

**Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee  
October 23, 2024, 6 p.m.**

**Bold text** indicates Committee decision expected. Asterisk\* indicates attachment.

6:00 p.m. CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL

- |                  |                 |                       |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| · Janice Catrell | · Diane Harper  | · Thomas Philpot      |
| · Richard Frye   | · Todd Lagestee | · Catherine Shornick  |
| · Pam Gould      | · Carol Landt   | · Uninc area position |

FLAG SALUTE

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Welcome to committee members, county staff and community, including:

- Laura Frolich, Public Works
- Roland Middleton, Public Works
- Gary Poole, Ferry Master
- Jon Scanlon, County Council

BUSINESS MEETING

- **Accept Agenda**
- **Adopt Minutes, September 25, 2024\***

6:10 COMMITTEE WORK

- Report on October 22 County Council meetings, Chair Gould
- WCFAC member terms and open seats\*
- ad hoc Access Committee-no report
- ad hoc Ferry and Terminal Committee, update\*
- ad hoc Level of Service Committee (LOS), update\*

6:50 NEW BUSINESS and DISCUSSION

- Ferry Master update, Gary Poole
- Public Works, Fares Proposal, Laura Frolich
- Reschedule November and December meeting dates-currently day prior to Thanksgiving and Christmas day

7:15 OPEN SESSION

7:45 ADJOURN

COMMITTEE SCHEDULE:

- Note adjusted meeting dates for November and December

**Location: The Gathering Place – 3913 Legoe Bay Road, Lummi Island**

*This is an in-person meeting only.*

Attachments: September 25 minutes; WCFAC terms; WCFAC slide deck; WCFAC letter on LOS

Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee  
September 25, 2024  
Minutes **DRAFT**

6:00 p.m. CALL TO ORDER – Diane Harper, Vice Chair (sitting in for Chair)

Present: Janice Catrell, Richard Frye, Pam Gould, Diane Harper, Carol Landt, Tom Philpot, Catherine Shornick

Absent: Todd Lagestee

This is an in-person meeting only. A hiring freeze prevents replacement of previous staff support for hybrid meetings; a community volunteer with necessary equipment would be most welcome.

**Welcome** to Laura Frolich and Roland Middleton, Public Works (PW); Gary Poole, Ferry Master; and Jon Scanlon, County Council (CC)

**Agenda** stands, other than pending motion from ad hoc Ferry and Terminal Committee

**Minutes** from August 28, 2024, adopted

COMMITTEE WORK

- **WCFAC member terms and open seats, follow-up:** Chair Pam Gould will send memo to Barry Buchanan; Jon Scanlon will follow through, regarding request adjustment to term appointments so only one-third of members rotate off each year, rather than the current 50%. [See attached]
- **ad hoc Access Committee, update:** Carol Landt reported that many unknowns continue, so ad hoc work has slowed. A letter campaign to inform fellow county citizens of the many needs for and reliances upon the ferry is pending.
- **ad hoc Ferry and Terminal Committee, update:** Tom Philpot reported on a lack of response from WCFAC’s earlier request to CC, PW and County Executive (Exec) regarding four recommended actions for an affordable solution, and therefore emphasized the first two questions. [See attached] Laura Frolich said KPFF is working on, and PW could look into responding in writing; the electronic component is more impactful than the vessel size. The question remains as to what the existing structure can tolerate. Roland indicated a 16- or 20-car ferry was not studied re the Gooseberry side. Diane cited earlier documentation assuming Gooseberry dock being adequate until 2040. Comparison of displacement between the Whatcom Chief and a 20-car ferry is needed.

The ad hoc committee also underscored a recommendation to pursue permission from DOT to downsize the ferry. Laura said 60% of design for 34-car ferry is completed, so the challenge is to meet the timeframe; as well, PW has not been directed to alter plans at this time. Roland said the timeframe will not change; they are looking at means of pivoting but again, there is no direction. It was pointed out that a smaller ferry could lower the overall cost and was included in the initial KPFF documents. Pam reported that KPFF indicated design work was on hold, and Liz Kosa (PW Director) had said she reached out to DOT re the timeline. Roland noted that maritime regulations require that we have funding on our end secured, indicating that federal regulations establishing the RAISE grants set the deadline, so there is no time extension possible. Rich F. asked that a case

be made for the best, affordable ferry within the timeline; such a vessel would also meet level of service (LOS) at three trips/60 cars per hour.

Jon Scanlon will ask Exec for another work session. Jon's focus is on closing the gap between total cost and cost to taxpayers. Sharon Shewmake told him she needs any request for funds by December, and the new county lobbyist is aware of the issue, although needs must be prioritized. Reportedly, the Exec met with federal and state representatives, and some WCFAC members met with Rick Larsen. Legislators underscored that the county must be the entity to reach out. Jon reported that both the General and Road funds are unhealthy; the Exec's budget proposal comes forward in October.

*Motion (Shornick; Gould second):* WCFAC recommends that the ad hoc Ferry and Terminal committee meet with County Council and request that Council enables that meeting (work session Oct 14, PW, or full CC Oct. 8). Passed unanimously by those present.

Diane said the size of ferry had nothing to do with the benefit cost analysis prepared for the RAISE grant. Roland indicated a 16-car ferry would meet that benefit analysis; Laura said decisions are based on what is wisest for tax base at this time.

- **Ad hoc Level of Service (LOS), update:** Diane H. reviewed a draft letter and information re LOS (see attachments) to consider for October action. LOS can be met by a 20-car ferry; however, public input and WCFAC comments are needed, so information will be available at the library and hopefully elsewhere. Roland said anecdotally, ridership has not returned to pre-Covid levels. Jon said WCFAC might ask for an update to Resolution 2018 026, not a change to LOS.

PW needs direction to investigate options; as to where direction comes from, CC must work with administration to move that forward.

## NEW BUSINESS

- Charles Bailey reported that the Climate Impact Action Committee (CIAC) unanimously voted to advise CC to adopt a resolution opposing I-2117. [See attached.] Skagit County was awarded \$18.75M to support their ferry, and Whatcom County could anticipate at least that amount. *Motion (Gould; Philpot second):* WCFAC will send a letter to County Council endorsing CIAC's recommendations. Passed unanimously by those present.
- Laura Frolich, PW, presented an update on the ferry system budget [see attached], including projections, impacts, conclusions, service reduction options, a proposed budget, and a commitment to the ferry system and community. Inflation, insurance, drydock, fuel, fixed costs age of the ferry, suppressed ridership and fixed costs are all causes of *projected* shortfalls and deficient reserves in 2024-25. Increased ridership could provide a cushion, but due to union contracts, service reductions cannot be addressed until the next budget cycle. Annual fare increases are needed to afford the 55%, and to keep the ferry as self-sustaining as possible and

sustainable. PW is recommending limiting punch cards for needs-based only, and increasing fares 10% across all categories effective 2025. Comments can be sent to [ferry@whatcom.wa.us](mailto:ferry@whatcom.wa.us) and expressed to CC October 8 and 22, and November 6 and 19.

Laura noted that a taxing district has not been enabled at this time so is not available for projection purposes. People could receive notification that they are purchasing into an “impaired transport network” but Islanders would have to decide on taxing themselves. This is just one proposal, but the only one at this time.

WCFAC members expressed frustration that not enough time was allowed for WCFAC to respond to such a dramatic proposal, and that the full burden of shortfalls appears to be falling on Islanders. As well, history has shown that as fare costs increase, ridership decreases, so PW should consider lowering costs for some categories.

Efforts will be made to schedule an additional WCFAC meeting (before October 23<sup>rd</sup>).

#### OPEN SESSION

- Bob Anderson noted that the focus has been on lowering costs, and urged serious consideration of purchasing a used ferry to buy time. No service reductions have been suggested, and no cost saving have been included – both of which need to be included, even if it means reopening union contracts. Looking at the expense side is imperative.
- Jim Dickinson advocated for the Hiyu at \$1.85M, since it is available now. WCFAC should hold a special session to review the complexities.

**Meeting adjourned 7:47 PM.**

#### Upcoming

- October 23, WCFAC meeting; possible additional meeting TBD
- October 8, 22 and November 6 and 19, CC meetings

Attachments: [submitted with draft minutes for county posting]

- WCFAC August 28, 2024, Minutes
- WCFAC Terms
- WCFAC Ferry Alternatives 8.28.24
- Background for LOS letter
- WCFAC letter on LOS 9.24.24 draft
- Climate Impact Advisory Committee to CC
- Whatcom County Ferry System Operations Budget Update

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Submitted by C. Shornick

## Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee

<https://www.whatcomcounty.us/3149/WCFAC-Reports-and-Additional-Information>

**Membership: 9 voting members appointed by County Council**

5 members live on the island.

2 members who live in unincorporated Whatcom County.

2 members who live anywhere on the mainland (incorporated or unincorporated, priority given to 1 Lummi Nation member when possible)

1 County Council member (ad hoc non-voting)

**Terms:** Members serve 3-year terms. Each member is limited to 2 terms, with 1-year separation required before applying again.

**WCFAC terms as they were appointed have 5 ending this January.**

position	term ends			current member
	1/31/2025	1/31/2026	1/31/2027	
1	island			Pamela Gould
2	island			Diane Harper
3			island	Thomas Philpot
4			island	Catherine Shornick
5	island			Richard Frye*
6	mainland			Janice Cattrell
7	mainland			Todd Lagestee*
8		unincorp.		Carol Landt
9		unincorp.		Vacant

If the terms are adjusted as shown for positions 1, 7, and 9; only three of the nine positions rotate each year. This also allows the mainland and unincorporated areas to have a continuing representative.

position	suggested shifts in term end			current member
	1/31/2025	1/31/2026	1/31/2027	
1		island		Pamela Gould
2	island			Diane Harper
3			island	Thomas Philpot
4			island	Catherine Shornick
5	island			Richard Frye*
6	mainland			Janice Cattrell
7		mainland		Todd Lagestee*
8		unincorp.		Carol Landt
9			unincorp.	Vacant

\* already has served one full term

## **Lummi Island Replacement Ferry – Issues and Challenges as of October, 2024**

2022 RAISE cost estimate = \$50.3 M → 2024 KPFF Revision = \$92 M (+83%)

### Funding gap

- \$56 to 71M for a 34-vehicle, diesel-electric hybrid without additional State funding
- \$40M for “in-kind” replacement of the Whatcom Chief and forfeiture of the \$25M RAISE grant

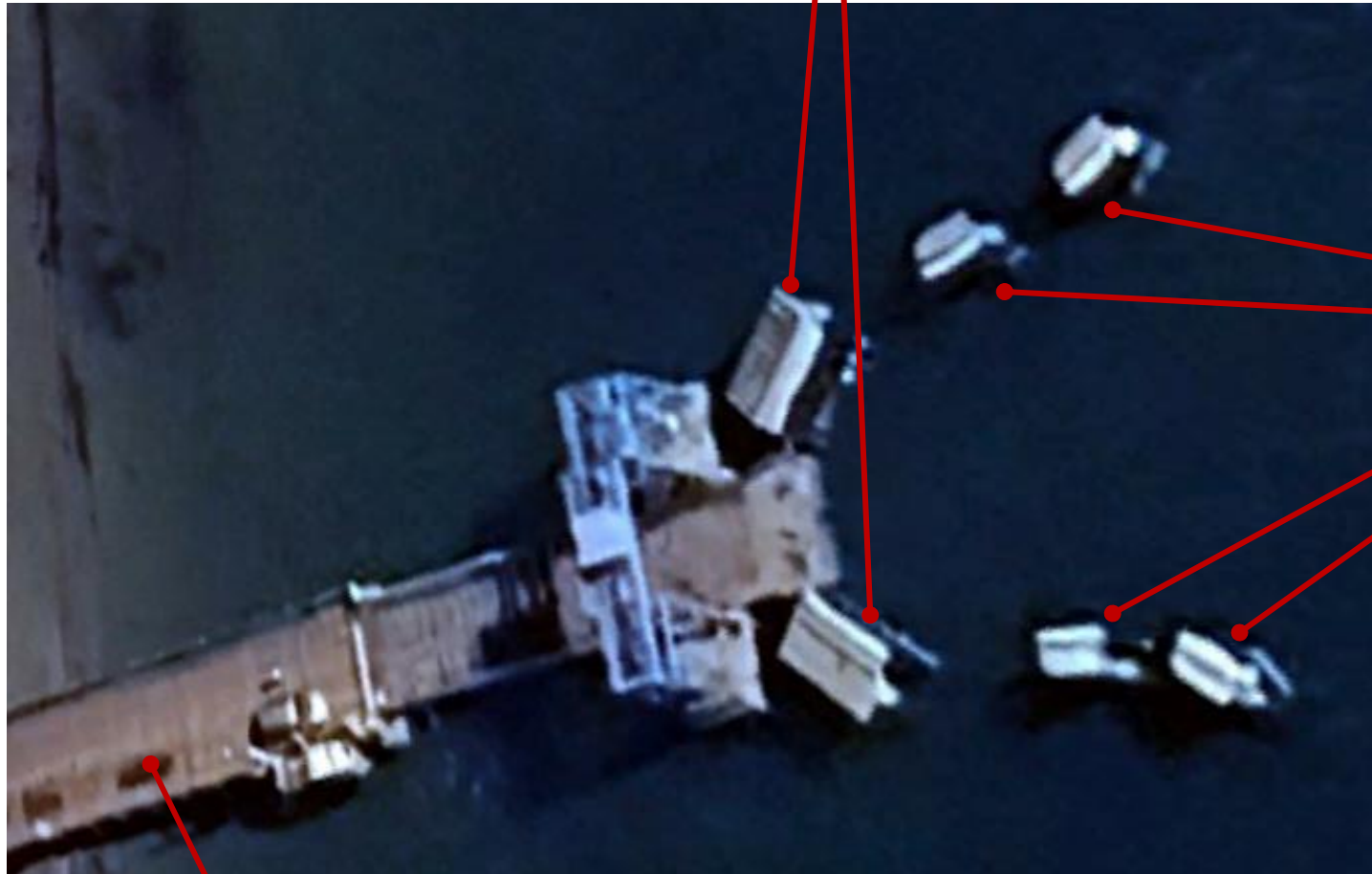
Complete RAISE grant funding package needs to be in place by *July of 2025*

## **Can/Should the Replacement Ferry Be Downsized?**

- Will/might it help bring the project home?
- Can USDOT be persuaded that downsizing is in the project's best interests?
- Can downsizing help to significantly reduce the required retrofit work on the two ferry terminals?

# Gooseberry Point Ferry Terminal as of 2024

Both timber wingwalls  
replaced with steel in 2013

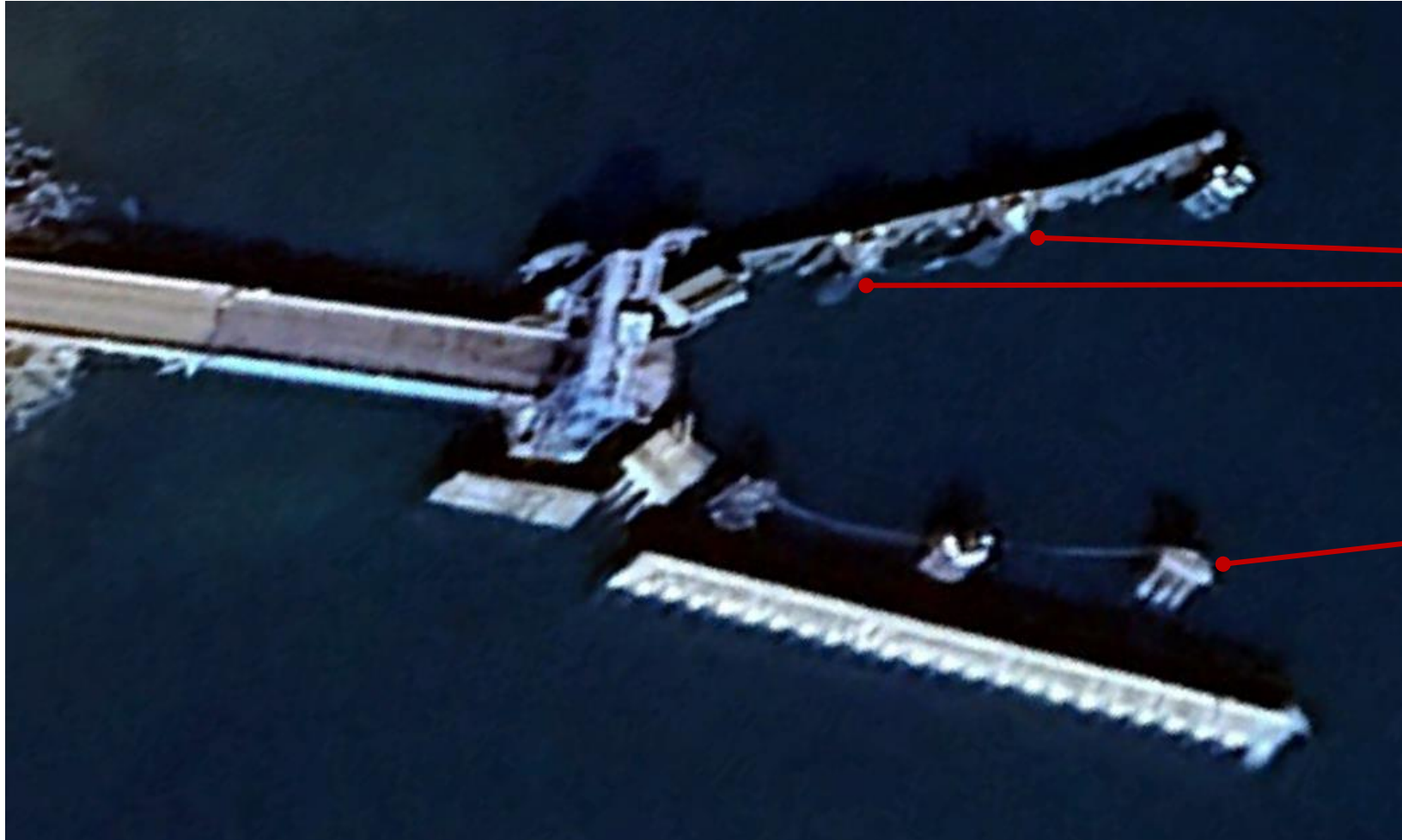


Four timber dolphins  
replaced with steel in  
2014

- 40-year amortization to 2053-54
- Tribal tidelands lease expires in **2046**

Transfer span

## Lummi Island Ferry Terminal as of 2024



Two timber dolphins replaced with steel in 2008 in anticipation of 35-vehicle ferry

One timber dolphin replaced with steel in 2005

Remaining three timber dolphins and wingwalls originally scheduled for replacement in **2018**

## Cost Estimate Comparison

2022 estimates are from the RAISE grant proposal (April)

2024 estimates are updated numbers from KPFF (July)

Project Cost	2022	2024	% Increase
Vessel Construction, 34-vehicle hybrid	25.0	35.0	40
Terminal Retrofit, Gooseberry Point <sup>1</sup>	4.6	26.1	118
Terminal Retrofit, Lummi Island <sup>1</sup>	7.4		
Uplands Improvements, Lummi Island	1.4	2.0	43
Lummi Terminal Electrification	7.8	8.0	3
Design and Preconstruction <sup>2</sup>	4.0	14.0	252
Additional project costs <sup>3</sup>	--	6.9	--
	50.3	92.0	83

<sup>1</sup> Costs were allocated differently in the two estimates, requiring combination of the two terminal retrofits for comparative purposes.

<sup>2</sup> These costs were allocated among the preceding five categories in 2022, but separated out and pooled in 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Not enumerated in 2022, but in 2024 these included environmental mitigation, Lummi TERO, and operational impacts, including lost revenue.

## Revisiting Level of Service (LOS)

- Whatcom County Council Resolution 2018-026

Design and construction of a 34 car vessel that will accommodate legal loads of vehicles.....

Design of a new vessel that will approach the goal of a carbon neutral vessel and provide flexibility for future electric conversion.

- In 2018, the Lummi Island community was actually quite divided on the issue of ferry size.
- Anticipated WCFAC resolution requesting that 2018-026 be amended to allow for a replacement ferry as small as a 20-vehicle vessel.

**9/25/24 DRAFT ----- to be reviewed and public comment is invited ----- action on the proposed letter may be taken at the October WCFAC meeting, and would include a draft resolution for Council convenience.**

**Dear County Council and Executive Sidhu,**

The Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee recommends that the Whatcom County Council adopt the attached draft resolution which updates Resolution 2018-026 establishing an action plan to obtain the adopted level of service for the Lummi Island ferry.

The amended Resolution would not change the level of service adopted by the former Lummi Island Ferry Advisory Committee, but would update the minimum size of the ferry from “a 34 car vessel” to “the design and construction of a 20 car or larger vessel.”

We recommend this change for the following four reasons

1. **New Data Available.** We have updated ridership projections using seven additional years of ridership data and 2020 and 2022 Census reports. Using the demand model and methodology that Kpff consultants used, the projections demonstrate that a 20 car vessel will be adequate to meet the adopted two-boat wait level of service in peak summer afternoons between 4 and 7 pm, accepting that one additional trip after 7 pm may be needed in the year 2060.
2. **Greater Service Flexibility.** Kpff established that the 20 car ferry that they modeled can make 8 trips in the 3 hour peak travel periods, versus only 6 trips for larger ferries. The faster trips by the 20 car ferry gives ferry managers more flexibility to adjust the number of trips to meet changing demand, and it reduces the time vehicles spend waiting for the next trip.
3. **More Cost-effective.** Since the 20 car ferry has almost 80% of the throughput of the 34 car ferry, even though much smaller, a 20 car hybrid diesel-electric ferry maximizes throughput for each dollar spent. It also may allow reduction in the cost of modifying the terminals.
4. **Climate-friendly.** A 20 vehicle versus a 34 vehicle ferry lessens the immediate and long term environmental costs.

Please see the addendum to this letter for the analysis supporting each of these reasons.

In conclusion the Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee recommends that the County Council update the minimum size of the ferry necessary to meet the adopted Level of Service in Resolution 2018-026.

Thank you for the efforts that you and staff are making to obtain a new ferry.

Sincerely,

Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee

## **Addendum: Background Analysis**

The update to Resolution 2018-026 is needed for the following reasons:

1. **New Data Available.** Updating ridership projections using seven additional years of ridership counts and the results of the U.S. Census for 2020-2022: the minimum capacity to meet the adopted level of service is a 20 car ferry instead of a 34 car ferry; accepting that in 2060 one extra ferry trip after 7 pm would be required.
  - Methodology used to forecast future demand was found in the RAISE grant, Appendix A, report from consultants Steer Davies Gleave. When their methodology was applied using the seven additional years of ferry ridership data from the Public Works Department, the projected vehicle demand used to size the ferry was at least 7% lower.
  - The population growth rate that the Kpff consultant used indicates about a 5% increase in population per decade. However, the growth rate forecast for ferry ridership would equal about 9% per decade. This is true to past trends nationally of each household taking an increasing number of vehicle trips. However, the COVID pandemic greatly accelerated the adoption of distance work, and the U.S. census shows that between 2011 and 2022, workers living on the island reduced commuting, with the percentage of those working at home increasing from 25% to 40%. It is difficult post-COVID to predict increased trips per household, so the model used in 2017 by Steer Davies Gleave and Kpff may estimate too high of a peak period demand in future years.
2. **Greater Service Flexibility.** The 20 car ferry modeled by Kpff was able to make almost 3 trips per hour (8 trips in 3 hours); while the larger 28 and 34 vehicle ferries they modeled were limited to 2 trips per hour (6 trips in 3 hours).
  - The smaller ferry allows ferry managers more flexibility to adjust the number of trips, adding an additional trip only as demand indicates. Also, the Level of Service of no more than a two trip wait has a different impact if two trips take about 45 minutes versus a 30 minute wait for the next ferry. This also impacts the length of the queue on Haxton Way in non-peak periods.
  - When surveyed in 2018, those dependent upon the ferry were 41% in favor of a smaller than 34 car ferry, even though the difference in cost was presented as less than three million dollars and the number of vehicles that would experience more than a two trip wait were about double what is in the updated forecast.
3. **More Cost-Effective.** Since the 20 vehicle ferry has almost 80% of the throughput of

the 34 vehicle ferry (160 vehicles in 3 hours versus 204 vehicles in 3 hours), even though much smaller; a 20 car hybrid diesel-electric ferry maximizes vehicle throughput for each dollar spent.

- The cost of a 20 car ferry, using the ratio of the costs Kpff estimated in 2018 for the 20, 28, and 34 car ferries as cited in the RAISE grant Appendix A, would be about \$24 million instead of \$35 million.
- Both the over \$18 million that Skagit County was granted by the State and the USDOT RAISE grant were based on the environmental advantages of a ferry that uses electricity. A traditional diesel only ferry would have to cost \$43 million less to be a less expensive alternative to a diesel-electric propulsion system.

1) **Climate-friendly.** A 20 vehicle versus a 34 vehicle ferry lessens the immediate and long term environmental costs, including materials necessary to build, the impact on the marine environment at the terminals, and the ongoing fuel consumption of diesel and electricity.