

# Maine State Ferry Advisory Board

Thursday 3/27/25 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 and Sonny Sprague – Alternate; Frenchboro: Duncan Bond – Primary and Jan Keiper – Alternate; Matinicus: Eva Murray – Primary; Islesboro: Peter Wilcox – Primary; Bass Harbor: Dennis Damon.

**DOT:** Bill Geary, Bill Pulver, Matt Higgins, Danielle Mallory, Joel Perry, Kyle Hall, Henry McFerren, Beth Getchell, Lee Delong, Alyshia Wentworth, and Missy Goocher.

## 2. Introduction of Visitors

Gary Farley – Selectman Swan’s Island, Rebekah Carmichael-Austin – Town Administrator North Haven, Peter Drury – Retired Captain.

**Chair Remarks:** Dennis informed the board and public that going forward public comment will come at the first part of the meeting and again at the end of the meeting to address items that came up from the board discussion but will not engage during board conversations unless directly asked by a board member.

## 3. Approval of the Minutes

Moved by Jon Emerson and seconded by Duncan Bond. Unanimous approval of the meeting minutes as drafted.

## 4. Communications

**To or by the Board:** None

**To or by the MSFS/MDOT:** None

## 5. Reports of the Board

**Financial Subcommittee Report** was provided to board members. Peter Wilcox of the subcommittee was noted to be on record that repairs to the M/V Margaret Chase Smith and other ferries should be classified as capital expense and not come out of the operating budget and not reflected in the ferry rates. Bill Pulver addressed that we did receive communication from Gabriel Pendelton from the finance subcommittee on the issue of capitalizing repairs. It was noted that some of the repairs are capitalized due the nature of the work but that does not mean that it comes out the capital budget. We have a long history of paying for repairs to the boats out the operating budget and that policy will remain in effect until the Commissioner or someone else decides that the policy of repairs will no longer come out of the operating budget. Significant improvements to the boats, such as the repower of the M/V E. Frank Thompson come out the capital budget and the state paid for those 100%. The repairs for breakdowns for hull work have come out the operating budget and the recommendation is noted. Discussion on what the financial process is for capitalizing the repairs on the depreciation of the asset, 3-4 certain criteria must be met to capitalize the repairs. It was noted that the finance subcommittee did not recommend that all repairs

come out the capital fund but rather in the case the Smith these extraordinary repairs. MSFS and MDOT acknowledge the request.

## **6. Reports of the Ferry Service**

### **a) Ridership**

All ridership information was provided on YTD vs LY. Overall ridership is up 4%, passenger is up 6.5% and regular vehicle is up 2%. Reports provided to board members on the specific island ridership and reach out to Joel Perry if wanting more specific information. At future meetings this will be provided as a hand out at the meeting.

### **b) Vessel Status Report**

Report sent to the board on the vessels. 3 COIs conducted so far and all passed with minor issues that are being addressed. Smith COI is scheduled this year and Spear is scheduled in May. Shay COI is also scheduled May and the Thompson has a hull exam and COI this year. Repairs continue on the Smith and anticipated return to service April 14<sup>th</sup>. M/V Almer Dinsmore continues to be built in Rhode Island. We are in liquidated damages right now with Senseco Shipyard and discussion on what that means and encouraging them to finish on-time. With the rejection of the Mitchell bid we are looking at solutions to reduce the overall cost of the ferry to come in-line with the estimate. Also need to see if these solutions still align with the grant.

### **c) Staffing Report**

Information was provided about the promotion of the Director of the Maine State Ferry Service. Other staffing was discussed for the MSFS both crew and terminal. Talked about the open positions, and where they were, in the hiring process. Discussion that has not used Seaward Services since December 9, 2024. Still in the process of reviewing the RFP with them to have in place as needed. Discussion was had on having extra mariners (MSFS employees) onboard however this provides the flexibility of a call out or FM/LOA and this will prevent us from being on razor thin margins to achieve the reliability numbers expected of the islanders. The Assistant Director position is open and interviews have been completed and will be announced soon. The operations manager resigned and has been posted and closed and scheduling interviews for that position.

## **7. Island Specific Issues**

**Frenchboro-** No concerns currently and to keep the schedule as it is currently.

**Matinicus-** Discussed needing to adjust the remaining schedule for the tides given the speed of the new vessel and a new schedule will be coming out shortly.

**North Haven-** Route is doing well and a great ferry that is reliable. Have a great crew and NH gave them a formal appreciation supper for both crews at the community center with select board, advisory board and community members.

**Islesboro-** Asked about the status of the ferries sleeping on the mainland. Bill Pulver – no change at this point on the conceptual proposal. The commissioner had meeting with all crews and evaluating the situation. The Islesboro population goes way up in the summer time and is estimated to 5,000 in the summer and make sure that everyone is aware of that.

**Vinalhaven-** Reception in the plans to have a reception for their crews. Concerns on the winter schedule and revisit this before next year with the 4:30pm run. Look at additional equipment and/or training for the captains on the runs in the dark. Discussion of the old crew's quarters and making that a parking area and will have a public comment for this and

looking at the sea level rise with this project. The term “Day Boat” is derogatory and is a regularly scheduled boat, seems like it is an add on. Always heard it called as the “Mainland boat”. MSFS noted that this is a term that the crew uses and never heard a complaint about that term before.

**Swan’s Island-** Kathy - Summer schedule and going back to Frenchboro having their trip back to what was earlier. Discussion was had on having a meeting if needed to come up with an agreement with the islands and the MSFS. Sonny - Discussion on the route and having the US Coast Guard put a mark and relook at this since this is adding to the time of the run and will impact the summer schedule and meeting the schedule. Request to find someone to find this shallow spot and mark it and then be able to cut down on the fuel and the time on run and adding in wear and tear on the boat. Find this shoal and put a marker on it is the request of the island and speak with the USCG to see if a marker can be placed.

## **8. New Business**

Public comment period is now open on anything that might have been discussed or what need to do. Peter Drury asked for an agenda of the meeting posted. Bill Geary stated these are posted at all the terminals as requested by the board. Peter asked that the agenda also be posted on the MSFS website. Ridership and vessel status were provided to the board member and asked that these documents be provided as well to the public on the MSFS website. Jan K discusses that as the Advisory Board member provides a report to the select board and they post these for the public. Population of stating service 2600 people and the that population goes up 5x in the summer and think about the vessel capacity and target that in the summer time and lot of time that the vessel is not at capacity. Recommended having smaller vessels and crew more vessels in the summer time and factor that in going forward with population size of the islands or passenger only vessels.

Jon Emerson sent a letter to the board and to Bill Geary and Bill Pulver from Fox Island electric that they can charge the new vessels on island. Bill Pulver stated that when and if the new ferry for NH comes the engineers would look at the power requirements of the ferry. Jon Emerson stated that he wanted this noted in the minutes.

## **9. Old Business**

**Tariff 11:** Rule making with a handout and was sent to the Advisory Board members before.

Discussed the needs to increase the rates since last fall and the 15% need and communicated last month and reduced that to 13.5% with an illustration of that with a target date of June 1<sup>st</sup>. The handout has the timeline of the rulemaking process and comments need to be in writing or at the public hearing on April 10<sup>th</sup> at noon at Samoset and will be livestreamed. There is an up and running website that has all the information required. These can be in letter form or direct comments directly on the website.

**Legislative Review** –Handout received with the 11 bills that are public information that will be considered surrounding the ferry service. For those online, email was sent as well with this handout. Bill Pulver noted that none of these bills are from the MDOT, some of the bills have language on this and others do not have details on them yet. Eva noted that the bill for Matinicus was not her recommended wording and just wanted to not have a number of certain trips and to have an appropriate discussion with the need and the MSFS. Dennis Damon noted that while you have an idea or request when you turn it over to someone else in the legislative area it can be turned into anything else or even

amended. Suggesting that a lot of changes that people think could be helpful and if not have full knowledge or understanding like the advisory board, errors could be made. Dennis recommended that the board members should stay turned to the public hearings on these bills and keep vigilant.

#### **10. Next Meeting/Adjournment**

It was agreed that the next Advisory Board meeting will be on **Thursday, May 15, 2025 at 1030.**

The Meeting was adjourned at 12:15pm.