

What is the 2008 Ferry Customer Survey?

In the 2007 session, the Legislature provided the Washington State Transportation Commission with funding and a mandate to conduct a survey of ferry customers per the statutory provisions contained in ESHB 2358.

The legislation states in part:

The Commission must, with the involvement of the WSDOT, conduct a survey of ferry users to inform level of service, operational, pricing, planning, and investment decisions. Information is to be gathered on recreational users, vehicle and walk-on customers, freight movement, and reactions to possible operational strategies and pricing policies.

For the full bill text, go to:

<http://www.wstc.wa.gov/FerryCustomerSurvey/FerryBill07.pdf>

The survey will gather information from a representative sample of ferry customers on their travel behaviors and attitudes. The research will also ask customers to provide feedback on a number of operational and other strategies that are being considered by the ferry system to help inform decisions that will better use existing ferry capacity, increase the efficiency with which the system operates, and evaluate the need for capital expansions to meet current and future demands for service.

The survey is being conducted by the Washington State Transportation Commission (WSTC). Opinion Research Northwest (ORC-NW) is an independent contractor hired by the WSTC to conduct the surveys.

www.opinionresearch.com/northwest)

What is WSF going to do with this data?

This survey will provide important input into WSF's review of the different strategies and policies tested in the surveys. All of the strategies contained in the survey are under consideration. However, none would be implemented without additional public input. The survey is the first step in this important public input process.

Is the intent of this survey to gather data that will justify a future increase in fares or to change the fare structure?

No. The purpose of this research is to gain general customer input and specifically to gauge opinions on a wide range of operational, fare, and other possible strategies aimed at better utilizing the existing capacity of the ferry system, per legislative direction. This research is one of three concurrent efforts underway that are meant to provide comprehensive solutions to the challenges that the system is facing. Some questions on relative fare increases and decreases are included in the survey but are not meant to imply that fares will automatically change based on your responses. As with all policy changes, no changes to fare policies or structure would be implemented without additional public input and further legislative direction.

How are people chosen for the survey?

A primary objective of the survey is to obtain a representative sample of ferry customers. To accomplish this objective, ORC-NW drew a random sample from all one-way trips within each of the ferry routes. Each of the randomly selected one-way trips was then linked with a trip going the opposite direction. If you are on a sampled trip, all passengers on each of those trips will be asked to complete the survey.

When will the survey be conducted?

The on-board survey will be conducted in two waves. The first wave occurred during the month of March and the second during the month of July. We are doing two waves of data collection to ensure that we capture a representative sample of all riders, including recreational and occasional riders who are more likely to ride during the summer. Also, the two waves of data collection will provide insight into different travel behaviors and attitudes at different times of the year.

Why are you doing a second on-board survey?

The purpose of the July study is to capture the difference in travel between summer and winter travel habits. The new survey is significantly shorter.

Should I take the survey again if I already completed it in March?

Yes. First, we want to find out how the summer months affect individual travel habits. Second, we have changed the questionnaire and want your input on the new issues. One thing we addressed in particular is the length of the survey. It is now about half as long as it was, so filling it out will be significantly easier.

Is the new survey different from the one in March?

Yes. In addition to being significantly shorter (about half the length) we added a section about recreational travel and are also trying to capture more specific travel information.

If I participate, how long will the survey take and what kinds of questions are you asking?

The survey takes approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The survey includes questions about your ferry travel, factors that influence when and how you travel on the ferry, and your opinions regarding a number of operational strategies that are being considered to help move people and vehicles better on the system.

To make it easier to participate, we are offering three options for completing the survey:

1. **Complete the survey on-board the ferry.** You may then return the survey to one of ORC-NW's survey personnel.
2. **Complete the survey on-line.** If you choose this option, you will be given a post card with the link (URL or web address) to reach the survey and an ID number that will allow you to log-on to the survey. If you log-on and are not able to complete the survey, you can return at your convenience and log back in. The survey will pick up where you left off.

3. **Complete the survey and mail it back to ORC-NW.** The back of the survey has mailing instructions. Simply fold the survey in half so that the mailing address shows. Postage is pre-paid – so you will just need to drop it in the nearest mail box.

We need all surveys for this July data collection period completed and returned no later than **August 15th, 2008.**

How many vessels will be sampled and how many people will be surveyed?

For the first round of surveys in March, we conducted interviews on more than 150 one-way trips. All routes were represented in the survey. We completed interviews with nearly 5,500 customers during March. We anticipate that we will survey an additional 6,000 to 7,500 customers in July / August. If your trip is one of the sampled trips, you will be approached while waiting for and/or while you are on-board the ferry and asked to complete the survey.

If I participate, will the State or anyone else see my personal information?

No. Unless you permit otherwise, any personal identifying information is deleted from the data so that your personal information remains completely confidential. Even the state will not know “who” completed the survey. Your information will be grouped and analyzed with that of other ferry customers.

Why is my participation important?

Washington State’s Ferry System is facing serious financial and operational challenges and this affects your service. Several studies are currently underway to help WSF develop comprehensive solutions that will meet the needs of its customers in the future. Your participation in the survey will be very important to developing informed solutions to guide the system’s future.

Each participating customer will represent many more ferry riders with similar characteristics. Your participation is important because you will be representing other customers like you.

When can I see the results from the survey you did in March?

We will be releasing the results from the March on-board after the current wave is complete. We do not want to bias any responses.

What if I don’t know an answer to a question?

It is perfectly fine if you do not know the answers to some of the questions. Most of the questions are based on your opinions, so there really is no right or wrong answer. Other questions require that you know specific information about your travel behavior. If you are not sure of the exact answer, just answer the question as best as you can.

Why do you need to know my household income, and other personal information?

There are two main reasons that we ask for personal information like your household income. First, we are only talking to a random selection of ferry customers, so it is important for us to know if the group we survey is representative of the entire system’s customer base. The best way for us to do that is to compare demographics from the people we survey to the demographics of the region served by the ferry system.

Second, opinions are often influenced by one's background, location of residence, and demographics. We collect this information so that we can best analyze the data to serve people of all walks of life. *Remember*, no personal identifying information will be linked with the personal information that you give us.

Will I be contacted again if I complete this survey?

As part of this research, we are asking respondents' interest in participating in additional follow-up research to test specific strategies that are being considered. This follow-up research will be conducted on-line. If you agree to participate in this additional research, we ask that you provide ORC-NW with a telephone number and/or e-mail address where they can contact you.

ORC-NW will be contacting a sample of those who agree to participate in the additional research during the months of April through September 2008.

Please be assured that your contact information will be used for research purposes only and only for research being conducted by WSTC for the Washington State Ferries. ORC-NW, the research firm conducting this research, will maintain the database of those agreeing to participate in additional research. Your personal and other information will be securely protected and will not be shared with any third parties except with your express permission or as may be required by law.

What is the follow-up on-line survey for?

The results from the current survey will be used to further refine the proposed strategies. In addition, some of the strategies WSF is considering are quite complex. We will be asking a sample of ferry customers who agree to participate in the follow-up survey to review and provide their input into some of these more complex strategies.

These on-line surveys will ask respondents to make choices between different options that are being considered. Because of the comparisons people will be asked to make, being able to do it at one's convenience and while viewing it on the screen allows us to get the depth of information we need. Most people who participate in this type of research find it very interesting. A survey typically takes about 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

If you elect to participate in the additional research, we will contact you by telephone or e-mail, per the information you provide. We will then send you a link to the survey to be completed as well as instructions on how to complete it. The on-line survey will take place between June and September 2008.

How do I know you'll keep my information confidential?

We are required by law and business standards to keep your information confidential. After all the interviews are completed, any identifying information you provide - your name, address, email address and phone number - are removed from the data file and destroyed.

Opinion Research Northwest is a founding member of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO). We abide by the strict business and ethics guidelines of this nationally recognized organization. For more information on the Code of Ethics that member organizations must sign, go to <http://www.casro.org/codeofstandards.cfm>.

I ride the ferry and didn't get a survey – how do I participate?

The objective of the survey is to obtain a representative sample of ferry customers. Not all ferry customers will be surveyed. You can send comments directly to ferryinfo@nwrq.com.

I would like to speak directly to someone at Opinion Research Northwest or the State for more information. Who should I contact?

If you have further questions about any aspect of the 2008 Ferry Customer Survey and would like to speak directly to someone at ORC-NW, please call (866) 461-0700 and ask for the ferry study. Or you may send an e-mail to ferryinfo@nwrq.com.

At the state, you may contact the Washington State Transportation Commission. Their telephone number is (360) 705-7070. Or you may send an e-mail to transc@wsdot.wa.gov.

Thank you for your interest and participation in the 2008 WSTC Ferry Customer Survey!!!