

Date: August 17, 2011

To: Washington State Transportation Commission

From: San Juan County FAC

The San Juan County FAC fully supports the idea of a fare structure that would encourage the use of smaller cars, but we also believe that the current vehicle-length proposal has not been adequately studied or discussed, and is flawed, and therefore urge the Commission to postpone action on this item.

The vehicle-length proposal is to be revenue-neutral, which means that it does not help the current budget issue. And being revenue neutral, any reduction in fares for smaller vehicles must be offset by an increase in fares for other vehicles. Additionally, extending the standard vehicle fare from the long-standing 20 feet to 22 feet encourages larger vehicles, contrary to the primary goal as well as further increasing the fares for standard-sized vehicles. We understand the issue regarding 20-21' extended-cab pickups, but the fact remains that larger vehicles require more deck space.

There are also operational considerations involving vehicle measurement that we believe have not been adequately considered. On the San Juan Islands routes vehicle fares are collected westbound, not just in Anacortes but also at the terminals on Lopez, Shaw, and Orcas Island for westbound interisland travel, and in Friday Harbor for travel to Sidney. Each of those terminals will be affected, and the need to measure or check vehicle length will likely result in a requirement for additional staffing, or delays which will impact on-time performance and vessel schedules. We do not believe that those impacts have been fully considered.

The 14' length was chosen specifically because there are very few cars under 14'. So the negative impact on ferry operations is minimized, but so are the benefits. One justification terms this a first step towards an effective length-based fare, but without a workable plan to measure vehicle length there is no second step. Yet it is sufficiently complex, in spite of its minimal impact, to require two or three phases for implementation.

The San Juan County FAC fully supports a fare structure that would encourage the use of smaller vehicles, but we believe that it needs to include the majority of vehicles, not just a few, and needs to be workable for the entire system. Measuring length automatically is the ideal solution but technically challenging, and perhaps not necessary. For example, one of our members has proposed that a length-based fare could be made part of a new frequent-rider program. Frequent riders are much more likely to make vehicle choices based on fares, and limiting it to frequent riders means that vehicles could be measured just once with a window sticker identifying the fare class.

There may be other ideas that would lead to an effective length-based fare system, and we would welcome the opportunity to participate in a discussion about what could be done.

Respectfully submitted,

San Juan County FAC

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