



Washington State Transportation Commission

Friday Harbor Meeting Summary

June 21, 2023

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Chair Roy Jennings opened the meeting at 9 a.m. with introductions by commission members and staff, an overview of the agenda, and meeting protocols.

Agenda Item 2:

Commission Business

- May Meeting Summary
- Colman Plaza Naming Resolution – ***ACTION***
- UPDATE: Hood River Bridge Traffic & Revenue Study Final Report
- Public Notice: Naming Proposal for Riffe Lake Overlook
- Commission Representative on the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) Policy Board

Presenters:

- Reema Griffith, Executive Director, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Carl See, Deputy Director, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Paula Reeves, Senior Policy Analyst, Washington State Transportation Commission

Commissioners had no changes to the May meeting summary.

To codify naming action taken by the Commission in May, Commissioner Debbie Young read Resolution No. 748 on the Colman Dock Plazas naming into the record.

Carl See provided an update on the progress of the Hood River Bridge Traffic & Revenue Study Final Report, which will be reviewed by Commissioners before being submitted to the Legislature on June 30.

Reema Griffith provided notice of the proposed naming of an overlook at Riffe Lake in Lewis County for former county commissioner Gary Stamper. The proposal will be advanced at the July meeting.

Ms. Griffith provided background on the Commission's two seats on the PSRC Executive Board and Policy Board. Commissioner Jerry Litt will be vacating a seat on the Policy Board at the end of June, and Commissioner Jim Restucci has been nominated to take his place on July 1, 2023.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 2, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:05:50, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: Commissioner Young made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 748; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Litt. The motion passed 6-0 with Commissioner Kelly Fukai excused.

Commissioner Nicole Grant made a motion to name Commissioner Restucci to the PSRC Policy Board; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Young. The motion passed 6-0 with Commissioner Fukai excused.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 3: County Council and Mayor Welcome

Presenters:

- Jane Fuller, Vice Chair, San Juan County Council
- Raymont Jackson, Mayor, Friday Harbor

Jane Fuller provided an overview of the transportation landscape of San Juan County. Challenges include the risks posed to roads by climate change and shoreline erosion (13 miles of public roadways are at risk of inundation), the lack of a public transit system and the fact that there are no state-owned roadways in the county. Island residents rely on Washington State Ferries (WSF) for access to healthcare, education, and commerce. WSF vessel and crewing shortages have been a hardship for county residents, and the long-term postponement of ferry service restoration between Anacortes and Sidney, B.C., has impacts on the county's tourism sector. While San Juan County does not belong to a state transportation planning organization, it is joining regional partnerships to help build a resilient transportation system.

Raymont Jackson described how backups on the main roadways throughout Friday Harbor following ferry cancellations during a recent holiday weekend served as a wake-up call on the need for improved communication and coordination with WSF. The Town of Friday Harbor is conducting traffic studies and envisions increased demand for transportation and ferry services. He stressed the importance of improved coordination with WSF and WSDOT to continue to support residents' and visitors' travel.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 3, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:14:21, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 4: Transportation Update

Presenters:

- Reema Griffith, Executive Director, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Carl See, Deputy Director, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Paula Reeves, Senior Policy Analyst, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Aaron Halbert, Financial Analyst, Washington State Transportation Commission

The Washington State Transportation Commission staff provided an overview of the state transportation system, funding structure, and key Commission roles.

Presentation: [Transportation Update](#)

For more detail on agenda item 4, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:32:11, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 5: San Juan County Transportation Issues: The Big Picture

Presenters:

- Jane Fuller, Vice Chair, San Juan County Council
- Melissa Fanucci, Principal Planner, North Sound Transportation Alliance
- Satpal Singh Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive, SWISS (Snohomish County, Whatcom County, Island County, Skagit County and San Juan County) Regional Partnership

Jane Fuller provided a history and overview of San Juan County’s participation in regional transportation partnerships, including the North Sound Transportation Alliance (NSTA), which remains an important collaborative entity. Melissa Fanucci of the NSTA updated the Commission on current activities focused on multimodal transportation and connections between transportation and health. In 2023, NSTA is examining the changes in transit, rail, and ferry travel. Ms. Fanucci discussed 21 regional studies being conducted by various regional partners in 2023 and work to identify potential collaboration and overlap.

Satpal Singh Sidhu discussed the unique challenges of Whatcom County and the region – including the challenges Point Roberts, an American peninsula bordered by Canada on the north, faced during the pandemic. He discussed I-5 congestion between Blaine and Everett and the resulting congestion on State Route 9. He suggested state assistance in creating an app that could be used for on-demand micro-transit systems developed by cities and counties that utilize volunteer drivers. He highlighted the work of the SWISS (Snohomish, Whatcom, Island and Skagit and San Juan) Regional Partnership on transportation, behavioral health, and broadband, and explained the organization was formed to elevate the priorities of the five-county region.

Presentation: [North Sound Transportation Alliance](#)

For more detail on agenda item 5, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:54:49, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

**Agenda Item 6:
Transportation and Infrastructure Planning to Build Resiliency for the Future**

Presenters:

- Mike Thomas, County Manager, San Juan County
- Colin Huntmer, Public Works Director, San Juan County
- Kendra Smith, Director of Environmental Stewardship, San Juan County
- Denice Kulseth, Town Administrator, Friday Harbor

Mike Thomas discussed the county's work to adapt to climate change and improve island mobility for residents and visitors, to include using a transportation voucher program to provide those with low incomes the means to travel on the ferry or on taxi systems on the islands.

Colin Huntmer shared that the county's public works staff is stretched thin caring for the hundreds of miles of public roads across 13 islands as well as county-owned marine facilities, and that his staff is learning to adapt classical engineering methods to preserving infrastructure against climate change. With little redundancy on travel routes throughout the islands, the failure of roads and culverts means cutting off neighborhoods with dozens to hundreds of people.

Kendra Smith discussed the interrelationship of seaside roads and shoreline habitat. Endangered orcas are reliant on salmon, which need healthy shorelines for growth and survival, and as a result, the coastal squeeze of shoreline habitats is a threat. Preserving the ecosystem is a priority while also ensuring that the 600,000-800,000 tourists who support San Juan County's economy annually can also move through safely. Severe storm surges and erosion are a threat to both roads and marine facilities. Strategies and solutions include a sea-level rise risk assessment, a county emissions analysis, methods to manage shoreline retreat and communicating with property owners on the risks present.

Denice Kulseth discussed goals to implement more bioretention features and fees to address and manage stormwater. She said pedestrian safety is a priority and that the town is analyzing the future of transit as it works to assess the need for more parking.

Presentation: [San Juan County – Planning](#)

For more detail on agenda item 6, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 01:27:27, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 7: **Washington State Department of Transportation Regional Overview**

Presenter:

- Brian Nielsen, Regional Administrator, WSDOT Northwest Region Office

Brian Nielson provided an update on the work WSDOT is doing in the area, including maintenance and fish barrier removal. The Northwest Region employs 1,400 workers, while aggressively recruiting to fill vacancies, (typically 200-250 ongoing). Region personnel are currently implementing a \$1.5 billion biennial construction budget and a \$300 million biennial maintenance and preservation budget. He highlighted the need to increase funding dedicated to maintenance and preservation for roads, bridges, buildings, and facilities.

Presentation: [WSDOT Regional Overview](#)

For more detail on agenda item 7, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:16:57, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 8: **Washington State Ferry Service Restoration Plan**

Presenters:

- Ken Burtness, Ferry Advisory Committee (FAC) Chair, San Juan County
- John Vezina, Director of Planning, Customer and Government Relations, Washington State Ferries

Ken Burtness described Washington State Ferries as providing the framework on which the community is built. He recognized work the Legislature has done to rebuild ferry service over the past several years, but also said he anticipated ongoing uncertainty and reliability challenges. The FAC urges prioritizing and improving WSF text alerts, real time maps and information on terminal conditions with parking space availability, cameras monitoring loading lanes, online reservation systems and other efforts to provide the best information to the traveling public. The FAC urges continuing the inter-island seven-day schedule through the winter months.

John Vezina provided an update on WSF's service restoration plan and shared about a task force of 25 residents working on a schedule re-write for the San Juan routes. As WSF works through vessel and crewing shortages, 40th Legislative District lawmakers have worked to educate lawmakers from non-ferry legislative districts on the needs of the ferry system. The Legislature has given WSF funding to work on recruiting crewmembers year-round and to create career pathways for captains and chief engineers that allow WSF to promote from within. He pointed out that the Anacortes-Friday Harbor and San Juan Island routes were the first to be fully restored (though with four boats serving the route instead of five with the suspension of Anacortes-Sidney, B.C. service), even as three other routes await

full restoration post-pandemic. WSF is reducing reserved spaces aboard island boats from 90 percent to 80 percent so when there is a service disruption, more displaced riders will be able to ride aboard the next sailing. While WSF is aware of complaints regarding the reservation system, IT challenges make upgrading the system difficult.

Presentation: [WSF Service Restoration – Update](#)

For more detail on agenda item 8, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:43:45, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 9:

2023-2025 Ferry Fares: Presentation of WSF Fare Proposal

Presenters:

- Todd Lamphere, Director Finance and Administration, Washington State Ferries
- Frank Immel and Meg Marshall, Co-Chairs, Ferry Advisory Committee on Tariff
- Aaron Halbert, Financial Analyst, Washington State Transportation Commission

Todd Lamphere presented three proposals developed by Washington State Ferries for meeting the Legislature’s fare revenue requirement of \$419 million for the 2023-2025 biennium:

Option 1: A 4 percent increase across all modes (passenger and vehicle) on October 1, 2023, and October 1, 2024.

Option 2: A 3.5 percent increase for passengers and a 4.5 percent increase for vehicles on October 1, 2023, and October 1, 2024.

Option 3: A 4.25 percent increase across all modes (passenger and vehicle) on October 1, 2023, and October 1, 2024. Increase the discount on multiride passes by 1%.

Mr. Lamphere shared an overview of the feedback gathered at WSF’s six spring online community meetings, which had 435 participants. There were more than 700 comments gathered in the meetings and by email. Key themes of those comments were support for lessening the burden of fare increases on frequent riders and frustration about fare increases on routes that were not yet fully restored to full service. Most participants preferred Option 3 over the other two options when polled.

Meg Marshall and Frank Immel expressed FAC-T’s support of Option 3.

Aaron Halbert presented the findings and results of the Commission’s Online Public Input Forum, which drew 3,882 completed survey responses. Based on the recommendation of WSF and feedback from the input forum, the Commission’s ferry subcommittee recommended Option 3 as the WSTC fare proposal, but with an expiration date for the multiride discount of Sept. 30, 2025.

Mr. Halbert provided an update on rulemaking surrounding the ferry fuel surcharge rule following legislative action in the 2023-25 Transportation Budget. He presented proposed amendments to the rule recommended for permanent adoption that would require review and approval by the Commission prior to implementing a ferry fuel surcharge. In addition, a proposed amendment allowing the Commission to consider factors such as the

revenue requirements of the ferry system and the impact on riders in their determination, and removal of the current surcharge calculation from the rule, instead allowing WSF to determine the need for the surcharge based on the amount appropriated by the Legislature.

Presentation: [WSF Fare Setting Process](#)
[2023 Ferry Fare Adjustments](#)

For more detail on agenda item 9, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 03:21:22, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 10: Public Comment

Ann Richart, Olympia – Ms. Richart introduced herself as the new Aviation Director for the Washington State Department of Transportation. She is an accredited airport executive and has managed airports across the country for 33 years. She has been the state aviation director for Nebraska and Oregon.

Kelley Balcomb-Bartok, Friday Harbor – As a journalist covering ferry challenges, the frustrations conveyed to him while reporting include the perception that standby crew are paid more than regular crew, that uneven raises are awarded to WSF employees, and that WSF has too many employees not directly involved in the operation of ferries. Island residents would like a change to the rule that you can't cancel a reservation if you decide to take an earlier ferry on short notice. There is widespread concern that a situation that occurred on Memorial Day, with many travelers stranded overnight on the island with no accommodations, will happen again.

Justin Paulson, Orcas Island – The Ferry Advisory Committee representative for Orcas Island discussed the need for better ferry access to providers of commercial services and those needing access for healthcare. Those who provide commercial services (garbage haulers, contractors, etc.) are competing with tourists for reservations. He also advocated for changes that allow for better access to those who need medical appointments to avoid delaying care.

Beth Helstien, Friday Harbor – A 35-year resident of Friday Harbor, Ms. Helstien discussed her work for Island Rides and the frustration she feels when seeing a medically vulnerable client unable to access medical appointments or getting left on the mainland when trying to secure critical medical care.

Kate Stone, Friday Harbor – A caterer, Ms. Stone shared the challenges she has operating her business, which involves transporting perishables, with unreliable ferry service. The delays mean the loss of goods and paying extra for staff time when she must pay employees who cannot return on schedule.

Jay Kimble, Orcas Island – A member of the San Juan County Climate Committee, Mr. Kimble pointed out that county transportation is the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions. Most of that comes from ferries and visitors, presenting an opportunity to provide local public

transportation and clean transportation options for locals who can't afford a car or don't want to drive, including walk-on electric ferry transportation to Anacortes, Bellingham, Victoria, and Seattle.

Ursula Euler, Olympia – Stated that aviation is not climate resilient and sustainable fuels do not clean up airports at the tailpipe. She said that in the overall interest of climate resilience, aviation expansion is not responsible.

Sen. Liz Lovelett, Anacortes – There are challenges associated with mischaracterization of the population of the San Juans Islands as upper class. While the perception is that island residents are well-off and can afford a boat of their own and hotel stays, the reality is that the islands are home to senior citizens on fixed incomes and families with children eligible for free and reduced lunches. As the Legislature and Commission move forward on solutions, there is interest in piloting ideas like ORCA passes being used around the ferry system and last-mile connections. As a legislator, Sen. Lovelett said she is here to make sure there is continued funding for WSF for boats, crews, and ferry service to Sidney, B.C.

David Robison, San Juan Island – With background in the tech sector, Mr. Robinson said WSF should be able to make its website more user-centered to serve the wide gamut of users.

Tom Thiersch, Port Townsend – The chair of the Ferry Advisory Committee for Port Townsend said that WSF's service restoration plan was formed without the input of FAC members. Had FAC members been involved, the outcome may have been different. To fully restore one route while leaving all others at a lower priority is not fair to the rest who are paying their share for support of the ferry system. He is not in support of sunseting the multiride discount in September 2025 without further public discussion.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 10, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 04:23:10, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 11:

Transportation Commission 2023-2025 Ferry Fare Proposal - ACTION

During discussion of the motion to adopt Option 3 as the Commission's ferry fare proposal, as modified by the tolling subcommittee, Commissioner Restucci said he attended all six virtual community meetings hosted by WSF. While he said he doesn't like raising fares, he said the Commission has a responsibility to meet the requirements of the Legislature and supported the modified Option 3, which is most in line with the preference of the majority of the participants in the virtual community meetings.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 11, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 04:57:42, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: Commissioner Litt made a motion to adopt Option 3 as the WSTC ferry fare proposal for the 2023-2025 biennium, with the proposed sunseting of the multiride discount on Sept. 30, 2025; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Young. The motion passed 6-0 with Commissioner Fukai excused.

Commissioner Restucci made a motion to approve the recommended amendments to Commission rulemaking on the ferry fuel surcharge rule; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Young. The motion passed 6-0 with Commissioner Fukai excused.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 12: The Island Economy: Challenges and Successes

Presenters:

- Victoria Compton, Executive Director, San Juan Economic Development Council
- Anneliese Vance-Sherman, Regional Economist, Washington Department of Employment Security
- Todd Nicholson, Executive Director, Port of Friday Harbor

Victoria Compton discussed the importance of ferry medical access, asking the Commission to imagine being diagnosed with cancer and not having access to the ferry as a medical priority. She urged the Commission to consider the ferries as the critical state highway they are.

Anneliese Vance-Sherman provided an update on employment in San Juan County in the context of state trends. While San Juan County employment trends differ from the state because of a strong seasonal economy, the county saw the impacts of the pandemic much like the rest of the state. While the leisure and hospitality industries were impacted most heavily, the county's economy is rebounding, with construction playing an important role in economic recovery. San Juan County has a range of income levels with some of the highest incomes and lowest wages in the state.

Todd Nicholson discussed the income disparity in San Juan County and the challenge it presents when applying for state and federal grants that award money based on median income for projects that generate jobs. He said responding to climate challenges the county and ports face comes with large costs, and he said the state could assist by allowing prescriptive engineering and expedited permitting when it comes to environmental projects. He cited the lack of affordable workforce housing as a challenge for the economy. He reiterated the importance of the ferry system, barges, and air transport as lifeline services for the community. Airports are also critical to the islands, and he talked about the importance of the state's Airport Aid Grant Program, which provides crucial matching funds to the state's rural airports and can be used to leverage Federal Aviation Administration grant funding.

Presentation: [San Juan County Labor Market](#)

For more detail on agenda item 12, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 05:05:02, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 13: Air and Sea Access to the San Juan Islands

Presenters:

- Rick Hoffman, Airport Manager, Lopez Port Authority
- Dave Gouchel, President, Kenmore Air
- John Gowey, Director of Operations, Kenmore Air
- Bob Reilly, Executive Director, Island Rides

Rick Hoffman reiterated the importance of air service to the San Juans and said the small airport managed by the Lopez Port Authority serves a range of uses, from the receipt of parcels for Lopez residents to hosting “angel flights” for those who need medical care. The port also oversees the seaplane landing area in Fisherman Bay and recently secured a custom pump-out boat, secured by grant money, to service boats unable to use pump-out stations. The port is building an Automated Weather Station, which will help with medical flights. Mr. Hoffman also discussed the importance of the state’s Airport Aid Grant Program and the 5 percent matching funds it provides for airport projects.

Dave Gouchel presented the history of operations of Kenmore Air, which started in 1946 and currently operates 27 aircraft with 175 employees. The company is the largest seaplane operator in the U.S. and has a landplane operation with bases at Boeing Field and Paine Field. Year-round, daily service is provided Friday Harbor and Eastsound. John Gowey discussed the services specific to the San Juans, which carry 20,000 passengers annually to and from the Friday Harbor and Eastsound airports. A new partnership with the Puyallup Tribe will add seaplane service to the San Juans from Tacoma.

Bob Reilly gave an overview of the nonprofit Island Rides, which serves about 300 customers in a nearly all-electric vehicle fleet. The organization employs 10 and has 35 volunteer drivers, who transport customers on the islands and to the mainland, often to medical appointments. The service accepts vouchers through the county transportation program and serves the elderly, disabled and low-income residents of the islands. Overall, total trips are up about 3 percent in 2023 compared with 2022, and total miles are up about 27 percent. On the other hand, deliveries are down about 15 percent compared with 2022. The nonprofit matches state grant funding with donations from benefactors and riders.

Presentation: [Port of Lopez](#)
[Kenmore Air](#)
[Island Rides](#)

For more detail on agenda item 13, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 05:35:55, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 14: Commission Business

Reflections and Recommendations:

Commissioners shared highlights from the meeting:

- Commissioners appreciated seeing challenges with WSF's reservation system firsthand as they traveled to Friday Harbor from other parts of the state.
- Commissioners empathize with island residents who rely on the ferry system as a lifeline and urge the Legislature to fully fund ferry service to San Juan County.
- The Commission heard about needs to be prioritized in the WSF reservation system, specifically access for those with medical appointments and for providers of critical commercial services on the island.
- The North Sound Transportation Alliance update stood out and the list of studies underway was impressive.
- The importance of transportation infrastructure planning, resiliency and stormwater management on the island is clear. Fish passage work along with culvert replacement stood out as critical needs.
- San Juan County Council member Jane Fuller and Friday Harbor Mayor Raymont Jackson gave comprehensive comments on the challenges the county is facing.
- Hearing from and learning more about the SWISS (Snohomish County, Whatcom County, Island County, Skagit County and San Juan County) Regional Partnership was a highlight.
- Hearing about the importance of the aviation services and ports to the islands was valuable.
- Commissioners appreciated the attendance and comments from state legislators. Their support and advocacy for ferry needs will continue to be critical.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 14, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 06:12:29, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Chair Jennings adjourned the meeting at 5 p.m.

The next meeting will be held in person and virtually in Olympia on July 18-19, 2023.