

# The Woodinville Weekly

## Ferry service to Seattle

by Don Mann - Staff Writer



Barring a major budget hiccup emanating from the state's current legislative session, a passenger ferry "demonstration" route will likely begin operating from Kenmore to Seattle as early as 2011.

That was the message from King County Councilman Bob Ferguson, Kenmore Mayor David Baker and King County Ferry District officials to an intrigued crowd of over 100 local citizens at a town hall meeting at the Northshore Utility District building last Tuesday.

The idea, Ferguson said, is to ease the rush hour congestion along Highway 522 by providing Northshore commuters with an alternative transportation route to Seattle's downtown core.

"We are facing tremendous transit needs and challenges in our region,"

Ferguson told the crowd. "People need to have different transit possibilities--bus, light rail and passenger ferry service."

Two years ago the state of Washington got out of the passenger-only ferry business, Ferguson explained, which led to the formation of the KCFD in April of 2007.

Under the name of "King County Water Taxi" the KCFD currently funds and oversees the operations of successful "foot ferries" between Vashon Island and downtown Seattle and between West Seattle and downtown Seattle.



Map courtesy of King County

*Map shows alternative ferry routes between Kenmore and Seattle.*

The KCFD is now looking to implement five additional demonstration routes across lake Washington and Puget Sound, including Ballard (Shilshole), Des Moines, Kenmore, Kirkland and Renton to Seattle routes.

The current West Seattle to downtown water taxi is the model for the proposed Kenmore demonstration route, Ferguson said.

A demonstration route, he said, is one which implements regular service for two years to familiarize passengers and get a better read on ridership numbers to determine the economic viability of a long-term enterprise.

"The ridership of the West Seattle water taxi exceeds even the best Metro bus transit route," Ferguson said, citing the 182,000 passengers it transported in '08 despite operating only seven months of the year.

"It's been a very efficient form of transportation and we're hoping for year-round service beginning in 2010," he said.

Mayor Baker said he'd been pushing hard for a Kenmore route since the KCFD was formed, and that the city already has docking facilities in place.

"I met with the owner of the potential Lakepointe site, asked him if he would agree to have a ferry come in and he was very agreeable,"

Baker said.

But there was a caveat, he said.

"If the ferry's going to be successful it has to compete time-wise with the buses," he said. "If we can't attract the people from the buses and offer another way to get to work then we won't be successful."

As of now, officials have determined the most likely Kenmore ferry destinations to be either the University of Washington landing along the ship canal or the Leschi dock.

"We know that 75,000 people a day are going to UW," Baker said. "We're just not certain how many people would be coming from the north end of King County and would potentially ride the ferry."

The mayor said he recently took an "unscientific" poll at the Kenmore park-and-ride, where he interviewed 100 bus commuters.

"Sixty-five percent said they'd ride the ferry," he reported.

According to KCFD officials, Leschi emerged over Madison Park as the next most appropriate destination alternative because of its proximity to downtown and the present condition of its docking facility.

"We did a study and found that it's actually closer from Leschi to downtown Seattle than it is from Madison Park to downtown," KCFD Executive Director Kjristine Lund said. "And the city of Seattle is currently looking into installing a street car line going to Leschi."

KCFD technical consultant Andrew Bennett said a major consideration was the condition of existing dock sites.

"We don't want to sink a lot of money into capital improvements for a demonstration route," he said. "The facility at Leschi is in better condition and closer to the road so you don't have to walk so far from the dock to the road. And the dock at Madison Park is pretty exposed to high winds that would make it difficult to dock the boat. It's smaller and there are presently no sidewalks that go down to the dock.

Again, we don't want to take on additional capital investment."

The KCFD is funded by a 5.5 cent (per \$1,000 assessed value) King County property tax which was levied beginning Jan. 1, 2008 to fund ferry-related service and capital projects. This amounts to approximately \$22 per year for a \$400,000 home, Ferguson said. The state passenger ferry account, federal grants, passenger fares, advertising and other promotional activities provide additional revenue, he said.

Baker said the projected time for the Kenmore to UW ferry route would be 28 minutes, which includes slowing down from 22 knots to 7 knots when entering the low-wake zone of the ship canal. A Kenmore to Leschi route would take 29 minutes, he said.

He added that each boat would handle an approximate capacity of 150 passengers, and said he hoped the demonstration service would include three morning and three afternoon round trips.

Mike Beck, spokesman for King County Marine Division, has been in charge of oversight for the West Seattle taxi service.

"We started off initially with weekday peak-hour service," he said.

"As ridership continued to grow we found demand for midday and evening service and we just kept adding to it. Now we're running it seven days a week, with late service on Saturdays and Sundays and for Mariners'

games. The growth process has justified itself. Hopefully what we would see in Kenmore is something similar."

Toward the end of the town hall meeting, Ferguson was asked if the demonstration route for Kenmore was a done deal.

"The fair answer is no," the councilman said. "I've learned when it comes to politics and policies there are no done deals until that ferry pulls out the first day. We have huge budget challenges here at the state and local levels so you never know."

He said he'd heard recent rumblings from the legislative session concerning eliminating KCFD funding altogether.

"But all of us here have been working on that issue and we think we have it taken care of," he said. "I think it's fair to say that if we're able to get the community behind it--and frankly the community has been very supportive--and if the money doesn't go away then there's every reason to believe that a demonstration model will come to Kenmore." (For more information go to [www.kingcountyferries.org](http://www.kingcountyferries.org))