

Maine State Ferry Advisory Board

Thursday 03/19/26 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: Alan Barker

Mainland-CBITD: Ben Dinsmore

Mainland-Rockland: Tom Luttrell

MSFS / MaineDOT: Henry McFerren, Bill Geary, E.J. Dupont, Dan Conrod, Danielle Molloy, Erica Cyr, Sri Beeram, Missy Goocher, Tracy Ames, Joel Perry, and crew of the Richard Spear.

Introduction of Visitors: Gary Farley and Peter Drury

Approval of Minutes

Unanimous approval of the previous meeting January 22, 2026, minutes as drafted.

Communications To or by the Board: None

Communications to or by MSFS/MDOT: None

Reports of the Board

Finance Sub-Committee.

Peter Willcox noted that due to changes in Board membership, currently only Islesboro is represented on the FinanceCommittee and encouraged other Board members to participate.

Revenue:

As of 28 February 2026, the sub-total from 2025 was \$5.2 million; sub-total from 2026 was \$6.2 million; variance was \$1.031 million. The State subsidy is \$5million, a variance of \$2 million from last year.

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Expenses:

Personnel. Total variance of payroll is \$71,840. The numbers are generally in keeping with the budget, with budgeted personnel expenses up 8.43% from FY 2025. The Health Insurance variance is up \$126,000 from last year but only 50% of the budgeted amount of \$1,794,000. This is a State-controlled expense, not MSFS.

All Other: Expenses Not By state are down \$574,924 from last year at \$357,667 but at 73% of budgeted amount – target is 67%. In-State Travel Expenses are \$353K, up \$54,545 from last year and at 76% of budgeted amount. DOT noted that MSFS employees are now paid 100% of per diem (\$92) for overnight stays in crew quarters rather than a prorated amount. A full week on-island is \$649 per crew member (first and last days are prorated for departure and return times); this varies slightly per location. Diesel is down \$190K from last year and on budget but fuel prices are likely to rise. Repairs are under budget but that can change at any time. Total All Other is \$3.375 million which is \$1.6 million less than last year and at 59% of budget. Technology and IT related contracts are up; this is due to software for a pilot software program for inventory, maintenance, and crew scheduling.

Reports of the Ferry Service**a) Ridership:**

The Board reviewed ridership data comparing 2025 and 2026, using the dates 1 January to 17 March for both years. Total passengers for 2026 were up 642 from 2025. It was noted that trip cancellations will also impact ridership numbers.

b) Reliability:

The overall system reliability rate for February 2025 was 99.3%, not including cancellations due to emergency runs or weather. With those cancellations included, the rate was 96.3%. There were 1,179 scheduled trips and a total of 44 cancellations, so 1,135 trips were completed. The 44 cancellations included 34 for weather, 4 for maintenance (2 were for a mandatory USCG inspection), 4 for mechanical, and two cancellations as a result of one emergency run.

Monthly reliability reports will be provided to the Board going forward to support ongoing monitoring and transparency.

c) Vessel Status Report:

All vessels are currently operational and running scheduled routes, with the exception of the Thompson, which remains in maintenance at Rockland Marine shipyard. The Lee is covering the Thompson's routes to maintain continuity of service. The Dinsmore is still in Senesco Shipyard in Rhode Island, doing sea trials.

It was noted that vessel maintenance schedules and coverage plans are being managed to minimize service disruptions while ensuring operational safety and compliance.

d) Staffing Report:

There are currently seven vacancies across the ferry service, three on crew side and four on terminal staff side. Since the January 2026 Board meeting, MSFS has filled positions including a full-time line attendant in North Haven and in Rockland. A new Deck Hand starts next week and a Human Resources (HR) Specialist has been hired to assist the MSFS HR Manager. The position of Assistant Port Engineer was offered to a candidate and a reply is pending. MSFS is advertising for a full-time person at Lincolnville Terminal, a part-time person for Rockland, an intermittent person for North Haven, and the supervisor position at North Haven Terminal. An Engineer (Relief) and an Engineer (Intermittent) position have been advertised. The HR Manager will be recruiting at job fairs in Rockland and at Maine Maritime Academy.

Island Specific Issues

The **Matinicus** representative thanked MSFS for improved communication and asked that the Matinicus pier not be forgotten as DOT schedules repairs. The **Swan's Island** representative made a request that for the summer schedule Frenchboro runs move back to mornings instead of afternoons. The **Frenchboro** representative was opposed to this. The **Swan's Island** representative also asked MSFS to look into a new mapping of the ledge area by the approach to the pen so the ferry could potentially cut through, as the current route takes a little longer and impinges on an old family fishing spot. **Vinalhaven** requested the summer schedule year round, to include the 4:30pm run, and thanked MSFS for restoring the practice of horn blasts when arriving and departing Vinalhaven.

Old Business

None

New Business

Finance Sub-Committee. DOT Multimodal Director asked Board to discuss if they felt the Finance Sub-Committee was useful or should be ended; DOT would continue to send out the financial report to the committee. Board could discuss finances at meetings rather than Sub-Committee reviewing ahead of time and presenting at meetings. The DOT's financial analyst spends a lot of time explaining things repeatedly. The Chair recommended Board members take the question back to their communities.

Update on M/V Dinsmore. The vessel is undergoing sea trials, to identify and troubleshoot faults. There has been a delay with the integrator and one of their major parts that failed causing a 3-4 week delay. There is not a rush to receive the boat in order to ensure it is fully operational, as this is the first hybrid ferry. The boat is close to completion but no estimated arrival date.

Update on M/V Mitchell. Senator George Mitchell's name is being removed from some places and things (schools, scholarships, etc) as a result of reporting related to the Epstein files; he denies any wrongdoing. The vessel name has been selected as George Mitchell but the name does not become official until the vessel is christened under that name. The Commissioner asked the Board for input on keeping or changing the name. There are 3-4 years before the final name needs to be decided. The Board will take the topic under consideration, and evaluate any information that comes forward.

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 for early July 2026. **Transfer bridge hinge pin replacement** is planned for all bridges except Matinicus, which doesn't have the same type of bridge. Rockland will be first, one bridge at a time. Except for Rockland, all work will be done at night. The schedule is being determined, but should be finished sometime in July 2026, and there will be no disruption in service. **Lincolnville parking lot upgrade.** The current temporary parking lot has been cleared. It will be paved and gated; estimated completion date is early June 2026. The other Lincolnville lots are not currently planned to be gated. **Transfer bridge refurbishment.** Initial meeting was held with project designer. Vinalhaven will be first island to get a replacement bridge; DOT is looking at the state of other bridges to determine refurbishment vs replacement. The project is planned for spring 2027 and there will be a 2-week downtime for Vinalhaven. MSFS will work with Vinalhaven on potential alternate transport options, such as the Island Transporter.

Safety Days. MSFS asked the Board for its input on implementing Safety Day training for staff and crew – whether employees should be brought in during their off-time and paid overtime, or do training when employees are on and temporarily stop service during the training period. The Board asked for a calculation of how much overtime pay would be required for employees brought in during their off-time. There would need to be at least two Safety Days to get all staff. The Commissioner emphasized that Safety Days are for the passengers' benefit, not just staff. There was discussion of potential for electric vehicle (EV) fires and the need to ensure passengers can get out of their vehicles in an emergency.

Public Comments. These included whether the Shay will be put into service if one of the two Vinalhaven ferries will be down for an extended period. Recommendation that if the 4:30pm run is not being done in the winter time, that it be restored as soon as light allows rather than waiting until Daylight Savings. Recommend looking at Rockland parking lot snow removal contract as the plowing could have been better. A potential way to address concerns about people in vehicles being able to exit a vehicle in an emergency would be to make everyone but driver exit the vehicle during runs. Are there lessons learned from the delays in construction of the Spear and Dinsmore that can be applied to future vessel construction?

Next Meeting/Adjournment

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Next meeting: Thursday, 21 May, 2026, at 10:30 AM at Rockland Ferry Terminal and via Zoom.