Washington State Ferries

2040 Long Range Plan

Spring 2018 Community Engagement Summary

WSDOT

Washington State Ferries

June 2018

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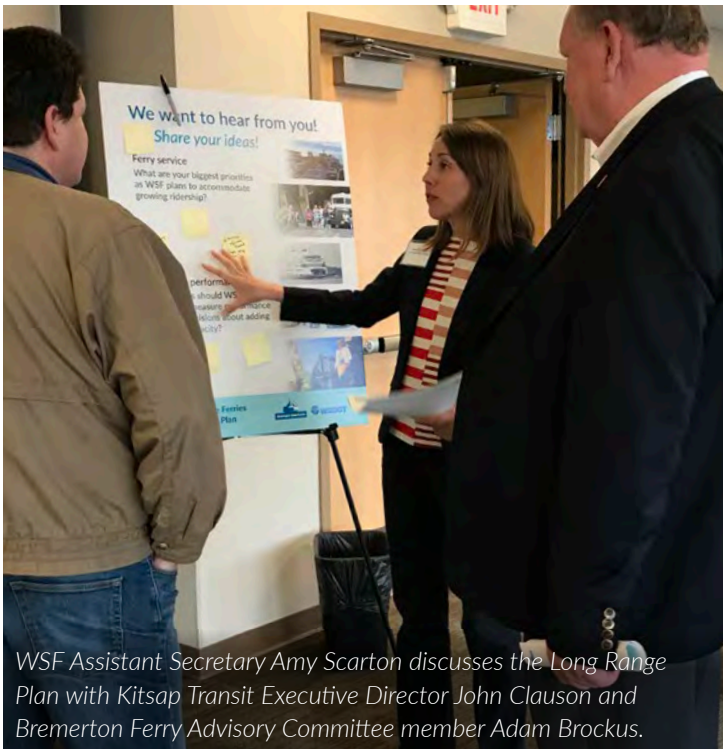
Background

Washington State benefits in many ways from a coordinated, comprehensive, and integrated ferry system. In 2017, the nation's largest ferry system carried nearly 24.5 million people, enough to fill CenturyLink Field every day of the year. As the region continues to grow, we need a ferry system that promotes mobility and allows people to thrive and participate as active members of their community, while supporting our natural environment. Washington State Ferries (WSF) is developing a Long Range Plan to better understand and prepare for the ferry system's changing needs through 2040. The process includes robust community engagement centered around two milestones: identification of issues and priorities in spring 2018 and review of a Draft Long Range Plan in fall 2018. The final Long Range Plan is due to the Legislature on Jan. 1, 2019 and will guide future service and investments in vessels, terminals, and technology.



WSF Assistant Secretary Amy Scarton discusses the Long Range Plan with Kitsap Transit Executive Director John Clauson and Bremerton Ferry Advisory Committee member Adam Brockus.

Spring 2018 open houses

Tuesday, April 17, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
Bainbridge Island Senior Center
370 Brien Drive SE, Bremerton

Thursday, April 19, 5-7 p.m.
Cotton Building
607 Water St., Port Townsend

Tuesday, April 24, 6-8 p.m.
Vashon Island High School
9600 SW 204th St., Vashon Island

Wednesday, April 25, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
Kitsap Conference Center
100 Washington Ave., Bremerton

Thursday, April 26, 6-8 p.m.
John Sedgwick Jr. High
8995 SE Sedgwick Road, Port Orchard

Tuesday, May 1, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
Clinton Community Hall
6411 South Central Ave., Clinton

Wednesday, May 2, 3:30-6 p.m.
Brickworks
150 Nichols St. Friday Harbor

Tuesday, May 8, 6-8 p.m.
Kingston Village Green
Community Center
26159 Dulay Road NE, Kingston

Thursday, May 17, 6-8 p.m.
Fauntleroy Church
9140 California Ave. SW, Seattle

Overview

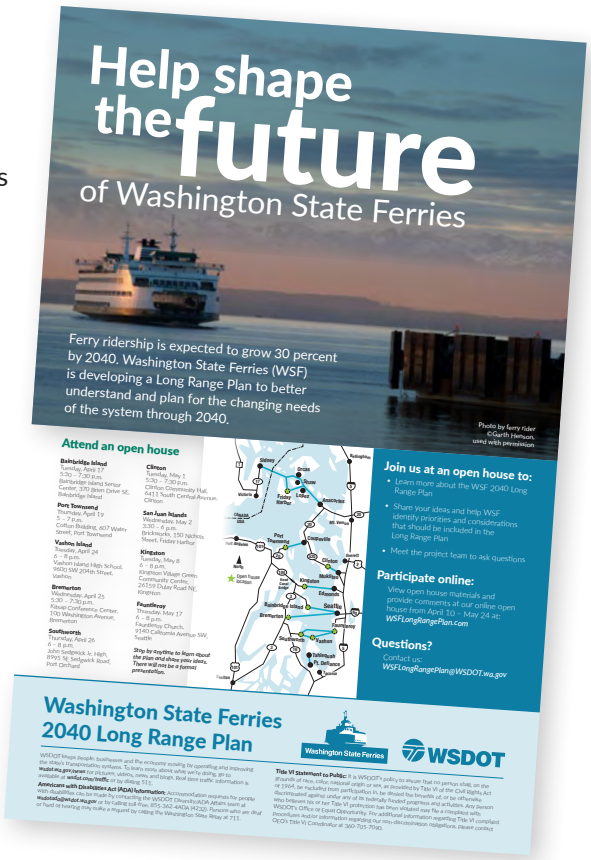
WSF's goals for community engagement during the Long Range Plan development are to:

- Promote public understanding of the purpose of and need for the plan and the challenges facing the ferry system.
- Ensure inclusive engagement early and throughout the process, and robust Ferry Advisory Committee involvement.
- Deliver comprehensive and consistent information through a variety of communication methods.
- Encourage community engagement and provide opportunities for public input.

During the first round of public outreach, WSF hosted nine in-person open houses, six outreach sessions on the ferry during the afternoon commute, and a six-week online open house in spring 2018 to introduce the Long Range Plan and gather input on community priorities. The public was invited to meet with project staff, ask questions, and provide early input about priorities and issues to be addressed in the plan. Attendees were encouraged to drop in at any time during the in-person open houses to learn about the plan and provide input; there were no formal presentations.

WSF is meeting regularly with Policy and Technical (PAG and TAG) Advisory Groups to gather input from key stakeholders. The PAG and TAG provided input to help inform the spring 2018 public outreach and their input is also helping to guide development of a Draft Long Range Plan. All advisory group meeting summaries are available on the project website: *wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/planning/long-range-plan*.

Throughout the planning process, an Executive Advisory Group made up of local and state elected and appointed officials is also meeting to provide policy guidance and input to WSF.



Community engagement

WSF offered multiple ways for people to learn about and provide early input on the Long Range Plan.

9 open houses

6 floating open houses

3,772 participants

330 open house attendees

3,442 online open house participants

482 total comments

869 survey responses

Getting the word out

68 posters displayed at terminals and aboard ferries

2,550 project website views

69 tweets

215,612 total impressions

10 emails* sent to **35,700** people

1 press release sent to statewide media

26 news articles

**Email announcements to: Subscribers of the project listerv, WSF weekly updates, ferry route alerts, WSDOT regional and project listservs, elected officials, tribes, Ferry Advisory Committee (FAC) members, and PAG and TAG members.*

Key themes

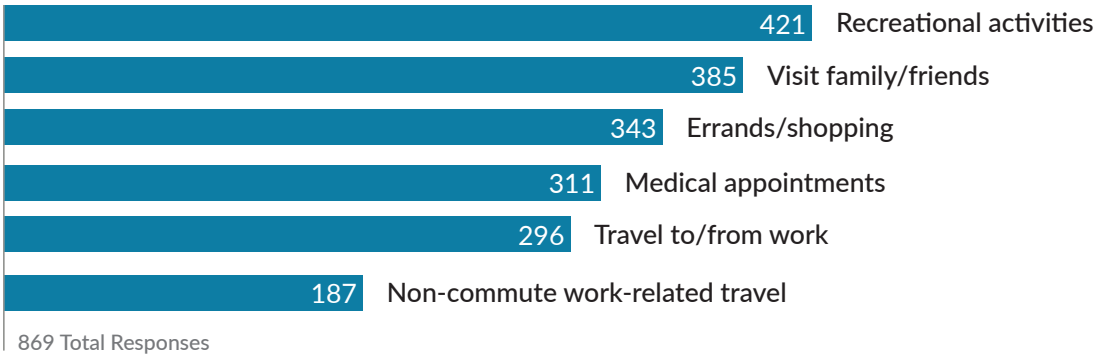
WSF received a total of 869 survey responses and 482 comments in person, by email, mail, and through the online open house between April 11 and May 24. The following key themes emerged in public comments and survey reponses, in order of frequency:

- **Service reliability:** The majority of participants said the Long Range Plan needs to focus on ensuring WSF is able to provide reliable service and making sure there are enough standby vessels in the fleet to minimize service disruptions. Many comments emphasized the need to build new vessels and to continue to adequately maintain an aging fleet. This was the strongest theme among all public comments and in all communities.
- **Managing growth:** Many participants provided input on how WSF should accommodate and manage ridership growth, including an interest in increased ferry service, expanding vehicle reservations, adjusting ferry schedules, providing more frequent service, considering new routes, and improving terminals to handle more customers and reduce wait time.
- **Multimodal connections and accessibility:** Several comments suggested ways to improve access to transit, walking, biking, parking, and carpool amenities. Participants also encouraged WSF to ensure access for people with disabilities or financial constraints.
- **Customer experience and technology:** Participants mentioned multiple ways for WSF to improve the customer experience such as real-time schedule information, advanced ticket technology, better access to Wi-Fi, parking, and additional amenities, including having healthful food onboard and more places for relaxing and leisure activities.
- **Sustainability and resiliency:** Participants provided mixed comments on reducing carbon emissions, greening the fleet, and preparing for climate change and emergencies. While some comments identified sustainability initiatives as key priorities for the plan, others asked WSF to prioritize providing reliable service over reducing carbon emissions.

Survey results

WSF encouraged in-person open house attendees, online open house participants, and ferry users to complete either a paper or online version of the survey. The purpose of the survey was to gather input on priorities to be addressed in the Long Range Plan. See Appendix C for the survey instrument and a full summary of responses.

A total of 869 people completed the survey. Respondents are almost equally split between infrequent ferry riders (45%) and frequent ferry riders (54%). Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) said they ride the ferries five or more days a week. When asked why they ride the ferry, respondents mentioned the following trip purposes most frequently:



Survey results

Overall, survey participants expressed support for maintaining reliable, convenient, and frequent ferry service. The following is a summary of key themes. Please see Appendix C for the survey instrument and a full summary of responses.

Service reliability

- More than half of survey respondents (54%) accept fewer sailings at non-peak times of the day if it would mean there is more time to maintain ferries and make them more reliable. The survey results indicated people are more willing to accept less frequent service if it means boats are better maintained, and therefore more reliable, than less frequent service to save fuel and operate more efficiently.
- When asked to rank priorities for budget purposes, respondents allocated the most funding to ferry operations (28%), vessel maintenance (25%), and building new ferries (21%).

Managing growth

- Participants are evenly split between preferring a guaranteed, reserved spot at a scheduled time, and showing up at the terminal for the next available ferry. Frequent ferry users and Central and South region users are more likely to prefer showing up at the terminal and waiting for the next ferry.
- Respondents said WSF should allocate almost half of the space on ferries for passenger vehicles. Frequent users and North and South region users allocated more space for passenger vehicles while Central region users allocated more space for walk-on passengers.
- Respondents, especially frequent ferry users, prefer adding service during peak times over encouraging customers to travel when more space is available.
- Survey respondents strongly prefer a sailing schedule where ferries leave at scheduled times (i.e. schedule reliability) over keeping the same number of departures throughout the day.
- When asked what incentives would be most likely to encourage ferry customers to walk on a ferry rather than drive, the top three responses included better access to public transportation near the ferry terminal; free, affordable, and available parking near the terminal; and free or discounted fares for walk-on passengers.

Customer experience and technology

- When asked about investment in technology, respondents prioritized real-time schedule information, mobile ticketing, and improved Wi-Fi connections.
- Parking, transit connections, and ticket technology are the most important terminal amenities to survey participants.

Sustainability

- Slightly more than half of respondents think ferries operating carbon-neutral/emitting zero greenhouse gases is important.
- 40 percent of respondents said it was acceptable to reduce service at non-peak times if it means the ferry system operates more efficiently, uses less fuel, and saves money.

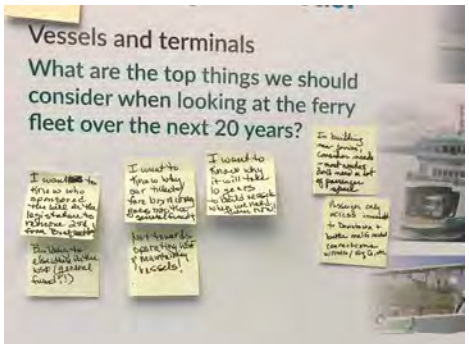
Comment summary

Below is a summary of comments collected in person, by email, mail, and through the online open house between April 11 and May 24. Quotes from sample comments are included in *italics* to highlight the tone of public feedback. Please see Appendix A for a complete record of all comments received.

Key themes

Service reliability

Commenters overwhelmingly said the Long Range Plan needs to focus on ensuring reliable service and making sure there are enough standby vessels to avoid service disruptions. Comments referred to prioritizing vessel maintenance and preservation, replacing aging ferries, and building additional vessels to expand the fleet.



- *Poor vessel reliability hurts everyone: residents, businesses, visitors, and WSF. Preservation and maintenance must be adequately funded. Additional spare/relief vessels are required to allow that maintenance.*
- *Frequent, reliable service is more important than occasional, really fast service.*
- *What is WSF doing to ensure that new ferries built today will last 60 years? In terms of procurement, ship yard selection, condition-based maintenance, cybersecurity, etc.*
- *Aging vessels must be replaced on a schedule that makes sense, 60 years is likely too long.*
- *Fund & build vessels before 50% of the fleet ages!*
- *Ferries that don't break down all the time in the San Juans. And/or enough backup capacity to handle them.*
- *The biggest priority for WSF should be replacing old, aging, unreliable vessels like the Super Class. These already have many reliability issues and seem to require a disproportionate amount of maintenance and repairs compared to other vessels in the fleet.*
- *Vessel maintenance, replacement and additions. Need more service and maintenance relief vessels, at least 2 as the fleet is experiencing more problems more frequently endangering people and economies.*
- *Standardize ferries, so they can serve all routes.*

- *Whidbey SeaTac Shuttle travels across the Mukilteo-Clinton ferry route a minimum of 18 times a day, 7 days a week...the biggest priority would be to have enough reserve ferries in the fleet to maintain the scheduled service. Our second priority would be to operate the ferries on-time, on schedule.*
- *Maybe make the ferry routes immune to tidal variances by having different docks, or adjustable docks that can work at different tidal heights.*
- *Prioritize building 3 more Olympic class now and develop the hybrid electric parallel, but not exclusively.*
- *Build new boats quickly.*
- *Dependable service without long waits in line to catch a ferry.*

Managing growth

Many participants had comments about how WSF should accommodate ridership growth and increase service to meet future demand. Commenters also thought WSF should encourage or provide additional passenger-only ferry service in the region. Comments in this theme included:

- Interest in adding ferry service, providing more frequent service, considering new routes, and improving terminals.
  - *Prioritize additional boats. Expand the system - additional routes would relieve road traffic in certain areas... Plan for more growth than projected.*
  - *Increase the number of passenger-only ferries.*
  - *Be a supportive partner to the new fast ferry routes (Kitsap Transit) since these could help reduce the impacts immensely.*
  - *[Provide] faster passenger only ferries, like Bremerton Fast Ferry and West Seattle Ferry.*
  - *At least some year-round evening connections between the islands, so that county residents can attend evening events on other islands without requiring evening lodging (at tourist rates).*
  - *The plan does not include any assessment of new or potential routes.*
  - *I think it would be very realistic for WSF to look into launching new southern auto ferry routes to ease congestion on I-5.*
  - *Terminal expansion needed to accommodate growth without backing up local roads.*
  - *Bigger dock at Fauntleroy.*
  - *The drop off/pick up area at the Bainbridge terminal needs to be redesigned for safety.*
  - *Increase capacity to meet demand both for ferries and terminals.*

- *Adding summer boats for tourist season, better vehicle maintenance schedules and standards.*
- *I think Mukilteo/Clinton stats will increase faster than your projections!*
- *The ridership forecast is based upon GMA numbers for growth. Does not include the growing level of tourist/recreational component of the ferry traffic model.*
- *There must be separate growth calculations for the growth of vehicle traffic on the vessels vs growth of passenger traffic.*

Comments about strategies to accommodate growth, such as expanding vehicle reservations and adjusting schedules. Several participants conveyed support for providing discounts or preferences to local residents.

- *Definitely expand the reservation system. It has been a huge success on the San Juan's routes, dramatically reducing traffic backups while rider numbers are increasing.*
- *Add reservations and measure service by spaces sold.*
- *...reservations!! Or better management of peak usage by using queuing theory, line or regression, or any better way of handling traffic!*
- *I wish a reservation system for commuters could be put into place to make the system more time reliable.*

- *Better night schedules so we don't have to wait 1+ hour in cold & dark.*
- *[The Long Range Plan Should consider] fast commutes -with schedules that match the typical island workday (10-5 for businesses, 8:30 to 3:30 for schools).*
- *Schedule should cater to residents, rather than tourists.*
- *Prioritize local/island residents who depend on ferry for errands/shopping/services/ etc.*
- *Discounts for island residents.*
- *Having a flexible system that can easily add boats to congested runs on heavy demand days.*

Multimodal connections and accessibility

Many participants expressed interest in better connections to transit.

- *Connection with transit systems - coordinated schedules.*
- *Current bus connections are poor in timing, route options, and weekend/off hours service.*
- *Work with other DOT departments (e.g. highways, rail) to develop transit plans that consider the big picture for transit.*
- *Better public transportation - better connection between ferries pedestrian/transit connection throughout system.*
- *Connection with public transit at the terminals should be better - the terminals really need to be multi-modal and have various destinations.*
- *Ensure strong partnerships with other transit providers in order to increase route options and accessibility for walk-on traffic.*

Participants encouraged WSF to prioritize accessibility to terminals and ferries for all users, including accommodating people with disabilities. Some participants expressed support for reduced passenger fares.

- *ADA parking so I can walk on the ferry or pick up a walk on passenger in a wheelchair.*
- *Access (car, walk on) to ferry docks. Getting flow in & out of the ferry loading area.*
- *Safe separated pedestrian access.*
- *ADA parking for wheelchair.*
- *Safe access for all, bikes, wheelchairs, [stroller], luggage, motorcycles, [pedestrians].*
- *ADA Parking without stairs. Accommodate wheelchair users for pick up & drop off loading.*
- *Safe, convenient, affordable transportation between Whidbey Island and mainland destinations.*

- *Households with kids should not be priced out of using the ferry system to access medical care, education, etc. on the other side of the sound.*
- *Why do we have to pay per person when we already pay for a car? This is hard for families with kids.*
- *The cost of leaving the San Juan Islands and returning home has become an economic burden for many, many islanders.*

Several participants suggested improving walking, biking, carpooling, and parking amenities and terminal accommodations.

- *Walking and biking access are usually after thoughts or not thought of well at all. Please work with WSDOT to rethink the car focus and prioritize mass transit, biking, and walking. Make those three *easy*.*
- *Decreasing the cost for walk-on passengers.*
- *Improve sidewalk/pedestrian facilities near terminals.*
- *Overhead loading in Clinton to match new terminal in Mukilteo.*
- *Overhead passenger loading in Friday Harbor [and] overhead passenger loading in Orcas.*
- *Passenger and bicycle riders should be prioritized. The sidewalks and pedestrian/bicyclist facilities extending from the terminals should be high quality to encourage walking/biking.*
- *Work with local municipalities to improve housing and non-motorized access to ferries.*
- *Secure bike parking at ferry terminals would be hugely helpful. When biking to the ferry terminal to walk on for a work commute and leave your bike for hours you need a place that it will be safe, even though it is left there regularly for long periods of time.*
- *If WSDOT wants to encourage multimodal [connections]…developing safe bicycle exiting procedures will encourage more people to adopt cycling as a viable and comfortable commuting mode.*
- *Integrate vanpool grouping on the ferry, so passengers can switch to another vanpool (closer to work/home) once they are on the ferry.*
- *Ensure sufficient and affordable parking on both ends of ferry routes-- both long term (for airport bound riders) and short term (for commuters).*
- *Overnight parking for commuters.*
- *Better parking to encourage walk-ons.*
- *Parking will be an issue in the years to come and should be addressed in the long range plan.*

Technology and customer experience

Several participants gave recommendations for technology to improve operational efficiency and amenities improve customer service and make their ferry trip more comfortable.

- *Attention to the latest trends in technology such as mobile ticketing, text alerts.*
- *The vehicle ticketing process from highway to holding needs more automation.*
- *Real-time announcements [and] signage for modified schedules.*
- *Ticketing system must be integrated with reservations and allow more flexible pricing and integrate tickets with reservations.*
- *Utilize technology (e.g. Good to Go lanes) to expedite fee collection as cashiers sitting in booths are too costly and inefficient.*
- *Better orca card integration and the ability to add multi use passes to an orca card online would be helpful. The current fare system is rather confusing.*
- *Data collection (and access to data) is critical for planning by communities as well as ferries, including ridership and schedule (on-time) measures, reservations statistics including unmet demand, location data (e.g. zip codes) for travelers, etc.*
- *Create a smartphone app that is simple to collect quick feedback. It shouldn't take more than a minute to use for me to provide performance feedback on any given day.*
- *Add free Wi-Fi on the ferries. Have cell phone reception so I can connect to the internet and work….it is vital that we can stay productive.*
- *Place to relax at terminals - sports bar/gym or internet available (for charging or using computers).*
- *Have healthier items available in the galley.*
- *Add a kids sitting play area to the new Colman terminal since residents have to wait awhile.*
- *Lockers to put your stuff [in] while walking around the boat.*

Sustainability and resiliency

Some participants expressed support for reducing carbon emissions and offered suggestions for making the ferry system more environmentally friendly.

- *WSF needs to plan for conversion of the current fleet of ferries to lighter, smaller ferries using less polluting propulsion systems.*
- *Carbon-emissions reduction, increase in non-car ridership.*
- *Reduce carbon with electric fleet.*
- *Incentivize and provide amenities for electric and low to zero emission travel options.*
- *Please consider ways to mitigate in-water noise disturbance to whales and other marine life from ferry engines.*
- *Electric vehicle charging at terminals.*
- *Attention to "future-proofing" against imminent and long-term regulations and requirements for emissions, sustainability, etc.*

A few participants expressed concern about the resiliency of the ferry system, including the ability to sustain service during an emergency event.

- *Ferries remain an option in case of a natural disaster.*
- *Glad you are aware of and planning for rising sea levels. All infrastructure needs to be designed around that reality.*
- *Update all island terminals to at least 100-year survivability.*
- *Increasing earthquake resiliency at Friday Harbor.*
- *With the Cascadia subduction earthquake imminent and Mt Rainier's Lahar zones threatening to block key portions of I-5 in the event of an eruption; Washington State may need the ferries during a statewide emergency.*

Route-by-route comment summary

Seattle/Bainbridge Island

Seattle/Bainbridge Island community members commented on improving infrastructure, access to terminals, and improving scheduling. Many community members stressed the importance of prioritizing on-time ferries and accomodating walk-on and bicycle riders. In addition, community members want improved terminal and ferry amenities, including: healthful food options and designated passenger pick-up and drop-off areas.

Seattle/Bremerton

Seattle/Bremerton community members expressed an interest in parking near the Bremerton ferry terminal and better amenities onboard and at the Seattle ferry terminal at Colman Dock. Many community members expressed frustration over the lack of reliable Wi-Fi and cell phone connectivity. Additionally, community members suggested focusing on reliable service, including: increasing the number of ferries, adding passenger capacity by placing larger ferries on the route, and ensuring that ferries depart on-time.

Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth

Many Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth community members shared interest in expanding the Fauntleroy ferry terminal and providing additional service. Many commentors expressed concern over increased traffic and congestion near Fauntleroy dock. In addition, several community members want improved technology for ferry loading, using mobile ticketing, so ferries leave full. Many participants want better connections to public transportation.

Edmonds/Kingston

Edmonds/Kingston community members had concerns about transit connections, State Highway 104 traffic, and an interest in adjusting ferry schedules. Many community members expressed concern the impact of increased traffic congestion caused by long queues of waiting ferry vehicles, especially during summer months and weekends. Community members also shared concerns over increasing ridership. Many participants suggested increasing the number of boats, while others suggested increasing the frequency of trips. Some commenters suggested adding vehicle reservations to this route.

Mukilteo/Clinton

Mukilteo/Clinton community members expressed support for increased parking, overhead loading at Clinton, and strategies to accommodate growth including vehicle reservations. Many participants suggested creating long-term and overnight parking at Mukilteo and improving loading processes at Clinton. In addition community members want reliable connections to public transportation.

Port Townsend/Coupeville

Port Townsend/Coupeville community members expressed support for increasing capacity, improving terminal amenities, and coordinating with other transportation agencies to improve access to transit. Several community members suggested creating a longer 2-boat season and increasing the hours of route operation.

Anacortes/San Juan Islands

Several community members in Anacortes and the San Juan Islands expressed interest in expanding the reservation system, terminal and ferry improvements, and increased bus service. Specifically, comments suggest terminal improvements such as adding a second slip and overhead loading at Friday Harbor and expanding vehicle holding and parking at Lopez. Many community members said their biggest priority was reliable service and expressed frustration over delayed and cancelled trips due to aging vessels. Community members also expressed interest in prioritizing residents over tourists, through reservations, fare pricing, and priority loading.

Agency and organization comments

The following agencies and organizations submitted comments. Please see Appendix A for copies of all comments received.

Cascade Bike Club: provided a letter in support of making the future ferry fleet more bike friendly by adding bike capacity and parking, signage, and electric bike charging; preserving and upgrading terminals to better serve surrounding communities and planned growth in walk-on ferry riders; and implementing demand management strategies such as dynamic pricing and reservations. They encouraged WSF to partner with transportation agencies, tourism groups, and jurisdictions to promote active transportation to and from ferry terminals.

City of Bainbridge Island Public Works Department: shared comments in support of replacing vessels to provide reliable service, securing adequate funding to modernize the fleet, and adding and modifying potential strategies for service to Bainbridge Island including adding bicycle capacity, increasing vessel capacity, promoting mode shift from vehicles to walk-on passengers, and improving terminal operations.

Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization: submitted a letter encouraging WSF to reevaluate Mukilteo/Clinton ridership forecasts. They encouraged WSF to consider additional data sources such as Puget Sound Regional Council planning activities and current investments and to conduct more focused planning studies.

Kitsap County Commissioners: hosted five forums and summarized public suggestions in a 2014 report to WSF. The report included suggestions for consistent schedules, reliable service, stable fares, and parking and terminal improvements.

San Juan Islands Ferry Advisory Committee (to San Juan County Council): submitted a letter emphasizing vessel reliability and replacement needs; terminal preservation and improvements; reservation system updates; integrated ticketing; data collection; multimodal integrated transportation systems; and emergency preparedness.

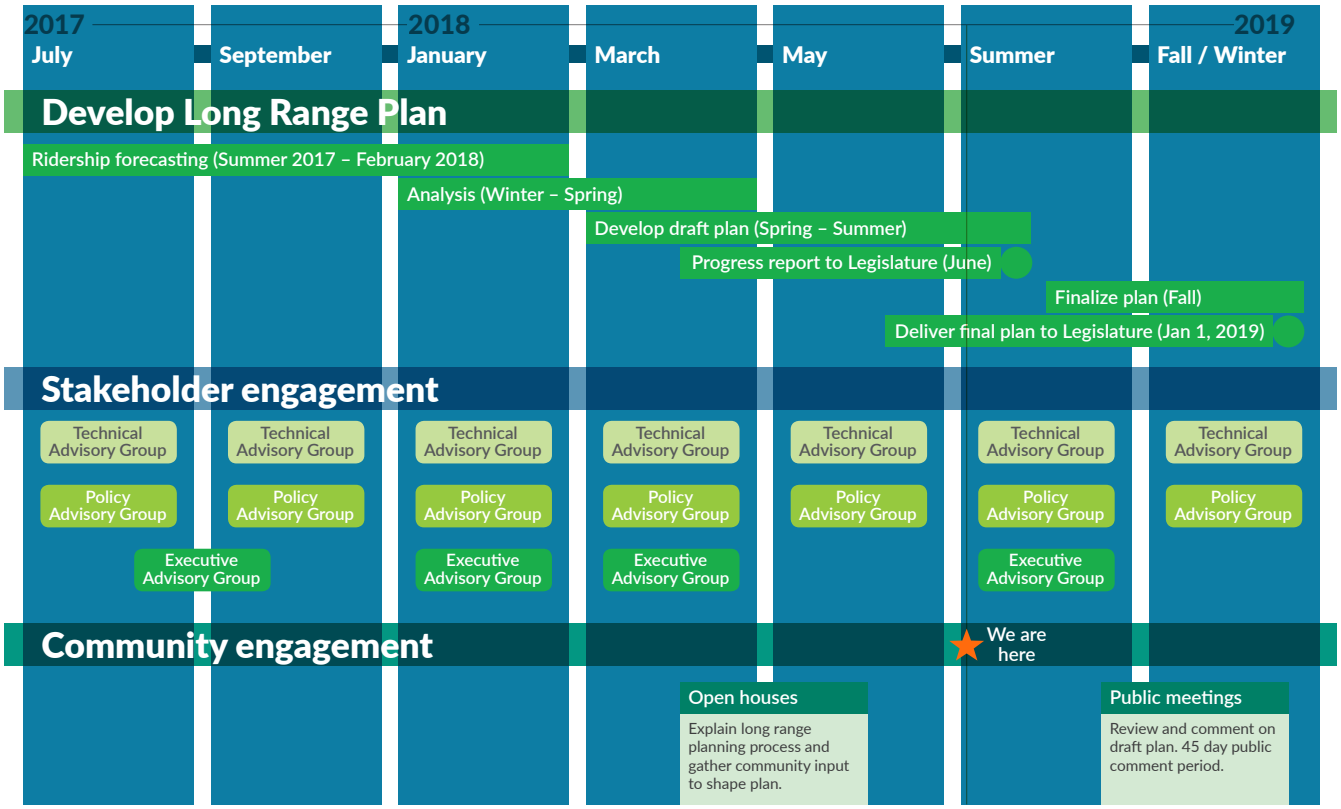
San Juan Islands Visitors Bureau: provided two requests for the 2040 Long Range Plan, ensuring that ferries are reliable, whether old or new, and ensuring that WSF has one spare ferry available at all times to eliminate service disruptions.

Kingston Ferry Advisory Committee: submitted a letter stating five principle interest areas, including: affordable fares, added capacity to reduce back-ups and to meet demand, reducing downtown ferry traffic congestion, sustaining reliable service, and improving business processes and cost reduction.

Ferry Advisory Committee Executive Council: provided a list of items to be included in the Long Range Plan. Key interest areas include strategies to implement WSDOT's "portal to portal" multimodal direction, redefining level of service, strategies to reduce system costs, affordable fares, coordinated strategies with local governments, addressing the funding needed, and future terminal and vessel capacity.

Next steps

The public comments outlined in this summary will help WSF better understand and prioritize issues to be addressed in the Draft Long Range Plan. Over the next few months we will continue assessing system needs and potential service scenarios and investments. We will consider our customers' priorities, along with technical analysis, as we develop the draft plan. WSF will release the draft plan for a 45-day public comment period and hold a second round of community meetings in Fall 2018. The final plan is due to the Legislature on Jan. 1, 2019.



WSDOT

Washington State Ferries