



PIERCE COUNTY WATERBORNE TRANSPORTATION STUDY

ADVISORY GROUP MEETING: APRIL 23, 2015

MEETING SUMMARY

ATTENDANCE:

Mark Burlingame, Town of Steilacoom

Paul Loveless, Town of Steilacoom

Steve Caputo, HMS

Rich Sullivan, Anderson Island Citizens' Advisory Board

Dave Jacobsen, Anderson Island Citizens' Advisory Board Ferry Liaison

Kendel Lyman, Anderson Island Volunteer Patrol

Krista Ullis, Riviera Club Media, Anderson Island

Marion Chenaur, Ketron Island Resident

Ann Dasch, Anderson Island Citizens' Advisory Board Ferry Member

Chris Frye, Anderson Island Resident

Vivien Savath, BERK

Michael Hodgins, BERK

Melanie Mayock, BERK

Deb Wallace, Pierce County Public Works and Utilities

Valerie Thorsen, Public County Public Works and Utilities

Welcome and Introduction

Michael gave an introduction to the meeting and where we are in the study process.

Review Analytic Approach

Michael gave a recap of the framework for analyzing alternatives (page 4 of the packet).

Review of Fare Policy Options

Vivien walked through the fare policy options.

Page 7 has a summary of current fares; Page 8 has a comparison to other ferry systems. Page 9 has an introduction to the discussion. Page 10 lists possible policy objectives.

AG Member: For the runs with lower ridership, we should look at marketing to companies with big trailers - if you come on this run, it will cost you less. Don't come during a busy time with a huge vehicle.

AG Member: Tides affect when those vehicles can travel.

Deb: In some cases, we're going to have them lease the whole ferry at a higher cost.

AG Member: Would you reduce the price at low time or increase it at peak time?

Michael: Either way works.

Michael: There's always an operational issue for implementing something new: vehicle processing, communication issues, etc.

Vivien: Page 11 lists a summary of fare policy issues. These are mix and match. For example, could combine sizing by price with congestion pricing. The ultimate package would be a mix of options.

Vehicle to passenger fare ratio

Vivien walked through the presentation, which starts on page 12.

Michael: The system is designed to move cars – they are a key driver of cost. They are also the key constraint on the system. Passengers are relatively cheap to add on and are unlikely to displace anyone.

AG Member: There's plenty of room for passengers.

AG Member: Washington State Ferries (WSF) is designed to carry more passengers. We aren't built that way. We're not near the limit on passengers, but we would approach it quicker if we drive people out of their cars. We would need to look at unintended consequences of adding more walk-on passengers.

Michael: Using the system as a walk-on has challenges. For example, parking and transit challenges are higher here than with many WSF routes. The number of trips you can move without supporting infrastructure may be limited. Getting more passengers in cars and increasing vehicle occupancy is good, but walk-ons present a challenge.

AG Member: Because we have such a high percentage of retired people, we won't get many people carpooling.

Deb: I was hoping to find opportunity for carpool/vanpool, but because of where people are going, their age, etc., there's not a lot of opportunity.

Vivien: The options are on page 14: It's up to the County whether to change the ratio.

AG Member: The problem with trying to increase passenger rates is that we don't have parking on the other side.

AG Member: There is some parking.

AG Member; It's limited and expensive. If we could get the buses coordinated to the ferries, you'd have a lot more people.

Deb: How many more people? When it was coordinated, it was primarily prison staff and families who used it. Now that it isn't coordinated, there hasn't been big demand. People think other people will use it, but historically that hasn't been the case.

AG Member: I would only use it to go to the airport.

AG Member: The earlier run proposal was to get the earlier bus, then meet the 512 bus according to data I looked at months ago.

Deb: There's historical data about the alignment of the transit with the ferry runs. The data showed that when service did match better, not many people used it except for those working at the prison or visiting family.

Michael: Please forward the data. We can look at that. Deb is commenting on Census journey to work and survey data. To make transit or carpools work, we need enough people heading to a similar place. I was surprised at how dispersed the trip ends were for people coming off the island. That doesn't mean we can't sync up some trips, but the data didn't suggest concentrations of destinations.

AG Member: In 2004, as a result of the last study, vehicles got a smaller fare increase than passengers. The commuter passenger had the highest increase. Since then we've seen declines. We had 50% more commuter passenger trips in 2002 than 2014. My household doesn't take as many passenger trips because the price is high.

AG Member: People budget \$3-4k/year for ferry fares for a working adult. But they forget to budget other types of trips – outings, etc. They travel off the island less frequently.

Vivien: Continue page 14. One option is to stop charging for passengers.

Michael: The vehicle deck is the main event; there aren't a lot of walk-ons. [Not charging for passengers] could have a benefit to simplify fare collection – don't have to figure out how many passengers in a vehicle. The revenue still has to be the revenue, but this would put more burden on the vehicle. Any walk-ons or bicycles get a free trip.

AG Member: Is there any data showing whether people working off island are increasing or decreasing?

Michael: Decreasing. Among those who are working, there's a hefty percentage who are planning to retire in the next 5 years. Emerging retiree population showed up in both surveys.

Vivien: Among those working full-time, a lot are working from home or have flexible schedules.

Michael: An overarching theme is that people have built their lives around what it means to live on an island. You have flexibility or you accept it until you retire. Some are paying a high price for that, such as lengthy commutes.

AG Member: My concern about free passenger fares is that they would be used as a fun, sunny boat trip and we'd have overloads on the passenger deck.

Michael: Yes, not charging for passengers has its own set of challenges.

AG Member: What if higher fees targeted commercial vehicles?

AG Member: Logistics would be a challenge; we would have to add personnel and would have to engage every person.

Deb: There may be a unique combination here.

Michael: You can mix and match, find something that achieves a goal, etc.

Vivien: Ratios for oversize vehicles are lumpy – not everyone pays the same price per foot.

AG Member: A vehicle gets more disruptive the longer it is.

Michael: Yes, and the bigger it is, the less it pays per foot.

Vehicle Type and Size

Vivien: Page 18 shows options for changing pricing for vehicle sizes.

Michael: The current discount of the price per foot may be steeper than intended. It's not discouraging anyone from traveling in a bigger vehicle. From a revenue perspective, I get less revenue from one longer vehicle than 2 standard cars. If you could incent people to bring smaller cars, you could carry more cars.

AG Member: A 40-foot vehicle pays three times as much as one standard vehicle. So, two cars pay less than one 40 foot vehicle. Also, we are the ones who pay for commercial vehicle trips. If you double ferry fare for truck deliveries, your deliveries will cost more.

Michael: It's only critical when the boats are likely to be full. If we can get those trucks traveling on non-busy times, it will help with capacity.

AG Member: We also talked about using reservation for large vehicles.

AG Member: For example, don't take campers on the first ferry run on Monday morning in the summer.

AG Member: One consideration – if you restrict access to some people, especially in the summer, the tides don't fall at the same time every day. There's a lot of moving pieces when you try to do that. It's beyond loading the boat.

Vivien: Another possibility is instituting a small vehicle fare. WSF has implemented this. There are operational considerations, such as how you identify it, the measurement capability, fare collection, vehicle processing, etc. WSF limit is 14 feet.

Michael: There are challenges with doing this on busy runs. It may be hard to recognize car models to see if they qualify for lower fare.

Kendel: When you have a commuter ticket and a utility trailer, you can't use the commuter ticket size with that trailer, which increases the cost more than what's shown. In the summer, that's a killer. You have to buy a whole new ticket if you attach a trailer. We have some people not taking their trailer off the island anymore, because it's expensive. For a utility trailer 32 feet, that's a lot of money. The cut-off on vehicles with a trailer – could you look at a car & trailer that are under 35 feet? That will take care of your utility trailers.

Michael: You can always redefine your categories. We can make more breaks in cost categories. Please make suggestions for what you'd like to see. But we also want a fare structure that's reasonably easy to implement and is addressing the customer base.

Deb: The ticket system will provide more flexibility to support it. What if we had a small vehicle fare that wasn't half, but a little more than half? Then we recruit advertising for small vehicles on the ferry. It may incent more people to buy a smaller car, then we get more capacity on the ferry. It makes a lot of sense to value the limited deck space.

Michael: It's the principle of paying for what you use.

Michael: The average vehicle size is probably 16-17 feet long.

AG Member: If you lower someone's vehicle fare, you need to lower passenger fares too.

Deb: There could be an option with the ticketing system to have a value pass for passenger fares that would provide some incentive for walking on to the ferry.

Passenger fare types

Vivien: Page 17 shows options for changing the relationship between passenger fare types, such as youth, senior, or disabled discounts.

AG Member: On the youth fare, do you know how many are used for school and how many aren't? I think most are going to school.

AG Member: A lot of them are not going in district. In July we have highest use, and no school tickets then.

AG Member: What about changing the youth fare to a student fare? In summertime, youth would pay more.

AG Member: My son will sometimes use a school pass on a Saturday, when he has to stay overnight on a weeknight and then needs to travel on Saturday. They get five passes for the week.

AG Member: I don't see a reason to give a teenager a discount unless they are going to school.

Michael: The senior/disabled fare is a federal requirement. We can't do anything less generous with the senior/disabled fare. There's some wiggle room with peak fares.

AG Member: What's the motivation for increasing the senior discount?

Michael: There isn't any reason; we're just showing it as an option.

AG Member: The youth category used to be 12 and younger.

Michael: That's what WSF did as part of the ORCA program. WSF is a signatory to ORCA— all the parties had to agree on a definition of youth. The new category is age 5-18. Many more kids got the break. The discount was decreased on the theory you got to have it for more years, so families come out in a similar place. As opposed to getting a big fare increase when they turn 13. Since then, WSF gone back to 50%. Everyone has landed on 18 years old.

AG Member: Whatcom eliminated fares for youth; they pay zero.

Frequent rider discount

Michael: This is the equivalent of a resident discount program. Depending on how you set your discount and frequencies, it can fit commuters, all regular residents, or almost everyone. If it fits everyone, then the full fare becomes less effective.

Michael: Page 24 lists several ideas for changes. Frequency could be changed. The time period could be shortened or lengthened. There could be two products. This would recognize that regular riders come in different flavors. (Keep in mind that changing frequent rider products can be difficult because people are attached to them.)

AG Member: You mentioned that use of the senior discount declined and everyone uses the frequent rider pass. I've never used the senior discount, even though I am a senior, because the commuter product is cheaper. People who can't afford to go off island much very much can't afford to use the commuter pass.

AG Member: Even in July/August, more than half of vehicle trips are using the frequent rider pass. They come every weekend.

AG Member: What's the reason to have two frequent rider pass products?

Michael: Having two products would allow you to be more refined on how you reward frequent use. They are buying the products up front and agree to use by a certain date. You reward the most frequent travelers the most.

AG Member: If you're having a commuter fare, I don't think it will work because you don't have the extra run in the morning for commuters. Most people go to work at 7 or 8:00. You can't get very far off the island by 7:00. You would have to have an earlier ferry to go along with a cheaper commuter fare.

Michael: Full time residents make 15 trips per month on average. So the best product could be 15 trips in 30 days. Another could be 5 trips in 30 days.

Deb: Why would we offer more discount? We would have to make up the funds somehow.

Michael: If you tweak the fares, some people will get more of a break than others. In the San Juans, frequent riders got 35% discount for that route, paid for with peak season surcharge for that run which was collected more from the summer folks, and a better deal to frequent riders.

Deb: We could go to a 15 trip with 20% discount, and a 5 trip with a 15% discount, still lower than the full fare to create separation between the levels of frequency.

AG Member: It'll be harder to lower the discount for the 5 trip, but there would be big support for the 15 trip.

Deb: Then how do you make up the fare?

Michael: Increase the base fare.

AG Member: When you create a 15 pass product, people stop looking at it as a Monday through Friday pass, because they have more flexibility. It provides freedom.

AG Member: The person driving Friday afternoons in summer should pay more than the person driving Monday through Friday in January.

AG Member: People who work and live on the island all year round have to pay more in the summer.

AG Member: The passes expire in 40 days but they aren't always caught.

AG Member: It's the system.

Deb: We need a certain base of fares; the question is what combination do we use? Ask AICAB to get together and provide feedback on these options soon. It is easier to get and incorporate their feedback now.

Congestion/peak pricing

Vivien reviewed congestion peak pricing (p.25). There are operational considerations and ticketing system constraints.

AG Member: These options seem to be benefiting the commuter. If they were all put in place, it would be confusing and would hurt tourism. It's hard enough to read the schedule already. A person who wants to come out for a day trip might not because they don't understand how it works.

Michael: When fares are more complex, it's harder to find yourself on the fare list. Fares need to be logical and intuitive. As to the balance between frequent rider and resident and others, there's always that tension. It's not in anyone's interest to chase people away from the system – the system needs more riders. The fare revenue target will be what it will be. If we increase ridership, that can lower everyone's fares. Different people have different levels of skin in the game. Any discount other than seasonal is challenging because you're only collecting fares in one direction. To make it work, you almost have to collect in both directions. That's a big hurdle to get over and tough to do operationally.

AG Member: That would make a big difference in summer. They all try to get off the island on the same day.

Michael: A reservation system accomplishes some of these goals too. But reservation systems have their own challenges.

AG Member: Are there any systems that charge both ways?

Michael: Most islands do one-way. WSF collects both ways for cars on Bremerton/Bainbridge.

AG Member: If the vehicle deck is more valuable in the summertime, why aren't we having the frequent fare adjust seasonally?

Michael: That is another option. The shorter pass window makes it more feasible. A 90-day window you can buy the whole summer. On a 30 or 45 day, you could include a summer surcharge. Frequent riders get a break off the higher summer price.

AG member: The regular year-round commuters who use a frequent pass would be very unhappy to get a surcharge in the summer.

Michael: We need to be careful about changing the structure. If you make frequent riders pay more and if they stop riding (move away), that harms ridership and harms the system. As a business, you have to take care of the frequent riders and explain to them that they are being treated fairly.

AG Member: How do you give a discount for frequency and charge more during peak times? The fare structure won't affect me; I will go on the least used runs.

Deb: A lot of people want the convenience of the pass. Then boost the overall vehicle charge for standard 21-foot vehicles in summer. Offer a small vehicle discount. Just curious what you think – should we be charging by time of day?

Michael: Hard to implement congestion pricing by time of day.

AG Member: I'd like to see HMS's response if you want to charge for time of day.

Deb: The County is not necessarily advocating for any changes. We want to hear what the public wants. I want to get to the budget period and have something we can implement, that reflects what the public wants.

AG Member: Will the new ticketing system let us do that?

Deb: Yes. There are other issues relating to ORCA.

Michael: ORCA and Good to Go are methods of payment.

Deb: We are pursuing both of those. The limitation will not be the new ticket system.

New Product: Monthly pass

(Page 31)

Michael: There can be value in a monthly pass. How you price it is an important decision. At what point the free trips kick in is what determines how many people shift to this product. A long time ago WSF was priced at 21 trips per month and had a 5% usage rate. They wanted more usage and changed to 16 trips/month. A lot of people then shifted from frequent rider passes to the monthly pass. People figure out when they get the free trips. The challenge can be that people can share it, which reduces revenue. (Different than the multi-ride, when the rides are gone they're gone.) For vehicles we wouldn't do this; the value and the risk for abuse are too high.

AG Member: If I had a vehicle pass, I would buy a month's worth on that pass. It's about the inconvenience. I hate nothing more than having to jump out and send a kid down because they don't have a ticket. We don't come off the island if it costs \$34. We're more inclined to come off the island if we had the flexibility of a pass. This also allows people to spread out their trips. You don't have to get everything done in one day. There's more flexibility with a pass.

Deb: Would this be for vehicles or passengers?

AG Member: One for each.

Deb: How do you give unlimited vehicle passes?

AG Member: In New York, it's assigned to the vehicle.

Michael: You would have to do a windshield sticker.

Deb: If I have unlimited rides, it creates potential for more overloads, and doesn't provide more revenue.

AG Member: In New York, there's a limit of two trips per day.

Deb: How would we do this and not create overloads every day because we've given unlimited passes?

AG Member: If we had a free ride every day, we'd go every day.

Michael: That's right and another reason why the vehicle deck space is most constrained – you want to be careful how you incent trip making.

Deb: We're running out of time. I'm interested in everyone's opinion on the key fare options discussed today.

Roundtable of opinions on fare options (page 11):

AG Member: Would like to see a passenger pass, just like the frequent rider one. Otherwise I like things the way they are now. Frequent rider pass is great the way it is. Congestion/peak pricing is a great idea – charge more for most used runs.

AG Member: The vehicle type issue is important. We should have pricing that's fair and consistent. Large vehicles are a concern for manageability. I think the current pricing schedule over-recognizes that – tried to load the cost on large vehicles – that's my largest concern. I support looking at pricing for passengers versus vehicles. Passengers are charged too much.

AG Member: Those large vehicles I've wondered about for a while. Not sure I would like congestion/peak pricing; when you have appointments in town, you're tied to those. It would penalize people who had to wait 3 months to get a doctor's appointment. That's a lot of people.

AG Member: I like the idea of small vehicle fare – encourage small, environmentally friendly vehicles. The congestion/peak becomes complicated. If you're that guy expecting to pay this amount and suddenly you can't get home and have to wait because it's more expensive.

AG Member: If peak pricing was on the run Ketron was given, would Ketron residents pay more? I have used a commuter ticket, using it 4-5 times a month. Not comparable to the people going 20 days, but I get to pay the same per ride that they do. I should probably pay more.

AG Member: We need to spread the gap between passengers and vehicles. Youth fare is too high. Charging a kid the same as seniors makes sense. For the frequent rider discount, it makes sense to distinguish between 5 times/month and 20 times/month people. The monthly pass – we had a petition for a monthly pass – we talked about 26 rides for the price of 13, 30-day expiration, rather than tied to calendar, because most buy at the terminal and beginning of the month holidays.

AG Member: In regards to the passenger ratios, kids and youth are considered just baggage in the vehicle. If you have five kids, it doesn't matter whether they are in a vehicle or deck. The frequent rider discount is the bread and butter of the island. It means people ride the ferry more frequently. If you affect them, they will move, affecting the ferry. Cater the pricing structure to the frequent commuter. How do I get

commuters to take 2 extra trips per week (more than Mon-Fri)? Do you give them a 20-day pass, etc.? Incent them to take more trips.

AG Member: No comments.

Funding Strategies

Michael walked the group through the presentation on funding strategies. (Slides starting on page 34.)

Public Comments

No members of the public attended to provide public comment.

Recap and Next Steps

There are two public meetings scheduled: Thursday May 14 and Thursday June 11; both are 7:00-8:30pm at Anderson Island Elementary. The final Advisory Group meeting will be Wednesday, May 27th.