Message from Amy

2020 was certainly a challenging year, but in many ways it showed us all what’s really important in life. Our duty to ensure the safety of our passengers and crews while traveling the Salish Sea was more difficult than ever before. Despite the hardships caused by COVID-19, I witnessed resiliency and creative problem solving from our team here at Washington State Ferries (WSF).

This was also my last year as head of WSF. As many of you know, I am moving on to be the new Deputy Secretary of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

I felt it was fitting that our WSF Year in Review focuses on the progress we made in 2020 and the incredible work that went into protecting our fleet and passengers during an unprecedented time for us as a transportation agency.

I had the great honor of participating in a virtual ribbon cutting to open our brand new Mukilteo Multimodal Ferry Terminal.

Key Milestones in our COVID-19 Response

As COVID-19 began to impact our region, we took steps to ensure the safety of our passengers and employees. Many of these actions happened swiftly, and, like everyone, we had to adapt to changing information and guidance.

March

- Closed the galleys to limit passenger contact.
- Started offering ticket refunds and suspended no-show fees.
- Announced the first round of service reductions in response to dramatic decreases in ridership.
- Eagle Harbor Maintenance Facility operations and construction on Colman Dock and Mukilteo Terminal projects are halted in response to statewide mandate.
COVID-19 Response

In March of 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic started, we saw our ridership drop to 1960s levels. In addition to a **dramatic overall decrease in ferry riders** we saw a significant decrease in walk-on customers on routes that serve downtown Seattle and across the system. More people chose to drive on board our vessels. So, we adapted. We developed a [COVID-19 Response Service Plan](#) and changed from seasonal schedules to service based on four pillars: ridership, crew availability, funding, and vessels.

Our crews preserved during a national PPE shortage. Most of our office-based employees made the drastic change to full-time telework with very little notice. We learned new ways for our terminals to safely operate. And meanwhile, we made progress on key projects. We even opened the first new ferry terminal in 40 years!

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We saw a decrease in riders over 2020.

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**April**

- Our vessels begin participating in the worldwide movement to “Make a Joyful Noise” by sounding whistles while underway.
- IT team begins installation of self-swipe credit card readers at toll booths and ticket windows to limit contact.
- Announced the extension of Winter Schedule and continued to postpone service on the Sidney, B.C. route.
- Began installing sneeze guards at our toll booths throughout the system.
All WSF customers and staff are required to wear masks.

Terminal Attendant Andrea Leon Mack shows some WSF love while also demonstrating proper mask wearing.

May

- Eagle Harbor reopens with a new health and safety plan for low-risk activities.
- Announced new terminal building occupancy guidelines and installed floor and chair markings for social distancing.
- WSF Employee mask mandate begins.
- Customers are advised to limit ferry travel to essential purposes ahead of the typically busy Memorial Day weekend.

June

- Announced we will continue to operate our current reduced schedules with the option for phased
service changes based on ridership, crew availability, vessel availability, and funding.

- Restarted the new employee orientation to train more crew members.
- Masks are required on all vessels in compliance with the Governor’s statewide order requiring that face masks and coverings be worn in public.
- WSF hosts a virtual community meeting with nearly 400 participants.

July

- Nine new deck employees graduate following completion of new deck employee training orientation.
- Installed additional safety notices in our terminals, at the tollbooths, and on the vessels about wear face coverings.

August

- New employees pose for a socially distanced group photo after orientation.

Notices about mask wearing requirements at our toll booths help keep our employees and customers safe.

Reliable service

In 2020 the availability of our ferries became one of the focuses of our COVID-19 Response Service Plan. Since critical maintenance was delayed on many of our vessels due to Gov. Inslee’s Stay Home, Stay Healthy initiative, we could not increase service if we didn’t have the vessels to support it.
Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, the dedicated crews and team at our Eagle Harbor Maintenance Facility continued working hard to make sure our fleet was operational. Our Eagle Harbor teams respond to critical vessel and terminal repairs and was responsible for installing sneeze guards at every toll booth in our ferry system. In order to reopen, each job site had to have an approved comprehensive COVID-19 exposure control plan demonstrating how all on site staff will adhere to a list of 30 safety protocols.

Reliable vessels, terminals, and a growing workforce are essential to keep our system running. The 2040 Long Range Plan indicates we will need 16 new vessels by 2040 just to keep the services we have in place today. I look forward to advocating for critical investments in our ferry system in my new role.

Welders from our Eagle Harbor Maintenance Facility working on the transfer span bridge seat at Southworth terminal.

- Restored daily two-boat service on Seattle/Bainbridge route and two-boat weekend service on the Edmonds/Kingston and Mukilteo/Clinton routes.
- New contactless turnstiles are installed at terminals system wide.
- Second set of new deck employees and 10 new terminal employees graduate from training.

**September**

- Premera installs a mask decal on the Wenatchee.
- Sept.5: Busiest day since Feb. 22 with nearly 65,000 riders. Ridership is still much lower than the same day in 2019, when we had close to 100,000 customers.

Premera sponsored a mask on the Wenatchee to encourage passengers to wear masks on and off the ferry.

**October**

- Started issuing WSF Mask Warning
The new shoreside Marine Evacuation System (MES) allows our crew members to train for vessel evacuations without disrupting service.

Our Eagle Harbor employees worked hard to deploy sneeze guards at every toll booth in our WSF system. Sneezeguard helps decrease contact between our employees and passengers.

Notice Cards to educate passengers on proper COVID-19 safety protocols.
- No-show fees for vehicle reservations resume.
- The call center, while still teleworking, resumes booking vehicle reservations for customers.
- Restored two boat service on the Seattle/Bremerton route.

November/December
- WSF asks that passengers limit travel to essential trips over the holidays to comply with state guidance.

Life Ring Awards
I want to especially acknowledge all our ferry employees who go above and beyond to keep passengers safe and who routinely serve our larger maritime community by providing assistance in all types of emergencies. The WSF Life Ring Award is given to either individuals or an entire ship’s crew when the action by either was clearly the difference in saving a person’s life. There were 13 life saving events in 2020 that earned this award.
Workforce recruitment, training, and succession planning

Much like our vessels, crew availability was another important focus of our COVID-19 response plan. More than 100 of our crewmembers are considered “high-risk” and spent time working remotely for health and safety reasons. In a “normal” year we begin training new crew members for the busy summer season in the spring. We had to delay training efforts which led to a shortage of new crew members able to operate our vessels. Without enough crew to fill all the Coast Guard-mandated slots on our vessels, maintaining service was a significant challenge.

Before a new employee can serve as a crewmember on one of our vessels, they must go through weeks of intensive training, which includes firefighting, personal safety and survival, classroom time and job duty familiarization out in our fleet. Even though it was a challenge to train our employees while maintaining the proper COVID-19 safety protocols, our training department was able to begin conducting face-to-face new deck employee orientations in June.

Great job to all who were involved!

Crew members launch a rescue boat aboard the Kaleetan.

Customer experience and community engagement

In-person events were not possible throughout most of 2020 so we focused on keeping our riders and employees updated on the constantly changing environment that COVID-19 caused.

Blitz the Seahawk wears a mask aboard the
Training new employees in a socially distanced, COVID-19 conscious way aboard the Elwha.

New WSF employees go through fire fighting training.

We hosted 19 WSF All Staff webinars to answer questions and keep our entire WSF Team updated on the latest COVID-19 information. We also hosted a series of virtual community meetings in June that had over 400 members of the public participate.

Our call center received 81,489 calls in 2020, down from 140,423 calls in 2019.

Our Customer Service and Communication Teams worked hard to launch a brand new WSF website. If you haven’t already visited our new site, please do! It’s a big improvement and much easier for customers to use. We also updated our rider alert system, saw increases in our social media platforms, and continued to work on large community outreach efforts like the Fauntleroy Terminal Replacement Project.

The Fauntleroy Ferry Terminal Replacement Project is focused on maintaining safe and...
New employees pose for a socially distanced group shot aboard the Elwha.

Mukilteo Multimodal Ferry Terminal opened in December

Celebrating Employee Service Milestones

Many WSF employees celebrated service milestones in 2020. Several were for 40 and 45 year milestones! Thank you all for your public service.

Ordinary seaman Carol Enfield receives a 40-year service award in December 2020.
Our crews practiced landing at the brand new Mukilteo Multimodal Ferry Terminal ahead of the first sailing.

On Dec. 29, 2020 we opened the first new ferry terminal in 40 years. Because we couldn’t celebrate the terminal opening in person, we released a virtual grand opening video highlighting many of the unique features of the terminal.

The Mukilteo Multimodal Ferry Terminal honors the tribal history of the land, the site of the 1855 Point Elliott Treaty signing. The passenger building, designed in the form a Coast Salish longhouse, features a large gathering hall with sweeping views of the water and a comfortable place for people to work, relax and stretch their legs while waiting for the ferry. The new terminal was also built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold standards for its efficient design. The site has many resource-saving features – solar panels, rainwater harvesting, natural ventilation, radiant floor heat, stormwater treatment, rain gardens and more.
Greening the fleet

We made progress on our Ferry System Electrification project in 2020. Our Jumbo Mark II conversion project received a big boost in 2020 with a $1.5 million grant award. Converting our largest vessels to a hybrid electric model will reduce fuel consumption by 5 million gallons per year, reduce maintenance costs, and save roughly $60 million in the overall lifecycle of these hard-working ferries.

I’m very glad that Gov. Jay Inslee’s budget proposal provides strong support for ferry system electrification, including funding requests to build a second new Hybrid Electric Olympic Class ferry, convert a second Jumbo Mark II Class vessel to hybrid electric and build three terminal charging stations. I look forward to working with legislators in
my new role as they consider these requests and many other important transportation infrastructure investments.

Current plans for new Hybrid Electric Olympic Class vessels include improvements requested by crew and customers.

Plans for charging hybrid electric vessels at our current terminals include long "shore charging arms."

An aerial shot of the Seattle Ferry Terminal at Colman Dock. In 2021 WSF will continue to work on building this new facility that serves the Seattle/Bainbridge and Seattle/Bremerton routes.

Capt. Marsha Morse receives a 45-year service award in August 2020.
Looking ahead to 2021

As we move into 2021 we’ll continue to closely monitor COVID-19 data and restore service while taking our four pillars of service and Gov. Inslee’s Healthy Washington - Roadmap to Recovery into consideration. We'll also be revisiting our 2040 Long Range Plan and recalibrating since this unpredictable year had an impact on our short and long term goals. As we plan for the future we’ll continue to focus on the WSDOT Strategic Plan priorities;

- **Workforce Development**
- **Inclusion**
- **Practical Solutions**

I’m looking forward to what lies ahead for WSF in 2021. It has been an honor to work with such adaptive and innovative colleagues for the past four years. I feel confident leaving such a great team under Assistant Secretary Patty Rubstello’s leadership.

As always, if you want to receive updates about WSF throughout the year, be sure to follow us on Twitter and find us on Facebook. You can also receive the latest news each week our Weekly Update.

Amy Scarton  
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WSF Weekly Updates are available online at [www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/about-us/weekly-update](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/about-us/weekly-update)  
Questions? Contact us at [WSFWeeklyUpdate@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:WSFWeeklyUpdate@wsdot.wa.gov)

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