

Maine State Ferry Advisory Board

Thursday 6/26/25 10:30 AM via ZOOM

1. Roll Call

Advisors: Vinalhaven: Alan Barker – Primary and Marjorie Straton – Alternate and Town Administrator; North Haven: Jon Emerson – Primary; Swan’s Island: Kathy Clark – Primary; Frenchboro: Jan Keiper – Alternate; Matinicus: Eva Murray – Primary; Islesboro: Peter Wilcox – Primary; Bass Harbor: Dennis Damon – Appointed; Hank Berg – Appointed; Tom Luttrell - Appointed.

DOT: Bill Geary, Bill Pulver, Danielle Mallory, Joel Perry, Henry McFerren, Beth Getchell, and Missy Goocher.

2. Introduction of Visitors

Gary Farley – Selectman Swan’s Island, Peter Drury – Retired Captain, Al Dinsmore – Retired Manager/Captain. There was an online participant without a name and the Chair asked to announce who they were and there was no response. Then the Chair asked the Clerk to remove them from the meeting since they didn’t announce who they were, which was completed.

3. Approval of the Minutes

Moved by Peter Wilcox and seconded by Allen Barker. Unanimous approval of the meeting minutes as drafted.

4. Communications

To or by the Board: None

To or by the MSFS/MDOT: Jon Emerson requested that MSFS look into a letter to the USCG on opposing the removal of buoys. Reminder that the Advisory Board needs to draft an annual report to the Commissioner in August. Jon Emerson volunteered to compile each island individual report.

5. Reports of the Board

Financial Subcommittee Report was provided to board members from the missed May meeting. Peter Wilcox of the subcommittee discussed the highlights of the report. He noted that health insurance was only at 53% to budget which seems low. Noted that Seaward services payments of \$741K have been paid out in full and they are on standby. Peter stated that the general completion of 95% of run completion last year was good given managements needs to deal with the nationwide mariner shortage. Repairs are at \$2.1M, which is 157% of the budgeted amount. He stated they are worried about the ongoing repairs to the Margaret Chase Smith which is still not in service at the time of this report. The May financial addendum is reported next with the subcommittee meeting on June 20, 2025. It was noted that this was not the end of year report, and this is frustrating for the subcommittee. Missy Goocher reported that revenues slightly fell off in April and explained how and when the subsidy is brought into the ferry service. Missy explained that health insurance is budgeted for all ferry positions where vacant or filled. Bill Pulver reminded the board that the budget for health insurance is given to us by DAFS and we don’t get to decide that or adjust it. He also noted that when we are projecting expenses for the 50/50 subsidy, we

reduce the personnel services to roughly 95%. Missy further explained that we don't get a bill for insurance, it is taken out each time we run payroll for each employee. Bill Pulver noted that sometimes questions get asked from the financial subcommittee that are not formal, and we want to answer every question and be transparent. Bill Pulver noted that in the report it was written that this is not the year-end report and that it is frustrating. He stated he is not sure why they were expecting one since the year isn't over yet and the fiscal year ends on June 30, 2025, and we always meet in July and that is where we provide the year-end report. He noted that this is in print and can interpret that DOT is not providing what the board needs. Jon Emerson stated that they were trying to note that this was not the year ending report and Bill Pulver said not sure where the frustration came in then, and both John and Peter stated they were not frustrated. Dennis Damon noted that he understood how this could be taken out of context. Dennis asked for a motion to say that the board has received the financial subcommittee report and Peter Wilcox made the motion with Alan Barker seconding. Unanimous vote in receiving the report. Jon Emerson made a statement that he found Bill P, Missy and Bill G very responsive and picking up the phone when he calls and does not feel any lack of transparency there. Bill G asked for clarification on what the financial subcommittee was looking for regarding Seaward services. He noted that we have all the data on this from how many positions by month (gave a run down of positions by month from June through December) and that Seaward has not been used since December 2024 and no projection of needing them in the month of July but are there if needed and we don't pay anything for this unless they are utilized. Peter stated he wanted to know how much was spent on each position and that heard rumors on how much more expensive they are than MSFS employees. Bill P stated that we don't know what Seaward pays their employees only that we have the daily rate for each position and if wanted we can provide the daily rate of each position as compared to the full cost of each MSFS employee, but this doesn't take into consideration the travel or hotel expenses incurred. Dennis asked if Seaward employees get per diem, and they do at the same rate as MSFS employees. Jon Emerson asked that Seaward was needed mostly due to the Vinalhaven run last year and Bill G stated yes, that the E. Frank Thompson last year had 2 ABs and an OS out of work status and peaked at 6 total employees on FM/LOA and we needed Seaward to get the boats running and that last year 4th of July there was a strong possibility that the Thompson would not be able to run for the month of July if not for Seaward. Bill G also noted that with the added positions at the MSFS for crew, currently we have 8 employees out on FM/LOA right now but have not needed Seaward due to these added positions being able to cover these and thanked the crews and Chris C, Michael and Dan for their work on the schedule. Missy noted that the controller doesn't close the fiscal year until 7/14/25 and the earliest she can start working on the year-end report is 7/15/25. Bill Pulver asked if the board wanted us to provide additional information and a further breakdown regarding Seaward services and the board did not make a motion nor request additional information. Peter Drury asked the board to consider finding out the transportation costs of bringing Seaward services personnel here. Dennis asked if this information is available if they want it and Bill G stated yes, if requested it can be provided. Peter Wilcox then noted that this information had been asked of Bill G and he stated that he was not aware of an official request for information and Peter stated that it was here during the meeting. Bill Pulver noted that the report of the financial subcommittee is a report to the board and that questions to the board then are supposed to be answered by the MSFS/DOT and that there is some informality of this board, but this is where confusion can happen. Peter W asked the board to have Bill G provide a breakdown of all expenses of the Seaward services so the financial subcommittee can provide to the board the full breakdown on the cost of Seaward. Peter stated he then would provide the board the cost of Seaward as compared to the cost of MSFS. Hank Berg noted that the comparison should be the cost of not providing the runs if Seaward was not hired. Marjorie Straton noted that the board has received quite a bit of information on Seaward and providing more information is not needed and to what end would this information provide. Marjorie stated that they were happy that the trips were not canceled and a higher percentage of completed trips and Seaward was a part of that. Alan B noted

as well that the cost of all the trips canceled without Seaward is what should be looked at. Peter W stated that he is not doubting that Seaward was needed and comparing the costs of the canceled trips is showing whether this was needed or not and he is not disputing that. Peter wants additional information on the cost of Seaward to provide to the board. Jan K stated that she felt satisfied with the information received on Seaward services. Peter W brought up the extra employees that he sees on the boats and Bill G discussed that per the COI, yes, there can be extra, however all reliefs, intermittent and Maine Staffing are technically extra per the COI, but if you didn't have this, there would be no vacation requests, no one could get sick, etc. Bill P noted that the word extra is a bit misleading, we have no extra staff right now, we are scrambling right now to keep the boats running with the LOA/FM that we currently have and the vacation/leave requests. Bill P also noted that this level of staffing is necessary to cover various crew leave to meet island reliability expectations. The tradeoff is there may be times when there are more crew on a ferry than the USCG minimum. Dennis Damon stated that he felt as though Seaward services were needed and warranted and should be proud of that and saw no need to make a mountain out of a mole hill and if there is disagreement with this there are courses of action that can be taken.

6. Reports of the Ferry Service

a) Ridership

Copies were provided for a calendar YTD with a total increase of 2.6% ridership. Passenger increase of 4.7%, vehicle increase 1%, truck decrease of 7.7%. April total ridership was 8% increase, while May was 4% decrease. It was noted that hard copies of these reports be at the meeting and were provided.

b) Vessel Status Report

Bill G introduced Danielle, HR Manager for the Ferry Service, Michael Cavalieri, Transportation Operations Manager, and Dan Conrod, Assistant Director. Each introduced themselves in more detail. Dan Conrod provided an update on each vessel. The Everett Libby has been sold. The Richard Spear hull exam is scheduled for September. The Captain Almer Dismore is scheduled for delivery in Rockland in mid-August, and Bill G, Dan C and Michael C are doing a tour in Rhode Island of the new vessel this week. Dennis asked for the hull exam on the Spear, typically how long does that last, and Bill G answered 2 weeks. Dennis further asked about the maintenance outstanding items and if they will be addressed prior to and it was reported that these are normal maintenance items due on each vessel and with the new software we are now reporting these, and they are not official USCG issues. Bill G noted that when the Almer Dinsmore arrives in Rockland it will take a significant amount of time to get the vessel into service, and we will have a commissioning ceremony like we did with the Shay. Bill G also noted that at the request of the board the plaque for the Dinsmore is being drafted.

c) Staffing Report

Danielle provided an overview of the staffing report that since the last board meeting in March we have filled a full-time relief Captain II and a full-time relief AB position. A pending offer to a full-time relief AB and a pending offer to an intermittent engineer as well. A few positions just closed to start the interview process of OS, Deckhand and the Director position.

7. Island Specific Issues

Frenchboro- Jan K stated things are looking good and happy with the summer schedule. August 2nd lobster dinner annual picnic and all are welcome. Also thankful for the Gott passenger boat on Friday's.

Matinicus- Eva M asked a minor request on tomorrow is Charles Norman Shay's 101 birthday and requested that bring a cake down for the crew and take some photos as well and post that on Facebook or newspaper columns. No objection from this from the MSFS. Prock Marine is scheduled to repair the pylons on Matinicus.

North Haven- Jon E stated that there were delays this morning on North Haven due to some ramp issues. Captain Larry Turner was on the transfer bridge troubleshooting with crew members and got it working to make the trip. Jon noted that it was a great thing to see the captain getting his hand dirty and fixing the problem. Jon also noted questions on reservations on truck for North Haven and believes that nothing has been changed but see more trucks are in line than normal. Beth, the terminal supervisor, noted that the town priorities and other priorities are taking more than normal. The town was having more construction and more use of town priorities. Bill G stated that he was not aware of any town priorities that are listed in the tariff and if these happen, we need to get them in the tariff and will research this.

Swan's Island- Kathy stated that she has nothing new and things are going well.

Islesboro- Peter W stated that 2 terminal agents who work on Islesboro take the Quick Silver to work and do not get reimbursed for this. They are looking to get this paid for by the Maine State Ferry Service.

Vinalhaven- Alan B reported that there is nothing specific and Marjorie noted the town priorities portion, and a subcommittee will be formed on VH. Marjorie asked about an update on the terminal parking. Bill G stated that he has some drawings on these and will forward them to Alan and Marjorie

8. New Business

Kathy C asked about rules for electric vehicles and anything being discussed on this topic? Peter W discussed that Islesboro had a seminar on this and that there are potential problems with this on the ferries. Peter discussed a fire blanket and there is no fire fighting special equipment on our ferries. He stated that new ferry designs should address this concern in the future. Dennis asked about any USCG regulation on how to fire this and it was stated there has not been direction from them on this. Bill G noted that he has looked at fire blankets in the past and will research further.

Peter Drury noted that these are public meetings and removing them who were not identified. Curious as to why this was done and find it troubling, they were taken out of the meeting. Dennis Damon noted that his concern that they did not identify themselves was troubling. Peter noted this is a public meeting and it is unacceptable and what is the state's position on this? Dennis stated this wasn't done by the state it was done at the request of the Chair. Dennis stated that if this was in person and you didn't identify yourself then he would ask you to leave. Dennis stated he understood Peter's concern but didn't share the same concern. Eva M stated that she supports Dennis' decision and is involved in a lot of committees and things are different since zoom and needs to be stricter to have disruption and intentionally disrupt meetings. I think it is reasonable to be stricter on the Chair to identify themselves, and just because we haven't run into this at the advisory board meeting doesn't mean it doesn't happen.

9. Old Business

Tariff 11: Bill G noted that since the postponement of the last meeting that Tariff 11 is in effect and has been transparent about that all the way from the public meeting until the effective date of June 1, 2025. The grace period for the tickets has gone by, and an upcharge will be needed for any old tickets under Tariff 10 pricing. Bill thanked Joel P for his work with Rocketrez to update the new pricing online and noted that there was nothing significant reported on technical issues with tariff 11. Bill G also noted that the MSFS website did have an update and that some of the information is inaccurate or old and we are working to correct that immediately.

Alan B brought up the concern on addressing the oversized vehicles not fitting down the tunnels and where we stand with this and what needs to be done to start this ball rolling. Bill G stated that we were going to implement this with Tariff 10 but realized that this would be a change in the definition of a vehicle and that needed to go through rule making so we did not proceed. Alan B asked for clarification to get this into the next tariff, and it was stated that if this was what the board wanted that we can include this in the definition of vehicles at the next rule making. Peter W stated that he thought that this was already done with the height of vehicles and it is in effect now. Bill G stated that this is not in effect. Peter W stated that the terminal agents do not know that, and some island residents are being charged at a truck rate due to their height. Bill G will research and get with Peter on the specific issues and address it, but there were no changes with Tariff 11 to the definition of vehicles.

Bill P noted that the informality of a representative from Vinalhaven talking to Bill G about putting something in the Tariff is not an official ask of the board. Bill P asked that is this a recommendation of the board to make this change? Alan B brought up concerns about a sprinter van and not being able to go down the tunnel and making a reservation they are centerline only and people get bumped. Alan wants to deny reservations for those vehicles who can't fit on the sides of the vessels. This request is not needed to go through rule making as it does not change the definition of a vehicle and a change to the reservation. Bill G asked if the board is making a recommendation to change the rules of a reservation of a vehicle with the height restriction and if above the height needs to be a truck reservation. Alan Barker made a motion that if your vehicle cannot fit down the side (tunnel) of a ferry, 7 feet 4 inches, that this be classified as a truck reservation versus a car reservation. Cathy Clark seconded the motion. Peter Drury noted that there are a lot of issues with this reservation system and Islesboro has had these issues since the Marget Chase Smith has been in service and is newer for Vinalhaven. Peter also noted that consistency is needed between the terminals in interpreting the Tariff. Peter W stated that something needs to be done but wants to go back to his select board and get their input before voting on it. Peter W suggests tabling this motion until next month to get each island time to get with their select board. Alan Barker withdraws his motion, and Cathy Clark withdraws her second.

Legislative Review –Bill P noted that the legislature adjourned yesterday and there were 9 bills related to the ferry service. LD841 went to criminal justice and public safety committee a resolve to study the delivery of emergency medical services to and ferry service effects on the unbridged islands and that resolve was passed. This will be an effort led by a work group by the department of public safety and emergency management system.

The following bills were heard by the transportation committee:

LD280 – Lifetime ferry service passes for retired MSFS employees that live year-round on the island—passed as amended and signed by the Governor. This allows retirees with 15 years of service, one vehicle and passenger ticket per month in the peak season and 2 vehicle and passenger tickets in the off peak.

LD447 – Amend the law of the ferry service to Matinicus Island – removes the upper limit of 36 trips per year and any additional trips beyond this would be agreed upon by town officials and the department. This passed and signed into law by the Governor.

LD947 – Act to clarify overnight docking of the ferry vessels – did not pass

LD1186 – Resolve directing DOT study the feasibility of ferry service to Monhegan Island – passed

LD1231 – Act to require approval of proposed overnight docking of the state ferries on the islands – passed as amended with changes recommended by Commissioner Van Note and signed by Governor. Requires legislative approval to change the location of the ferry except for emergency or significant need.

LD268 – Act to address employee recruitment and retention by providing a yearly stipend – did not pass

LD1680 – Act to establish a permanent ferry oversight committee – did not pass

LD1731 – Act to increase the influence of the Maine State Ferry Service Advisory Board – passed and then was vetoed by the Governor

Eva wanted to thank Commissioner Van Note on the one that directly impacted them passed and grateful for it and to the ferry service who has helped out many times already this year.

Alan B noted that he spoke and was glad he went but wanted to stay longer to make the boat back.

Dennis D noted that LD280 – asked the cost of this and Bill P stated that he would need to get that number and Dennis noted that this will have a fiscal note and impact the budget. Dennis also noted that the bills certainly got the attention of the department and the commissioner and the white paper on the Maine State Ferry Service. Dennis requested hard copies printed which were handed out to those who wanted them. Dennis noted that the Commissioner commented on the climate of the marine workforce and being away from home for an extended period of time. Also, he noted that despite the best efforts of the department and the MSFS can't please everyone. Then Commissioner brought up a novel approach of looking at the ferry service like the other transit services, like northeast rail. Having islanders who utilize the ferry the most being involved in running the operations of the ferry service.

Dennis recommended that the board discuss this and suggested each board member read the white paper and take time to talk about this concept. Also, there is a thought on having municipal officials being a part of this board – Bill P stated it was an amendment to the bill that was ultimately vetoed by the Governor.

Bill P stated the white paper draft they have is the latest official version and the Commissioner is the author. Bill G noted that he sits on the Casco Bay Transit Authority as a board member and that they operate as quasi – municipality with a board of directors like the Commissioner noted in the white paper. Bill G stated that as the board reads the white paper and has questions about this, he would be willing to help answer questions on this as well as Hank Berg offered his knowledge as the former GM of Casco Bay reporting to the Board of Directors.

10. Next Meeting/Adjournment

It was agreed that the next Advisory Board meeting will be on **Thursday, July 31, 2025 at 1030am.**

The Meeting was adjourned at 12:56pm.