WSDOT

Washington State Ferries

Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth Route Frequently Asked Questions

Background

Washington State Ferries (WSF) has heard a wide range of ideas and feedback on how to improve operations on the Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth route. This document is organized around the key themes that come up most frequently in public comments: customer information, electronic tolling, Fauntleroy terminal size and layout, hand-held scanners, rerouting service to Downtown Seattle, sailing schedule, terminal operations, tollbooth bypass lane, and vessels sailing with space available.

FAQs

Customer information

1. **Can WSF's ferry alerts focus more on wait times than on vessel delays?**

   WSF strives to strike a balance between the two. We serve walk-on passengers, bicyclists, vanpools, motorcycles, and vehicles. For those not boarding the ferry in a vehicle, vessel departure times are more important than vehicle wait times. In addition, we can predict delays more accurately than the amount of time an individual vehicle spends in line.

   The wait at the Fauntleroy terminal is difficult to quantify for several reasons:
   - Vehicles line up on the shoulder of a city street out of sight of the terminal.
   - WSF Customer Service uses traffic cameras to estimate wait times based on how far up Fauntleroy Way the vehicle queue stretches, but with sailings to dual destinations, determining the wait time of a specific customer is difficult as we have no way to estimate how many Vashon or Southworth cars are in line at any given time.

2. **Can WSF use technology to help determine when the next boat is coming?**

   The tool we use for tracking ferries is called [Vessel Watch](#). Vessel Watch works well when vessels are on time and following the published sailing schedule. When boats are behind schedule, the Vessel Watch program begins picking up the next scheduled sailing and shows it as "on time" even when it's an earlier sailing that's delayed.

3. **How should customers alert WSF when queued vehicles are waiting behind a parked car along Fauntleroy Way?**

   Customers can contact us in a number of ways: email wsfinfo@wsdot.wa.gov; call WSF Customer Service at 206-464-6400, 888-808-7977, or 511 (from within the state of Washington); or send a tweet to [@wsferries](#). The best way to let us know when a vehicle is blocking the ferry line would be to call Customer Service.

Electronic tolling

4. **Can WSF use Good to Go! at the Fauntleroy terminal to speed up the current ticketing process?**

   Not currently. There are two ways that Good to Go! could be used for ferry fare payment in the future.

- Add Good to Go! as a payment option, while continuing the existing fare structure and current method of payment at the tollbooth.
- Use Good to Go! as the exclusive method of fare payment. This would require WSF and the Washington State Transportation Commission (WSF's fare-setting authority) to simplify WSF's current fare structure and would take some time to implement.

5. **How would WSF's current fare structure need to change in order to use Good to Go! at the Fauntleroy terminal?**

At this time, Good to Go! technology does not have the ability to count passengers in vehicles, so using the system at the Fauntleroy terminal would require the elimination of passenger fares. (The systems used to count passengers in highway toll lanes only counts to the number of passengers necessary to use the HOV lane, not the actual number of people in the vehicle.) This lost revenue would need to be captured in other ways. In 2012, the legislature's Joint Transportation Committee recommended that WSF consider Good to Go! as the sole method of payment on the Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth route to speed up processing at the terminal. The recommendation indicated that there would be no fares for passengers, and revenue loss would be made up elsewhere. At the time, there was some community concern expressed over the potential for significantly higher vehicle fares necessary to make up the difference in lost passenger revenue.

6. **Will WSF consider Good to Go! or other technology in the future?**

WSF's 2040 Long Range Plan will include recommendations on new technology options for improving operations and efficiency across the system. The Long Range Plan is scheduled to be delivered to the legislature in January 2019. The complexity of WSF's fare structure would need to be simplified in order to implement some of these new technologies. Any finding for use of Good to Go! at ferry terminals would likely be incorporated in WSDOT's 2020 budget request for a new ticketing system across WSF.

7. **Can WSF use ORCA cards to speed up the process for processing vehicles at the Fauntleroy terminal?**

ORCA cards are not a viable option for the Fauntleroy terminal. ORCA cards are designed for passenger travel, not vehicle travel. There would still need to be some sort of determination for how many passengers are in each vehicle if travelers were allowed to "tap and go."

8. **Can WSF load the ferry and collect tickets on the boat?**

The Washington State Transportation Commission sets fares for WSF. Shifting fare collection to onboard the vessel would require a policy change, restructuring of the fare system, new technology, and personnel changes. Comparable ferry systems using this method have self-serve ticket kiosks and a purser who collects tickets on board. It is not feasible on the Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth route because the crossing time to Vashon Island is too short, and all passengers would need to remain in their vehicles during fare collection.

Fauntleroy terminal size and layout

9. **Can WSF make changes to the Fauntleroy terminal, such as adding lanes or making the dock bigger?**

Many of the suggested changes to the Fauntleroy terminal will be studied as part of the Fauntleroy Terminal Trestle and Transfer Span Replacement Project, which will start in January 2018. The Fauntleroy terminal is aging and highly vulnerable to a seismic event. To preserve this critical transportation link, the facility is scheduled to be replaced by 2027, with preliminary engineering and environmental review for the terminal replacement project set to begin in early 2018, and construction starting in 2025. The project will be designed to meet WSF's current facility design standards. The extended timeline is necessary to perform the required environmental review.

WSF will conduct robust stakeholder engagement in Fauntleroy, Southworth, and Vashon throughout environmental review and permitting, design and construction for the project.

10. Can WSF add parking lots or remote holding?

The Fauntleroy dock is located in a residential neighborhood with limited land availability. Options for adding remote vehicle holding lots or parking lots will be considered as part of the Fauntleroy Terminal Replacement Project, which will include extensive public participation.

11. Can WSF change the tollbooth configuration?

The number and orientation of the tollbooths will be studied as part of the Fauntleroy Terminal Replacement Project. Changing the size, shape, or orientation of the existing tollbooths at the Fauntleroy terminal in the interim would require additional funding.

12. Can the Vashon and Southworth vehicle lines be separated?

The Fauntleroy Ferry Advisory Committee has investigated this idea in the past. There is simply not enough room for additional vehicle staging lanes along California Avenue, Wildwood Place or Fauntleroy Way. While there is a small turnout for waiting vanpools just south of the bus stop on Fauntleroy Way, the shoulder past that point is too narrow to allow for a long line of cars. The City of Seattle would be the lead for any effort to widen the street around the terminal.

Hand-held scanners

13. Is WSF currently using hand-held scanners at the Fauntleroy terminal?

Yes. We are currently using hand-held scanners at the Fauntleroy terminal for carpool vans and motorcycles. However, due to a new loading procedure, we are no longer using them for other vehicles at the terminal.

14. Why did WSF discontinue using the hand-held scanners for all vehicles?

Our current handheld scanners were deployed in 2008 and have been in use for over nine years. The devices have gone through substantial wear and tear, making the physical hardware less reliable. They have to be sent in for repairs frequently and it is becoming difficult to find spare parts to fix them. We have been working with our ticketing vendor for two years to get a new device developed, but they have been unable to meet our needs. This is in part because their technology is old and does not work with the new generation of handhelds.

Additionally, we have issues with wireless access at the Fauntleroy terminal. There is limited reach of the wireless signal and sometimes our staff try to operate the hand-held scanners outside of wireless range (e.g. on the street just prior to the tollbooth). This causes us to assume the ticket being scanned is valid until the system can reconnect, deeming the transaction "offline." This leads to lost revenue or some cards being scanned multiple times when staff try to scan a card several times to get the transaction to go through.

We are currently working on next generation systems, which will provide a new solution that is more reliable.

15. How much revenue was lost when the scanners were used for all vehicles?

We have no way to quantify the exact amount of lost revenue.

In 2016, there were 13,442 offline transactions at the Fauntleroy terminal, compared to 4,678 offline transactions in 2017, when the handheld scanner were not used. Offline transactions occur when there is no available wireless signal to validate a ticket in real-time. While there is no way to quantify the exact amount of lost revenue, offline transactions are generally correlated to lost revenue. The greater the number of offline transactions, the greater the probability that a customer received a free trip.

Rerouting service to downtown Seattle

16. Can WSF change the current route structure to send Southworth or Vashon customers to Colman Dock in downtown Seattle instead of Fauntleroy?

In the 2006 WSF Long Range Plan draft, WSF considered the option of closing the Fauntleroy terminal and running all Southworth and Vashon ferries to downtown Seattle. Users of the route opposed this plan, particularly those from Vashon Island who stressed the long-time employment, commerce and medical connections between the island and West Seattle and customers from South Kitsap County who use the ferry to connect to points south of the City of Seattle. Additionally, the City of Seattle opposed bringing more vehicles into downtown. With all the opposition, this option was not included in the final 2009 WSF Long Range Plan. We are updating our long range plan to look at options for service through 2040 and will determine if this option warrants fresh consideration.

Sailing schedule

17. Does WSF plan to change the sailing schedule for the Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth route?

Yes. In spring 2019, three Issaquah class ferries (124-car capacity) will operate on the route compared to the two Issaquah class ferries and the smaller, 90-car *Sealth* that serve the route today. The sailing schedule will need to change to accommodate this new vessel assignment and add the necessary time to load/unload three 124-car vessels. We have already seen the impact of having two Issaquah class vessels on a run with a dock holding 80 cars and a schedule designed for three smaller vessels, and the challenges are likely to increase with three 124-car ferries.

As with any schedule change, WSF will work closely with Ferry Advisory Committees, the Triangle Route Task Force, transit providers, and the public before making any changes to the sailing schedule. Public outreach, including the opportunity to comment on any proposed schedule changes, will occur in mid-2018.

18. Is there discussion of changing all sailings out of Fauntleroy to direct sailings or all sailings out of Fauntleroy to multi-destination?

Direct sailings provide quicker crossing times for Southworth customers and ensure a set amount of dedicated (i.e. non-shared) capacity for either Vashon or Southworth. Vessels can also cycle back to Fauntleroy more quickly to make another sailing.

Dual destination sailings provide more frequent opportunities to travel to either Vashon or Southworth. They make it easier to process vehicles at the Fauntleroy terminal as every car that passes through the tollbooth could get on every sailing (compared to a Vashon-only or Southworth-only trip). Sailings stopping at both Vashon and Southworth make connections between Vashon and Southworth possible, providing access to the King County Water Taxi at Vashon for Southworth customers.

Adding more direct or multi-destination sailings would require a schedule revision. WSF will make schedule adjustments in anticipation of adding a third Issaquah Class ferry to the Triangle Route in spring 2019. All options, including more direct sailings or more multi-destination sailings, will be considered.

19. Can WSF adjust the schedule to better serve customers connecting from Southworth to the Vashon King County Water Taxi?

All connections, including Southworth to Vashon, will be considered as part of the upcoming Triangle Route schedule review. For any schedule change, WSF works with all transit agencies to align schedules through regular coordination meetings.

20. **Is it possible to improve the emergency two-boat schedule?**

Yes. WSF recognizes that the emergency two-boat schedule needs to be improved. WSF planners are currently working on adjusting the emergency two-boat schedule to better serve customers and make sure sailings leave on time.

Terminal operations

21. **Can all walk-ons be loaded at the end of vehicle loading in Fauntleroy?**

The Fauntleroy terminal serves walk-ons, motorcyclists, vanpools, and other vehicles. WSF's policy is to encourage walk-on customers, especially given the vehicle constraints at the Fauntleroy terminal.
It is currently standard procedure for us to load walk-ons at the end of the load when we are running late. If we are on schedule, we also load waiting walk-on customers at the beginning of the load to allow them the opportunity to find a seat on the ferry and get out of the weather as soon as possible.

22. **Is there opportunity to improve how terminal attendants direct cars at the terminal?**

Last summer, 18 vessel and terminal employees completed a two-day WSDOT course in traffic control training. This course certifies each participant as a trainer in hand signaling. These employees are taking what they learned back to their respective terminals and vessels, including on the Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth route, to help standardize the traffic hand signals used to direct customers across all routes.

23. **Is it possible to add signage along Fauntleroy Way so customers know what ferry is loading and where the traffic line begins?**

WSF is considering options for better signage along Fauntleroy Way. It will require coordination with the City of Seattle and depending on the size and scale of the project, possibly additional funding.

24. **Can you send ticket-sellers up the line along Fauntleroy Way to sell tickets by credit card?**

This technology is not currently available to WSF, but scanners may have this as a feature in the future. At this time, we don't have the ability add a separate ticketing system that is not compatible with the rest of our fare collection system.

Additionally, WSF employees cannot conduct business in active traffic or on Seattle city streets, so transactions would need to take place from the sidewalk on the passenger side of the vehicle. WSF would also need additional funding to add staff to sell tickets outside the terminal area.

25. **What is the process for handling vehicles eligible for medical preferential loading?**

During peak travel times, medical preferences are sent around the south side of the Fauntleroy tollbooth near where vanpools stage. During off-peak travel times when lines are short, medical preference vehicles process through the toll booth just as normal vehicles do.

Tollbooth bypass lane

26. **Can WSF bring back the bypass lane to fill the empty spots on the ferry?**

In the past, WSF used to let Vashon drivers "by-pass" the tollbooth by using the exit lanes. Due to the recent increases in overall ferry traffic at this terminal, in addition to issues related to cross-traffic, limited visibility and speed, this practice is no longer safe and will not be re-instituted. WSF cannot put our employees and customers at risk in this way.

We will continue to use the exit lanes for vehicle holding after a vessel offloads.

27. **Can one tollbooth be used as a pre-ticketed customer lane only?**

The Triangle Task Force is currently discussing how a pre-ticketed customer lane at Fauntleroy might work. Such a lane would have to serve both Vashon and Southworth customers and would only work during busy times when a vessel is actively loading and the dock has been cleared.

In 2016, 70% of Vashon vehicle customers and 41% of Southworth vehicle customers used multi-ride cards to pay for their travel. Additional study is needed to determine if designating one of the Fauntleroy tollbooths as "pre-ticketed only" would speed up operations or allow more vehicles on sailings during peak times.

Vessels sailing with space available

28. **How can there be empty spaces on ferries when there is a long wait?**

During peak time, more vehicles arrive than the dock can hold, which means drivers for both Southworth and Vashon must wait in a single line on Fauntleroy Way. When a vessel arrives, we load the vehicles from the dock onto the vessel and start processing vehicles through the tollbooth. For single-destination sailings, a police officer has to pull vehicles for that destination out of line. This takes time, because the officer must walk up Fauntleroy Way and manually call vehicles out of line, waiting for gaps in through-traffic to allow the vehicles to pull out safely. Often, there are not enough vehicles for an individual destination within the officer's sight to fill the vessel.

29. **Why can't WSF hold a ferry until it's full, even if it means it will depart late?**

Customers often ask that we wait "as long as it takes" to fill each ferry, because they believe this will get them to their destination faster. Due to the single slip at Fauntleroy, this is not the case. When we delay one sailing's departure to wait for more vehicles, it results in a cascading series of delays for the rest of the day. In addition, because there is only one slip, a vessel waiting offshore to offload passengers at Fauntleroy can't land. People on the incoming ferry then arrive late, which results in unexpected delays to their trip and missed transit connections.

Other

30. **How do I reach out to my community's Ferry Advisory Committee (FAC)?**

Contact information for each FAC chair is can be found on WSF's website along with a link to the state law that directs WSF to consult with FACs.

31. **Where can I find contact information for Washington State Ferries?**

Visit our website to find information about purchasing tickets, making reservations, and signing up for ferry alerts. We also are very active on our Twitter page. If you have questions specific to this route or the Triangle Task Force email us at WSFcomms@wsdot.wa.gov.

32. **When a boat breaks down why does it take so long to find spare parts and fix the problem?**

Nine of our 22 vessels are over 30 years old. Because of their age, many parts the vessels require are not readily available and must be retrofitted at our maintenance facility at Eagle Harbor or ordered from offsite locations.

With 19 vessels in service and two vessels rotating out for maintenance, WSF typically has only one funded standby vessel for emergency relief throughout the busy summer months. Unscheduled repairs can quickly consume this extra capacity, and there have been periods during recent summers when all of our ferries were either in service or out for repairs with no relief vessel available. This makes it difficult to restore service when a boat breaks down on one route.