

# Washington State Ferries Training & Workforce Development Status Report

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## Introduction

This report is submitted in compliance with ESSB 5689, Section 222 (18), which requires that Washington State Ferries WSF “must report on the status of efforts to increase training and development opportunities for employees. The report must include a description of the new training and career advancement programs for able-bodied sailors, mates, and engineers” by Dec. 1, 2022.

Currently, WSF is facing severe staff shortages unprecedented in its 70-year history. The effects of an international shortage of mariners, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the aging demographics of the workforce have combined to reduce staffing below levels necessary to reliably operate the system. This shortage has resulted in unplanned service reductions and a decrease in system reliability, especially as ferry ridership increases from the early part of the pandemic.

The 2022 Supplemental Transportation budget and the Move Ahead Washington package provided significant investments to support efforts to increase training and development opportunities for WSF employees. WSF has implemented various targeted workforce programs, outlined in this report, to stabilize our staffing levels needed to increase system reliability.

WSF is making significant progress toward workforce stabilization. So far in calendar year 2022, we have hired 233 new employees, 202 of those who are fleet personnel, into the system and have over 50 employees currently participating in a training program that will lead to potential promotions. We have created six new training programs tailored to the needs of new and existing staff and are exploring another two more training programs, currently in the development phase. As we continue working on the crewing availability necessary to stabilize the ferry system, it has become clear we must focus on filling key positions in the fleet such as Licensed Deck Officers to reliably increase service. With this substantial investment in our workforce and the cooperation of our labor partners, we anticipate that by mid-2023 we will have restored the vast majority of our sailing schedules to pre-pandemic levels, dependent on the number of employees that complete LDO training in spring 2023.

## Fleet Staffing Needs

Since October 2021, WSF has been operating on an “Alternate Service Plan,” which is a reduced level of service that better aligns with available resources. The purpose of the Alternate Service Plan is to provide customers with more predictable and reliable travel by minimizing unexpected cancellations while still providing critical links to island communities and travelers who depend on the ferry system.

The management, maintenance, and operation of the ferry system depend on many specialized positions responsible for transporting people and goods in a marine environment 24 hours a day, 365

days a year. These specialized employees, such as licensed deck officers and chief engineers, undergo years of training, certifications and sailing time before they are qualified to serve in these positions.

Because WSF is legislatively funded to crew at the minimum levels required by the U.S. Coast Guard, a single missing crewmember means a vessel cannot sail, and a trip, or multiple trips, must be cancelled. Cancellations are only made after WSF's dispatchers make hundreds of calls to relief and other staff trying to fill vacancies. The four types of positions—licensed and unlicensed deck, and licensed and unlicensed engine room—each have different considerations and constraints on scheduling and dispatch based on labor contracts such as the distance an employee can travel to each terminal, restrictions on work hours, licenses required for different routes and vessel classes and seniority considerations.

**Licensed Deck Officers:** The number of LDOs is the biggest crewing challenge facing WSF. Ideally, WSF would have approximately 200 licensed deck officers in the system. As of October 31, 2022, WSF has 174 licensed deck officers. These highly skilled and highly credentialed positions are challenging to fill. To sail as a LDO at WSF, a crew member must not only possess the required U.S. Coast Guard licenses, but must also acquire the necessary pilotage and working knowledge of the vessels. Historically, while obtaining this training, they were also expected to work in an unlicensed position in the fleet, which can be undesirable for those coming in with hard-earned maritime experience and credentials they could not use until the training element was completed.

Employees wishing to move up from unlicensed to a LDO in the fleet must complete New Mate Orientation which is a six-week intensive training program that is contractually required between WSF and Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P). This training is designed to not only assess a candidate's ability to safely navigate a WSF vessel under any and all circumstances, but also includes safety, security, leadership, ship management and other factors that create a successful career deck officer. An LDO candidate is considered qualified to attend New Mate Orientation once they have obtained:

1. A license as Mate of Unlimited Tonnage upon Inland Waters (or better)
2. An Endorsement at First Class Pilot of Unlimited Tonnage upon all WSF ferry routes and interconnecting routes
3. A Radar Endorsement
4. A Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Marine Radio Operators permit.

At this point, a candidate submits these credentials to the Bid Administrator and, if approved, the Bid Administrator issues a Seniority Sequence number for New Mate Orientation. The candidate then undergoes an HR review for any "documented performance disqualifiers" and if cleared may begin the New Mate Orientation training at the invitation of a Port Captain. 15 crewmembers completed New Mate Orientation in Spring 2022. With these new officers eligible to work in the system, it helped alleviate some of the crewing constraints that are contributing to reduced service, but WSF still needs additional LDOs to restore service to pre-pandemic levels.

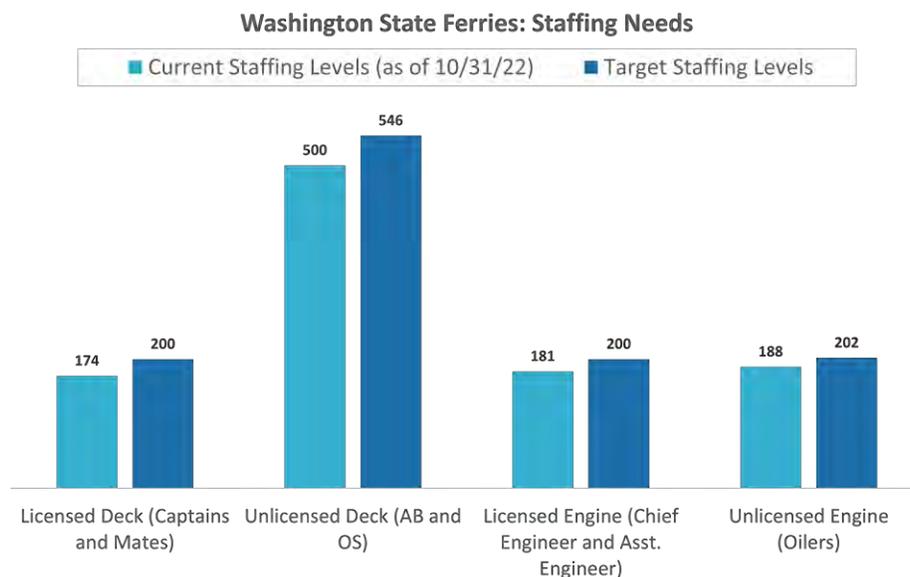
**Engine Room Crew:** A lack of engine room crew has posed a large threat to WSF’s ability to fully crew vessels and maintain service reliability, though the situation has improved. Unlike deck crew, which are assigned to a specific route, engine room crew are assigned to a vessel. This means that all vessels must be staffed at all times, even if not in service. Finding and retaining qualified engine room crew at all levels has proven to be extremely challenging: A nationwide shortage of vessel engineers and oilers predates the pandemic but has become critical since the outbreak. Training programs for oilers and licensed engineers last approximately one and four years, respectively, and there are a limited number of training resources. In addition, WSF must compete in the national labor market to attract and retain these employees.

A persistent recruitment and hiring effort this past year has improved our engine workforce numbers. The situation is improving due to the recent hiring and training of new oilers and wipers who will begin working in the system soon.

This influx of new oilers supports WSF’s ability to replace vacated licensed engine room positions with promotions and new hires. Recent new employee training for engine room employees have averaged 12 people per class compared to classes of 3-5 people during the height of the pandemic.

Licensed engine crew vacancies are filled by seniority bidding, so any licensed vacancy creates a cascading series of vacancies that must be filled both in the licensed and unlicensed ranks. Contractual timelines for reassigning employees to vacancies and subsequent vessel-specific training timelines make this a protracted process. As a result, the simple number of total engine room employees does not directly affect WSF’s ability to provide service, and there are additional complexities in ensuring the fleet has the right type of employee to staff each individual vessel on each route.

As reflected in the Service Restoration Plan, which provides a process for restoring service systemwide on a route-by-route basis, to meet target staffing levels across all positions, WSF’s staffing needs are outlined in the chart below.



**Figure 1: Staffing Needs Compared to Current Staffing Levels**



## Workforce Programs for Deck Personnel

### OS to AB Pipeline

WSF developed a New Employee Resource Group, that is available to all new employees. The group is comprised of six LDO's that are available via a central email address to answer any questions that these new employees may have. We also send out reminders about bidding for new jobs and other general things until the new employees become accustomed to WSF. WSF has been developing a formal mentorship program that is designed to educate employees about their jobs and the next steps they need to take for advancement. The portion of the mentorship program for unlicensed deck employees has been completed. The documentation has been sent to the Executive Sponsors for review and HR will be reaching out to the Inlandboatmen's Union (IBU) to get their input and how they want to move forward with program.

The agency is also working on improving the process for employees to move from Ordinary Sailor (OS) to AB. In the meantime, currently WSF has eight OSs who have completed AB School and had their AB credentials approved and filed with the Bid Admin to begin working as an AB. Another nine OSs started AB School on Oct. 3, 2022. WSF is currently recruiting from the OS pool and hoping to get 13 more employees into AB School by the end of the calendar year.

Number of Employees Participating in the Program	Number of Employees Completing the Program	Number of Open Positions the Program is Designed to Fill	Anticipated Number of Employee Promotions as a Result of the Program
Two are scheduled to start December 6	14 have completed the program	16	16

### AB to Mate Program

Washington State Ferries has a chronic shortage of LDOs, including all levels of Captains and Mates, which has been exacerbated by both accelerated retirements due to the aging workforce and the COVID-19 pandemic. This results in a shortage of qualified crew in both the short and the long term. It is a major time commitment for crew to receive their pilotage and credentialing to move from unlicensed to licensed. According to the recent JTC study commissioned by the legislature 81 LDOs will become retirement eligible between now and 2027. In addition to the 26 we are already short, this means that WSF will need to hire and train 107 LDOs between now and 2027. WSF has submitted decision packages to make the AB to Mate programs permanent and increase the number of candidates in the credentialing program to 36 per year to put a significant dent in that long term 105 LDO deficit.

To sustain staffing required to provide reliable service, WSF will take a proactive approach to workforce development by easing the career growth restrictions for internal unlicensed deck crew (ABs) to become licensed mates. Previously they had to obtain mate credentials and pilotage on their own time, using their own money. WSF will now be paying for these credentialing classes and paying employees' wages while they are obtaining their mate credentials and pilotage creating a cleaner path from AB to Mate for those who wish to take it. One of the added benefits of these programs is that in the past WSF often didn't know exactly how many ABs were engaged in or how far along they were in the process meaning

we weren't able to sufficiently plan ahead. With these programs in place we can now forecast out how many mates we will have/need year after year. At the same time, WSF will address barriers to attracting external candidates for mates. Training costs are a barrier to many candidates, which is an equity issue. Private maritime industry absorbs these costs as a business cost, and WSF needs to be able to compete with those businesses for new recruits.

The pool of candidates ready to move from unlicensed to LDO positions needs to be solidified and supported to create a robust system from which WSF would be creating future captains and mates. By creating this pool, WSF will have the pipeline of candidates prepared to move up, while more are being trained. The AB to Mate programs are the only process to ensure WSF can fill the 105 LDO positions which represents 55% of the LDO compliment WSF needs to fill by 2027. This pathway allows WSF to attract mates from other industries like the U.S. Navy, cruise ships, tugboats, etc. All other paths for external candidates require them to start from the bottom as an OS and work their way up, something most are not willing to do after having achieved senior rank with their current employer. This is a problem WSF is frequently asked by the legislature and the public to fix, and this proposal addresses that problem.

There are two parts to this program, the AB to Mate Credentialing Program and the AB to Mate Pilotage Program.

- AB to Mate Credentialing Program** - WSF has created a program with the Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies (MITAGS) at Pacific Maritime Institute (PMI), from which WSF gets a lot of its candidates. This program provides the basic competencies and foundational skills for mariners desiring to become a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Licensed Mate.

12 ABs graduated from the AB to Mate Credentialing Program in Nov. 2022 with their Mates credentials. A second group of 12 ABs will start the program in January. Once these ABs receive their credentials, they move on to the AB to Mate Pilotage Program.

Number of Employees Participating in the Program	Number of Employees Completing the Program	Number of Open Positions the Program is Designed to Fill	Anticipated Number of Employee Promotions as a Result of the Program
24*	12*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>107 total LDO positions between now and 2027.</li> <li>Funding has been requested to expand this program to 36 candidates per year.</li> </ul>	24

*\*12 employees have completed the program so far, 12 more are scheduled to join the program in early 2023.*

- AB to Mate Pilotage Program** – WSF has created Mate in Training positions for the purpose of riding pilotage, studying to take USCG pilotage exams, and gaining knowledge and experience on WSF vessels and routes. These pilotage opportunities have been well received amongst the crew and who keep asking for more. This requires WSF chartering other vessels or using its own vessels deadheading (completing a trip with no passengers or freight) on routes that WSF does not sail but are required for candidates to obtain pilotage.

Mates in training are expected to dedicate their 80-hour work cycle to the goal of obtaining their pilotage license. They are designated as full-time employees and continue to earn an hourly wage while in the program. Mates in training do not bid on a watch. They are scheduled by the AB to Mate Program Manager each work cycle to a watch that best meets their current and real-time training needs.

Participants in the program are expected to register for New Mate Orientation within 12 months of starting the Mates in Training program. Progress towards this expectation will be reviewed with each individual on a regular basis. Remaining in the program will be contingent on necessary progress being made.

Nine ABs started the pilotage program on September 29, 2022, and nine more started the program on October 24, 2022. Full implementation will begin during the 2023 Winter Schedule and will include employees who have completed the Credentialing Program. Up to 30% the open slots in the pilotage program can be filled with external candidates, which allows WSF to fast-track some LDOs who already have their mate credentials.

Number of Employees Participating in the Program	Number of Employees Completing the Program	Number of Open Positions the Program is Designed to Fill	Anticipated Number of Employee Promotions as a Result of the Program
18	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>107 total LDO positions between now and 2027.</li> <li>Funding has been requested to expand this program so there are 30 candidates in this program at any one time.</li> </ul>	19

## Workforce Programs for Engine Room Personnel

### Wiper Program

WSF needs an innovative approach for sourcing new talent into the organization in an environment where skilled workers are becoming more difficult to attract. This change is necessary because the existing approach is not supplying a candidate pool that is able to fulfill WSF's short and long term needs. This change will lower the barriers to entry into engine room work for WSF. Credentialing is holding people back from applying to the entry level engine room positions at WSF. The Oiler position is the current entry level position in the engineering department. The Wiper position has lower credentialing requirements. Currently, 80 out of the 188 Oiler positions can be filled with a Wiper.

This program will expand the pool of eligible candidates to include people who have the skills to perform the work and lack the advanced credential. It will also add more pathways for entry level engineering employees to join WSF. The long-term goals include, but are not limited to, diversification of the workforce, removing unintentional barriers for those that have an interest in working for WSF, creating employee career path and growth possibilities, and providing a well-trained and competent workforce. To date, WSF has hired nine engine room staff at the Wiper classification and have either already been promoted to an Oiler or will be promoted in the next few months.

This program enhances recruiting for engine room crew by adding entry level positions and providing training for advancement. This proposal will enlarge the pool of skilled labor while supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion objectives by lowering the barriers of entry into the department and industry. WSF will have a better pool of staffing to ensure it can meet the minimum crewing levels required for vessels to sail.

The sea-time requirement for these Wipers to become Oilers is 180 days, per the USCG requirements. However, the USCG will recognize 90 days sea time for the formal training WSF will provide the wipers-in-training while the other 90 days will be accounted for while they are working with on-the-job training. Additionally, the applicants who complete the training will not be required to complete a USCG administered exam. Once a Wiper-in-training has successfully completed the program and receives their Oiler documents from the USCG, they will be placed on the on-call Oiler list.

Number of Employees Participating in the Program	Number of Employees Completing the Program	Number of Open Positions the Program is Designed to Fill	Anticipated Number of Employee Promotions as a Result of the Program
8*	8*	12	12

*\*Eight employees are currently working as Wipers.*

*This program is scheduled to be fully promoted before the end of calendar year 2022. New employees will begin onboarding/training in early spring 2023.*



### Oiler to Assistant Engineer Program

WSF is not able to recruit and hire Assistant Engineers; they can only be promoted from the Oiler pool. WSF will be offering an in-house license preparation course for unlicensed engine-room employees that are seeking either their National 3rd Assistant Engineer or their National Assistant Engineer (Limited) license, which will allow them to be placed on the promotion list from Oiler to Assistant Engineer once a position opens. This course will take place from February 27- March 24, 2023. Currently the program will be able to accommodate at least five qualified candidates, although depending on relief availability and funding the training department is looking to expand the number of openings. At this time there are 12 employees interested in the program. The course will be offered in a hybrid format, with 60% taking place in a live-online environment and the remainder as an in-person training at the WSF Warehouse.

WSF has also discussed a joint effort with MITAGS and Seattle Maritime Academy (SMA) to develop a USCG approved apprenticeship program for Oilers to progress to Assistant Engineer. The education piece at MITAGS is currently waiting to be approved by the USCG.

Number of Employees Participating in the Program	Number of Employees Completing the Program	Number of Open Positions the Program is Designed to Fill	Anticipated Number of Employee Promotions as a Result of the Program
0*	0*	5-10	5-10

*\*This program is scheduled to be promoted before the end of calendar year 2022. Employees will begin training in early spring 2023.*