

Fare Simplification Study

Washington State Ferries

Washington State Transportation Commission

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Focus of the Study

Project Objectives

- Analyze WSF's current fare structure and recommend ways to simplify it, if appropriate
- Identify policy considerations for future action

Key Questions

- Is the WSF fare structure more complex relative to similar ferry systems?
- Are there elements or features of the current fare structure that add complexity while contributing to policy, operational or customer impacts?
- Since the fare structure was designed to achieve various policy, financial and operational outcomes, what should be the goal for fare simplification?

Current Fare Structure

The current structure has evolved in response to policy objectives/directives while balancing operational constraints and customer concerns.

- **Tariff Route Equity (distance-based fares)** – customers pay roughly in proportion to the time spent on a ferry
- **CUBE (space-based fares)** – vehicle customers pay roughly in proportion to the amount of space used
- **Demand management policies** designed to spread demand, particularly for vehicle traffic, among routes and across sailings and encourage effective use of available capacity
- **Discounts** to account for impacts on overall customer costs (frequent use, youth and child pricing, in-need organizations, commercial fleet use) and other policy directives (senior and disabled pricing consistent with federal regulations)

Peer and Comparable Systems Review

WSF's current structure is generally consistent with other systems reviewed:

- **Vehicle fares** vary according to length of route, season, vehicle size and/or type
- **Passenger fares** recognize price variance among regular adult, youth/child, senior and disabled passengers
- Various policies designed to favor or otherwise distinguish among regular customers and infrequent users

No evidence of a particular “sweet spot” or optimal number of fares.

All systems appear to base their fare tables on some combination of:

- **Market factors:** number of routes, customer types
- **Consumption:** what they use (time and space)
- **Demand:** when they use it (time-of-day, day-of-week, time-of-year)
- **Customer characteristics:** who they are (age, disability, frequency of use, dependency on service).

Challenges Based on Fare Structure

- Complexity of fare structure primarily impacts WSF operations and ferry customers.
 - **Operational** challenges in determining fares at the tollbooth:
 - Different vehicles (class and/or length and height)
 - Passengers (qualified youth, senior and disabled customers)
 - **Customer impacts:**
 - Regular customers having to use multiple products to obtain frequency benefits (passenger, small car, standard vehicle, motorcycle)
 - Challenge of fare determination for infrequent users (not knowing vehicle length and/or changing vehicles after pre-purchasing tickets online)

Complexity versus Number of Fares

- The large number of unique fares in the system is a result of decisions to align prices with customer and market characteristics (number of routes, number of length-based vehicle categories)
- This is not a significant factor contributing to operational or customer impacts:
 - From an IT perspective, the number of unique fares does not significantly impact the current fare collection system, nor is it likely to affect development of a future system.
 - From an operational perspective, the challenges are associated with fare determination and not the number of fares
 - For customers, the total number of fares can lead to frustration when trying to make trip plans, but this is largely a communications challenge where current tools are not particularly intuitive or accessible for infrequent customers.

Why Simplify?






- There are two areas where simplification could yield significant benefits:
 1. ***Options that would enhance current or future operational efficiency and/or effectiveness***
 2. ***Options that would improve the customer experience and/or simplify how customers understand and use ferry services***
- Thus, the simplification options proposed in the next slides support at least one of these objectives

Simplification Options

CUBE Policy Options (space-based fares)

- Reduce length categories (11 fare categories) by consolidating categories beyond 40 feet (40'-60', and per foot over 80')
- Change from strict length-based fare categories to those based on vehicle types while maintaining a relationship to amount of deck space consumed
- Charge trailers as a separate add-on fare (small, medium and large); does not apply to semi-trailers
- Support space-based fares with automated vehicle measurement for vehicles under 40-feet

Example: BC Ferries uses a length-based vehicle classification system. The relationship of BC's vehicle classification scheme to FHWA's vehicle classification scheme is depicted to the right.

Bin	Vehicle Type	FHWA Equivalent
0 - 6 m		Motorcycles (1); passenger cars (2); light single unit trucks (3)
6 - 12.5 m		Buses (4); two axle, 6 tire single unit trucks (5); three axle single unit trucks (6); four axle single unit trucks (7)
12.5 - 22.5 m		4 axles or fewer, single trailer truck (8); five axle single trailer truck (9); six or more axle single trailer truck (10)
22.5 - 35 m		B-trains (8, 9, 10); five axle, multi-trailer truck (11); six axle, multi-trailer truck (12); seven axle, multi-trailer truck (13)
> 35 m		Multi-trailer (13)

Simplification Options

Tariff Route Equity Policy Options (distance-based fares and route groups)

- Combine Southworth-Fauntleroy and Vashon Routes into a single route group
- Create a Whidbey Island group by combining Mukilteo-Clinton and PT-Coupeville
- Create a single passenger fare group for all routes that connect directly with ORCA partner services
 - South Sound
 - Central Sound
 - Whidbey Island

Selectively Add Toll Model to WSF System

Build a fare structure around two distinct fare collection models: a new toll highway model and the current blended highway/transit model.

Suitability for "Highway Model"	Low Volume Walk-ons	Single Destination	Terminal Limitations	Frequent Service	No Reservations	Overall
Central Sound	✘	✔	!	!	✔	✘
PT-Coupeville	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	!
S'worth-Fauntleroy	!	!	✔	✔	✔	✔
Vashon Island	!	!	✔	✔	✔	✔
Mukilteo-Clinton	✔	✔	!	✔	✔	✔
San Juan Domestic	✔	✘	!	✘	✘	✘
International	✘	✘	!	✘	✘	✘

Options focused on Operations

- Replace the current “trip-based” frequent user and passenger pass products with a loyalty type discount system where reduced fares for frequent use are earned and credited to a customer account
- Restructure the current passenger fare system to better align with pre-sales and app-based transactions; support future congestion pricing; and accurate ridership data:
 - Create a new online purchase discount fare that is equal to the current half fare and reclassify the current full fare to apply only to full fare passengers who purchase at the terminal
 - Separate the passenger and vehicle components of the vehicle fares, effectively eliminating the senior/disabled fare categories and simplifying fare verification for online sales of vehicle fares
 - Collect fares in both directions to provide a price signal during peak periods

Options focused on Customer Experience

Enhance the customer fare information portion of the WSF website to integrate a vehicle selection process to more accurately make fare determination decisions

Alaska Marine Highway System Online Booking

Foot Passengers

Adult 12+	Senior Citizen 65+	Child 6-11	Child 0-5
<input type="text" value="2"/>	<input type="text" value="1"/>	<input type="text" value="1"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/>

Online Booking Information & Restrictions

Vehicle	Year	Make	Model	Sub-Model	Length *	
<input type="text" value="Car / Truck"/>	<input type="text" value="Year"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text" value="Length"/> ft	Remove
<input type="text" value="Choose Vehicle"/>						

Extra Carry-On Items

Route selection

Departure *	Arrival *	Date *	
<input type="text" value="Akutan"/>	<input type="text" value="Cold Bay"/>	<input type="text" value="Mon 16 Sep"/>	Add Segment
<input type="text" value="Choose Port"/>			

Contact

For more information on the
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