

# Progress Report – 2024-2025 WSF Passenger-only Ferry Proviso Study

October 30, 2024

During the 2024 Legislative Session the Washington State Legislature passed the 2023-2025 Supplemental Transportation Budget (ESHB 2134). That budget bill included a proviso that directed the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to review and analyze a set of potential passenger-only ferry routes in the Puget Sound and on Lake Washington. The full proviso text is provided on the following page.

The Legislature required WSDOT to contract with an external consultant to complete the tasks outlined in the proviso. In August 2024, Washington State Ferries (WSF) conducted a competitive selection process to find a suitable consulting firm with the requisite passenger-only ferry service and marine planning experience.

WSF used a Request for Additional Information (RFAI) competitive selection process. The RFAI process utilized a list of preapproved consulting firms with vetted experience doing transportation plans and studies, giving three weeks for firms to respond. A panel of WSDOT and WSF employees reviewed the submission materials and scored the proposals. The highest scoring firm was selected, which was KPFF Consulting Engineers, Inc (KPFF).

KPFF is headquartered in Seattle and has a wealth of experience and expertise in marine transportation plans, studies, operations, and projects in Washington state and around the country. KPFF was also the same firm that completed the 2020-2021 passenger-only ferry study for the Puget Sound Regional Council.

Three subconsultants will support and report to KPFF. Berk Consulting will primarily assist with ridership estimates and revenue forecasting. Maul Foster Alongi will provide support to WSF for community engagement activities. Elliott Bay Design Group will focus on route, dock and support site evaluations, as well as vessel fueling and charging analysis.

WSF staff have negotiated a final scope of work (attached) and contract with KPFF, and KPFF staff have begun work on this study. Milestones for draft and final deliverables are in place to keep this project on track over the next eight months. WSF staff do not anticipate any final study delivery delays at this time.

The next few months will include several different community engagement activities which will provide ferry communities and partners opportunities to provide their insights, experiences and feedback to the project team. This feedback will help shape the recommendations that appear in the final study in June 2025.

Please feel free to reach out to Jason Rogers, WSF Planning Manager, at [Jason.Rogers@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:Jason.Rogers@wsdot.wa.gov) with any questions regarding this report.

**EXCERPT FROM THE 2023-2025 SUPPLEMENTAL TRANSPORTATION BUDGET (ESHB 2134, SECTION 222 (22)), SHOWING THE PROVISO LANGUAGE FOR THE PASSENGER-ONLY FERRY STUDY:**

(22) \$500,000 of the Puget Sound ferry operations account—state appropriation is provided solely for the department to evaluate options for the state to return to providing state passenger-only ferry service to support existing ferry service routes.

(a) The study must focus on the routes recommended for further study by the 2020 study of passenger-only ferry service by the Puget Sound regional council as well as San Juan county interisland passenger-only ferry service. The department must contract with a third-party entity with experience in passenger-only ferry service.

(b) The evaluation must study options for the state to return to providing state passenger-only ferry service to support existing ferry service routes. The study must include estimated ridership, operating costs including labor, vessel procurement options with prioritization given to clean fueled ferries such as electric ferries, funding options including state subsidies of passenger-only ferry districts, and schedule and timing to implement passenger-only ferry options in evaluated routes.

(c) A progress report is due to the governor and transportation committees of the legislature by October 30, 2024. A final report is due to the governor and transportation committees of the legislature by June 1, 2025.

## Task 0- Project Management

KPFF will conduct project management activities as needed to support successful completion of this project. Tasks will include meeting preparation, attendance, and follow-up; subconsultant management; budget and schedule tracking; and preparation of invoices and monthly progress reports.

Project management meetings will be held with WSF biweekly to discuss project status and key tasks.

### Deliverables

- Detailed project schedule with tasks, roles, and timeline
- Kickoff meeting presentation
- Monthly invoices
- Monthly progress reports

### Assumptions

- One project kickoff meeting will be held.
- One-hour, biweekly check-in meetings will be virtual and will be held using Microsoft Teams.
- Two staff from KPFF will attend all meetings and will bring in other specialized staff, as needed.
- Assumes a 9-month project duration.

## Task 1- Project Goals & Criteria

Our team will work closely with WSDOT staff to establish goals for potential POF service and criteria for evaluation of potential routes. Goals and priorities could cover multiple topic areas (e.g., potential to support existing WSF service, ridership targets, operating or capital costs, emissions, and implementation timeframes). A Study Steering Committee comprised of WSF/WSDOT staff will be developed to guide goals and criteria. Goals for service and criteria for route assessment may be different for routes from the 2021 the PSRC Study routes (**PSRC routes**) and the San Juan Islands interisland routes (**SJI routes**). This may be reflected in evaluation criteria having different weights, depending on route geography.

Based on the confirmed goals and criteria, the KPFF team will establish a screening and route evaluation process to review the recommended routes.

The screening process for the **PSRC routes** will review findings from the 2020-2021 PSRC POF study to identify those that are most implementable in the near term and would best supplement current WSF vehicle ferry service.

The screening process for the **SJI routes** will focus first on developing route options, building upon findings from the *Walk-on/Roll-on Ridership Maximization Study*. The process will involve coordination with WSF to further develop an understanding of the existing conditions of WSF's

interisland ferry service, as well as the current transportation needs and challenges of the SJI communities.

## Deliverables

- Project Goals, Screening Criteria, and Screening Approach Memo

## Assumptions

- One meeting with the Study Steering Committee is included in this task.

## Task 2- Community Engagement

Our team will work with WSF to develop a comprehensive community engagement plan that details the communication strategies, tools, and channels to be used to inform, engage, and gather feedback from stakeholders and the general public. The plan will utilize existing outreach channels and regularly scheduled convenings to maximize input while reducing meeting fatigue. While the project will have one approach and similar methodology for engagement, the study areas are geographically diverse calling for specialized engagement planning.

For the **PSRC Routes**, our team anticipates using multiple tools to connect with stakeholder groups and the public, such as an online survey, targeted interviews, and presentations at existing working groups and public meetings.

For the **SJI Routes**, our engagement approach will aim to capitalize on the outreach groups targeted during the *Walk-on/Roll-on Ridership Maximization Study* and will build on existing relationships and channels established in that effort. Methodologies could include a series of stakeholder working groups in conjunction with a broader public meeting.

Final engagement approach and tools for both route types will be decided upon with WSF during plan development. Following plan development, the team will execute the engagement plan through coordinated efforts to ensure all stakeholder groups are reached effectively.

## Deliverables

- Draft community engagement plan
- Final community engagement plan
- Outreach summary memo
- Project team to work with WSF to invite and implement up to 12 stakeholder group and/or public briefings.
- Recommendations for ongoing community involvement as the project transitions to potential implementation phases.
- Proposed engagement materials:
  - One online survey to gather broad feedback on the POF service expansion, which can be adapted to print and provided to ferry passengers.
  - Key milestone content for one project web page/or email newsletter content.

- One PowerPoint slide deck to be used at community briefings, focus groups and for the final report (includes ability to customize by location and update as the study progresses).
- Up to (3) infographics, 1 brochure, and 2 fact sheets explaining the study, potential ferry routes, and how to provide feedback.
- Up to (3) social media posts for Facebook and X.
- Content for up to (3) e-newsletters.
- One FAQ document reflecting common public questions and concerns.

## Assumptions

- The project web page will be hosted by WSF.
- Up to two revisions and one final for each communications material deliverable.
- WSF will lead tribal coordination.
- If WSF chooses to use digital advertising, direct expenses would be paid for directly by WSF.
- Up to 10 briefings would be held virtually and up to 2 in-person in the Puget Sound or San Juan Islands areas.
- Assumes up to 3 online focus groups, or up to 8 or one-on-one calls with key stakeholders.

## Task 3- Potential Routes & Service Levels

The KPFF team will conduct the route screening process established in Task 1. First, the team will re-examine the **PSRC Routes** based on current conditions to update our understanding of opportunities and challenges for implementation and to identify any routes not recommended for further evaluation.

For the **SJI Routes** screening process, the KPFF team will work with WSF staff to review current San Juan Islands travel demand, travel destinations, and potential landing sites that provide access to those destinations, informed by findings of the *Walk-on/Roll-on Ridership Maximization Study*. Identified landing site options will be used to develop potential interisland POF routes.

The screening process for both routes will involve an initial qualitative ridership demand review, focused on identifying key destinations. For the **SJI Routes**, this qualitative review will also be informed by a potential rider survey that will be developed and distributed as part of Task 2.

Following the screening process, KPFF will then develop potential operating profiles for the routes to be studied. These profiles will identify factors including number and type of vessels serving the route, proposed vessel propulsion type, passenger capacity, crew needs, route length, sailing time, and frequency of service. Operational profiles will also identify route landing sites, maintenance needs and potential maintenance locations. Inputs for operating profiles will be developed in concert with WSF's internal experts. The team will conduct one-on-one meetings with key departments (service planning, terminals, electrification, maintenance, operations, etc.) to gather inputs and review needs.

The team will also develop two conceptual fare levels options for the **PSRC Routes** and two conceptual fare levels options for the **SJI Routes** to be used later in revenue forecasting. Fare level development will include participation in or support for a meeting with WSF and the Washington Transportation Commission.

## Deliverables

- Memo summarizing the route screening process and findings.
  - Includes inventory of landing sites that could meet SJI travel demand needs
- Vessel characteristics memo discussing propulsion technology, key vessel features, and potential vessel availability.
- Route operational profiles.

## Assumptions:

- The screening process will eliminate routes with significant implementation challenges.
- Up to five meetings with WSF departmental staff.
- One meeting with the Study Steering Committee will be held to review the results of the screening study.
- Operational profiles for up to 5 routes will be developed.
- All routes will operate with either hybrid-electric or full electric propulsion.
- Landing sites for PSRC routes will be those landings identified in the 2021 study and will be updated with current information based on desktop review of landings and applicable recently completed POF studies.
- Landing site review in the San Juan Islands will be limited to locations with existing marine uses.
- The consultant team will use two conceptual fare levels for each set of routes. One fare level for the San Juan Islands route will be the current WSF walk-on fare structure.
- The Vessel Characteristics memo will identify up to 4 representative vessel types based on route types and will include a review of procurement options for these vessel types.

## Task 4- Route Evaluation

Each route resulting from Task 3 screening will be evaluated using the following analyses.

### Ridership assessment.

- For **PSRC routes**, the team will update and build on the ridership analysis of the previous PSRC study and will estimate potential ridership for each route based on the assumed operating profile. Induced demand will be estimated based on a literature review and on an analysis of actual ridership compared to modeled travel demand prior to service implementation for the Kitsap Fast Ferries.
- For **SJI routes**, the team will estimate the share of existing ridership on the current interisland route that could be accommodated by POF and will estimate any currently unmet or potential induced demand for interisland travel from San Juan Islands residents

and visitors. Other sources, including ridership from other local water transport service providers, will also be examined during the demand forecasting process.

- To inform the estimation of ridership demand for the **SJI routes** and the **Bellingham to Friday Harbor route**, the team will design a potential ferry user survey which will aim to capture a representative sample of potential ferry users from selected geographies representing the market capture areas for the proposed POF service. The team will analyze the survey data to generate an estimate of market capture for the proposed POF route.
- Demand estimates will be developed based on the travel time, operating profiles, terminal accessibility/modal connections, identified fare levels, and community engagement findings.

#### **Revenue forecasting.**

- Forecasting will examine all possible sources of revenue to develop a balanced financial plan for each route.
- The financial plan for each route will address capital and operation funding and will likely include fares; Federal, State, regional and local tax funding sources; and miscellaneous operating revenue.
- Fare revenue forecasts will be provided for one year of full operations, under two different fare policy alternatives, for each route.

#### **Operational cost forecasting.**

- Cost factors will be calculated to outline capital and operating expenditure projections, including vessel crewing and terminal labor requirements.
- For **PSRC routes**, costs from the 2021 study will be updated to reflect actual and predicted cost escalation and any recommended changes to the proposed service delivery plans and management structure.
- For **SJI routes**, costs will be developed based upon inputs identified from the operational cost profiles and the dock and support facility siting evaluation.

#### **Dock and support facility siting evaluation.**

- For each route, this evaluation will review available infrastructure along with existing and planned multimodal connections at landing sites. Potential multimodal connection improvements needed to maximize POF use will be identified at a high level.
- Each evaluation will also identify potentially needed improvements to support POF service per route including in-water, terminal service infrastructure, and crew spaces (trailer, office, etc.).

#### **Vessel fueling/charging needs identification.**

- This identification will calculate the energy needed to support proposed service for each route.
- Based upon energy needs and existing available electrical infrastructure, the team will identify proposed vessel propulsion technology for each route in the near and long term.

- The team will then identify the next steps needed to comprehensively plan for route decarbonization.

### **Deliverables**

- Ridership assessment memo
- Financial plan memo
- Route evaluation findings memo

### **Assumptions:**

- Up to five routes will be evaluated across geographies.
- PSRC route evaluation will update key findings from the 2021 study and will expand on additional needs.
- WSF will provide current ridership data.
- Fare revenue analysis will utilize passenger fare elasticity factors from WSF's current ridership information.
- Estimated costs will be at a rough order-of-magnitude (ROM) level.
- Two days of site visits at potential landings and associated travel is assumed to support the dock and facility siting evaluation.

## **Task 5- Recommendations/Final Report**

Based upon WSF's identified goals, the results of route evaluation, and community feedback received throughout the engagement process, the team will develop recommendations for WSF's potential involvement in POF service. Recommendations will consider multiple potential roles for the State including operating POF service, and non-operational roles such as funding, collaborating with other regional agencies and organizations, and developing key POF partnerships. Next steps for WSF will also be recommended and could include implementation actions, system-wide funding options, and strategies for near-term and long-term service expansion. A final report and supporting presentation materials will detail recommendations and findings from all steps.

### **Deliverables**

- Draft report
- Final report
- Executive summary
- Presentation materials

### **Assumptions:**

- Two weeks is assumed for WSF review time between the draft and final reports.
- The team will support WSF with the development of legislative briefing materials.
- The final report will use best practices such as Adobe and Word accessibility checking tools and WCAG 2.1, Level AA guidelines (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, the standard for WSDOT and WSL web accessibility).