



## Metropolitan King County Council

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April 30, 2007

### County Council creates King County Ferry District to enable operation of local waterborne transit

The Metropolitan King County Council today expanded transportation options for county residents by creating a King County Ferry District that will enable potential operation of passenger-only ferry service to various parts of the county, including service to Vashon Island, the Eastside, and South Puget Sound.

"With the impending replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct and the State Route 520 Bridge, we must seize this opportunity to use our open waters to get people out of gridlock," said Councilmember [Dow Constantine](#), prime sponsor of the legislation. "Passenger-only waterborne transit already serves an important role in San Francisco and Vancouver B.C., and has proven successful here on the Vashon and Elliott Bay routes."

"I believe in maximizing our resources in an efficient and cost-effective manner," said Councilmember [Jane Hague](#). "Exploring a route between Kirkland and the University of Washington could provide congestion relief and an alternate route in case of an emergency."

The ordinance adopted unanimously today establishes the framework for a King County Ferry District that corresponds with the boundaries of King County, with members of the King County Council serving as its board of directors.

The District would potentially support operation of Vashon-Seattle passenger-only ferries, year-round Elliott Bay Water Taxi service, and a Kirkland-to-University of Washington demonstration route; conduct feasibility studies of future routes; and establish a modest capital fund for better boats and dock facilities. Other potential destinations that could be served include West Seattle, Des Moines, downtown Seattle, North Bay, Magnolia, Shilshole, Shoreline, Lake Union, North Renton, and Kenmore. Depending on the results of a potential feasibility study for passenger-only ferry service for South Puget Sound, additional service could be developed linking King County with Gig Harbor and Tacoma.

"Waterborne options are as much a part of the transportation system as any bus or road, and we need to start looking at

ways to expand those options throughout the region," said Councilmember [Julia Patterson](#). "People tend to focus on options for Vashon or Lake Washington, but there have been studies looking at running ferry service from Des Moines to north Pierce County into Tacoma. The Ferry District would have a role on seeing if such a route is feasible."

Under legislative authority to counties provided by the state in 2003, local ferry districts receive funding for operations through a property tax levy. The King County Ferry District will refine costs and schedules in anticipation of setting a rate later in the year sufficient to provide the services decided upon.

State and federal funds have already been allocated to construct new dock facilities in West Seattle and Vashon. The proceeds from the sale of the state's current passenger-only ferries, estimated at more than \$5 million, have also been pledged to the governmental entity that assumes Vashon service.

"This region has a proud history of using waterborne vehicles to move people from our island communities around the region into urban centers for work and play," said Council Chair [Larry Gossett](#). "The Ferry District is a logical extension of that historic use: it would transform our waterways into a true 'highway' that would benefit everyone, regardless of where they live."

"As a bus commuter, I am an avid supporter and an enthusiastic user of public transportation," said Councilmember [Bob Ferguson](#). "This Ferry District will provide us with the opportunity to expand our public transit beyond the shore and provide yet another option to driving."

"Waterborne transit is a key component to keeping our transportation system afloat," said Councilmember [Larry Phillips](#). "Our region is gridlocked, in part because our geography is constricted by Lake Washington and Puget Sound. Passenger ferries have the potential to put those waterways to use, increasing our mobility options. Passenger ferries could also have a role in keeping the region moving during road construction on our major highways."

The new Ferry District will initially examine a business plan for Vashon Island passenger-only ferry service developed last year by the King County Department of Transportation, along with two alternative routes serving Vashon Island, two operating options for the Elliott Bay Water Taxi, and a possible demonstration service across Lake Washington.

Waterways such as Puget Sound and Lake Washington served as the first major transportation routes in the area. King County began operating seasonal water taxi service across Elliott Bay in 1997, a service that by 2006 carried a record-high 122,000 passengers between West Seattle and Pier 55.

In 1993, the Washington State Ferry System produced an implementation plan that called for expanded passenger-only ferry service in Puget Sound. In 1998, voters approved Referendum 49 to provide a state funding source for expansion of the state's passenger-only ferry fleet, funding that was reduced the following year by passage of Initiative 695.

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Phone: (206) 296-1000 | Fax: (206) 296-0198 | TTY/TDD: (206) 296-1024 | Toll Free: (800) 325-6165  
Mailing Address: King County Courthouse, 516 Third Avenue, Room 1200, Seattle, WA 98104-3272

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This page was last updated on April 30, 2007

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