

Cranberry Isles Commuter Service

Contact Information

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Service Summary

Service area: Hancock County
Type of service: Commuter ferry service

Ferry Service

The Cranberry Isles Commuter Service is one of three ferry services providing transportation from Great Cranberry Island and Islesford (Little Cranberry Island) to the mainland. It supplements the year-round service provided by the Beal and Bunker Mailboat which arrives at the islands and Northeast Harbor at different times, and the Cranberry Cove Ferry which runs a seasonal service to Manset and Southwest Harbor. While the Cranberry Isles Commuter Service is the only one partially supported by funds administered by Maine DOT, all three services form an integrated and coordinated system of transportation to and from the Town, so all three are described in the paragraphs below.

Cranberry Isles Commuter Service. The Commuter Service operates five days per week, Monday through Friday. The Commuter Ferry allows islanders to arrive on the mainland earlier than they could otherwise by taking the Mailboat.

- **Summer service (May 1 to October 14).** During the summer, service is provided on the Elizabeth T, operated by Sail Acadia. The summer schedule is a morning trip only. The commuter ferry leaves Northeast Harbor at 6:00 a.m., picking up passengers on Great Cranberry and leaving about 6:15 a.m., then picking up passengers on Islesford and leaving about 6:30 a.m. The ferry arrives at Northeast Harbor (NEH) around 6:50 a.m. Following drop-off in NEH, the ferry goes to Southwest Harbor to drop off passengers at the Cranberry Isles Manset dock by approximately 7:15 a.m.
- **Winter service (October 14 to May 1).** During the winter, service is provided by the Miss Lizzie, operated by Downeast Windjammers (which also operates the Cranberry Cove Ferry as described below). The commuter ferry leaves Northeast Harbor at 6:00 a.m., picking up passengers on Great Cranberry and leaving about 6:15 a.m., then picking up passengers on Islesford and leaving about 6:30 a.m. The ferry arrives at Northeast Harbor (NEH) around 6:50 a.m.

The afternoon commuter service departs Northeast Harbor at 5:00 p.m. and arrives at Islesford at approximately 5:15 p.m. then arrives on Great Cranberry at approximately 5:30 p.m., then heads directly back to NEH.

Beal and Bunker Mailboat and Ferry. This ferry service operates year-round, seven days per week, providing service between Great Cranberry Island, Islesford and Northeast Harbor. In the summer months, there are six trips operating between the two islands. Service begins in Northeast Harbor at 7:30 a.m., and ends at 6:45 p.m. During the spring and fall, there are four trips per day, starting at 8:15 a.m. and ending at 5:15 p.m. In the spring and fall, service is further limited to three trips per day (two on Sunday), beginning at 7:30 a.m. (11:15 a.m. on Sunday) and ending at 4:15 p.m.

Cranberry Cove Boating Company. This is a seasonal ferry service operating 7 days per week between the Southwest Harbor upper town dock and the Town of Cranberry Isles municipal pier in Manset and Great Cranberry Island and Islesford. The service operates from May to October 1. The service operates four trips daily (five in July and August), beginning at 7:00 a.m. and ending at 5:20 p.m. (6:20 p.m. during July and August).

Summary of Service Changes

There have been no major changes during the past five years. The commuter ferry, which originates on the mainland, now operates as a round-trip service for anyone going to the islands early in the morning. A new boat was put into service in 2015 by the contractor which is faster and more reliable, and provides greater passenger comfort. The Beal and Bunker year-round service now operates a Sunday morning service beginning at 8:15 a.m., expanding its Sunday winter scheduled from one afternoon trip to include a morning trip.

Summary of Accomplishments

Residents have come to rely on the Cranberry Isles Commuter Service for transportation needs that are not met by the regular private commercial ferry service(s), particularly during the winter months (Mid-October through the end of April). Ridership remains steady for trips needed for getting to employment on the mainland, school trips, medical appointments, and other errands.

Plans and Studies

During FY 2015 & 2016, the Town conducted a survey and public forums to hear comments about all ferry operations serving Cranberry Isles, including the Cranberry Isles Commuter Service, and how they are meeting the transportation needs of the Town. This was part of a year-long effort to develop a plan to consolidate the three ferry services operating in the Town. Although the consolidation plan was not funded in FY 2016, the plan remains a goal of the Town in order to develop a more efficient ferry transportation system for the future, to include the Cranberry Isles Commuter Service as a component of the system.

Future Priorities

- Continue ferry services.
- Improve Islesford municipal dock in length and wave protection to make landings safer and easier in rough weather.
- Continue to work with the boat operators to safely reduce the number of cancelations due to weather conditions.

Ridership

Cranberry Isle Commuter Services Flex Route Trips					
	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017
General Public	1,406	1,573	1,431	1,448	2,656

Fares

Cranberry Isles Commuter Service. One-way fares are \$9 per person. Ticket purchases or cash payments are made on the boat. All fares collected are kept by the boat operator per the TCI Commuter Boat Contract.

Beal and Bunker Mailboat and Ferry. Adults and children 12 and over one-way \$9, round-trip \$18. Children 3-11 one-way \$4.50, round trip \$9. Children under 3 are free. A 10-trip pass can be purchased for \$90.

Cranberry Cove Boating Company. Adults and children 12 and over one-way \$22, round-trip \$29.50. Children under 12 one-way \$18, round-trip \$22. Local commuter pass (year-round residents only) \$75 for 10 one-way trips. The 10-trip pass for summer residents is \$90.

*These are the fares charged to island residents during the 2018 calendar year. Fares, including the 10-trip passes, are not interchangeable between ferries as each ferry functions as a separate operation.

Ferries/Facilities

The ferries serving the Town are all privately owned and operated by private companies, including the commuter ferry which is operated for the Town under a contract for services.

Northeast Harbor is the primary point where residents travel to and from the mainland. The Town of Mount Desert maintains a public dock in Northeast Harbor, which, except for Cranberry Cove Ferry, is used by all ferry operations as the primary mainland location serving Cranberry Isles. The Town of Cranberry Isles leases a parking lot in Northeast Harbor for its residents on a year-round basis. The parking lot in Northeast Harbor is in close proximity to the municipal pier and ferries serving Cranberry Isles. During the summer months this parking lot can only accommodate about half of the summer

resident population. Therefore, the Town of Cranberry Isles purchased (in 2003) and maintains an intermodal facility in Manset, in the Town of Southwest Harbor. This facility, made up of the municipal dock, a large parking lot, and a boat shop, is an important facility for seasonal use by Town residents, and is served by both the Cranberry Cove Ferry and the Cranberry Isles Commuter Service during the summer months (Memorial Day through October 1st).

The intermodal facility is used seasonally. Municipal/public docks on Great Cranberry Island, Islesford and Sutton Island are used year-round. Dock space in Northeast Harbor is leased from the Town of Mount Desert by the boat operator in the case of Beal & Bunker, and by the Town of Cranberry Isles for the commuter boat. The Town's docks are in good condition, but improvements are needed at Islesford to lengthen the dock and provide wave protection to make landings safer and easier in rough weather.

Coordination/Outreach/Partnerships/Unmet Needs

The ferry boat operators serving Cranberry Isles occasionally operate boats for each other and frequently arrange to bring each other's crews back and forth from the Town to the mainland.

Major Challenges

The major challenge facing Cranberry Isles is the inconvenience of frequent cancellations due to adverse weather conditions. This can sometimes result in people being stranded on one of the islands or on the mainland. However, there is a fairly well-developed system to notify passengers of cancellations beforehand using social media and word-of-mouth. This allows residents/potential passengers to make arrangements and plans accordingly if boats are cancelled. The nature of the community served is such that most people are aware of weather conditions that can affect boating and they plan accordingly.

Public Participation Summary

There is a great deal of local support for all of the ferry services. There are opportunities for public comment and input at Selectmen's meeting when renewal of Cranberry Isles Commuter Boat contracts is being considered and at town meetings when the town votes to renew contracts or appropriate funds for dock and other improvements. Although not specifically Town-owned, the private commercial ferry services operated by Beal & Bunker and Cranberry Cove's seasonal ferry are open to public comments and ways to improve service. Issues related to these services can be discussed at regular Selectmen's meetings if requested.