



Nov. 8, 2007

Funding for waterborne transit urged at public hearing for King County Ferry District

Citizens and local government leaders from the communities that ring Lake Washington joined residents from West Seattle and Vashon today in urging the King County Ferry District Board to enact a plan with funding for operation of local waterborne transit for county residents.

Eighteen speakers testified at a public hearing in favor of the District's 2008 work plan, budget, and funding through potential authorization of a property tax assessment as recommended by County Executive Ron Sims in his 2008 budget address. More than 50 written comments were also received online.

"Expanding transportation options along the I-405 corridor will not only benefit the residents of Renton, but all of the cities along the corridor," said Suzanne Dale Estey, Director of Economic Development for the city of Renton. "Residents of south King County are going to jobs in Mercer Island, Bellevue and Kirkland. The ferry has the possibility of getting them out of their cars and easing some of the congestion."

"I'm very excited by the possibility of water taxi transportation from my home in Des Moines to my job at Harborview that gets me to work with a little less anxiety," said Peggy Weiss of Des Moines. "In some ways I can't quite believe we're still talking about this and that we haven't already done it —ten years ago would have been just fabulous!"

"We have two piers and a harbor marina and are looking forward to the possibility of their use as a ferry terminal," said Kenmore Mayor Randy Eastwood. "Our city is looking forward to the day that county residents — regardless of where they live — will be able to use this form of transportation to visit our city."

The Ferry District Board has scheduled a vote on the 2008 work plan, budget and funding for next **Tuesday, Nov. 13, at 9:00 a.m.** in Council chambers.

The County Executive today transmitted a plan for providing waterborne transit services to the District. The plan would require a property tax levy of 5.5 cents per thousand dollars of assessed valuation over ten years to fund:

- Passenger-only ferry service for Vashon Island,
- Year-round operation of the Elliott Bay Water Taxi between downtown and West Seattle starting by 2010, and
- Up to five future demonstration routes with the capacity to make them each permanent.

The Executive's proposal calls for the first demonstration route to begin in 2009

followed by additional routes in subsequent years. Demonstration routes may include service across Lake Washington to serve the communities of Kirkland, Kenmore, and Renton. Other demonstration routes under his proposal may include service on Puget Sound to serve communities in south King County such as Des Moines and communities in Seattle such as Shilshole.

Former Port of Seattle Commissioner Jack Block, Sr., credited the District today with “a strong and a bold move to advocate the rebirth of the Mosquito Fleet.”

Officials from the cities of Kenmore, Des Moines, and Renton told board members they are eager to participate in demonstration routes. Patti Mullen, executive director of the West Seattle Chamber of Commerce, applauded the concept of year-round Water Taxi service, saying, “The Elliott Bay Water Taxi will be providing the community with a gift — the gift of a reasonable commute.”

The Metropolitan King County Council created the King County Ferry District on April 30 to expand transportation options for county residents through provision of waterborne transit services. All 9 members of the County Council sit as the King County Ferry District Board of Directors.

The state Legislature in 2003 authorized counties to create local ferry districts whose funding was only possible through a property tax assessment. In 2006, the Legislature voted to end state funding for the Vashon Island passenger-only ferry service, currently operated by Washington State Ferries, on June 30, 2007. The Legislature agreed to extend service if King County would assume financial responsibility for the Vashon ferry by July 1, 2008, and assume full operation of the route in July 2009.