

Maine State Ferry Advisory Board

Thursday 05/21/26 10:30 AM via ZOOM

1. Roll Call

Bass Harbor: Dennis Damon – Board Chair

Frenchboro: Duncan Bond, Jan Keiper

Matinicus: Eva Murray

North Haven: Laura Doran McDougal

Islesboro: Peter Willcox - Vice-Chair

Swan's Island: Kathy Clark

Vinalhaven: Marjorie Stratton, Alan Barker

Mainland-CBITD: Ben Dinsmore

Mainland-Rockland: Tom Luttrell

MSFS / MaineDOT: Henry McFerren, Bill Geary, E.J. Dupont, Michael Cavalieri, Dan Conrod, Erica Cyr, Missy Goocher, Joel Perry

Introduction of Visitors: Kyle Madigan, from LifeFlight. Jon Emerson.

Approval of Minutes

Unanimous approval of the previous meeting minutes from March 19, 2026, minutes as drafted.

Communications To or by the Board: At the request of the MSFS Director, the LifeFlight Director of Client Relations Kyle Madigan gave a short brief on the air ambulance organization, including medical capabilities and service areas, and then answered questions about costs, coverage, and transport criteria.

Communications to or by MSFS/MDOT: None

Reports of the Board

Finance Sub-Committee

Peter Willcox expressed appreciation for the more detailed format of the budget report from DOT. It was noted that fuel price per gallon was lower than the previous year; this was due to the rate being locked in at \$2.5524 per gallon for 600,000 gallons. If fuel use goes over 600,000 gallons, then fuel price would be at market price, about \$5.71 a gallon. For fiscal year 2027 (starting 1 July 2026), the rate of \$2.5358 per gallon for 590,000 gallons is locked in. DOT

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Finance has sent an inquiry to DOT Purchases to see why the number of gallons is lower than FY26. At the previous Advisory Board meeting, DOT recommended doing away with the Finance Sub-Committee, seeing it as an unnecessary extra step since financial reports would continue to be provided to the Board. Islesboro recommends keeping the sub-committee, as it once found a large accounting error in a DOT budget report.

Revenue: Revenues were up 20% from last year, due to a revenue increase of 19% from fares and 33% from parking, and also due to lower expenditures to date.

Expenses:

Personnel Services. On track, up 5% from last year but still under budget.

All Other: Down \$1.5 million from the same time last year, primarily due to fewer repairs, and not having used Seaward Services. Out of State Travel is up, due to visits to the shipyard building the Dinsmore ferry.

Reports of the Ferry Service

a) Ridership:

The Board reviewed ridership data comparing 2025 and 2026; numbers were similar with a slight increase (+ 313 from total of all categories). All islands' numbers were up except for Islesboro.

b) Reliability:

For April, not considering weather and emergency run cancellations, MSFS reliability as a whole was 99.3% (from 99.7% in March); if we include weather and emergency run cancellations, the reliability rate was 98.4% (up from 97.3% in March). Year to date not considering weather and emergency run cancellations is 99.5%; include weather and emergency run cancellations, it is 97.8%. There were a total of 1370 scheduled trips, with 22 cancellations for total runs of 1348; 18 of the cancellations were Vinalhaven. The cancellations were 4 weather, 2 crew issue (sick employee sent home), 8 due to emergency runs, and 8 for mechanical. Cancellations were: North Haven – 2 due to emergency runs; Vinalhaven – 2 crew issue, 4 weather, 8 mechanical, and 4 due to emergency run; Swan's / Frenchboro – 2 due to emergency runs; Islesboro – 0.

c) Vessel Status Report:

All vessels are currently operational and running scheduled routes, with the exception that the Lee is covering for the Spear on 21 May, while the Lee has a scheduled US Coast Guard Certificate of Inspection (COI) inspection. The Dinsmore is still in Senesco Shipyard in Rhode Island, doing sea trials.

d) Staffing Report:

There are currently eight vacancies across the ferry service, four on crew side and four on terminal staff side. Since the March 2026 Board meeting, MSFS has extended an offer to a

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candidate for an intermittent Engineer position. Advertisements are running to fill terminal positions: Lincolnville one full-time, Rockland one part-time, and for North Haven one full-time and one intermittent. . Advertisements are running to fill terminal positions: two Relief Engineers and the Assistant Port Engineer position. Human Resources is being creative in reaching out to potential candidates, including print advertising, Facebook, ads in maritime sites and media such as gCaptain,

Island Specific Issues

Frenchboro is working with MSFS to determine who is responsible for repairs near the ferry bridge. **Frenchboro** has a concern that ferry passenger service using the Gott boat starts every year in April, before the town of Tremont puts docks in the water so the Gott boat goes to Bernard, which is not convenient for passengers. **Frenchboro** Annual Picnic is on 1 August 2026.

Islesboro has voted at the town meeting for an island-run program of resident rates for summer ferry tickets. This will be funded by property taxes; it is expected to begin in July 2026.

Matinicus noted that one time during a ferry trip there was a short power outage and the ramp was unable to be used during that time; there is a need for the ramp to be able to be manually / mechanically operated, and more than one person needs to know how to do it. **North Haven** is discussing the issue of priority reservations for businesses and which are or are not essential; they are interested in how other islands are doing it. **Islesboro** and **Vinalhaven** explained their processes. **Swan's Island** no comments. **Vinalhaven** noted some confusion on the oversized vehicle process and made a recommendation for wording change to the Tariff to reduce the confusion.

Old Business

Finance Sub-Committee. Discussion continued from last meeting on whether to continue or stop the Sub-Committee. Some Board members felt it has a useful purpose in reviewing the DOT-provided budget numbers. A member noted the Sub-Committee was originally established when the DOT financial reporting was less user-friendly, and noted it is not the purpose of the Sub-Committee to audit the DOT. DOT said the finance reporting was more detailed and open than was the case in some previous years. Some felt there was not a problem to continue if there were Board members willing to serve on it. A member of the public thought it was useful to have a second set of eyes on the finance report. The Board Chair directed that unless there was opposition, the Sub-Committee would continue; there was no opposition.

Safety Standdown Days. Discussion continued from last meeting on islands' perspectives on whether employees should be brought in during their off-time and paid overtime, or do training when employees are on hitch and temporarily stop service during the training period. There would need to be at least two Safety Days to get all staff trained. **Swan's Island** preference was not to cancel service. DOT suggested doing it in fall 2026 (October or November) with on-duty crews so middle runs would be cancelled, and see how it goes. The

safety days have not been done for several years so there would likely need to be an additional safety day in spring 2027, but following that it would likely just need to be once a year in the fall. The Board agreed and made this recommendation.

New Business

Update on M/V Dinsmore. MSFS management has visited the shipyard several times. Trials have mostly been going well but with some issues with the integration of the electric system and the diesel system. DOT criteria to receive the boat is five days of full sea trials with no faults or issues. There was an issue with the gearbox not cooling while in electric mode after 30 minutes so Coast Guard could put limits on what the boat can do. DOT is looking at options with the shipyard and electrical integrator. The integrator company BAE - selected years ago – is now out of the maritime business so there are two personnel to work on the boat's electrical integration. The battery company – Spear – is also now out of the maritime business. MSFS is working on a service contract for after the one year warranty period expires.

Update on M/V Mitchell. This vessel will also be a hybrid electric ferry. Two integrators have been selected from an original pool of seven; these are Siemens and ABB. They are preparing their cost estimates for the design of the vessel. Based on this, one will be selected as the integrator in the next month or so. DOT's intent is to put this out to bid in fall 2026 for selection of a shipyard. Bids for the original design of all electric with a rapid charging arm came in too high, so the vessel was redesigned as a hybrid and the length was shortened. As per the last Advisory Board meeting, the potential renaming of the vessel is on pause pending any information or evidence.

Updates on Multimodal Projects. Electrical upgrades at Swan's Island and Bass Harbor is ongoing, and new generators will be installed at both locations. Completion of the project is estimated in summer 2026; latest estimate is 21 July. **Transfer bridge hinge pin replacement** is planned for all bridges except Matinicus, which doesn't have the same type of bridge. The schedule is being determined, but should be finished sometime in July 2026, and there will be no disruption in service. **Lincolntown parking lot upgrade.** The current temporary parking lot has been cleared. It will be paved and gated. The DOT Information Technology (IT) office is involved in vetting the new gate software. Depending on the vetting timeline, the parking lot may be opened to the public prior to the gates being operational. The **Rockland parking deck** is being planned for next year and putting out for bids. **Transfer bridge refurbishment.** The project is planned for spring 2027 but is not currently funded. DOT is seeing if the Federal Transit Authority would allow the grant money that is now not needed for the Lincolntown and Islesboro dolphin expansions (due to changes in the Mitchell design) to be used for the Rockland parking deck, ramps, bridge refurbishment, and other infrastructure projects. The Vinalhaven bridge is planned to be first, then North Haven; the other bridges are being evaluated. The intent in the current work plan is all the bridges, with two identified to start.

Seward Services. MSFS was doing very well on staffing but in the last month we have lost three fulltime Engineers – two Relief and one from the permanent Thompson crew. Recruiting is ongoing to try to fill those positions. MSFS has reached out Seaward Services for Engineer support. Starting 1 June 2026, we'll have one Seaward Engineer on the Thompson and also covering for other Engineers in off-hitch weeks. This will likely be through late July. There is also a one-week period in July when a second Seaward Engineer will be needed.

Rockland Terminal parking issues. The Terminal has seen an increase in customers using the standby line to avoid paying for parking. A requirement for parking in State parking lots is that vehicles are registered and inspected. A new law related to parking – LD 1794 – has come into effect so MSFS is revising its parking procedures and forms to comply with the law.

Matinicus Board representation. Eva Murray noted that Jake Caron will be the primary and Eva will be the alternate.

Public Comments. None.

Next Meeting/Adjournment

Next meeting: Thursday, 16 July, 2026, at 10:30 AM at Rockland Ferry Terminal and via Zoom.