

## **Maine State Ferry Advisory Board**

**Thursday 11/20/25 10:30 AM via ZOOM**

### **1. Roll Call**

Vinalhaven: Alan Barker – Primary; North Haven: John Emerson – Primary, and Vice-Chair; Islesboro: Peter Willcox- Primary; Swan’s Island: Kathy Clark – Primary; Matinicus : George Tarkleson – Alternate; Frenchboro: Duncan Bond – Primary and Jan Keiper – Alternate; Bass Harbor: Dennis Damon – Primary, and Board Chair; Tom Luttrell – Mainland-Rockland; Hank Berg - Mainland

MaineDOT: Acting Commissioner Dale Doughty, Director of Multimodal Operations Bill Geary, Director MSFS E.J. Dupont, Assistant Director Dan Conrod, HR Manager Danielle Molloy, Data Analyst Sri Beeram, Financial Analyst Missy Goocher, Assistant Program Manager Nate Benoit

### **2. Introduction of Visitors**

Captain Chris Cusson, Rockland Terminal Supervisor Tracy Ames, North Haven Terminal Supervisor Bethany Brown, Captain Charlie Yarnell of the M/V Margaret Chase Smith, Swan’s Island Selectman Gary Farley, retired Captain Peter Drury, John King, Jerry Gilligan (Gilbert Associates), Matinicus Town Manager Jake Caron,

### **3. Approval of Minutes**

Unanimous approval of the previous meeting minutes as drafted.

**4. Communications To or by the Board:** The Chair noted Sonny Sprague (Alternate: Swan’s Island) was requesting that MSFS Director reach out to him on his perspective on the route into Swan’s Island pen; Director acknowledged request. Alan Barker said that ferries used to blow their horns when arriving and departing Vinalhaven but no longer do; this is useful for letting passengers know the ferry is arriving. Director said ferries would blow horns upon arrival and departure.

Acting Commissioner Dale Doughty provided remarks thanking the Board for their efforts and promising to continue to work with the Board moving forward.

## **5. Reports of the Board**

**Finance Sub-Committee.** A meeting of the Finance Sub-committee of the Maine State Ferry Service Advisory Board took place by Zoom on November 17, 2025. Present were Jon Emerson, Gabe Pendleton, and Peter Willcox. John King was also in attendance. The Sub-Committee reviewed the Variance Report as of October 30, 2025. **Revenue.** Revenue was 24% ahead of 2025 and at 50% of Budget. The Sub-Committee noted that it is important to keep in mind that these farebox numbers consist of 3 of the 4 peak season month's revenue. The MSFS agreed, noting that the MSFS is cyclical in nature and cautioned against using only the percent of time elapsed in the Fiscal Year (FY) as the measuring stick for expenditures. **Expenses.** Budgeted expenses have increased from last year, at 8.43% for personnel expenses and 34.7% for "All Other Expenses. In response the MSFS noted that in fiscal year 2025, \$735,826 of the All Other (AO) Budget was moved to Personal Services (PS) to fund the six new positions that were created to alleviate the need to use Seaward Services for staff augmentation. In doing so, it was understood that in FY 2025 we would be under budgeted in All Other, but that FY 2026 would be adjusted appropriately. The increase from FY25 to FY26 may be more appropriately be based on the Original FY 2025 budgets for PS and for AO, in which case the % increases are 16.3% for PS and 15.1%AO. **Personal Services.** Special Pay expenditures are down from last year (-39%) but stands at 44% of budget. MSFS noted that this is in part because of the new recruitment and retention policies. Premium OT is similar, slightly less than last year. Health Insurance was \$60,588 over last year but only 25% of budget. MSFS noted that having more people is going to mean more insurance, particularly when we get to the portion of the year where we are fully staffed. Other lines are essentially on budget. The numbers for the 40\*\* line sent to the Finance Committee reflected the entire balance of Staffing Contracts under Project Staffing. Seaward Services has not been used in FY26. The Sub-Committee was somewhat relieved to see Repairs are at \$350,067 which is \$858,851 less than this time last year. In state travel was \$52,620 over last year and at 41% of budgeted amount. MSFS reminded the Sub-Committee that MSFS employees are now paid 100% per diem for overnight stays in a crew's quarters instead of a prorated amount. This is a direct cost of having the vessels and crew stay on island.

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

**a) Ridership:** Information was provided for Oct 2024, October 2025, and year to date (YTD) for 1 Jan – 18 November 2024 and 2025. For the YTD reports from 2024 to 2025, there were decreases in vehicles < 20' (-1%), >20' vehicles (-7%), 0-40' trucks (-7%), and >60' trucks (-13%), and with an increase in trucks 40-60' (+7%) and passengers (+2%).

**b) Reliability:** The reliability report for October 2025 was presented. There were 1470 trips scheduled, with a total of 13 cancellations, including 6 weather cancellations. For October, not considering weather /emergency run cancellations, MSFS reliability as a whole was 99.5%; including weather / emergency run cancellations, the reliability rate was 99.1%. Cancellations: 7 Islesboro (5 maintenance and 2 crew), 2 North Haven (weather), and 4 Swan's / Frenchboro (weather). There were 3 emergency runs, all for Islesboro.

**c) Vessel Status Report:** SHAY, SMITH, BURGESS, and PHILBROOK operational and ready for use. Hull exam extension request on the PHILBROOK was granted. SPEAR is on the railway at Rockland Marine with repairs and maintenance underway. LEE is on the Vinalhaven run in place of THOMPSON. THOMPSON is on the Vinalhaven run in place of SPEAR.

**d) Staffing Report:** We filled four positions since the September meeting: AB Relief (internal promotion), AB Relief (pending), Engineer Intermittent (pending), and Terminal Agent Lincolnville. We had 4 employees out on various leaves of absence and have two positions currently advertised – Engineer Relief and Assistant Port Engineer.

Seaward Services has not been used so far in calendar year 2025.

## **7. Island Specific Issues**

**Swans' Island.** Noted that when the ferry broke down, the replacement boat did not immediately conduct runs but instead waited for next scheduled afternoon trip. Asked about potential for Saturday schedule to be same as other days. MSFS will look into both issues

**Vinalhaven.** Next winter Vinalhaven will continue to ask for a 4:30 trip.

## **8. Old Business.**

White Paper and Transit Authority. The Board Chair noted that the Board has not always been heeded but emphasized the Board is an advisory board and not a policy board. If the Board wants policy authority, the served islands would need to reconsider the idea of a transit authority. There was discussion of the general dissatisfaction there had been about how the proposal of mainland berthing had been presented without discussion with the islands, and how the islands' opinions had been ignored.

## **9. New Business:**

**Update on the DINSMORE and MITCHELL.** The DINSMORE is undergoing sea trials at Senesco Shipyard in Rhode Island to work out remaining hybrid issues between diesel and electric systems. Delivery date is still to be determined. Bill Geary provided a status on planning for the design of the **Mitchell**. The low bid received in January 2025 was \$41.5 million, which \$7 million over budget. The original design was 207' long, double-ended, with electric motor propulsion, 2 large battery banks, and shoreside rapid charging with automated charging gantry at pier. The vessel length was 40' longer than the Margaret Chase Smith ferry and required substantial pier upgrades. The double-ended design, with exposed rudder and propeller, would make drydocking a challenge. To save substantial costs, the ferry was redesigned and alternatives considered. All electric operations were modified to hybrid assist and the double ender design was changed to a conventional ferry design. The vessel design shortened the overall length to 172' and saved close to \$20 million with the pen improvement project modifications. The Chair stressed the importance of MaineDOT holding discussions on the plans for the **Mitchell** with the public.

**MSFS Advisory By-Laws and Appointments.** The Director noted that a phrase in the by-laws was obsolete; the phrase was "for meetings held at the Rockland Terminal, the Vinalhaven and North Haven members & alternates shall be provided with walk on tickets only." A motion was made and seconded to remove the phrase and was passed unanimously. The Director provided the Board members with the upcoming dates of expiration for their current terms.

**Election of Board Officers (January 2026).** The Director reminded the Board that in accordance with the by-laws, the officer positions (Chair and Vice-Chair) shall be chosen during the first regularly scheduled meeting of each calendar year, which will be sometime in January 2026.

**10. Next Meeting/Adjournment.** The next Advisory Board meeting will be on Thursday, 22 January 2026, at 10:30am at the Rockland Ferry Terminal and over the Zoom app.