldn't have a problem. How much year-round

- implementation is going to be involved so that 10-12 weeks out of the year work better?
With all that extra staffing, what is the return on investment for this?
We will only add staff when needed; when there is no risk of overloads there will be no extra staffing.
So there are no costs associated with the reservations system outside of those 10-12 weeks?
There is an upfront capital cost to implement the program.
I believe the scope of the project will cost us money all year round to only help for a short period.
23. (Sally Thomsen) There is a need for this outside of summertime; we want a travel certainty. This is bigger than just summer.
24. (Deborah Hopkins) I second that. On San Juan Island we get in line over an hour in advance all year round.
25. (Pat McKay) You still have not addressed the issue of getting through the tollbooths from a 4-mile one-lane road in Anacortes. Even with all the tollbooths open only one car at a time gets through the tag shack. How are you going to address that?
The terminal staff feel that even during busy times they will be able to process people in time. They feel that the dynamics will change with implementation; after looking at the holding lane patterns by hourly segment we see that because of the separation in departure and arrival windows, there is not the same amount of pressure.
On Sunday afternoons we still sit for 30 minutes trying to get through those booths.
We will definitely revisit this topic.
26. (John Whetten) For me this is the issue: if I show up on time, can I get processed. I'm skeptical. I'm reading that you want me to show up 30-90 minutes ahead of time; I may be able to show up during that window but in terms of getting through the tollbooths I would never know.
We expect certain times to be worse than others, and we know when those times are and will communicate that so you will know when to get in line.
You should say "be through the tollbooths" rather than "in line."
That's why we say 30-90 minutes; it's a large window.
27. (Sally Thomsen) Can you have a dedicated line for reservations only on the approach?
We only have one lane feeding the booths; to get that second lane we would have to build it and then separate traffic.
Can you do it?
Not with our current level of funding. We have modeled this out and believe that if people arrive during that 30-90 minute window we can process them. We will use additional staff at first and then modify the staffing as needed. We will open that 4th booth during peak times to help out. The next step is to look at the tag shack bottleneck.
28. (Clark Johnson) You have at your disposal the way to solve the problem: that initial sorting of the line. At the top of the hill turn them around if they can't be processed. That will keep the line moving indefinitely. I congratulate you on the summer schedule; it's a spectacular response to what we asked. Also, the Best Times to Travel information is amazing, you just need to make it easier to find. I asked on the Google Group about issuing information cards at the tag shack; you dropped the issue. I'm ready to help you with planning but you don't tell us anything as you go. Talk to us a little and let us know rather than only giving us these concentrated sessions. Also, I would like to see the info cards happen to educate those who don't know the system. If you don't make it

extremely clear that the rules have changed for at least the first couple of years there will be problems.

Thank you for the feedback. We notice the Google Group is only being used by about 5 people, is it effective?

(Pat McKay) I can't get on it, I've tried several times.

If you could get on it, would you use it, show of hands? (10 participants raised their hands)

(Howie Rosenfeld) If we continue the Google Group can you include the terminal staff?
We can look at that.

29. (Gordon Jonasson) This new issue of checking ID needs to be talked about.

We will have to reassess the estimated transaction time once we are required to ask for ID; that may change our operating plan.

Updates on Improved Customer Information

Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations

Brian discussed the changes coming to improve customer access to information about WSF.

Conclusion

The next suggested meeting date is September 11, 2013. David thanked the group for their ongoing participation. 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
	Kathy Booth	Lopez Island
	John Brantigan	Shaw Island
X	Ken Burtness	Lopez Island
	Cass Clark	Lopez Island
X	Jim Corenman	San Juan Island
X	David Dubbell	San Juan Island
	Lance Evans	Orcas Island
	Tony Ghazel	Orcas Island
	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
X	John MacLeod	Orcas Island

X	Pat McKay	San Juan Island
X	Bill Pike	Mount Vernon
X	John Poletti	Orcas Island
X	Howie Rosenfeld	San Juan Island
	Margot Shaw	Orcas Island
X	Bob Jarman (for Jamie Stephens)	Lopez Island
	Mike Stolmeier	Orcas Island
	Terresa Sundstrom	San Juan Island
X	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

- David Moseley, WSDOT Assistant Secretary
- George Capacci, WSF Deputy Chief of Operations
- Marta Coursey, WSF Director of Communications
- Brian Churchwell, WSF Deputy Program Manager for Vehicle Reservations
- Dwight Hutchinson, WSF VRS Manager
- Michael Hodgins, BERK & Associates
- Leonard Smith, WSF Operations Manager
- Rachel Waitt, WSF Communications Staff