

# **Stranded at the Dock?**

**Integrating Passenger-Only Ferry Service  
Into the Regional Transportation Network**

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# **Stranded at the Dock?**

## **Integrating Passenger-Only Ferry Service Into the Regional Transportation Network**

### **Executive Summary**

Washington's ferry system is in crisis. After a major loss of funding due to Initiative 695, Washington State Ferries (WSF) has been forced to make difficult financial decisions. Between 2000 and 2004, for the first time since its formation, WSF simultaneously cut service while raising fares. In addition, WSF ended Bremerton's popular passenger-only ferry routes.

In spite of this tough financial climate, ferry service continues to be a vital part our regional transportation system. As the Puget Sound region struggles to come to consensus on transportation issues, we should not forget that ferries are an integral, iconic part of our regional transportation network, and an under-utilized way to move people between population centers without cars. This report concludes that transit connections and pedestrian infrastructure around ferry terminals needs to be improved so that ferry foot passengers can quickly and safely access regional transportation.

Two new private passenger-only ferry runs begin service in 2004, expanding commute options into Seattle. Unfortunately, transit connections and pedestrian infrastructure fail to adequately serve these passengers, especially on the Seattle side. On the Seattle waterfront, for example, adequate transit is not readily available to bring riders to the major regional transportation hubs like the Jackson Street Station. At present, Alaskan Way is served by only two bus lines and the Waterfront Streetcar. In addition, the topography in downtown Seattle is quite challenging, with a steep hill between the ferry terminal and downtown transit connections. Yet, there is great potential to improve waterfront pedestrian access with the redevelopment of Colman Dock and the Alaskan Way Viaduct replacement. As these projects move forward, WashPIRG recommends that specific steps be taken to encourage ferry travel without cars:

- In the final design for the Alaskan Way Viaduct, ferry queuing should be located so as to minimally impact the character of Pioneer Square, and future waterfront access.

- In addition, pedestrian traffic should be separated from car traffic and routed so that pedestrians can easily and safely access downtown amenities and traffic connections.
- In Seattle, ferry terminal siting for both public and private ferry operators should be coordinated with waterfront transit stops so that ferry passengers can easily access transit.
- King County Metro should extend bus routes #3 and #4 down to the Colman Dock so that foot ferry passengers have easy connections to downtown transit hubs. These buses should be coordinated with ferry landings.
- To finance improved transit connections in both Seattle and on the Kitsap Peninsula, the state and Puget Sound region must support new multimodal funding for transit and ferry operations and capital investments.
- Bremerton and Kingston have made great strides in coordinating transit service, ferry service, and land use planning. To fully integrate ferry foot passengers, each city should continue to encourage transit-oriented development in high-density zones near ferry terminals and park & ride lots. In particular, Kingston should encourage transit-oriented development near the George's Corner, Kountry Korner, and Squamish park & ride lots.
- To facilitate seamless ferry-to-transit connections with Kitsap Transit and King County Metro, the two private passenger-only ferry operators, Kitsap Ferry and Aqua Express, should participate in the Smart Card program.

## **I. Introduction: A Ferry System In Crisis**

Ferry service in the Puget Sound region began in the early 1900s, when several companies operated fleets of small steamers. By 1929 their number had shrunk to two, and a 1935 strike forced one out of business. From 1935 until 1951, the sole operator of cross-sound ferries was Puget Sound Navigation Company, also known as the Black Ball Line, owned by Captain Alexander Peabody. In February 1948, after a 10-day shutdown, Peabody forced agreements between Puget Sound county governments and Black Ball, whereby the counties largely paid for the service. Local officials pressed the governor to create a state ferry system, and eventually the newly created Washington Toll Bridge Authority bought all of Peabody's terminal facilities and ferries. On June 1, 1951, the state ferries began service.<sup>1</sup>

Since beginning operations, Washington's state ferries have remained a reliable service for cross-sound commuters, but between 1993 and 2000 three voter-approved tax measures had wildly divergent effects on Washington State Ferries' finances. State spending levels, including ferry system spending, were greatly curtailed by Initiative 601<sup>3</sup> in 1993. But in 1998, voters approved Referendum 49,<sup>4</sup> transferring revenue out of the general fund to benefit transportation projects, like the ferry system. As a result of Referendum 49, the ferry system was flush with new money. Plans were made to improve terminals, replace aging vessels, increase frequency of service on existing runs, and add new passenger-only boats. Passenger ferries began serving Bremerton and Vashon Island from downtown Seattle, and runs to Kingston and Southworth were also envisioned. All this came to a halt when voters passed Initiative 695 in 1999,<sup>5</sup> which virtually destroyed the funding source of the state ferry service.

Initiative 695 was a tax-cut measure intended to lower the state MVET to \$30 for every passenger vehicle in Washington, while subjecting legislative tax increases to a 2/3 majority requirement. After passing by a wide margin, the initiative was ruled unconstitutional; however, state legislators enacted the \$30 MVET provision into law in March of 2000.<sup>13</sup> The loss of MVET funds left a \$750 million annual gap in state funding.<sup>14</sup> The ferry system was hit especially hard. As a result of the loss of MVET revenue, state ferry funding was slashed by \$93 million between Fiscal Year 1999 and Fiscal Year 2001.<sup>15</sup> Washington State Ferries began the 1999-2001 biennium with cash reserves of \$114 million; by the end of the two-year period that amount had dwindled to \$18 million.<sup>16</sup> Overall, I-695 cut the ferry operations budget by 20% and the capital budget by 80%.

## **II. Fares Increased and Service Cut Back**

For nearly 50 years, WSF gradually increased service and improved facilities while fare increases did not keep pace with inflation. The low fares affected not only ferry commuters, but also the cost of goods transported via the ferry system, enabling a lower cost of living for island residents on Vashon and in the San Juans. That policy came to an end after the passage of I-695.

In response to the new funding crisis, WSF made administrative cuts and reduced service on most ferry routes.<sup>18</sup> The Legislature also created the Joint Task Force on Ferries (Task Force) to study the ferry system and make recommendations. The Task Force studied the possibility of privatizing the ferry system or its maintenance facilities, as well as other cost-cutting measures. It concluded that private ferry operators would not be able to provide as cost-effective a service as the state, but that private-public partnerships might be an option if expansion of the passenger-only service was considered.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the task force noted that Washington law recognizes the ferry system as an extension of the state highway system, and recommended that the state should continue to provide both auto and passenger-only ferry service.<sup>20</sup>

The Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation (Blue Ribbon Commission) released its policy recommendations in December, 2000, advising that WSF adopt a six-year goal of recovering 80% of its operational funding from fares and a 20-year goal of 90-100% fare recovery, an extraordinarily ambitious farebox recovery goal.<sup>21</sup> This suggestion was consistent with the findings of the JTFF, which were released in January, 2001 and echoed the goal of 80% fare recovery within six years.<sup>22</sup> Both these reports influenced the direction of the Washington State Ferries Tariff Policy Committee (Tariff Policy Committee),<sup>23</sup> a standing advisory body to the Washington State Transportation Commission composed of representatives from the Legislature; WSF; and transit, industry, and labor organizations.<sup>24</sup>

To achieve the goal of 80% recovery of operational costs from fares, the Tariff Policy Committee ultimately recommended to the Transportation Commission an across-the-board 20% fare increase, premium pricing on passenger-only ferry service, and the additional cost-cutting measure of halting the policy of refunding for unused portions of ferry coupon books.<sup>25</sup>

Fig. 2<sup>28</sup>

Fare increases between June, 2001 and May, 2004

% change in fare	June 3, 2001	May 12, 2002	May 4, 2003	May 2, 2004
Passenger-only to Bremerton & Vashon	75.5% 75.5%	9.8% 8.5%	4.9% 4.2%	(no service) 4%
Auto ferry passengers to Bremerton, Bainbridge, Vashon, & Kingston	21.6%	11.8%	5.9%	5.6%

Fig. 3<sup>29</sup>

Lowering levels of service while increasing fares is necessary in view of the Initiative 695 funding cut; however, it represents a drastic shift in policy for WSF. For nearly 50 years the agency gradually increased service and improved facilities while fare increases did not keep pace with inflation. The new policy of steady fare increases can be seen as a logical need to restore historic levels of funding from fares, but it has a disproportionate impact on current riders who must adjust to higher commute costs after relying on lower fares for many years. WSF is continuing to make cuts in order to reach a goal of 80% farebox recovery by 2006. Cuts are now made each year based on a “5+5+5” formula: a 5% fare increase, a 5% cut to administrative expenses, and 5% non-farebox funding sources.<sup>30</sup>

### III. Passenger-only Ferry Service Hit Especially Hard

Following the overall fare increase, ridership declined on most WSF ferries. The decline on passenger-only routes was the most drastic, probably due to the additional surcharge. Prior to the passage of Initiative 695, WSF had begun operating passenger-only service on two routes, serving downtown Seattle from Vashon Island and Bremerton. The two runs were extremely popular with commuters, so much so that peak-hour morning sailings were often overloaded.<sup>32</sup> With the extra capacity and high speed of the passenger-only boats, total WSF ridership to Bremerton doubled.<sup>33</sup>

After the loss of funding for operations, the state legislature stepped in with money to continue service through the 2001-2003 biennium. A “premium” charge of an additional \$1

each way was added on passenger-only routes, rather than the TPC's initial recommendation that fares be doubled.<sup>35</sup> The new surcharge went into effect on June 3, 2001,<sup>36</sup> and as a result, passenger-only cost recovery increased by 50%.<sup>37</sup> However, ridership declined on the Bremerton run by 21% and on the Vashon run by 18% during the fiscal year following the increase.<sup>38</sup> Despite the losses in ridership, peak-hour morning sailings were often still above 90% of capacity.<sup>39</sup> The surcharge was maintained in 2002<sup>40</sup> and 2003.<sup>41</sup> With the \$2 round-trip surcharge, the cost to ride the passenger-only ferry may have become prohibitive to some commuters. The smaller loss in ridership on the Vashon – downtown Seattle route may be explained by the fact that riders on the Vashon auto ferry must also take a bus from Fauntleroy to reach downtown Seattle at an additional cost and 30 minutes more travel time, while riders on the Bremerton auto ferry lose only 20 minutes of travel time by taking an auto ferry.

Passenger-only service to Bremerton was ended in October, 2003<sup>42</sup> but service between Vashon and downtown Seattle is funded by the Legislature through 2004.<sup>43</sup> In 2003, Kitsap Transit proposed a Kitsap County ballot measure which would have raised money from county residents through a county-wide .3% MVET to fund passenger-only ferry boats from Bremerton and Kingston to Seattle. In 2003 the Legislature lifted the 10-mile restriction for passenger-only ferries that operate in Washington.<sup>44</sup>

#### **IV. Private Operators Step in to Operate Passenger-Only Ferries**

Two private companies, Kitsap Ferry Company and Aqua Express, begin service to Bremerton and Kingston during 2004 (Bremerton service began this summer and Kingston service is scheduled to begin in December of 2004). Kitsap Ferry Company's Bremerton route travels the same route as the WSF Bremerton auto ferry. It costs \$14/round trip before discounts, and intends to attract riders with peak hour departures, coffee concessions, and reserved seating. Aqua Express's service will be a new route between Kingston and downtown Seattle, providing a direct ferry connection for Kitsap County passengers traveling to Seattle. Aqua Express fare will be \$10.50/round trip. Though the experience of WSF is that ridership is very sensitive to fare increases, both private operators hope to serve roughly 250,000 riders during their first years of operation.

##### **A. Bremerton's Kitsap Ferry Company**

Kitsap Ferry Company, LLC is a consortium of Pacific Navigation and Hornblower Marine Services.<sup>48</sup> Its boat, the Spirit of Adventure, can accommodate 250 passengers, and will

began service on August 1, 2004 between the Port of Bremerton and Argosy Cruises' Pier 55 on the Seattle waterfront

Fares are \$7 one-way, and unlike WSF service the fare will be charged sailings in both directions. Frequent user discounts can make the fare as cheap as \$5; a “business class” area of the boat will cater to frequent users who opt for a \$322.50 monthly pass, providing complimentary coffee service and newspapers.<sup>50</sup>

Fig. 4<sup>51</sup>

Bremerton to Seattle		Seattle to Bremerton	
Depart Bremerton	Arrive Seattle	Depart Seattle	Arrive Bremerton
5:20 a.m.	6:00 a.m.	6:10 a.m.	6:50 a.m.
7:00 a.m.	7:40 a.m.	7:50 a.m.	8:30 a.m.
2:50 p.m.	3:30 p.m.	3:40 p.m.	4:20 p.m.
4:30 p.m.	5:10 p.m.	5:20 p.m.	6:00 p.m.

The timing of Kitsap Ferry Company’s runs is gauged to “fill in” the gaps between WSF peak-hour sailings, thus enhancing the options available to riders. WSF operated passenger-only service on this route with no detrimental effect on its auto ferry operation,<sup>52</sup> and in 2002 carried 681,830 riders.<sup>53</sup> Kitsap Ferry Company projects its first-year ridership at 245,542.<sup>54</sup> The smaller number of riders is based on the higher price of the service and the gradual re-acquaintance of riders with the passenger-only option.<sup>55</sup> With a ridership of less than half the historical WSF level, it is doubtful that Kitsap Ferry Company’s operation will detract from WSF’s revenues significantly; even at full capacity Kitsap Ferry Company’s vessel can carry only 459,552 riders per year.<sup>56</sup>

The cost difference between the Kitsap Ferry service and the WSF ferry may be prohibitive for the average commuter. For a daily commuter, riding the auto ferry as a walk-on costs \$28.50/week (summer 2004 rates), while riding the Kitsap Ferry boat costs \$70/week. Even with a monthly pass, the weekly cost of the passenger-only ferry will be \$52.50. Kitsap Ferry’s service is targeted to those potential riders with higher incomes who will be able to afford nearly double the weekly cost to ride the faster ferry. This targeting is reflected in the offer of reserved seating in a “business class” section, where riders who purchase a \$322.50 monthly pass (\$74.23/week)<sup>57</sup> will have complimentary coffee service and newspapers. Residents in Bremerton’s new waterfront condominiums are potential customers of this enhanced service, as

are other Bremerton residents who take advantage of Kitsap County’s relatively low home prices.

**B. Kingston’s Aqua Express**

Aqua Express, LLC is a consortium of Argosy Cruises, Clipper Navigation, Nichols Brothers Boat Builders and Four Seasons Tours. The consortium purchased the former Washington State Ferry Tyee and renamed it the Aqua Express; the boat can carry 250 passengers. The company plans to begin operations in December of 2004, transporting passengers from the Port of Kingston to Argosy’s Pier 55 in Seattle. Aqua Express will temporarily use a public dock in Kingston, and must obtain the necessary permits and sign-offs from the Department of Fisheries and the Army Corps of Engineers for its planned new permanent dock facility. The fare for the 40-minute trip from Kingston to Seattle will be \$5.25 each way.<sup>58</sup> Aqua Express projects a first-year ridership of 248,000.<sup>61</sup>

Fig. 5<sup>59</sup>

Kingston to Seattle		Seattle to Kingston	
Depart Kingston	Arrive Seattle	Depart Seattle	Arrive Kingston
5:30 a.m.	6:10 a.m.	6:20 a.m.	7:00 a.m.
7:10 a.m.	7:50 a.m.	8:00 a.m.	8:40 a.m.
8:50 a.m.	9:30 a.m.	4:00 p.m.	4:40 p.m.
4:50 p.m.	5:30 p.m.	5:40 p.m.	6:20 p.m.
6:30 p.m.	7:20 p.m.		

In contrast to the Kitsap Ferry service, Aqua Express will be operating a completely new route directly to downtown Seattle from Kingston. Aqua Express riders will avoid a lengthy bus trip or car journey to reach Seattle. Also, while the round-trip fare for a regular commuter on Aqua Express is \$52.50/week, a commute to Seattle via the Kingston-Edmonds WSF ferry and Sounder Express bus costs \$58.50/week.<sup>62</sup>

Both Kitsap Ferry Company and Aqua Express plan to charge fares that are significantly higher than WSF’s passenger fares. This reflects both the need of private service providers to operate at a profit and their lack of ability to spread losses over many routes as WSF does. Kitsap Ferry projects a loss of \$111,014 in its first year,<sup>63</sup> Aqua Express projects a first-year loss of \$149,866 but hopes to turn a profit by its fourth year of operation.<sup>64</sup>

The effect of allowing private operators rather than WSF to provide passenger-only service is that riders of the private service pay a user fee equal to or greater than 100% of operating costs. By comparison, the WSF target farebox recovery is 80%, one chief difference being that WSF is expected to operate ferries all day long and that off-peak service does not generate as much revenue as peak service. However, the other side of this coin is that taxpayers who do not use the ferry system are not asked to subsidize the private operations. Initially public funding to support the ferries is limited to Kitsap Transit's new bus service to transport ferry passengers to and from park & ride lots and other destinations.<sup>65</sup> Kitsap Transit will also continue research into fast, low-wake passenger ferry design and development, and may provide new vessels to enhance service on the passenger-only routes. Those vessels would remain public property.<sup>66</sup>

## **V. Improving Commute Options?**

To effectively serve commuters, the new passenger-only service must be well-connected to transit systems in King and Kitsap Counties. So far, the Puget Sound region has not done enough to accommodate ferry travel without cars. While park & ride lots near Bremerton and Kingston provide adequate parking for ferry foot passengers and Kitsap Transit is working hard to provide transit connections to every ferry landing, in Seattle, the regional transit network is located up a steep hill from the waterfront ferry terminal and few direct connections serve foot passengers arriving on WSF or the new passenger-only ferries. In Seattle especially, with several major new mass transit projects in the works, including light rail and monorail, and major redevelopments along the waterfront, we have a unique opportunity to integrate ferries to the regional transit network and to improve pedestrian access to major new downtown transit hubs where buses, light rail, monorail, commuter rail and passenger rail will converge.

### **A. Bremerton**

Adding two passenger-only ferry routes serving downtown Seattle will result in improved travel options for riders in King, Kitsap, Mason, Jefferson, and Clallam Counties, but only if land-based transit connections are available to ferry riders. Kitsap Transit, which provides bus connections to the Kingston, Bainbridge, and Bremerton ferry terminals, scheduled new service for the Bremerton terminal beginning on August 1, 2004 to coincide with Kitsap Ferry Company's start-up.<sup>67</sup> Riders can call ahead to set up special bus service to the 5:20 sailing, and several regular bus routes serve the 7:00 a.m. sailing with 6:55 arrival times at the ferry

terminal. Buses also are timed to pick up passengers arriving in Bremerton on WSF afternoon ferries, and new bus departures will serve passengers arriving on Kitsap Ferry Company's 4:20 p.m. and 6 p.m. boats, providing transit connections to the East Bremerton and West Bremerton Transfer Centers.<sup>68</sup> There are four park & ride lots, with 424 total spaces available to ferry commuters, of which two have space available.<sup>69</sup> Kitsap Transit promises service for passenger-only ferries at the same level as service for WSF ferries.<sup>70</sup>

## **B. Kingston**

Existing bus service to the Kingston ferry terminal is not as comprehensive. One reason for this is the large difference in population; Kingston's population is 2,800<sup>71</sup> while Bremerton's was 37,165 in the 2000 census and is projected to increase by 13,000 by 2023.<sup>72</sup> Two Kitsap Transit buses, #91 and #92, serve the Kingston ferry terminal. Both buses do also serve park & ride lots including George's Corner, Kountry Korner, and Suquamish park & ride.<sup>73</sup> A total of 498 parking spaces are available for commuters, which is more than enough to serve Aqua Express commuters.<sup>74</sup> Arriving at the Kingston terminal in the morning, waits for the ferry range from just five minutes to 30 minutes; afternoon buses leaving the ferry terminal depart between 10 and 50 minutes after the ferry arrives.

Kitsap Transit is planning to add bus and park & ride capacity before Aqua Express begins to operate in December, 2004. An overall revision of bus service to the Kingston ferry terminal is in the works, with a goal of providing bus service to and from peak hour trips within 10-15 minutes of ferry landings. Kitsap Transit's plan in Kingston is to re-route two existing buses which go to Winslow now, and to add a local shuttle bus which is to operate all day long to the ferry terminal.

## **C. Seattle**

From the Bremerton and Kingston ferry terminals, commuters to downtown Seattle will likely save time by using the new passenger-only options. For example, commuters who opt to take the Kingston-Seattle passenger ferry instead of the Kingston-Edmonds auto ferry and a bus to downtown Seattle will save approximately 35 minutes, and commuters from Bremerton will save 20 minutes by using passenger ferry service. The following chart shows these differences in travel times, and includes the Vashon Island-downtown Seattle run, operated by WSF, for further comparison. Total ferry and bus travel time does not include bus waiting time; most rush-hour ferries at Kingston and Fauntleroy are met by express buses within five minutes of arrival.

Fig. 6

	Auto ferry + bus travel time	Passenger-only ferry travel time	Time saved per one-way trip
Kingston – Seattle	1 hour 15 minutes	40 minutes	35 minutes
Bremerton – Seattle	1 hour	40 minutes	20 minutes
Vashon – Seattle	50 minutes	30 minutes	20 minutes

In spite of these new commute options, coordinated transit connections with ferry landings are spotty at best on the Seattle waterfront. Both Kitsap Ferry Company and Aqua Express will use the Argosy Pier 55 dock, which is located near the WSF facility at Colman Dock. Unfortunately, King County Metro transit options serving the ferries are limited; the only direct service offered between Alaskan Way and the Metro bus tunnel is via the George Benson Waterfront Streetcar (Metro route #99). The streetcar has the potential to be a vital link connecting ferry foot passengers to the King Street Station, a regional transit hub with easy connections to buses, trains, and the future Link Light Rail and Monorail lines. However, streetcar service is not timed to meet all ferries, and the route does not begin operation until 6:30 a.m., well after the first Kitsap Ferry Company and Aqua Express passengers arrive at 6 a.m. and 6:10 a.m. respectively. Also, though the route is located within the Metro Ride Free Zone it is not free.

Two buses, #16 and #66, do stop on Alaskan Way near the ferry terminals and serve Third Avenue, providing service up the hill to Metro Bus Tunnel entrances and continuing to North Seattle neighborhoods and Northgate. The #16 provides service within 10 minutes for almost all WSF auto ferry arrivals from Bainbridge and Bremerton, but service for passenger-only ferries is far less well-coordinated. Indeed, wait times for some ferry arrivals range from 20 to 30 minutes (see table below).

Fig. 7<sup>5</sup>

Passenger ferry and WSF ferry arrivals, with minutes of wait time for scheduled Metro service					
	Kitsap Ferry	Aqua Express	Vashon	Bremerton	Bainbridge
Metro #16	6:00 – 25m	6:10 – 15m	5:50 – 8m	5:50 – 8m	5:20 – 5m
Serves:	7:40 – 5m	7:50 – 15m	7:30 – 15m	7:20 – 5m	5:55 – 3m
Downtown,		9:30 – 14m	8:45 – 21m	8:20 – 5m	6:55 – 6m

Wallingford, Green Lake, Northgate					7:40 – 5m 8:30 – 15m 9:20 – 4m
Metro #66 Serves: Downtown, Eastlake, U District, Northgate	6:00 – 10m 7:40 – 30m	6:10 – 30m 7:50 – 10m 9:30 – 10m	5:50 – 20m 7:30 – 10m 8:45 – 25m	5:50 – 20m 7:20 – 20m 8:20 – 20m	5:20 – 50m 5:55 – 15m 6:55 – 15m 7:40 – 30m 8:30 – 10m 9:20 – 20m
Streetcar (#99) Serves: Waterfront, Pioneer Sq., King Street Station	6:00 – 36m 7:40 – 18m	6:10 – 26m 7:50 – 10m 9:30 – 10m	5:50 – 46m 7:30 – 3m 8:45 – 25m	5:50 – 46m 7:20 – 13m 8:20 – 35m	5:20 – 66m 5:55 – 41m 7:40 – 18m 8:30 – 25m 9:20 – 2m

While connections to Seattle’s downtown core are present, current connections may not be enough to serve the new influx of ferry foot passengers and long wait times may ultimately discourage transit use. Even though many ferry foot passengers walk to downtown destinations, waterfront infrastructure should better accommodate those who are elderly or have disabilities that prevent them walking up the hill to access transit. To provide a seamless regional transit network, Metro should establish a waterfront transit station and extend east-west bus service so as to connect the ferry terminal with the bus tunnel and to major employment centers. Certainly lack of funding is a major obstacle in implementing these changes; nonetheless with the redevelopment of the waterfront presents the region with a unique opportunity to better integrate passenger-only ferries into the regional transportation network.

**D. Future Integration into regional transit network: the “Smart Card”**

A new system for fare payment, the Regional Smart Card, is under development by transit agencies in King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Kitsap Counties. Transit riders will be able to use a single card when switching between buses, ferries, and rail. Seven transit agencies are participating in the program: King County Metro, Community Transit, Kitsap Transit, Pierce Transit, Everett Transit, WSF, and Sound Transit. The system will undergo “beta testing” in 2005 and is expected to be operational in 2006.<sup>76</sup> The advantage of the Smart Card is that a commuter will be able to use a single card to access buses, trains, and ferries throughout the

region. A “new partner agreement” will accommodate other agencies that are interested in participating, such as monorail and private ferry operators.<sup>77</sup> Kitsap Ferry plans to participate in the Smart Card system through Kitsap Transit.<sup>78</sup> Aqua Express is “in the loop to participate.”<sup>79</sup>

## **VI. Integrating Passenger-Only Ferry Service**

Passenger-only ferry service is an important part of the regional transportation system, has the potential to spur pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented development in Bremerton, Kingston, and Seattle, and is an underutilized strategy for moving people between cities without cars. Successful passenger-only service depends on good pedestrian infrastructure and easy transit connections to and from park & ride lots, ferry terminals, and jobs. The following section reviews existing redevelopment plans in Bremerton, Kingston, and Seattle in the context of accommodating passenger-only ferry service.

### **A. Bremerton’s Metropolitan Future**

Bremerton is designated as the urban center of Kitsap County, with a redevelopment vision built around reducing downtown traffic. According to current growth projections, 13,000 new residents will live in the city by 2023, reaching a total of 50,000. To accommodate this growth, the City of Bremerton is planning concentrated development in “neighborhood centers.” The centers will be characterized by high-density housing served by local commercial development and mass transit options. Near the port, significant developments are planned including a new 1,000-space parking garage with 525 spaces available to ferry riders, 200 new condominiums with a pedestrian walkway serving the ferry terminal, and a hotel and convention center adjacent to the ferry terminal.<sup>84</sup> In all, \$500 million in public and private funds will be put into redeveloping downtown Bremerton over the next few years.<sup>85</sup> The new passenger-only ferry to Bremerton will enhance the city’s new pedestrian-friendly developments by encouraging people to walk or use transit rather than drive.

The city plans a new Bremerton Transportation Center serving the ferry terminal and downtown with transit connections to other parts of the city and links to Jefferson and Mason Counties’ transit systems. To relieve congestion in Bremerton’s core, ferry traffic will be routed into a new \$28 million tunnel that will take cars under instead of through downtown.<sup>86</sup>

Bremerton will be home to the Water Transportation Research Institute, which will be the recipient of \$600,000 in federal grant money obtained by Senator Patty Murray; the institute will research hull design for a low-wake boat that can operate between Bremerton and Seattle in 35

minutes without causing wake damage to the shoreline of Rich Passage. The money is to be administered by Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).<sup>87</sup>

As commute options between Bremerton and Seattle improve, Bremerton hopes it will attract professionals who live in Bremerton and work in Seattle.<sup>88</sup> These commuters and others with higher incomes are a principal audience of Kitsap Ferry's service; because the passenger-only vessels travel the same route as the WSF ferries, commuters who cannot afford the higher price will simply opt for the less expensive option. To implement its metropolitan visions, Bremerton should continue to increase density along its waterfront and continue to coordinate transit service with ferry service so that travel is efficient and reliable for those who cannot or chose not to drive.

### **B. Balancing Kingston's Development**

Passenger-only ferry service directly from Kingston to Seattle will encourage non-motorized commute trips, and Kingston can use the new amenity to guide its growth. Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure can serve the town by reducing pressure on local highways, helping Kingston retain its character as a small community.

Kingston is an unincorporated town; its Urban Growth Boundary encompasses low-density rural residential areas and industrial areas, a walkable, low-rise downtown, a large port facility, and a population of 2,800. Growth is anticipated, but in creating the Kingston Sub-Area Plan county planners expressed the goal of preserving the town's "quality of life and community character."<sup>89</sup> The Plan envisions maintaining a high level of protection for wetlands and other wildlife habitat, and requiring future development to include a system of pedestrian trails and wildlife corridors.<sup>90</sup>

To achieve these goals, mixed-use development including retail, offices, services, and high-density housing will be encouraged in some locations within the Urban Growth Boundary.<sup>91</sup> An integrated system of pathways, dedicated bicycle lanes, and public transit is planned to reduce dependency on vehicles. In addition, the Plan sets forth a policy of encouraging Kitsap Transit and the ferry system to design and provide facilities such as transportation centers, secure bicycle parking at the ferry terminal, and accommodation for bicycles on bus routes and on ferries.<sup>92</sup>

Public testimony at the WUTC hearing on Aqua Express' certificate application reflected impatience with frequent traffic snarls on SR 104, which serves the Kingston ferry terminal and is also a main road in the community. It is hoped that Aqua Express will have a positive effect on local traffic congestion by reducing the number of commuters who travel to and from

Kingston, Poulsbo, and Bainbridge Island by automobile. Commuter witnesses testified that using the Kingston-Seattle passenger-only ferry would save them approximately an hour of commuting time each way and also save the cost of fuel, parking, and ferry vehicle fares which they would otherwise spend to reach downtown Seattle via Edmonds or Bainbridge Island.<sup>93</sup> Kitsap Transit is developing park & ride lots to serve the Kingston ferry terminal in anticipation of the passenger-only ferry service. This development was begun when WSF planned to start passenger-only service in 1999.<sup>94</sup> By channeling inevitable growth into transit-oriented development near park & ride lots and the town center, Kingston can preserve its character while adding new residents. The passenger-only ferry service directly to Seattle will encourage non-motorized commute trips. With good transit support, ferry-related congestion on local streets and highways can be reduced.

### **C. Seattle's Waterfront Vision**

Seattle's waterfront will undergo major changes over the next few years, including replacement of the seawall and the Alaskan Way Viaduct, and redevelopment of the Colman Dock. At present, WSDOT envisions an upgrade involving expanded holding lanes, and a complete replacement of the terminal building with mixed uses so that the terminal is a destination in itself. Plans include improving pedestrian connections to transit and downtown Seattle.<sup>95</sup>

At a "visioning charrette" held in April, 2004 and involved Seattle planners, architects, and interested citizens, the participants discussed and prioritized plans for the new ferry terminal. Plans for intermodal transit connections were introduced, including remaking the Colman Dock as a "world-class" intermodal transit center.<sup>96</sup>

Seattle's Department of Transportation and Department of Planning and Development should plan the new ferry terminal to include facilities for docking of passenger-only ferries including Kitsap Ferry and Aqua Express vessels, and work to ensure foot passengers are served by convenient, safe, pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and good transit connections to downtown Seattle and regional employment centers.

With such a major makeover, Seattle can make great strides in facilitating ferry travel without cars. In the final design for the Alaskan Way Viaduct, ferry queuing should be located so as to minimally impact the character of Pioneer Square, and future waterfront access. In addition, pedestrian traffic should be separated from car traffic and routed so that pedestrians can easily and safely access downtown amenities and traffic connections.

## **VII. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Kitsap Ferry began service in the summer of 2004 and Aqua Express is expected to begin service in December 2004. They anticipate serving a total of roughly 500,000 riders in their first year. Though their riders will pay more for the private service, they will also reap the benefits of shorter commutes. The communities they serve, Bremerton, Kingston, and Seattle, should benefit from fewer cars on their arterials and better travel options for residents and visitors. The success of this service will depend to a significant degree to the quality of service provided by the land-based transit systems serving the ferry terminals. People commuting to a location not well served by transit will be more inclined to drive.

For now, however, transit connections, especially on the Seattle side, need to be improved to fully integrate passenger-only ferry service into the regional transportation network. In order to support the new passenger ferries, the following actions should be taken:

- In the final design for the Alaskan Way Viaduct, ferry queuing should be located so as to minimally impact the pedestrian-friendly nature of Pioneer Square.
- In addition, pedestrian traffic should be separated from car traffic and routed so that pedestrians can easily and safely access downtown amenities and traffic connections.
- In Seattle, ferry terminal siting for both public and private ferry operators should be coordinated with waterfront transit stops so as to leverage transit service with ferry landings.
- King County Metro should extend bus routes #3 and #4 down to the Colman Dock so that foot ferry passengers have easy connections to downtown transit hubs, and should coordinate bus schedules with ferry landings.
- To finance improved transit connections in both Seattle and on the Kitsap Peninsula, the state and Puget Sound region must support new multimodal funding for transit and ferry operations.
- Bremerton and Kingston have made great strides in coordinating transit service, ferry service, and land use planning. To fully integrate ferry foot passengers, each city should continue to encourage transit-oriented development in high-density zones near ferry terminals and park & ride lots. In particular, Kingston should encourage transit-oriented development near the George's Corner, Kountry Korner, and Squamish park & ride lots.

- To facilitate seamless ferry-to-transit connections with Kitsap Transit and King County Metro, the two private passenger-only ferry operators, Kitsap Ferry and Aqua Express, should participate in the Smart Card program.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.historylink.org>: The agency's original name reflects the expectation at the time that ferry service would soon be replaced by cross-sound bridges; the agency also operated the Hood Canal Bridge. In 1959, however, the Legislature rejected plans for construction of the other bridges. See also WSF history, available at [http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/your\\_wsf/index.cfm?fuseaction=our\\_history](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/your_wsf/index.cfm?fuseaction=our_history)
- <sup>2</sup> Joint Task Force on Ferries report, p. 17
- <sup>3</sup> Codified as RCW 43.135
- <sup>4</sup> EHB 2894, enacted in 1998
- <sup>5</sup> Enacted by legislature 3/22/00 as SB6865
- <sup>6</sup> RCW 43.135
- <sup>7</sup> "Changing the Rules of the Game: Washington Fiscal Developments Before and After Initiative 601" Institute for Public Policy and Management p. 10 (Nov. 1999)
- <sup>8</sup> Id. p. 20
- <sup>9</sup> EHB 2894, 1998
- <sup>10</sup> Chart from "Changing the Rules of the Game: Washington Fiscal Developments Before and After Initiative 601" p. 19 (numbers from the Office of Financial Management)
- <sup>11</sup> Joint Task Force on Ferries report p. 18
- <sup>12</sup> Enacted by legislature 3/22/00 as SB6865
- <sup>13</sup> Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Final Recommendations to the Governor and Legislature p. 26 (Dec. 2000)
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> WSF Two-year Operations Report 1999-2001, p. 59
- <sup>16</sup> Id. p. 62
- <sup>17</sup> Joint Task Force on Ferries report p. 2
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Joint Task Force on Ferries report p. 11
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Final Recommendations to the Governor and Legislature p. 66
- <sup>22</sup> Joint Task Force on Ferries report p. 12
- <sup>23</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 2001-02 p. 3
- <sup>24</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 1999-2001, p. ES-3
- <sup>25</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 2001-02 p. 3-4
- <sup>26</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 1999-01 p. ES-7
- <sup>27</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 2001-02 p. 3
- <sup>28</sup> Numbers from WSF Tariff Policy Committee reports 1999-01, 01-02, and 02-03 appendices
- <sup>29</sup> WSF traffic statistics, available at [http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/traffic\\_stats/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/traffic_stats/)
- <sup>30</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 02-03 summary report p. 4
- <sup>31</sup> WSF Two-year Operations Report 1999-2001 p. 10
- <sup>32</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 01-02 summary report p. 33
- <sup>33</sup> WSF Two-year Operations Report 1999-2001 p. 7
- <sup>34</sup> ?
- <sup>35</sup> WSF Two-year Operations Report 1999-2001 p. ES-7
- <sup>36</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 2001-02 p. 3
- <sup>37</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 2001-02 p. 6
- <sup>38</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 01-02 p. 6
- <sup>39</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 01-02 p. 33
- <sup>40</sup> WSF Tariff Policy Committee 03 p. 3

41 WSF Tariff Policy Committee 03 Attachment C-6  
42 WSF traffic statistics report, Oct. 1, 2003 – Dec. 31, 2003, available at WSF web site  
43 2004 state budget, available at <http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsladm/billinfo1/bills.cfm>  
44 EHB 1388, available at <http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsladm/billinfo1/bills.cfm>  
45 letters from Kitsap Transit to WUTC in support of applications; attached as addenda to  
applications, available at <http://www.wutc.wa.gov/>  
46 IBU protest, available at <http://www.wutc.wa.gov/>  
47 Joint Task Force on Ferries report, p. 23-24  
48 Kitsap Ferry Company Certificate of Public Convenience application, available at  
<http://www.wutc.wa.gov/>  
49 Ibid.  
50 Kitsap Ferry Company brochure  
51 Ibid.  
52 WUTC Docket No. TS-040794, Order No. 02, p. 13, available at <http://www.wutc.wa.gov/>  
53 Ibid.  
54 WUTC Docket No. TS-040794, Order No 02., available at <http://www.wutc.wa.gov/>  
55 e-mail from Gregory Dronkert  
56 see Kitsap Ferry Company Certificate of Public Convenience application, available at  
<http://www.wutc.wa.gov/>  
57 Kitsap Ferry Company brochure  
58 Aqua Express brochure  
59 Ibid.  
60 WUTC Docket No. TS-040650 Order No. 05, available at <http://www.wutc.wa.gov/>  
61 WUTC Docket No. 040650, Order No. 05 p. 7, available at <http://www.wutc.wa.gov/>  
62 Community Transit web site & WSF web site fare listings; calculations are based on full-price  
fares.  
63 Kitsap Ferry Company Certificate of Public Convenience application, available at  
<http://www.wutc.wa.gov/>  
64 Aqua Express Certificate of Public Convenience application, available at  
<http://www.wutc.wa.gov/>  
65 Joint Development Agreement for Bremerton to Seattle Passenger Only Ferry Service  
66 Ibid.  
67 Kitsap Transit web site, <http://www.kitsaptransit.org/>  
68 Kitsap Transit web site “Bremerton Transfer Center” section, <http://www.kitsaptransit.org/>  
69 E-mail from Cathie Knox-Browning of Kitsap Transit, quoting Doug Johnson.  
70 Ibid.  
71 <http://www.kingstonwa.com>  
72 <http://www.ci.bremerton.wa.us/forms/communitydev/shapingbremerton/introduction.pdf>  
73 Kitsap Transit web site, <http://www.kitsaptransit.org/>  
74 E-mail from Cathie Knox-Browning, quoting Doug Johnson  
75 KC Metro web site, <http://transit.metrokc.gov/>  
76 <http://transit.metrokc.gov/prog/smartcard/smartcard.html>  
77 phone interview with Candace Carlson, Smart Card Project Manager  
78 e-mail from Gregory Dronkert  
79 phone interview with Jim Boldt 7/26/04  
80 WSF Clean Fuel Initiative Background Information, available at WSF web site  
81 Ibid.  
82 e-mail from Gregory Dronkert  
83 phone interview with Jim Boldt, Aqua Express lobbyist/publicist  
84 <http://www.ci.bremerton.wa.us/>  
85 Susan Gilmore, “Bremerton poised on brink of prosperity” *Seattle Times* 7/27/04

- <sup>86</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>87</sup> James Vesely, (editorial) "Full Speed Ahead on Private Ferry Service," *Seattle Times* 6/13/04
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>89</sup> Kingston Sub-Area Plan p. 49
- <sup>90</sup> Kingston Sub-Area Plan, 2.3.2
- <sup>91</sup> Kingston Sub-Area Plan 5.1.16
- <sup>92</sup> Kingston Sub-Area Plan 7.2 Policy 2.1
- <sup>93</sup> WUTC Docket No. TS-040650, Order No. 05, p. 8-9, available at <http://www.wutc.wa.gov/>
- <sup>94</sup> Id. p. 9
- <sup>95</sup> Northwest Transportation Strategies seminar presentation, March 18, 2004.
- <sup>96</sup> Waterfront Charette Recommendation Summary, from "Visioning Charrette, April 7, 2004  
[http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/stellent/groups/public/@dpd/@plan/@proj/@waterfront/documents/dpd\\_informational/cos\\_002831.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/stellent/groups/public/@dpd/@plan/@proj/@waterfront/documents/dpd_informational/cos_002831.pdf)