

January 31, 2017

Jim Corenman, Chair
San Juan Islands Ferry Advisory Committee
fac@sanjuanco.com

Jim,

Thank you for your January 6 letter providing feedback on the San Juan Islands Task Force process that we've been undertaking for the last few months. As you know, this process began when my staff and I traveled to the San Juan Islands in August 2016 to meet with community members and local officials to get input on the vehicle reservation system and San Juan Islands ferry service in general. I very much appreciate your support for and attendance at those meetings and our collaborative approach in the face of community frustration.

Once the 2016 summer season was over, I appointed an internal task force to review issues identified by the San Juan Islands community. This cross-functional team included representatives from operations, planning, communications, terminals, IT, vessel crew and customer service. They were charged with identifying operational and policy priorities and where gaps in our communication and transparency existed. The task force reviewed comments from the August outreach, interviewed employees who work in the San Juan Islands and reviewed all available relevant data. I felt very strongly that this group should not include members who were instrumental in earlier decision making and in designing the reservations program. I wanted fresh eyes on this new set of issues and a small group that could make quick decisions based on their on-the-ground experience on our vessels and at our terminals.

The task force has concluded their work and presented recommendations to me and other members of the WSF executive team and I concurred with their conclusions. Starting immediately, we will:

- Address long wait times on the phone, realign call center staffing to better meet peak call demand within current budget constraints.
- Streamline the internal notification process for delayed sailings to improve customer communication, resulting in more frequent, uniform and more accurate email alerts and Twitter notifications when vessels are running late.
- Allocate IT department staff time to implement Microsoft recommendations to better utilize our existing system resources to provide improved customer experience during peak periods of system usage (e.g. 7:00 am when reservation space is released). This work is expected to be complete in time for our summer sailing season.
- Refer all public comments related to the sailing schedule to the WSF/FAC schedule committee that meets seasonally so they can be discussed openly and with community input.
- Evaluate peak season medical priority usage in order to inform future decisions on standby allocations.

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- Monitor reservation usage to evaluate the effectiveness of the tiered release and periods of pressure on the system.
- Ensure the existing 30-minute arrival policy is consistently being followed by all staff at all San Juan Islands terminals.

I have decided to accept these staff recommendations and therefore the 30-minute advance arrival policy will remain in place. Our task force felt strongly, and I agree, that we should not change the current policy, which is working as intended to safely and efficiently load our vessels. The policy makes it easier and more efficient to load each sailing safely and completely, and to plan the load given the complexity of our operations. It provides consistency and uniformity for our operations and reduces confusion. We were able to maintain our on-time performance levels last summer with the policy in place and reduce the number of vehicles left behind due to loading challenges with multi-destination sailings. Incoming WSF Assistant Secretary Amy Scarton was part of our final decision making on this issue and she has been fully briefed on the 30-minute policy and its history.

I want to extend my sincere thank you to you and other members of the San Juan Islands Ferry Advisory Committee not only for your participation in our public meetings last summer, but your ongoing involvement in this process. I know you participated in several phone meetings with staff during the last few months (on Nov. 16, Dec. 2, Dec. 16 and Jan. 5) and that you reviewed the task force's recommendations and their initial identification of the priority issues. We appreciate our ongoing dialogue with the FAC. You provide valuable advice as residents of the San Juan Islands, frequent ferry riders and representatives of your community. I hope you understand that we must weigh your input with that of our employees who work on the Anacortes/San Juan Islands route and team members at WSF who bring an operational and system-wide perspective to our policies, along with safety and operational considerations.

In lieu of providing a point-by-point response to your January 6 letter, I am asking staff to arrange a tour of the Anacortes terminal to walk you through the loading procedures and how reservations are processed. Although this will not change our decision about the policy, it may help provide more clarity and closure on this issue. Please continue to work with Government Relations Liaison John Vezina on this and other FAC topics and concerns.

Sincerely,



Lynne Griffith
WSDOT Assistant Secretary
Ferries Division

cc: San Juan Islands FAC
Amy Scarton, Assistant Secretary
Senator Kevin Ranker
Representative Jeff Morris
Representative Kristine Lytton



San Juan County Council

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Date: January 6, 2017

To: Lynne Griffith, Assistant Secretary, Washington State Ferries

CC: WSF Executive Committee, John Vezina, FAC

Subject: Response to San Juan Islands Task Force, FAC Discussion.

Lynne,

FAC and the citizens of San Juan County are very grateful for the time that you and your team spent in our islands last August. As a follow-up to those meetings, your staff sorted comments into three broad categories, and further into four topics where operational or policy changes could result in improvements for the spring season. The goals included a focus on quick "wins"—changes which could yield positive benefits within time and budget constraints.

We requested the opportunity to collaborate on changes, WSF instead organized an in-house "task force" to make recommendations. These were presented to us on Dec 5 via teleconference and via a "San Juan Islands Task Force / FAC Discussion" Powerpoint presentation on Dec 15 with a request for feedback. We responded but no apparent consideration has been given to our suggestions (emails attached). This contrasts sharply with the original design of the reservation system which was very much a collaborative effort between WSF, FAC and the Reservations Partnership.

There were four topics identified as priority issues in the Task Force document (pg. 5): Standby space, website/customer service experience, 30-minute arrival window and email alerts. We agree that these were the primary topics that are "fixable" to some degree. With respect to call-center/website issues, we agree that the short-term proposals outlined will help, and also agree that standby space is not an issue, but remained concerned with the no-show rate.

The two areas where FAC disagrees with the proposed recommendations are the hard 30-minute cutoff for the arrival window, and email alerts as they relate to adjusting that arrival window for late boats (promised as late as August, now considered impractical). We also remain very concerned about large commercial vehicles, which are both the lifeblood of our islands and also greatly disadvantaged in terms of missed sailings (tall space is fully reservable and no-shows are few).

We have submitted written comments via email on Dec 5 and Dec 22 (copies attached), which were acknowledged but not addressed in the FAC Discussion document (pg. 23, copy attached).

Our primary recommendation is simple: Honor reservations until the vessel begins loading. Specifically:

- Keep the public message the same: "Plan to arrive 30-90-minutes prior to the scheduled sailing time, and allow extra time during periods of heavy traffic (e.g. holidays and weekends, especially in summer)".
- Change a few words in the Terms and Conditions: (a) Arrivals after 30 min prior **may** be required to travel standby; (b) arrivals after loading begins **will** travel standby.
- Terminal Policy: Honor reservations until the boarding announcement (marking beginning of loading).

The advantages are that late boats are naturally accommodated, email alerts announcing a revised arrival window are no longer an issue, and everyone gets a little break when the traffic is unexpectedly heavy. And it gets rid of "ferries allows itself to be late but not the riders", which not the best message to be sending. This also solves most of the oversized commercial issue. It is a win-win, for both ferries and the riders.

Our discussions have traversed a wide range of reasons why ferries believes that the 30-minute hard cutoff is required. For example:

- 1) Terminal staff prefers a time-based cutoff.

This appears to be given the highest priority, but does not consider rider needs nor has there been any comment on the feasibility of other options.

- 2) On-time performance was improved for 2016 (pg. 25, 26).

Also a priority, and simply incorrect. Only 2016 data is presented, but comparison to 2015 shows that OTP was worse, not better, in 2016. The differences are arguably within normal variation but to the extent that

the 30-min hard cutoff was a factor, it made it worse not better. (See attached charts).

- 3) Dwell times are consistent with a 30-min arrival window (pg. 27).

Only 9 out of 21 sailings out of Anacortes are shown, while the remainder are mostly 20 or 25 minutes. So for half of the sailings, arrival must occur before the boat has even arrived at the dock to avoid the risk of missing the sailing. FAC believes this is unnecessary and is not perceived by the public as "reasonable".

- 4) In spring and fall 2015, vehicles (primarily Lopez) were left on the dock on multi-destination sailings, while space remained on the boat (pg. 28 and phone discussion).

This has been discussed many times. Multi-destination sailings are primarily an issue for spring and fall schedules, not summer which has the highest traffic. Bill Pike provided an excellent analysis of this in his June 3 letter (attached, and provided via email previously).

- 5) Operations and "safety" require knowing the vehicle load 30 minutes prior (phone discussion, 1/5/2016).

This cannot be a "safety" issue, because ferries has never counted cars at the 30-minute point in the past yet was able to operate safely. Whenever the count is made, vehicles continue to arrive and are loaded safely.

Operationally, a 30-minute reservations cutoff is irrelevant to sending the vehicle counts to the vessel. Counts have always been for whatever vehicles were in the lot at the time, and have never been "final" or accurate as vehicles continue arriving right up to sailing time. It is just a snapshot.

- 6) Visitor businesses prefer the simplicity of a 30-min arrival.

Agreed, and nothing we propose changes that: FAC recommends that the public message continue to be "Plan to arrive at least 30 minutes prior". That's pretty simple.

There is one very important thing to keep in mind throughout this discussion: Reservations have nothing to do with loading the vessel.

This seems absurd, but consider how the reservations system works at Anacortes: As vehicles arrive they are directed by the tag shack to one of about 16 holding lanes depending on destination, size, reservation status and any special requests (elevator etc.). So for Friday Harbor as an example, standard-sized reservation holders might be sent to lanes 1 & 2, talls to 3, standbys to 4 and elevator requests to 5. At that point they simply become vehicles parked in a lot, and reservation status no longer matters.

At loading time, the vessel staff might ask for elevators first, then 30 cars, then talls and then the rest of the cars—depending on the vessel configuration and mix of vehicle sizes. So the terminal sends lane 5, the first half of lanes 1 & 2, then lane 3, the rest of 1 & 2 and then 4. The vessel staff doesn't care which lane they come from, and neither terminal nor vessel staff care who had a reservation or not—at that point it is all irrelevant.

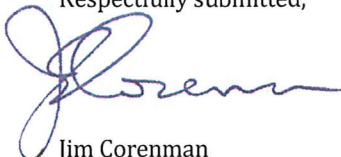
The multi-destination problems in 2015 occurred when terminal staff failed to follow WSF's own policy: Reservations were to be no longer honored once the first standby was loaded. Instead, staff would continue to load late-arriving reservation-holders right up to sailing time. FAC believes that if the original policy had simply been followed then most of the issues identified in 2015, which led to the hard 30-min cutoff, would have been non-existent.

But that was then, the "now" is that WSF is trying to respond to complaints created by the hard 30-min cutoff. For WSF to go back to the public with "no change", as recommended, is not going to be perceived by anyone as a "win". But it is actually worse than that: In addition to offering no relief from the hard 30min cutoff, the task force recommendations also rule out any possible sliding of the window for late boats (the email alert issue), and staffing cuts (and policy) will prohibit Anacortes from cutting anyone some slack next summer no matter what the circumstances. (It is no secret to riders that Anacortes didn't always enforce the 30min cutoff during the 2016 summer season).

The arrival window rose to a priority here because of public input during the outreach. We believe our recommendation is workable and practical, and urge WSF to give it serious consideration.

There is no "win" with the current proposals for ferries or for the public, and we would like to help change that.

Respectfully submitted,



Jim Corenman
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