

Washington State Ferries

FEBRUARY 2025

System facts

- Created June 1, 1951
- Largest ferry system in the United States
- Post-pandemic ridership growth of 5.2 million since 2020, reaching 19.1 million riders in 2024
- Second-largest ferry system in the world for vehicles carried with more than 9 million in 2024
- Fleet of 21 auto-passenger vessels
- Operates 20 terminals on 10 routes (service to Sidney, British Columbia currently suspended)
- Nearly 2,000 employees
- 16 unions and 13 collective bargaining agreements

Key functions

Transit agency

- Third largest transit system in Washington (#1 King County Metro, #2 Sound Transit)

Marine highway

- Part of state highway network, serving eight counties and British Columbia, Canada (international service suspended)
- Vital connection for emergency medical services on and off several islands

Link in region's multimodal connections

- Priority loading for freight, bicycles, vanpools and carpools
- Vehicle reservations on two routes

Mover of freight and goods

- Ferries specially constructed to accommodate commercial vehicles

Tourism, economic development

- Major tourist attraction and icon of Washington state
- Critical link between more affordable housing on the west side of Puget Sound and key employment centers on the east side

Safe, secure travel

- Enforce procedures to ensure the safety and security of passengers by working with the Washington State Patrol and U.S. Coast Guard

Challenges

Operations and Maintenance

- Aging fleet with nearly half of fleet over 30 years old
- Ferries in service 20+ hours a day, so it is difficult to find time for adequate maintenance
- Drydock capacity in Puget Sound limited and difficult to adjust for emergency repairs

Workforce development

- Succession planning a critical priority
- Approximately half of vessel employees are 55 years old or older and may qualify for retirement in the next five to 10 years

New construction

- Entry building and elevated walkway at Seattle's Colman Dock opened fall 2023, connecting multimodal terminal to city streets
- Opened new concrete and steel overhead pedestrian walkway at Bainbridge terminal in 2024 that is built to current seismic code, replacing the more than 50-year-old wooden one
- Gathering community input in the planning and design of the upcoming Fauntleroy Terminal Trestle and Transfer Span Replacement project
- Building up to five hybrid-electric Olympic-class ferries
- Converting the fleet's largest Jumbo Mark II-class vessels from diesel to hybrid-electric propulsion

2040 Long Range Plan

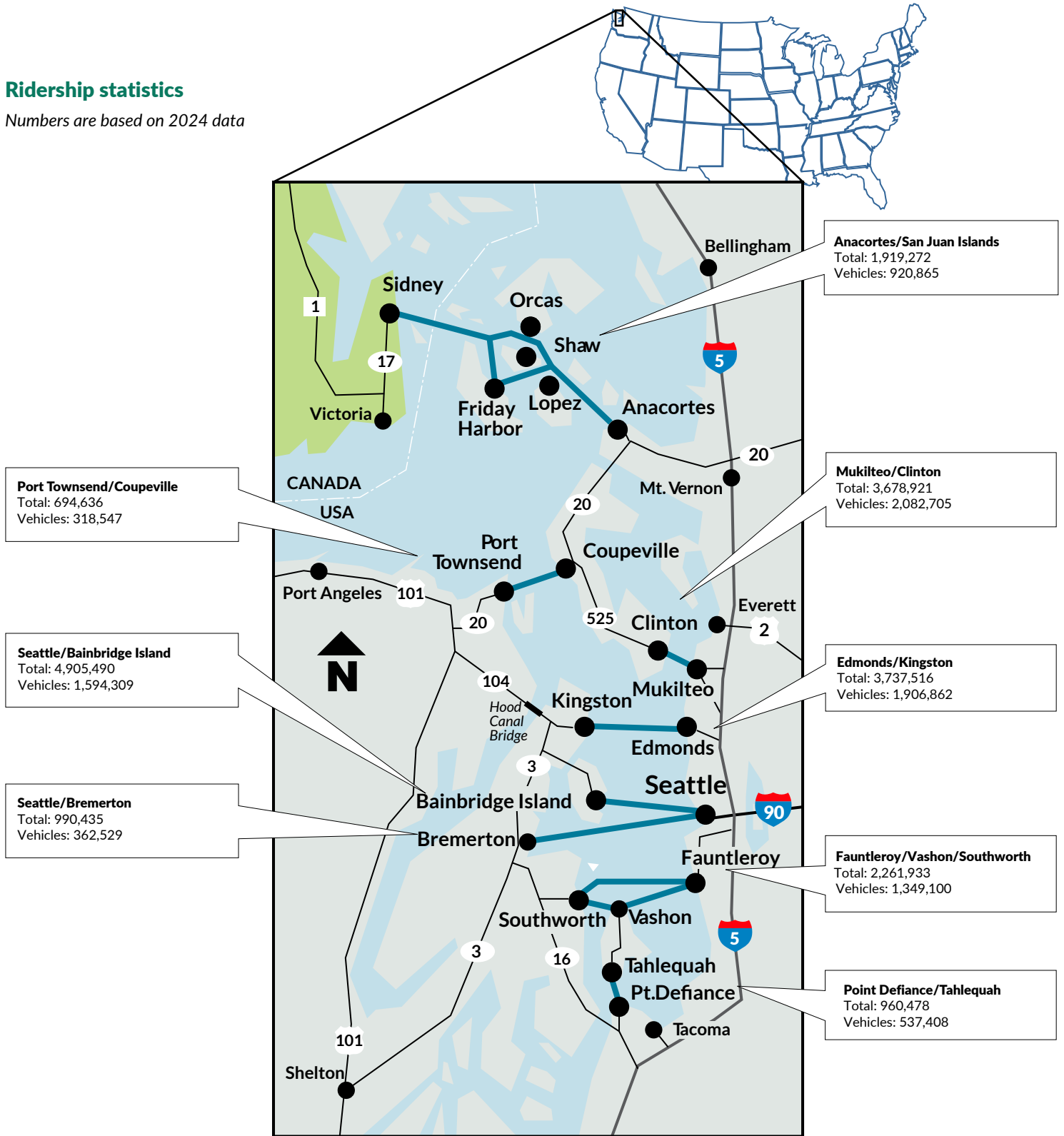
- Plans for the future of the ferry system through 2040
- Calls for 16 new ferries to replace aging vessels and help stabilize the fleet
- Considers ridership growth of 30% over the next 20 years



WSDOT Ferries Division – Nation’s Largest Ferry System

Ridership statistics

Numbers are based on 2024 data



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