

Maine State Ferry Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes

Thursday 7/20/23 10:30 AM via ZOOM

1. **Roll Call**

Islands: Jon Emerson/North Haven, Kathy Clark/Swan's Island, Sonny Sprague/Swans Island, Duncan Bond/Jan Keiper/Frenchboro, John King/Islesboro, and Phil Crossman/Vinalhaven.

MaineDOT: Bill Pulver, Bill Geary, Joel Perry, Bethany Mulcahy, Melissa Goocher, Abby Baker

Mainland: Hank Berg/Casco Bay Lines, Dennis Damon/Bass Harbor.

2. **Introduction of Visitors**

Alex Zipparo/ Island Institute, and Peter Drury/Vinalhaven, Amelia/North Haven

3. **Approval of the Minutes**

Jon Emerson- asked to motion to Approve Meeting Minutes from May 18, 2023.

Dennis Damon- Moved.

John King- Approved.

Jon Emerson- All in favor. (No one disagreed.)

4. **Communications**

a) **To or by the Board**

Amelia- Brings up the letter she sent to the state regarding add additional runs to the North Haven Ferry boat schedule.

Jon Emerson- Knows of nothing on this subject.

b) **To or by the MSFS/MDOT**

Bill Geary- Speaking of the letter, it was received regarding the scheduling of additional North Haven Trips.

Jon Emerson- Could you please speak on this.

Bill Geary- Yes. Were looking into it. Various options and seeing what's available.

Jon Emerson- Looking into the year of 2024, perhaps the “Shay” would be available for an additional run to North Haven. It seems that the current schedule especially in the busier months, the ability for loads gets farther and farther behind.

Amelia-Would like to comment. On the extra trips to help with scheduling extra.

- Staffing of the new boat.
- A lot of people are frustrated because of how hard it is to get their cars back and forth from the island.
- See’s potential for additional boat running, for possibilities of additional ticket sales, with it.

Jon Emerson-Thanks Amelia.

Bill Geary- Looking into all possibilities for these options. USCG- COI to see if the required crewing be different if it was just a cargo run. What our schedule would, could be, etc.

Jan Keiper- What’s the protocol- the how to for requesting additional for trips, money, usage, availability for Frenchboro?

Bill Geary- Meet informally or send a letter.

John King- Perhaps a Town Meeting, of Creative thinking.

Jon Emerson- Does this take care of this topic. (Unanimous agreement.)

c) **Legislative Review**

Bill Pulver- Nothing new to report.

John King- Curious about the Highway Fund and Transportation Committee.

Bill Pulver- Dept was successful with rental car tax, sustainable funding. Overall magnitude was more sustainable, of the 50/50 budget.

John King- Thought the Advisory Board should be familiar.

5. **Reports of the Board**

Nothing to report.

6. **Reports of the Ferry Service**

Bill Geary- Shares a PowerPoint Presentation.

a) **Ridership**

Joel Perry- Talks about Ridership data for 2022 vs. 2023. There isn’t much difference. Probably because the 4th of July Holiday didn’t fall on a weekend, like it did last year.

(Vessel Status Report and Staffing report are backwards from that of the meeting.)

b) Vessel Status Report

Bill Geary- Reports that the USCG is very happy with COIS, maintenance of vessel, and progress thus far. Mentions the both the Spear and Philbrook are scheduled for their Hull exam as soon as the Thompson is back in Service. Did request a 60-day extension for the Philbrook, so Vinalhaven doesn't lose both boats currently operating.

Jon Emerson- Asked about the Spear and Elevator issues?

Bill Geary- Responded with yes, it will be addressed when it's hauled out. And I do have weekly meetings with Progress updates of both the Dinsmore and Shay.

Dennis Damon- Asked about the launch date of the Dinsmore?

Bill Geary- Mid November 2023.

Jan Keiper- To confirm that is the launch date, not the delivery date.

Jon Emerson- Yes, the launch date, not delivery date.

Bill Geary- Concerns with yard about yard about the date. Still must have the Delivery date, COI, and Delivery date.

Bill Geary- Myself and Henry, do plan on going down to Alabama to see the Shay- Libby replacement, which is ahead of schedule. This isn't a hybrid vessel.

Phil Crossman- What about the Smith Replacement?

Bill Geary- Fully Electric.... ABB Propulsion for the new boat.

Phil Crossman- What about the sides, on Port and Starboard for vehicles? We've heard concerns with space.

Bill Geary- Can find out.

John King- Access in and out of vehicles. With the open deck space on the Smith Replacement.

Bill Geary- There have been improvements, ability to be fully electric with recharging batteries, and double ended.

John King- Brings up the 17.5-million-dollar grant.

Phil Crossman- Not nearly as much of a novelty as thought.

Bill Geary- But it doesn't necessarily have a bow or stern, so it's never in reverse.

Hank Berg- We can share our designs with ABB.

Jon Emerson- Curious about the time the vessels spend turning around. And are they seaworthy.

Bill Geary- I can't give an intelligent answer to your questions, but I'll get back to you.

John King- Reading I've done, being a double ended doesn't affect the seaworthiness that much. But I can tell you the boat run itself in Lincolnville Islesboro is only about 12 minutes. But the turning around of the boat is about 3 to 5 minutes on each side.

Jon Emerson- Is there anything else to add? – No one answered...

c) Staffing Report

Bethany Mulcahy- Pending selection for Assistant Port Engineer, from Jim Savoy leaving his position. Very CSR Positions posted. Able Bodied Seaman Position, to be posted today.

John King- Brings up concerns of Islesboro and weekend staffing schedules, and the terms of an intermittent schedule.

Bethany Mulcahy- Certain number of hours for budgeted intermittent positions.

John King- Holly is doing a great job.

Bethany Mulcahy- We'll continue to do the best we can to continue.

Bill Pulver- Intermittent positions can be tricky because the employees do not have to work when called.

Bill Geary- We can see it with the boat crews because people do have other jobs.

Kathy Clark- Where are these postings? Do they get posted in Terminals?

Jon Emerson- Staffing is still an issue on North Haven, any additional ideas for hiring? Make it easier.

Joel Perry- It's been ongoing. We just hired a couple people from Maine Staffing that are willing to travel a little further, like go to an island for the day. Talking to Jen from North Haven, to work it out. But these employees are currently still training.

Jon Emerson- What about incentive for island employees? It's hard for most to even consider when they can make \$40 an hour cleaning houses on the island.

Bethany Mulcahy- Were working on it. But I can't directly say what it is right now.

Jon Emerson- Hasn't seen it affect boat passenger traffic but has affected terminals.

d) Financial Reports/Financial Subcommittee Report

John King- Subcommittee has yet to meet. No formal preliminary issues to report.

Bill Pulver- Melissa Goocher is having technical issues. So I'll go ahead and read over the reports we have.

- 2021 vs. 2022, a good sign of revenue being up in personal services- costs up. Which is most likely due to staffing.
- Not many big Changes.

- Diesel and repairs up due to costs. Something of \$400,000 dollars.
- Year-end totals take longer and will get out a final report when its available.
- Does anyone have any additional questions?

Jon Emerson- Incentive pay? Is it done?

Bill Pulver- Get employees in, and its done.

Jon Emerson- Incentive vs. Bonus.

Bill Pulver- Stayed vs. 6 month- Prorated, added stipends to salary.

Jon Emerson- Ticket offices?

Bill Pulver- State process with Classifications, solid examples, and committee meetings.

Jon Emerson- I hope it doesn't get worse, first. Do you have anything additional to add John King?

John King- I'll give more thought, but nothing formal currently.

7. **Island Specific Issues**

Kathy Clark- No propane runs on Wacky Wednesday, having the departure change by 15-minutes for the winter schedule. The way it is right now, it's a long wait for the school kids.

Jon Emerson- Where does this stand?

Bill Geary- I vaguely remember it but will be looking into it more.

Jan Keiper- Mentioning the fuel truck didn't get there sometimes, or the trash truck not making it to Frenchboro either. The selectboard did bring it up.

Joel Perry- Asking more about these instances.

John King- Brings up past discussion of the naming of the Smith Replacement. Original selection or thought for the name, was 'George Mitchell' which was mentioned by Mark Higgins. A meeting on 06/21/2023 of the select board from Islesboro, the name was unanimously agreed upon, 'George J Mitchell'.

Jon Emerson- Recommending contacting the namesake, for confirmation of name.

John King- I would like to motion for this selection of name, for the commissioner.

Jon Emerson- 'Motion for John King, to name the Smith Replacement.'

Phil Crossman- Second

Jon Emerson- Any further discussion.

Unanimous Agreement from all board members.

8. **New Business**

a) Bill Pulver - Tariff Presentation

Bill Pulver presented slides explaining the analysis of the current fare revenue situation, projections of future year expenditures, and how much of an increase in fare revenue will be needed to cover those costs.

- The last two years of fare revenues have been up, however average fare revenue over the last 2 years, falls short of 50% of the 2023 operating costs by over \$580K.
- A breakdown of projected expenditures over the next 4 years was shown. Personal Services have the highest increase due to implementation of recruitment and retention initiatives (higher pay stipends, more positions) to provide more dependable levels of service. Fortunately, diesel is down considerably since last winter.
- In total over the past 5 years, state and federal funding has contributed \$5.4 million more than customer revenue. (Instead of 50%/50% subsidy/revenue, it was 54%/46%).
 - Fortunately, federal CARES funding covered \$4M of the difference over this period.
- In total over the past 5 years, the total government contribution to the MSFS, (including capital) was \$79.0 million. Customer revenue over that period was \$29.2M.
- Expenditure projections for the next 4 years shows that an 18% increase in customer revenue is necessary to meet the 50%/50% subsidy/revenue scenario. 4 years ago, the increase needed was 17%.
- Only 95% of budgeted Personal Services was used for the projection because, historically, that has been our experience.
- Bill asked for any Board member ideas/suggestions for how to raise the additional 18% from ticket sales, other than just applying it across the board to all ticket types.

John King- A total annual Budget 4% of all other expenses. 4-3-2-1%.

Jon Emerson- Firstly, thank you for the transparency.

John King- Subcommittee hasn't met yet. But I can certainly share a few things...

- Revenue from reservation cost. Changing fees perhaps.
- Other thing is Peak and Off-Peak ticket prices. Adding more increase to Peak Season tickets vs. Off-Peak Prices.

- Something to do with island residency. Checking driver's license for discounted price to be applied.
- More user-friendly commuter tickets.
- Senior citizen rates

Alex Zipparo- I could get an analysis done. The DOT was KPFF, and Lisa Molett can help with long term recommendations.

- Happy to manage this process.

Hank Berg- Asked about the residential rate.

John King- Just an overview of ideas, with last week. Hopefully we can get some clarification of these rate increases. We appreciate the ability for giving feedback.

Jon Emerson- Trying to catch higher group in Peak Season to customers. Anything additional?

Jan Keiper- Anything new regarding Rocket Rez?

Joel Perry- There's a ton of data, but its raw, and hard to retrieve. Will try ot get more answers.

Bill Pulver- Except for Covid, it did well. Better the data, the better the goal for increased fares.

Jon Emerson- Is there any other new business?

Joel Perry- Some abilities for our system. Incentive Abilities for additional Rocket Rez information.

Bill Pulver- Jon E. do you think the board will want to make a motion with how you want to proceed forward?

Jon Emerson- Do you want us to make a motion?

Bill Pulver- Was a combined decision with the board.

Jan Keiper- I'd like to ask the selectboard of Frenchboro. If we each did this for our own. And we send it back to the chair of the committee?

Jon Emerson-We need to meet and talk about it? John King?

John King- 30 days from now, getting back to the board? Would everyone be in favor of that?

Bill Pulver- Did expect that, we can work with each other. Peak Season more. Or every island community.

Jon Emerson- Who else?

Kathy Clark- This is what we're working with, etc. She asked to see what 18% across all tickets would look like.

Bill Pulver- I'll plug some numbers in.

Jon Emerson- Sounds like we'll do that....

Jan Keiper- Something to ponder.

Bill Pulver- Something to look at, etc. I'll start with these recommendations.

Jon Emerson- I'll send out the feedback from board.

Bill Pulver- I'll send out the information I find to the Advisory Board members.

9. **Old Business**

Nothing new to report.

10. **Next Meeting/Adjournment**

September 21, 2023, at 10:30 am.