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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
Committee Of The Whole

April 12, 2005

Council Chair Laurie Caskey-Schreiber called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Committee Room, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington.

Present:

Barbara Brenner
Dan McShane
Sam Crawford
Seth Fleetwood
Sharon Roy

Absent:

L. Ward Nelson

1. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE DRAFT 2005 LUMMI ISLAND FERRY OPERATION REPORT (AB2005-163)

Ken Richardson, Public Works Department, stated he will present the draft plan and also the draft 14-year Long Range Improvement Plan for ferry operations.

Staff would like the Council to approve the 14-year plan at it's April 26, 2005 Council meeting. There is an opportunity to receive funding if the application is submitted by May 9, 2005. He introduced representatives from Art Anderson Associates and Elliott Bay Design Group.

Rob Henry, Art Anderson Associates Vice-President of Facilities Engineering and Design and Civil Engineer, stated his company has been working with the Public Works Department on this project since 2000.

The conclusion of three recent reports is that the Whatcom Chief should be replaced with a newer, safer, and larger ferry in the near-term. That conclusion has been the starting point. The consultants evaluate the appropriate ferry to purchase and put in service, and the appropriate dock requirements for that ferry. The new ferry should be between a 30- and 40-car vessel.

The consultants and Public Works Department went through steps in the process to come to the conclusion that a 35-car ferry is the right solution.

Mike Complita, Vessel Design Project Manager, stated the consultants road the Whatcom Chief, talked to the captain and crew, and talked to the ferry passengers about what they want, need, like, and don't like about the current ferry. The single biggest criticism is that it's very difficult to make room for the vehicles that ride the ferry.

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1 The proposed new vessel is substantially bigger. There would be four vehicle
2 lanes that allows quite a bit of space between the vehicles. The existing boat has a
3 seven-foot wide vehicle lane. The new boat has eight- to eight and a half-foot
4 lanes, and the center lane is even wider to accommodate larger trucks. The new
5 vessel is designed to handle any legal road size vehicle.
6

7 Another criticism the consultants heard was that loading big vehicles takes a
8 lot of time and slows down the schedule. The crew would like those larger vehicles
9 to load straight onto the vessel. That is a big factor for moving the house off to the
10 side. All the vehicles will have a straight on access on and off the boat. He
11 indicated the location of the passenger cabin. The pilot house will be built on top of
12 the passenger cabin. It is all off to one side.
13

14 Another need the crew expressed was an ability to load the walk-on
15 passengers more quickly. Now, it takes time for passengers to work their way
16 around the vehicles and walk up and down the ramps. The walk-on passengers
17 also have to cross the vehicle lanes and find their way around the vehicles. That is
18 a safety issue. Putting the house off to the side allows the passengers to come off
19 without ever having to cross vehicle lanes or mix with the vehicles.
20

21 Caskey-Schreiber asked if this design affects the boat's balance at all.
22 Complita stated it does not.
23

24 The existing boat has a cabin on either end for the passengers. The new
25 design is entirely open all the way through the vessel so passengers can walk and
26 load from one end to the other end of the vessel. An advantage of keeping the
27 passenger cabin on the vehicle deck instead of above the cars is it allows the
28 County to maintain three crew. A cabin that is up above will require an additional
29 crew for safety. The passenger cabin is four times larger than the cabin on the
30 existing ferry.
31

32 The pilot house must be elevated to allow for a view over any large trucks
33 that may be on the boat. The space includes room for a crew break room and crew
34 toilet, which the current ferry does not have right now. There are a lot of
35 complaints that the ferry schedule is affected when the crew must get off to use the
36 facilities and take their breaks.
37

38 Roy asked if there is a passenger restroom. Complita stated there is not.
39

40 Caskey-Schreiber asked if this design is custom or if it has been used before.
41 Complita stated almost all vessels are custom designed to fit the application and
42 the terminal. However, there are a number of vessels operating that are similar to
43 this design.
44

45 Brenner asked why people care if they can't open their car doors. No one is
46 supposed to get out of their cars anyway. Complita stated it's a safety issue if the
47 vessel must be evacuated.

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2 Complita stated they have designed the footprint of the boat to fit into the
3 existing terminal, minimizing the required changes to the terminal at this time.
4 They've also designed an opening that is large enough to facilitate loading two
5 lanes at a time in the future, if and when the terminals are expanded.
6

7 Roy asked if loading will initially be one-way. Complita stated it will be, as it
8 is now.
9

10 Henry stated the consultants went through certain steps to evaluate what is
11 the best value for the County. Optimize the system based on the capital
12 investment for the ferry and minimize any increase in operational costs. That was
13 the consultants' assignment.
14

15 Once the 35-car vessel was selected, they needed to understand the
16 improvements needed for the dock to accommodate the new vessel. The new
17 vessel has about four times the mass, which produces four times the momentum.
18 The dock wing walls will need to be replaced. Work required on the Lummi side is
19 required anyway, due to deterioration of that facility. Those maintenance costs are
20 folded into budget development.
21

22 They must establish the capital budget. There is opportunity for financing.
23 The Public Works Trust Fund loan application can be made up to May 9. The
24 Council must go forward with this plan before the Public Works Department can go
25 after that funding opportunity. Other immediate actions would be to commence
26 vessel design and initiate permitting design of the dock improvements. Overall, the
27 plan is to implement by 2010. If everything falls into place, completion could be
28 moved up to 2008 or sooner.
29

30 The reason for the 35-car solution was determined after they looked at
31 capital investments and the capacity that can be accomplished with that
32 investment. They looked at 30-car, 35-car, and 40-car vessels. Improvements to
33 the dock are in the same order of magnitude for a 30- or 35-car vessel. With a 40-
34 care vessel, dock improvements result in a 50 percent incremental cost increase.
35 The 35-car ferry moves the most number of people in one direction per hour.
36 Given the number of crossings that can occur while staying on a schedule, the 35-
37 car ferry allows four round trips every two hours. The Whatcom Chief makes five
38 round trips every two hours. A 40-car vessel can only make half the numbers of
39 round trips in the same two hour period. Therefore, the 35-car produces a 40
40 percent increase in capacity and will better stay on schedule. It's important to
41 build float time into the crossing schedule, which is a feature of this design.
42

43 Roy asked if more people could go across at one time, but there would be
44 fewer trips. Henry stated that's right. The overall number of cars and people
45 moving across in either direction will be greater.
46

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1 Henry stated the capital budget to design, construct, and administrate the
2 costs of building the vessel is a little over \$5.5 million. There is a lot of design to
3 be accomplished. The price of steel now is volatile, so that cost could change.
4 There is about \$4 million in total investment to the docks.

5
6 Brenner asked the lifespan of this system.

7
8 Unidentified speaker stated the typical ferry boat design now runs a life of
9 about 60 years. That is the life of a steel hull. Economically, they plan for a 40-
10 year vessel life, to be conservative.

11
12 Caskey-Schreiber asked how they will pay for it. Richardson stated the
13 County will hopefully get this trust financing. There are other financing sources
14 available for which they can apply. The trust fund financing is most favored
15 because there is a 50-50 chance of getting that money. The loan can be repaid
16 through a grant from the legislature. There are also issues with the federal Transit
17 Authority and other places to look. They will mine every source that is out there.
18 In the worst case, they have to borrow the money and figure out how to pay it
19 back. That is both ends of the spectrum on financing.

20
21 Caskey-Schreiber stated they currently have a policy to recover 55 percent
22 of the costs of the ferry through the fare box. She asked if that is applied to the
23 operation of the ferry. Richardson stated there is currently no amortization of the
24 existing ferry. There is no depreciation. When the boat came on to the County, it
25 was fully depreciated. The intent is to recover the capital over the life of the vessel
26 as a depreciation cost. That fare box number is calculated as the total fares
27 collected, divided by the ferry operating cost minus the docks.

28
29 Crawford asked if the County included the dock improvements in the fare
30 box. Richardson stated they did not.

31
32 Brenner stated the fare box collects for maintenance and operations.
33 Richardson stated the fare box is based on the operating cost of the system, except
34 the docks. No capital costs are included. The capital costs are allowed as a
35 depreciation cost, except for the year in which they are spent, for the remaining
36 life. The percentage of the fare collected for maintenance varies based on the
37 maintenance cost of the vessel each year. Seldom are fare increase decisions
38 made based on that 55 percent.

39
40 Fred Kinney, Lummi Island Ferry Conservation Committee, stated there is
41 also a fuel tax subsidy from the State that is dependent upon ferry operation and a
42 deficit funding. The 55 percent is a piece of (*inaudible*).

43
44 Crawford asked where they are in the process. Richardson stated the
45 process now is to get feedback to finalize the 14-year plan and get Council approval
46 at the next meeting. Acceptance of the 14-year plan will allow staff to include it
47 into the Six-Year Transportation Improvement Plan and the Annual Road Plan,

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1 which are required for budget consideration. Public Works Director Monsen's
2 intention is to no longer think of this as a 20-year ferry plan. Instead, think of it as
3 a report on the status of the ferry, including the 14-year plan. The County will
4 update the 14-year ferry plan annually and submit it to the County Road
5 Administration Board (CRAB) along with the Six-Year Transportation Improvement
6 Plan. There will be a continuous planning process, which wasn't done in the past.

7
8 The Council already improved and amended the six year plan and the annual
9 plan that allows the staff to do the work that's been done to-date and to continue
10 with the contract.

11
12 Caskey-Schreiber stated the Council has already approved this. Staff must
13 come back and tell the Council how to pay for it. Richardson stated Council
14 approved the contracts for design and consulting. The administration still must
15 come to the Council for approval to buy a boat. Part of that process is approving
16 the 14-year plan and incorporating that plan into the six-year and annual plans so
17 they can apply for the loan.

18
19 Roy asked if the consultants have involved the citizens of Lummi Island
20 throughout this process. Henry stated they have.

21
22 Richardson stated there is a large survey that was done last year on this
23 issue.

24
25 Roy stated a survey is not necessarily the answer. Richardson stated the
26 administration has not limited input to the survey. There have also been meetings
27 with people on the island. A great source of feedback is the boat crew, who also
28 live on the island.

29
30 McShane stated one key in the plan is the concept of relocating the
31 Gooseberry terminal. He asked how important that is for a 35-car ferry.
32 Richardson stated it is not at all required for a 35-car ferry. The reason that option
33 is included in the plan is because there is an expressed desire by the Lummi Nation
34 to do some improvements at Gooseberry Point, which may result in their
35 recommendation to move the site of the ferry terminal at some point in the future.
36 Staff has not tried to define the cost if that happens, but they need to keep it in
37 mind. If that happens, there are both costs and opportunities to improving the way
38 a terminal works.

39
40 McShane asked if the County would be stuck with a boat that it couldn't use
41 if the County must relocate it's dock. Richardson stated they would not. They
42 might be able to use it better. The new boat will certainly fit in the existing facility.

43
44 McShane stated he doesn't have a lot of concern about the size of the ferry.
45 He has had some concern about enabling the process of someone having a car
46 parked on each end of the ferry route. However, he won't let that concern hinder
47 his approval of the contracts.

1
2 Fleetwood stated the plan calls for holding on to the Whatcom Chief. He
3 asked where the County would store it. Richardson stated they haven't decided.
4 The Chief would be held in standby on a location in the water, for use if there were
5 a breakdown or during dry dock. Some day in the future, they may want to use it
6 for special runs. There is a cost to keep it, but the cost of using it as a second boat
7 is a lot larger. Find some place in Bellingham Bay.

8
9 Richard Frye, Lummi Island, stated the ferry capacity increase from 58 to 70
10 cars per hour, with fewer runs, doesn't calculate into a 47 percent increase in
11 capacity. It is a 20 percent increase. Also, if this ferry comes into service around
12 2010, and population continues to grow at the current rate. The new ferry would
13 be at capacity about the time it comes into service.

14
15 Patrick Vasicek, Art Anderson Associates, stated the 58 number was an
16 idealized number in the report. Practically, the capacity is five round trips every
17 two hours. Based on that, the capacity is about 50 cars per hour. Using the same
18 criteria for the 35-car ferry, the capacity would be about 70 cars per hour. That is
19 a 40 percent increase. A capacity of 58 cars per hour is not realistic. It doesn't
20 happen. It can happen anecdotally, periodically, but it won't happen consistently
21 over a long period of time.

22
23 Frye stated the real issue of ferry traffic is rush hour in the morning and
24 evening. When they are at capacity. The current schedule is something like five
25 runs per two hours. The real issue is where this ferry fits into service during peak
26 loads. (*Inaudible.*) This new ferry doesn't seem big enough. It will be full when it
27 comes into service. He asked if this new ferry design will handle the capacity at
28 peak hours in five years. Richardson stated that no matter what size boat they put
29 on the water, the boat will be filled with people trying to get off the island during
30 the peak hours. They don't want to buy enough capacity so no one ever has to
31 wait and the boat can take everyone off the island at once.

32
33 Frye stated they have just spent a bunch of years going through the planning
34 process. He asked how the island will grow over 35 to 40 years. That question is
35 tied to the size of the ferry. If the boat is too small, it affects growth (*inaudible*).
36 Unidentified speaker stated capacity of the ferry needs to serve the subarea plan,
37 not (*inaudible*).

38
39 Richardson stated there is a lot of incomplete work done on island issues and
40 how people want to see development happen. Now, they know they need to do
41 something about the ferry. This is the best solution they can come up with now to
42 do something about the ferry. He can't predict very well what will develop in ten
43 years. He knows that the County needs to get better and safer ferry service with
44 more capacity within the next three to five years.

45
46 Unidentified speaker stated he analyzed the rider history over the past ten
47 years against the island population, then projected that level forward. At a two

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1 percent growth rate, in 2020 there will be the same service level as in 1991. At a
2 four percent growth rate, the service level will be the same it is now.

3
4 Caskey-Schreiber stated the Whatcom Chief is also 43 years old.

5
6 Bruce Roll, Water Resources Work Session, stated they will keep the
7 Whatcom Chief for times when they need it.

8
9 Fleetwood asked if it's likely that Lummi Island will grow to capacity based
10 on allowable zoning, whether or not there is a new boat.

11
12 McShane stated the County has a level of service policy. *(Inaudible.)* There
13 has been some pressure to change the level of service.

14
15 Fleetwood stated people frequently suggest that keeping the current ferry
16 will keep the island from growing to capacity. The island is not that far away from
17 growing to capacity. At some point in time, the allowable zoning will be full.

18
19 Colleen Berg, Lummi Island, *(Inaudible.)* She asked if alternative
20 transportation incentives were considered.

21
22 *(Clerk's Note: End of tape one, side A. The remainder of the meeting was not*
23 *recorded.)*

24
25
26 **OTHER BUSINESS**

27
28
29 **ADJOURN**

30
31 The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:00 p.m.

32
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35
36 _____
36 Jill Nixon, Minutes Transcription

37
38 The Council approved these minutes on April 26, 2005.

39
40 ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

41
42
43
44
45
46 _____
46 Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Laurie Caskey-Schreiber, Council Chair