



# SAVE A SPOT

## Washington State Ferries



# Vehicle Reservation System Phase 1 Outcomes

January 2013



**Washington State  
Department of Transportation**





# WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FERRIES DIVISION

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## Vehicle Reservation System Phase I Outcomes January 2013

### INTRODUCTION

During peak sailing times, vehicle space on ferries is a scarce commodity. Sailings often overload, resulting in congestion in and around ferry terminals and long wait times for customers. At the same time, there is excess vehicle capacity on off peak sailings, resulting in the need to manage and spread demand for vehicle space on the ferries.

The 2009 Washington State Department of Transportation Ferries Division (WSF) Long-Range Plan proposed a reservation system as the primary strategy to manage demand, spread peak vehicle traffic, and improve asset utilization, thus reducing customer wait times, community traffic congestion due to queuing, and minimizing the need for costly terminal and vessel expansion projects.

In June of 2012, WSF implemented Phase 1 of the new reservation system, which included its Port Townsend-Coupeville, Sidney, B.C., and San Juan Islands (for commercial travel only) routes.

### Vehicle Reservation System Goals

In designing the new reservation system, WSF identified three goals centered around its three primary groups of stakeholders: customers, communities, and WSF.

1. **The system must work for WSF Customers**, being easy to use and offering an adequate degree of predictability, spontaneity, and flexibility.
2. **The system must work for Ferry Communities**, reducing the negative impacts of queuing outside the terminal and allowing WSF customers and local residents to access local businesses and reduce congestion in residential neighborhoods.
3. **The system must work for WSF**, recognizing the unique circumstances of its different routes, helping the agency manage demand, improving asset utilization, and responding to legislative direction.

The purpose of this report is to show whether the initial implementation of the improved vehicle reservation is meeting these goals and working for customers, communities, and for WSF. This report will describe initial Phase 1 outcomes and identify lessons learned to inform planning of future phases of the project.

## Project Overview

The reservations project began in 2010 with the Vehicle Reservation System Predesign Study. WSF proposed implementing the project in three Phases. As of February 2013, Phase 1 is nearly complete (final installation and activation of highway and terminal radios remains to be completed), and WSF is currently planning for Phase 2.

**Phase 1 Budget:  
\$4.97 million**

**WSF expects to  
complete the project  
within budget.**

**Phase 1:** Port Townsend/ Coupeville, Anacortes/ Sidney, and commercial vehicles on Anacortes/ San Juan Islands routes

**Phase 2:** All vehicles on Anacortes/ San Juan Islands routes and commercial vehicles system-wide

**Phase 3:** All vehicles on Seattle/ Bainbridge, Seattle/ Bremerton, and Edmonds/ Kingston

Although the Predesign Study assumed WSF could buy an existing reservations software package and integrate it with its ticketing system, this was ultimately not the right option. Off the shelf software packages that could be easily integrated WSF's existing ticketing system were not available. WSF ultimately designed and built its own reservation system, allowing for flexibility to tailor the system as needed in future phases.

In addition to the software development, the project included some capital upgrades to terminals and WSF's communications infrastructure, like new signage, highway advisory radio, and traffic channelization. The total budget for Phase 1 was \$4.97 million, and WSF expects to complete Phase 1 within budget.

## VEHICLE RESERVATION SYSTEM OVERVIEW

### The Save a Spot System

The Save a Spot website went live on June 4, 2012, and redemption began at terminals out of the new system on June 17, 2012. Since then, several software updates have been rolled out to improve performance, fix bugs, and add features.

Some of the defining features of Save A Spot include:

- **Multiple methods for managing reservations.** Customers are able to make, change, and cancel reservations online using the Save A Spot website and by phone.
- **Refundable deposits that apply to the fare price.** In order to make a reservation, most customers pay a deposit that is a portion of their fare. This deposit is applied to the total fare due when they check-in at the terminal.
- **Different account types.** Customers can choose to sign up for an account or make a reservation as a guest user. Accounts allow customers to store information like credit cards and vehicle types so that they do not need to re-enter this every time they make a reservation. Three types of accounts are available to customers:

**Universal Account.** Any customer can establish a Universal account.

**Premier Account.** Premier accounts provide benefits to frequent ferry users, like not having to pay a deposit, and require a multi-ride revalue ticket to qualify.

**Executive Account.** Executive accounts provide benefits to commercial customers, like not having to pay a deposit, and require a WSF business account to qualify.

- **Flexible change and cancelation policies.** Customers can change or cancel reservations online or by phone. Customers receive a refund on their deposit if they cancel 24 hours in advance of their sailing. They are allowed one free change in the 24 hour window before their sailing.

## Stakeholder Involvement

While the system was being designed, WSF employed an inclusive process to solicit input and feedback from staff, community members and customers:

- **Port Townsend – Coupeville Partnership Group.** Consisting of 22 members from the Port Townsend and Coupeville communities and including local politicians, business owners, Ferry Advisory Committee members, ferry commuters, and other customers, the Partnership group met seven times in Port Townsend to advise WSF on reservations business policies, preview software under development and provide input on the new reservation system.
- **Business Stakeholder group.** Consisting of representatives from customer service, terminal operations, accounting, and other departments as needed, the business stakeholders met weekly throughout the process to develop and refine system requirements, discuss affected business processes and make recommendations about new business policies.
- **Terminal Staff.** Throughout the software development process, WSF met regularly with Port Townsend and Coupeville terminal staff to discuss software requirements, plan vehicle staging, and test system features. WSF also engaged Anacortes terminal staff shortly before system rollout. In future phases, WSF plans to engage all terminal staff as early in the process as possible, as explained in the Lessons Learned section at the end of this report.

Input from these three user groups was key to identifying the best business policies and system features for customers, communities, and WSF staff. WSF was able to implement a flexible and agile system that can be customized by route and sailing to address the traffic characteristics of its routes and unique needs of different customer groups.

## PHASE 1 OUTCOMES

This section of the report summarizes the current outcomes of Save a Spot and assesses how well the system is meeting its three primary goals: (1) the system must work for WSF Customers, (2) the system must work for Ferry Communities, and (3) the system must work for WSF.

### How is Save a Spot Working for Customers?

**The system must work for WSF customers, being easy to use and offering an adequate degree of predictability, spontaneity, and flexibility.**

Customer satisfaction with Save A Spot was measured by analyzing three customer surveys spanning from July through November 2012. Two surveys were given to reservation users and one was given to Port Townsend-Coupeville travelers that did not use a reservation. The two reservation user surveys received more than 1,200 responses each and provided helpful insight into reservation customer perspectives.

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*"We had never traveled with Washington State ferries, and we were delighted with it from start to finish! The online site was extremely easy to use... and the employees were very friendly"*

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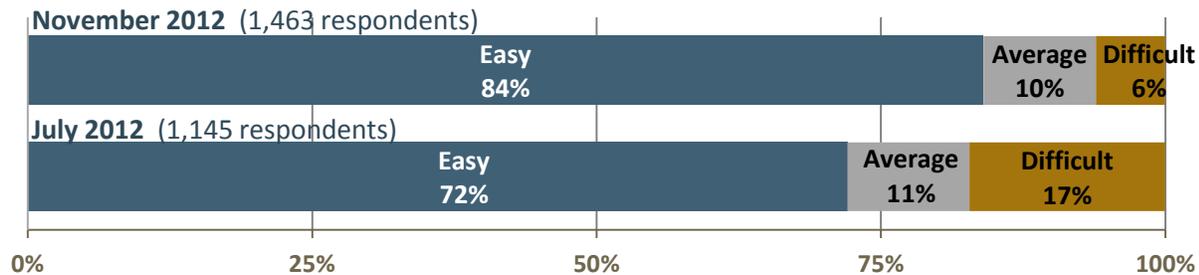
Customer satisfaction is a difficult metric to measure. Using survey results and some WSF data on customer behavior, WSF analyzed the following five aspects of the system to provide a broad view of how customers are using the system: (1) the Save A Spot website, (2) the reservation check-in process, (3) changes in commercial account travel and revenue, (4) customer communication, and (5) the availability of guaranteed travel.

### Save A Spot Website

Survey respondents in the summer and fall were asked about the ease of use of many different aspects of the Save A Spot website, including general ease of use and making changes or cancelations. About 91% of survey respondents used the website to make their reservation, and about 9% of respondents changed or canceled their reservation online.

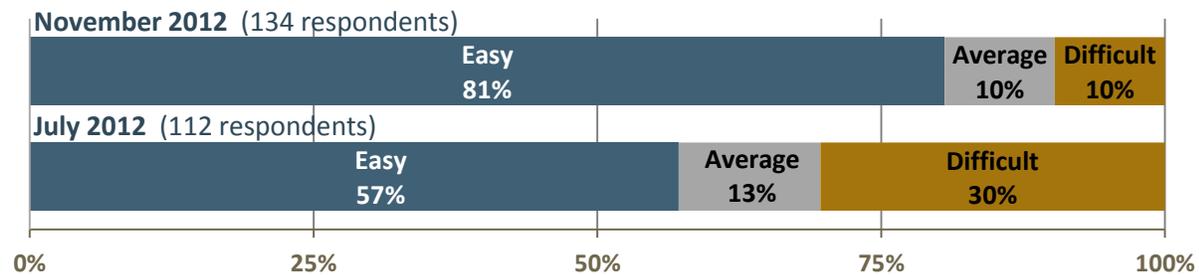
#### *Nearly 85% of fall survey respondents found the website easy to use*

From the July to November survey, the percent of respondents that found the website easy to use rose from 72% to 84%. WSF’s software updates over the summer and fall improved performance, incorporated usability improvements that had been identified during usability testing, and fixed bugs that were present in the initial rollout, which likely contributed to this increase in satisfaction.



#### *More than 80% of fall survey respondents who changed or canceled online found the website easy to use*

In the July survey, only 57% of survey respondents who changed or canceled their reservation online reported that the website was easy to use. This percentage increased to 81% in the November survey.



#### *Respondents listed website ease of use, online reservations, and other various website features as what they liked best about Save A Spot*

- More than one-third of fall survey respondents listed the easy to use, clear website as what they like best about the reservation system, which mirrored the results of the July survey.
- Customers also liked various website features including account management, information about available space, pop-up calendars, and the ability to make round-trip reservations.
- Although customers are generally positive about the website, the number one suggestion for improving the reservation system in both the July and November surveys was to improve the usability of the

*“The online reservation system is very user friendly”*

website, suggesting there is still room for improvement. However, the number of suggestions to fix bugs and glitches decreased from 45 in the summer survey to only 2 in the fall survey, suggesting that WSF has responded well to specific customer complaints.

### Reservation Check-In Process

Survey respondents were also asked about the ease and clarity of the check-in process at the terminal to understand how well WSF’s communications are being understood and how quickly reservations are being processed.

#### ***About 92% of survey respondents rated the check-in experience as good or excellent (n = 1,600)***

The large majority of both fall and summer survey respondents rated the check-in experience as good or excellent. This percentage increased slightly from 86% in the summer survey to 92% in the fall survey.



#### ***About 90% of respondents understood important elements of the check-in process before arriving at the terminal***

Survey respondents were also asked about how well they understood WSF’s communications about the check-in process, including arrival times, necessary documents, and deposit policies. Both the fall and summer surveys had nearly identical results for these four topics; the results of the fall survey are described below:

- About 90% of respondents knew when they should arrive at the terminal (n = 1,589)
- About 92% of respondents knew what they should bring to the terminal (n = 1,561)
- About 92% of respondents knew their deposit would be credited toward their fare (n = 1,559)
- About 88% of respondents knew they would owe some additional fare at the terminal (n = 1,554)

### Increase In Commercial Revenue and Accounts

#### ***WSF has increased the number of Commercial Account holders from 2011 to 2012***

WSF previously provided reservations to commercial customers for San Juan Islands travel through a reservation system that was separate from the system used for all customers on the Port Townsend-Coupeville route. Commercial customers would fax seasonal reservation requests to WSF, and customer service staff would keep track of reservations.

The new Save A Spot system integrated commercial customers into the same system as other customers, using an Executive Account program. Commercial customers can make and manage their own reservations online.

Since switching from the previous reservation system to Save A Spot, WSF has gained 43 commercial accounts. This increase indicates that commercial customers are responding well to the new system, and that WSF has retained old customers as well as added new customers.

***Revenue from commercial customers increased from 2011 to 2012***

The table below shows that revenue from commercial customers increased from summer 2011 to summer 2012 by 88% on the Port Townsend-Coupeville route and by 12% in the San Juan Islands. A large portion of the commercial revenue increase on Port Townsend-Coupeville can be attributed to increased activity at the Port Townsend paper mill due to the closing of the Kimberly Clark paper mill in Everett and is not directly related to the reservation system.

Total revenue from all customers on Port Townsend-Coupeville and San Juan Islands routes increased by 13% and 7%, respectively, over the same time period. This indicates that commercial travel has increased at a quicker pace than ridership overall since Save A Spot was deployed.

**Revenue from Commercial Customers**

	<b>Port Townsend- Coupeville</b>	<b>San Juan Islands</b>
July - September 2011	\$118,056	\$950,843
July - September 2012	\$222,514	\$1,062,269
Revenue Increase	88%	12%

Source: WSF, 2013.

**Improved Customer Communication**

***Reservation accounts provide WSF with the contact information necessary to keep customers informed of travel updates***

One of the results of moving from the old vehicle reservation system to Save A Spot is that WSF now has email addresses for all customers that make reservations online and for the majority of customers that make reservations by phone. One of the challenges of the old system was informing customers about sailing changes, cancelations, or delays. Unless customers had signed up for WSF’s email alert system, they would not receive information about cancelations or delays until they had arrived at the terminal. This resulted in congestion at the terminal when sailings were canceled due to weather conditions as well as customer frustration about longer wait times.

With Save A Spot, WSF can send emails to all customers with reservations on a specific sailing. These customers then are aware of sailing changes so they can tailor their arrival time to the new scheduled departure or choose to use an alternative means of travel.

**Reduced Wait Times and Guaranteed Spot**

***Customers like that the reservation system guarantees them a spot on the boat and reduces the time they have to wait at the terminal***

Besides having a clear, easy to use website, the number one thing that survey respondents said they liked about the reservation system was having a guaranteed spot on the ferry. Customers appreciate knowing when they will be sailing and not having to arrive hours before their desired departure to guarantee themselves a spot. Customers said this provided assurance, reduced stress, and gave them piece of mind about their travels.

*“I like that I know exactly which boat I will be on regardless of lines... makes life much easier to plan.”*

## How is Save a Spot Working for Communities?

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**The system must work for ferry communities, reducing the negative impacts of queuing outside the terminal and allowing WSF customers and local residents to access local business and reduce congestion in residential neighborhoods.**

The Port Townsend-Coupeville Partnership Group is WSF's primary source of information on how local communities perceive the new reservation system. WSF hoped that the new reservation system would reduce traffic at the terminal, on the approach, and on connecting roadways that can get backed up during peak ferry travel times.

Many survey respondents and partnership group members noted that their favorite aspect of Save A Spot is that it allows them to arrive at the terminal only 30 minutes before their sailing, instead of hours before as they sometimes had to under the old system.

This flexibility to arrive later has two main benefits: (1) only the number of cars that are traveling on the next sailing are lined up, instead of multiple sailings worth of vehicles, and (2) customers have more free time prior to their sailing to continue to do tourist activities in ferry communities, such as shopping and visiting restaurants.

While WSF does not have consistent data on vehicle queues outside of its terminals to measure impacts of the new reservation system on queues, Partnership members shared that they noticed fewer back-ups of ferry traffic outside the terminal under the new system. WSF would like to be able to systematically track queuing outside of terminals and will explore options for doing so in future phases of the project.

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*“Reservations are a huge win for Port Townsend - ferry traffic can go downtown, eat, sightsee, and not fill the roadway with idling cars for hours”*

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## How is Save a Spot Working for WSF?

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**The system must work for WSF, recognizing the unique circumstances of its different routes, helping the agency manage demand, improving asset utilization, and responding to legislative direction.**

### Demand Management

An effective demand management tool encourages customers to move from the most desired sailings of the day into off-peak sailings where vehicle deck space is not at capacity, thus allowing WSF to transport more customers using existing terminal and vessel holding capacity. The Save a Spot System encourages this shift by making reservations for off-peak sailings available 6 months in advance while reservations for peak sailings are only available one month in advance. Customers with flexibility in their travel plans who want to plan ahead (typically tourists and less frequent users) therefore book off peak sailings instead of driving up to the terminal during the busiest times.

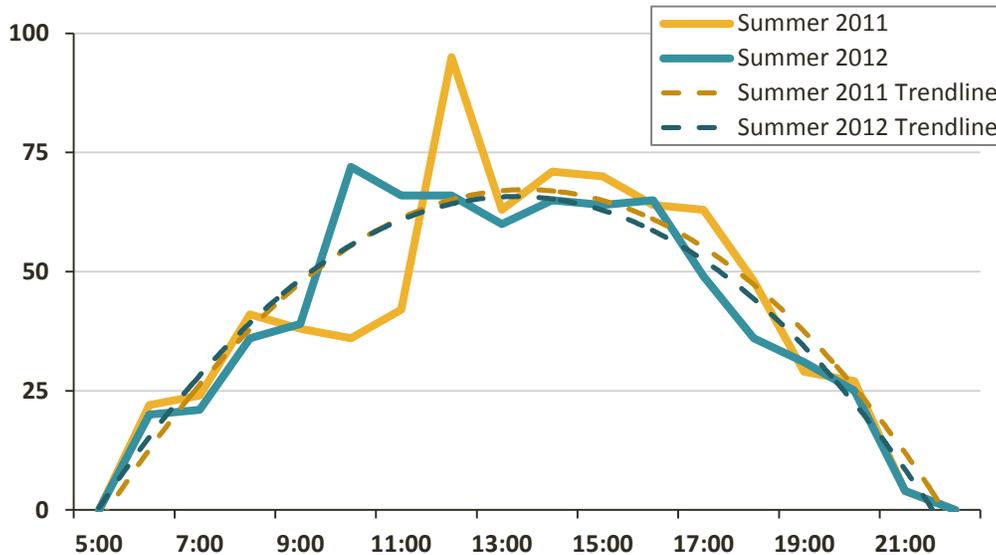
In order to understand how and if Save a Spot is achieving demand management goals, WSF analyzed customer arrival and ticket sales data to see how traffic patterns compared between 2011 and 2012 on the Port Townsend-Coupeville route. It was expected that impacts would be small given that WSF is only making about 60% of the vehicle deck available for reservations currently as it works to ensure tollbooth processing times are fast enough. The large portion of space available for drive-up customers without reservations means that some congestion and traffic spikes are still expected during peak times.

*The new reservation system has not yet demonstrated a significant impact on spreading demand*

**Analysis of Customer Arrival Trends.** One way to understand the demand curve is to look at customer arrival times throughout the day to see where demand peaked last summer (when the old reservation system was in place) compared to this summer (with Save a Spot).

The chart below shows Sunday travel patterns (typically the busiest day during the summer) by comparing the average of seven Sundays of customer arrivals in summer 2011 to the same seven Sundays in summer 2012. This data shows fairly similar customer arrival patterns from 2011 to 2012, although in 2012, customers began arriving earlier in the day and arrival patterns were slightly flatter throughout the afternoon.

**Average number of vehicles processed per hour on Sunday at the Coupeville terminal**



Source: Average of WSF Vehicle Exits Statistics comparing July 8-August 25, 2012 and July 10-August 27, 2011 leaving from the Coupeville terminal.

WSF would like to continue to improve the demand management impact of the new reservation system. During planning, WSF assumed that 80% of the vessel would be available for reservations. This means there would be fewer drive-up spaces available, and customers would be less likely to come to the terminal without a reservation, expecting longer wait times. With a few exceptions, only 60% of the vessel has been available for reservations during Phase I, diminishing some of the system’s demand management potential. Longer transaction times than expected have only allowed for 60% of the vessel to be reserved at current staffing levels in order to process all reservations and maintain on time performance.

*With the new reservation system, WSF has carried more vehicles with fewer overloaded sailings*

**Analysis of Overloaded Sailings.** Another way to look at demand management is to compare the number of vehicles being transported to the number of sailings that are at or above capacity.

**Number of Vehicles and Sailing Overloads in August**

	<u>Sample Week in August</u>	
	2011	2012
<b>Eastbound</b> (Leaving Port Townsend)		
Vehicles Carried	4,994	5,230
Sailings Overloaded	29	31
<b>Westbound</b> (Leaving Coupeville)		
Vehicles Carried	5,076	5,191
Sailings Overloaded	37	23
<b>Total Both Directions</b>		
Vehicles Carried	10,070	10,421
Sailings Overloaded	66	54

Source: WSF ticket sales data for August 11-17, 2012 and August 13-19, 2011. Vehicle counts are converted to 20' vehicle equivalents.

The table above shows the number of standard vehicle equivalents (assuming a standard 20' vehicle) that were transported in during a sample week in August as well as the number of sailings in those weeks that were overloaded. "Overloaded" is defined as 64 or more vehicles wanting to travel on a sailing, which implies that at least one customer would have to wait for the next sailing.

In the eastbound direction (Port Townsend to Coupeville), WSF carried 5% more vehicles in the 2012 sample week than in 2011. This increase in traffic resulted in two additional overloaded sailings during the same week, meaning those additional vehicles only caused a small increase in wait times for other passengers.

In the westbound direction, WSF carried about 2% more vehicle traffic in the 2012 sample week than in 2011. This increase in traffic was well spread across all available sailings, as the number of overloaded sailings decreased from 37 in 2011 to 23 in 2012.

**WSF carried 3% more vehicles in 2012 with the new reservation system.**

**The number of overloaded sailings decreased by 18%.**

Although one week of data represents a small sample size and is not statistically conclusive, this preliminary analysis shows that WSF is likely achieving its goal of carrying the more vehicles using its existing assets. It is important to note that 2012 ridership levels are still not as high as they were in 2006/07 before the steel electric vessels were taken out of service and the 2008 recession affected ridership system wide. With the new reservation system, WSF expects to be able to accommodate ridership at the levels it saw in 2006/07.

***The No-Show Rate decreased from about 39% to 14% from summer 2011 to summer 2012***

The No-Show Rate is the percent of customers that do not show up for their reserved sailing. A high no-show rate was one of the issues with the previous vehicle reservation system on the Port Townsend-Coupeville route. Because customers did not have to pay a deposit, they could make multiple reservations for a day even if they did not intend to use them. The high rate resulted in some boats sailing emptier than expected, long standby lines of customers who knew they could likely travel on boats that were fully reserved, and customers not being able to make reservations on their desired sailings because the reservations were already taken by customers who did not intend to travel at that time.

The Save A Spot system was designed to reduce the no-show rate by adding methods for customers to easily change or cancel reservations and by introducing the deposit system. Both of these business rules have contributed to a measurable decrease in the no-show rate from 2011 to 2012. The no-show rate tracked during August 2011 averaged 39%.

Getting a comparable figure for summer of 2012 involved some calculation, as "no-show" is defined differently under the new system. Customers do not forfeit their deposit as long as they travel any time

within the operational day. Only 6% of customers with reservations did not travel at all during the same operational day with the new reservation system. However, a slightly larger portion of customers did not show for their reserved sailing time. When customer arrival time was compared to reserved sailing time, the no-show rate during July and August 2012 averaged 14% by sailing. This is still a significant improvement from the prior system.

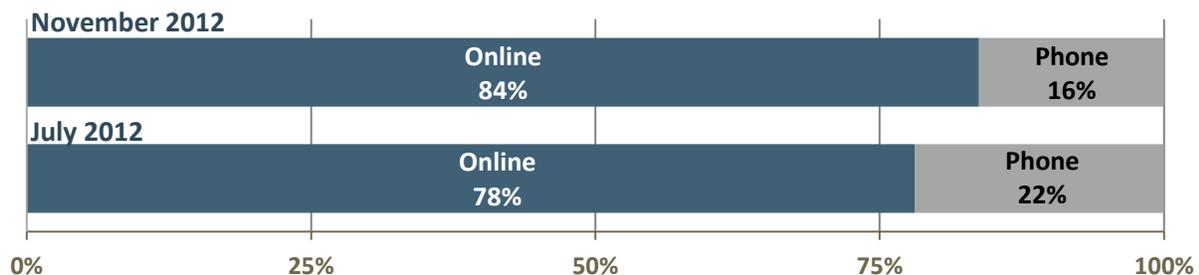
### Minimizing WSF Customer Service Staffing Impacts

WSF designed Save A Spot with customer features, such as online reservation management, that were intended to minimize customer service staffing impacts and result in more efficient operations. The analysis of customer activity below shows that most customers are using the system in the way that minimizes staffing impacts at WSF.

#### *Nearly 85% of customers are making reservations online*

Reservation system data shows that the percent of customers making their reservation online increased from 78% during July to 84% in November. Universal and Premier Account holders made reservations online more than 97% of the time. Guest users (81%) and Executive Account holders (84%) were less likely to make reservations online.

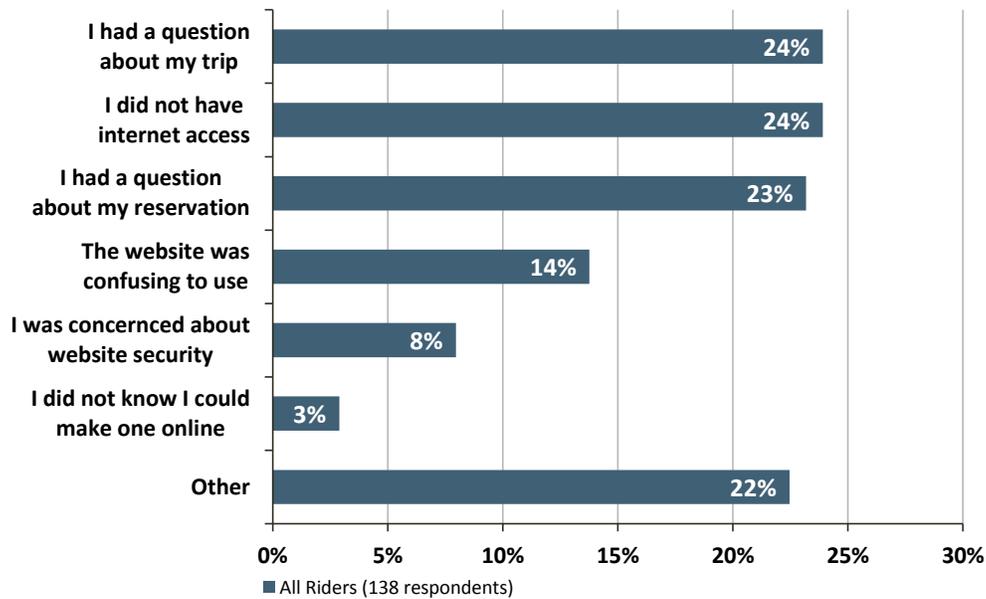
Executive Account holders (commercial customers) have been contacting WSF more frequently regarding reservations account management tasks like refund requests for no show fees and other billing questions. Many of the system improvements that have been rolled out between initial system implementation and the end of the year were aimed at providing better online tools to commercial customers. Since implementation of these tools (like the ability to make recurring reservations), more commercial customers have been making reservations through the website. Calls tend to be about account management issues rather than assistance making reservations.



#### *Customers choose to make reservations by phone because they have a question, don't have internet access, or generally prefer the phone over the internet*

In the fall customer survey, respondents who reported making a reservation by phone were asked why they elected not to use the WSF website. The reasons why customers made reservations by phone are shown in the exhibit below.

WASHINGTON STATE FERRIES  
VEHICLE RESERVATION SYSTEM PHASE I OUTCOMES



Note: Respondents could select multiple answers, so percentages will not add to 100%

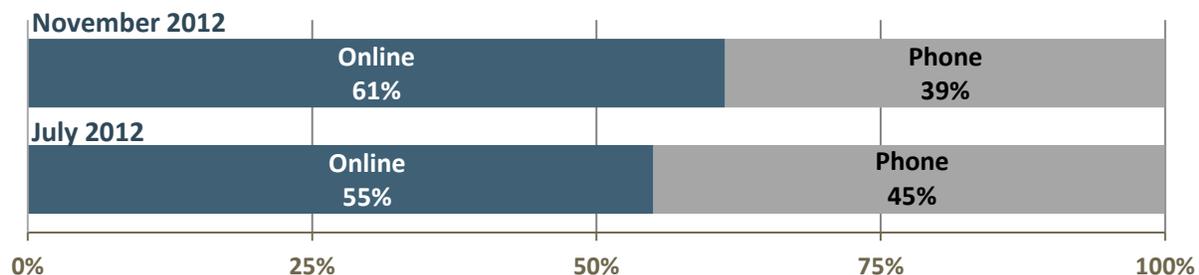
- Most customers who made a reservation by phone did so because they had a question about their trip or reservation they wanted to clarify with a customer service agent (47%) or because they did not have internet access (24%).
- About 22% of respondents selected other. Of these respondents, most noted that they just prefer to use the phone over the internet. Additional responses included special scenarios such as vehicles that were too long to make a reservation for online and bugs or glitches with the reservations website.
- Respondents traveling on the Anacortes-Sidney route were more likely than other respondents to say they had a question about their reservation (33%, versus 23% of all customers).

**About 87% of respondents kept their original reservation (n = 1,609)**



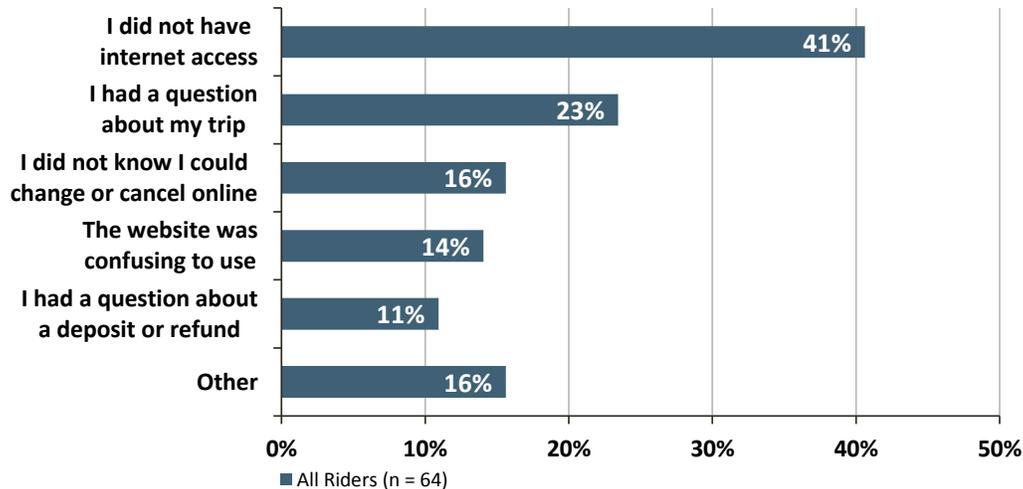
**About 61% of changes and cancelations were made online**

Reservation system data shows that the percent of customers making changes and cancelations online increased from 55% in July to 61% in November. This is still significantly less than the 84% of new reservations that are made online, and WSF will be looking at ways to encourage customers to change or cancel their reservations online when possible.



**Customers choose to change or cancel reservations by phone because they don't have internet access or have a question for a customer service agent**

In the fall customer survey, respondents who reported changing or canceling their reservation by phone were asked why they elected not to use the WSF website. The reasons why customers used the phone are shown in the exhibit below.



Note: Respondents could select multiple answers, so percentages will not add to 100%

The most commonly selected reason was that the customer didn't have internet access, following by needing to speak to a representative to answer questions about the trip. About 16% of respondents did not know they could make a change or cancellation online.

### Impacts on Existing WSF Systems

WSF manages several IT systems in addition to the new Save A Spot system. Implementation of the new system has highlighted the need for WSF to review existing operational policies and business processes related to some of these systems, like the Wave2Go ticketing system and the Foundation schedule management system, in order to ensure better integration and efficient processes that work for staff.

In addition to systems integration questions, Save a Spot has introduced new types of transactions, which have had an impact on current back office functions. Refund activity has increased, including exception-based refunds (those falling outside the normal circumstances under which a refund would be issued). Exception-based refunds require staff time to investigate the circumstances and manually issue a refund.

Finally, the new reservation system has highlighted the need for increased IT support hours to help staff troubleshoot problems and better documentation. Given the complexity of the system and the business policies that have been developed, written desktop procedures aren't always adequate to support staff. More thorough operating manuals and online support tools are required.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Key Successes

1. **Customers like having a guaranteed spot on the boat.** One of the most common responses from customers who took the survey was that they like having a guaranteed spot on the sailing of their choice. This means that ferry customers find benefit in the fundamental purpose of the reservation system. While there may be need to continue to refine how the system works and the details of the business rules, customers like having a reservation system that works for them.
2. **The website is working well for WSF and WSF Customers.** The Save A Spot website was one of the foundational elements of the reservation system. Its success is directly tied to the efficiency of WSF's operations and to customer satisfaction. Survey results indicate that people are using and liking the website.

Most customers who responded to the survey used the website to make their reservation, and many also made changes and cancelations online. Survey respondent's number one aspect they like about the new reservation system is that the website is easy to use. They also identified numerous features they like that WSF built to serve customers, such as intuitive booking of sailings and account and reservation management options.

3. **Community input was key to designing a successful reservations program.** The Port Townsend - Coupeville Partnership Group played a key role in forming business policies. This resulted in a system that works well for the community.

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*"I think this has been incredible evidence of Ferries listening to the public and incorporating our feedback"*

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4. **Ridership is increasing while overloaded sailings and no-shows are decreasing.** While analytics will be stronger as WSF continues to collect data from the system over time, analysis of preliminary results shows encouraging trends in ridership patterns. Ridership on the Port Townsend-Coupeville route increase by about 3% from summer 2011 to summer 2012, while overloaded sailings decreased, indicating some demand management impacts from the reservation system. Additionally, the percent of customers that do not show for their reservation is decreasing, which leads to more predictability for WSF and other customers.
5. **WSF has improved customer communications.** Since WSF collects email addresses for nearly all customers that make a reservation, it is easier and faster to contact customers with travel information updates such as canceled or delayed sailings.

## Areas for Improvement and Lessons Learned

As WSF embarks on planning for Phase 2 there are a few system issues it will continue to address and lessons learned that it will carry forward.

1. **Vehicle Processing Times.** One of the current limiting factors of increasing the amount of vessel space available for reservations is vehicle processing times at the terminal. While IT improvements are not expected to have much of an impact at this point, WSF will be providing staff with additional training to help improve processing times. It expects to improve processing times slightly, which may allow a higher percentage of each sailing to be reserved. WSF is also working to improve customer communications about the check-in process, such as arrival times and barcode/confirmation requirements, in order to reduce confusion at the terminal.
2. **Summer Rollout.** Rolling out a new system during the summer when there is more traffic and more customers who are not familiar with the ferry system is risky and presented challenges for WSF staff. Going forward, major system changes will not be rolled out during the summer months.
3. **Terminal Staff Engagement.** During Phase I, Port Townsend and Coupeville terminal staff were engaged early on in the process, while Anacortes terminal staff were not engaged until close to the system going live in June. In implementation of future phases of the reservation system, WSF will work to engage terminal staff as early as possible to ensure that all issues are brought forward in a timely manner to receive staff input.
4. **Online Changes and Cancelations.** A smaller percentage of customers are making changes and cancelations online (61%) than are making their original reservations online (84%). While some of this difference is likely unavoidable due to changes and cancelations from the road where customers do not have internet access, some of these changes and cancelations could be moved online through improved communication and website usability. Common reasons that customers made changed or canceled reservations by phone included needing information about trips or refund policies, website confusion, and not knowing that changes and cancelations could be made online.
5. **Commercial Customers.** Given the complexity of their businesses and the multiple drivers who use the ferries on a daily basis, commercial customers require specialized customer service. In future phases of the reservations project that would open the system to more commercial reservations, WSF will consider a dedicated staff position to work with commercial accounts.