



Washington State Ferries Service Contingency Plan

JANUARY 2024



Washington State Ferries

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INTRODUCTION

As the largest ferry system in the United States, Washington State Ferries' (WSF) white and green vessels are an iconic symbol of transport in Washington state and an important part of the state highway system. This plan provides our customers and partners a better understanding of both the challenges and opportunities that WSF faces as it works to increase crewing levels and build new vessels.

High demand for ferry service, limited vessel availability and an ongoing shortage of U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) credentialed crew presents many challenges for WSF. While ridership continues to recover following the COVID-19 pandemic, WSF is unable to return service to pre-pandemic levels. This puts pressure on the entire ferry system, as customers wait longer to board, crews work longer hours and frequent overtime, and unexpected service disruptions create ripple effects felt throughout the system.



Vessel Availability

Vessel availability is a major constraint. In 2015, WSF had 24 vessels; since then, WSF has retired five vessels and added two. WSF's fleet now consists of 21 vessels ranging from five- to 64-years-old. WSF's [2040 Long Range Plan](#), delivered to the Legislature in 2019, says 26 vessels are necessary to provide reliable service on every route as well as out of service time for necessary vessel inspection, maintenance and preservation work. WSF presently has funding for five new ferries. In 2023, the Legislature changed state law to allow WSF to expand its new vessel build program out of state, which provides additional opportunity to build new vessels more quickly. Even with these changes, the first new vessel likely won't enter service until 2028.

Operating full service on every route requires 19 vessels in the summer, 18 in the spring and fall "shoulder" seasons (generally Mother's Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day) and 17 in the late fall/winter/early spring. Throughout 2023, WSF operated with 14-16 vessels in service for extended periods of time. Due to the increasing age of the fleet and a long history of deferred vessel maintenance, WSF believes planning for a baseline of 15 vessels in service, with up to 17 available for portions of the year, is the most reasonable projection for the next four years. With limited vessel availability, WSF will be unable to operate full service until new vessels are constructed and delivered.

Crew Availability

Furthermore, WSF is affected by the global shortage of mariners, and currently lacks the necessary crew to operate full service. WSF faces severe staff shortages that are unprecedented in its 70-year history. In 2019, the [2040 Long Range Plan](#) recommended that WSF's workforce must be further strengthened with more active recruitment, development and retention to ensure reliable service. Since then, the effects of an international shortage of mariners, attrition due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors, and retirement due to the aging demographics of the workforce have combined to reduce staffing below levels necessary to reliably operate the system.

As part of the "generational transformation" that the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has been discussing since at least 2016, 50% of WSF's most credentialed deck and engine room employees are retirement eligible in the next five years. Recognizing the need, the governor and Legislature have recently provided robust funding for recruiting, hiring and training new employees. The new funding has allowed WSF to also create new programs to move non-licensed employees to licensed, but, due to USCG requirements around the amount of training and days at sea for each position, that takes time.

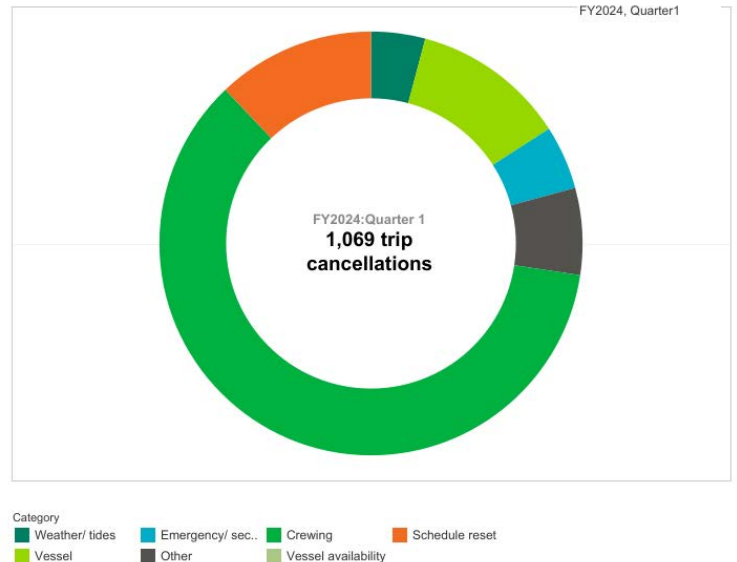
With an estimated shortfall of 21,000 mariners worldwide, this is not just a WSF issue. BC Ferries, the Alaska Marine Highway System and the Massachusetts Steamship Authority are all canceling sailings due to crewing. And importantly, BC Ferries and other international ferry systems can hire crew from other nations, something U.S. ferry systems are precluded from doing by the [1920 Jones Act](#).

Goals of the Service Contingency Plan

This plan focuses on how WSF intends to provide service over the next four-to-five years, until new vessels are constructed and delivered, as well as how WSF intends to provide service in the event of unplanned disruptions. There are numerous reasons a vessel might be taken out of service- not only mechanical issues, but also hard landings, groundings or propeller shafts getting tangled in crab pot lines. Similarly, a terminal might become inoperable because of mechanical failure of a loading bridge or trestle, electronic malfunction or even law enforcement activity. Service disruptions also occur when there is a lack of crew resources dispatched to operate a vessel. The graphic below shows the breakdown of cancellations for July-September 2023 (fiscal year 2024, quarter 1), from the [WSDOT Gray Notebook](#). Out of 37,025 scheduled trips, 1,069 were canceled. Sixty percent of trip cancellations were due to lack of crew, 12% due to vessel mechanical issues and another 12% due to schedule resets due to severe delays. While operating under this Service Contingency Plan, the goal is for WSF to complete 95% of its scheduled sailings. WSF generally operates over 95% reliability, with most months between 96-97%.

The goals of the Service Contingency Plan are to:

- Provide a measure of **predictability** about service levels WSF will be able to operate for the next four-to-five years.
- Be **transparent** about decisions, considerations and priorities when service adjustments are necessary; and how WSF will manage unplanned service disruptions.
- Provide **consistency** in service to enhance reliability for customers.
- Outline how WSF will **communicate** with customers, community members, and other partners.



BACKGROUND

Released in March 2022 and updated in February 2023, the COVID-19 Service Restoration Plan described the process by which WSF would increase its service to meet increasing demand as the ferry system recovered from the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as ridership rebounded and responded to ongoing crew and vessel availability challenges exacerbated by the pandemic. Now, as more years separate us from the pandemic and WSF better understands some of the systemic challenges related to crew and vessel availability, it's clear it will take longer to restore all routes to full service. This plan is intended to replace the COVID-19 Service Restoration Plan and provide a framework for service decisions over the next several years.

VESSEL CONSIDERATIONS

WSF's vessels are in service more than 20 hours each day, 365 days a year. This puts stress on our fleet, which is complicated by additional factors:

- **Aging Vessels:** The fleet has an average age of 32 years. Half of the fleet is more than 30 years old, including five that are at least 50 years old. This aging fleet requires more maintenance to deal with problems such as steel corrosion, replacing or repairing obsolete equipment and preservation projects that have been deferred in prior year budgets, leading to a higher risk of vessel breakdown.
- **Limited Spare Vessels:** With only 21 vessels, an aging fleet requiring additional maintenance and long-term preservation work on its largest vessels over the next three years, WSF will not have a standby vessel for emergency relief available at all times. Even when one is available, unscheduled repairs can quickly consume this extra capacity, and there have been periods during recent times when WSF lacked enough vessels to operate even the "baseline" level of service.

WSF vessels are highly regulated by the USCG and must meet stringent requirements before they are allowed to carry passengers. Some of these requirements include an underwater inspection twice every five years, an annual safety inspection, quarterly random inspections and additional testing of sprinkler systems and marine evacuation systems. Scheduling these tests and any related maintenance projects is often a delicate negotiation between the vessel's maintenance needs, its assigned route's service needs, and the scarce availability of drydock space in the Puget Sound region. Shipyard capacity in the region is very limited, and WSF has to schedule drydock periods well in advance and often our partner shipyards have minimal or no flexibility on scheduling to accommodate emerging needs. Annual certification for the USCG-issued Certificate of Inspection (COI) has an expiration date that is non-negotiable and WSF is unable to defer this date to increase flexibility when we are short of vessels.

WSF is often able to shift vessels around, juggle maintenance needs and reallocate resources across the system to ensure a minimal loss of service in the event of unplanned maintenance. However, with the fleet operating with only 21 vessels and no service relief vessel, taking a vessel out of service for repairs is more complicated.

Based on current planned maintenance at WSF's Eagle Harbor Maintenance Facility and commercial shipyards, we expect to have between 16-18 vessels available at any given time over the next few years, with the number of vessels available varying throughout the year due to maintenance requirements and scheduling. However, recent experience has shown that WSF has, on average, one or two vessels out of service for unplanned maintenance or repair at any given time. Each of our three Jumbo Mark II-class vessels is scheduled to be out of service (one at a time for long-planned "mid-life" propulsion, navigation, and safety upgrades over the next several years, to allow these 30-year old vessels to achieve their anticipated 60-year lifespan. Accounting for unplanned out-of-service time further reduces vessel availability and also complicates the process of scheduling needed maintenance for the fleet.

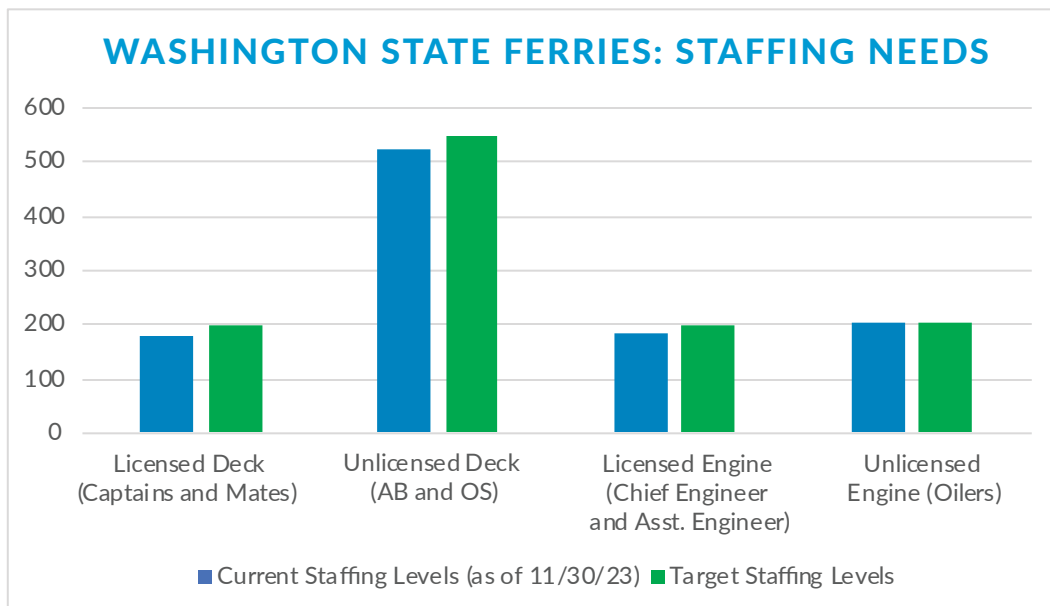
CREWING CONSIDERATIONS

WSF is currently budgeted to provide crew for vessels per the COI for each vessel. Vessel crewing varies by class, with smaller vessels such as the Kwa-di Tabil class requiring fewer crew members and larger vessels such as the Jumbo class requiring more personnel. Total crew on a vessel while it is in service could range from 10 up to 16 crew members, with a typical range of 12-15, depending on the vessel and route. WSF crews are broadly divided into deck crew, those who steer and navigate the vessel, load vehicles, and monitor and clean the passenger cabin; and engine crew, who are responsible for the vessel's engines and other mechanical systems. If even one crew member is missing, the vessel cannot sail. The minimum required number of crew for each vessel is mandated by the USCG and is based on the number of crew required to carry out essential emergency functions. One crew member being missing and unable to fill these emergency duties is the reason a vessel cannot sail. WSF is currently funded to crew vessels at the minimum COI level.

	Jumbo Mark II	Jumbo	Super	Olympic	Issaquah	Evergreen State	Kwa-di Tabil
Captain and Mates	3	3	3 ^a	2 ^b	2	2	2
Able-Bodied Sailors	4	4	4	5 ^c	4	4	4
Ordinary Sailors	4	3	3 ^d	4 ^c	3	2	3 ^e
Licensed Engineers	2	2	2	2	2	1	1
Oilers & Wipers	2	2	2	2	1	2	2

- Notes:**
- a - Super class: One mate not needed late fall to early spring, Anacortes/San Juan Islands route only
 - b - Olympic class: One additional mate is required on the Seattle/Bremerton route
 - c - Olympic class: One AB and one OS are not needed when the passenger capacity is reduced to 50% and the sun deck is closed.
 - d - Super class: One OS not needed at low passenger loads and the promenade deck is closed.
 - e - Kwa-di Tabil class: One or two OSs not needed when passenger capacity is reduced to 50%.

Deck crews are assigned to a specific route regardless of which vessel is assigned and work only while the vessel is in service, while engine crews are assigned to a vessel 24 hours a day every day of the year, regardless of which route the vessel is on or whether the vessel is in service. Fleetwide, between 430 and 505 crew are needed every day.



Note: Available staff numbers include staff who are on extended annual, sick, disability or other protected leave. WSF assumes approximately 8% of staff in this leave category at any given time.

The number of licensed and unlicensed deck crew to reliably operate different numbers of vessels in service is shown in the table below.

Vessels in Service	Licensed and Unlicensed Deck Crew Members Required
15	710
16	733
17	770
18	791

WSF has determined that it will need to hire 60 entry-level deck hands (OSs) and 36 ABs every year in perpetuity to restore 18 vessel service in 2025 and maintain that level of service. At the same time, WSF needs to continue developing licensed deck offices (mates and captains) through recently implemented programs that support workforce development.

Even when WSF is able to hire and train crew to reach full staffing levels, last-minute relief requests lead to canceled sailings. WSF is funded for crewing levels required by the USCG. At the beginning of every sailing season all watches are crewed. As we get relief requests, WSF's dispatchers work tirelessly to fill open jobs to allow vessels to sail on time. However, when an employee requests relief at the last minute – wakes up sick, has a childcare challenge, gets a flat tire on the way to work – it takes time to find a replacement and dispatch another crew member to the ferry. Regardless of the reason for the crew absence, it is not safe or legal to sail without a full crew.

On average WSF receives 130 relief requests a day. This number fluctuates wildly depending on season and circumstances. Pre-COVID, people were more willing to work with mild cold symptoms. In a post-COVID world, we are seeing a societal change where those people call in sick and stay home instead. When WSF had better staffing levels in prior years, there was a solid bench to fill these relief requests. With fewer relief crewmembers available due to staffing shortages, it can take longer to fill a last-minute request, especially on more remote routes like the San Juan Islands or for watches that occur at the start of the sailing day. Unfortunately, this leads to canceled sailings that can last until a full crew is available.

PRESEASON PLANNING AND SETTING SEASONAL SERVICE LEVELS

WSF operates four seasonal schedules:

- 1 Summer peak season (mid-June to late September)
- 2 Fall (late September to end of December)
- 3 Winter (January to mid-March)
- 4 Spring (mid-March to mid-June)

The Port Townsend/Coupeville route has a shoulder season spanning parts of spring and fall (from generally Mothers' Day in mid-May through Indigenous Peoples' Day in early October), and service on the Anacortes/San Juan Islands route also increases during the shoulder season.

For each seasonal sailing schedule, WSF works across departments to determine how to provide service on each route and when each of its 21 vessels will undergo its required maintenance. Both the "where" and "when" come with a significant number of constraints. For example, a vessel may be too large to physically fit in a particular terminal, or a vessel may be too fast or too slow for a particular route, making it a bad fit to maintain the sailing schedule and on-time performance (see Table 1 below). WSF sets a seasonal schedule at least two months in advance. This timing is essential to support preparation of sailing schedules, vehicle reservations, crew bidding for watch assignments, determination of tidal cancellations and vessel assignments.

Among the policies or assumptions WSF attempts to adhere to during this planning phase includes:

- Scheduling no more than four boats to be out for planned maintenance at any given time.
- Assuming at least one vessel will be unavailable due to unplanned maintenance at any given time.
- Avoiding situations where two vessels of the largest classes (Jumbo class or Jumbo Mark II class) are out at the same time.
- Taking into account which routes are operating on reduced service, as this may dictate the assignment of larger vessels to partially mitigate fewer sailings or to not assign a smaller-than-normal vessel.

Along with a list of other considerations – including contracting, crewing and training needs, the capacity of WSF's maintenance facility at Eagle Harbor and budgetary concerns, among others – the initial planning process can take some time to complete and involves representatives from all parts of the organization.

Table 1: "Fit" of Vessel Classes to Routes

Size	Class	Veh Spaces	Route:		South										North
			Vessel	Home Port	Point Defiance-Tahlequah PD-TAL	Fauntleroy-Vashon-Southworth FVS	Seattle-Bremerton SEA-BR	Seattle-Bainbridge SEA-BI	Edmonds-Kingston ED-KING	Mukilteo-Clinton MUK-CL	Port Townsend-Coupeville PT-KEY	Anacortes-San Juan Islands ANA-SJ	San Juan Interisland ANA-SJ 4	Anacortes-Sidney ANA-SID	
Big	Jumbo Mark II	202	Tacoma	Seattle	Oversize for route	Oversize for route; lengthy loading and unloading	More capacity than needed	Meets demand	Meets demand	Oversize for route	Will not fit in Keystone Harbor	Oversize for route; lengthy loading and unloading	Oversize for route; lengthy loading and unloading	No SOLAS	
			Wenatchee	Seattle											
			Puyallup	Kingston											
ê	Jumbo	188	Spokane	Edmonds	Oversize for route	Oversize for route; lengthy loading and unloading	More capacity than needed	Meets demand	Meets demand	Oversize for route	Will not fit in Keystone Harbor	Oversize for route; lengthy loading and unloading	Oversize for route; lengthy loading and unloading	No SOLAS	
			Walla Walla	Seattle											
	Super	144	Kaleetan	Seattle	More capacity than needed	Lengthy loading & offloading	Good fit for route	Moderate overloads	Moderate overloads	Lengthy loading & off-loading	Will not fit in Keystone Harbor	Good fit for route	More capacity than needed	No SOLAS	
			Yakima	Anacortes											
	Olympic	144	Tokitae	Mukilteo	More capacity than needed	Good fit for route	Good fit for route	Moderate overloads	Moderate overloads	Good fit for route	Will not fit in Keystone Harbor	Good fit for route	More capacity than needed	No SOLAS	
			Samish	Anacortes											
			Chimacum	Seattle											
			Suquamish	Mukilteo											
	Issaquah 124	124	Issaquah	Fauntleroy	More capacity than needed	Good fit for route	Good fit for route	Severe overloads	Moderate overloads	Good fit for route	Will not fit in Keystone Harbor	Good fit for route	More capacity than needed	Issaquah, Kitsap, Kittitas, Cathlamet: No SOLAS	
			Kitsap	Seattle											
			Kittitas	Fauntleroy											
			Cathlamet	Fauntleroy											
			Chelan	Anacortes											
	Chelan: SOLAS														
	Issaquah 90	90	Sealth	Bainbridge Isl.	Good fit for route	Good fit for route	Moderate overloads	Can't meet demand	Moderate overloads	Moderate overloads	Will not fit in Keystone Harbor	Winter: Good fit for route	Spring to Fall: Moderate overloads	Good fit for route	No SOLAS
E-State	87	Tillikum	Friday Harbor	Poor operational fit	Moderate overloads	Too slow to keep schedule	Can't meet demand. Too slow to keep schedule	Severe overloads	Severe overloads	Will not fit in Keystone Harbor	Too slow to keep schedule		Good fit for route	No SOLAS	
Small	Kwa-di Tabil	64	Chetzemoka	Pt Def	Good fit for route	Lengthy loading & off-loading	Too slow to keep schedule	Can't meet demand. Poor fit to terminal	Severe overloads	Severe overloads	Good fit for route	Can't meet demand. Too slow to keep schedule.	Fall to Spring: Lengthy loading and off-loading	Summer: Moderate overloads. Lengthy loading and off-loading.	No SOLAS
			Salish	Pt Town											
			Kennewick	Pt Town											

Key: Good fit for route. Vessel not ideal but is acceptable. Vessel can work the route but it's not optimal due to vessel size/speed. Vessel does not work on the route.

SERVICE PLAN

WSF expects crewing levels to continue to increase over the next 18-24 months, which should increase reliability and allow for crewing of more vessels. However, vessel constraints are likely to continue until new vessels join the fleet. Until both new vessels and sufficient crew are available, WSF can reliably operate 15 vessels in service as a baseline. As such, vessels would be assigned to provide the following service:

Route	Baseline Contingency Plan: 15 vessels	Full Service: 19 vessels in the summer, 18 in the spring and fall “shoulder” seasons and 17 from late fall to early spring
Anacortes/San Juan Islands	4 vessels including 1 interisland-only vessel	4 vessels including 1 interisland-only vessel (interisland does not run on winter weekends)
Port Townsend/Coupeville	1 vessel year-round	1 vessel (late fall through early spring); 2 vessels (late spring through early fall)
Mukilteo/Clinton	2 vessels	2 vessels
Edmonds/Kingston	2 vessels	2 vessels
Seattle/Bainbridge Island	2 vessels	2 vessels
Seattle/Bremerton	1 vessel	2 vessels
Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth	2 vessels	3 vessels (2-boat service on winter weekends)
Point Defiance/Tahlequah	1 vessel	1 vessel
Anacortes/Sidney	No service	1 vessel (spring/summer/fall)

WSF currently does not anticipate full, permanent restoration of service on domestic routes until new vessels start entering the fleet in 2028. Full, permanent service restoration may be gradual and will remain dependent on vessel availability. Restoration of international service to Sidney, British Columbia, is projected for 2030.

Seasonal Service

There will be times, often entire seasons, in the interim period when WSF has both the crew and vessels available to operate additional service above the 15-vessel baseline. At those times, WSF will operate additional service in the following priority:

- 1 Add a third vessel at Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth
- 2 Add a second vessel at Seattle/Bremerton
- 3 Add a second vessel (shoulder/summer only) at Port Townsend/Coupeville

Scheduled and Unscheduled Service

At times when vessel availability is not projected to be consistent over an entire season, additional service may be unscheduled and a route will operate on an alternate schedule for part of the season. WSF will operate additional scheduled service on a route when projected vessel and crew availability will allow for doing so for an entire season. As an example, WSF may determine it can operate Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth on its regular three-boat schedule for the spring season, but limited crew or vessel availability for the summer season may result in the route reverting to the two-boat schedule with additional unscheduled service added when possible.

Unplanned Service Disruptions

If a vessel unexpectedly goes out of service, WSF's first priority is the safety of our passengers and our crew. If a vessel breaks down in transit, our focus is first moving it to a dock as soon as possible so that passengers can disembark. Vessel crew work very hard to identify the cause of the problem. Vessel maintenance crews are often dispatched from WSF headquarters and the Eagle Harbor Maintenance Facility to help troubleshoot the problem. We also notify the USCG so that they can assess the situation. Whether WSF can restore service depends on a number of variables, including the nature of the problem, whether WSF has parts available for repair or must purchase them elsewhere, whether the repair will require drydock space, whether drydock space is available and more. If it is determined the issue is severe and will last more than a day, WSF will consider moving vessels around the fleet to cover prioritized service needs.

In general, during the **first day** following a vessel being taken out of service, the route where the vessel is assigned will operate without that vessel. The reasons for this are twofold:

- **WSF needs time to make an assessment** as to whether repairs will last more than one day. Often, vessels can be repaired the same day.
- **It is a logistical challenge to move a vessel the same day**, especially if it is a mechanical breakdown and occurs on a route far from Eagle Harbor. WSF needs time to assemble deck crews to move vessels to new routes and our customers need advance notice of schedule changes to plan accordingly.

There is one notable exception to the general rule that vessel reassignments will not occur on the first day of an unplanned vessel breakdown:

- **WSF will restore service as quickly as possible on routes already on reduced service.** On the Seattle/Bremerton and Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth routes where service has already been reduced, it is necessary to maintain service to ensure essential transportation connectivity and not strand passengers. This may require same-day vessel moves and a reduction in service on other routes.

While the Point Defiance/Tahlequah and Port Townsend/Coupeville routes operate with single-vessel service, WSF will not immediately restore those routes if their vessel is taken out of service. The Port Townsend/Coupeville route requires a Kwa-di Tabil-class vessel, and one may not be immediately available or close to the route. WSF would need time to determine when and how to restore service to that route. The Point Defiance/Tahlequah route is both somewhat distant and a suitable relief vessel may not be available.

WSF will attempt to rearrange sailing schedules on multi-destination routes with more than two vessels. In the San Juan Islands, alternate schedules are available that allow WSF to reassign existing vessels to cover important connections to island communities even when one of the route's vessels is out of service.

In general, on the second day after a vessel has been taken out of service and when a relief vessel is available, the relief vessel will be put into service. Due to limited crew availability, WSF's ability to shuffle vessel assignments is

limited, and provided it can work the route, the relief vessel would likely be directly substituted for the missing vessel. If it cannot, then the relief vessel would be assigned to another route and a vessel would be taken from that other route, often resulting a cascading impact on multiple routes as vessels are moved to cover service needs.

When a relief vessel is not available, WSF must make difficult decisions about reallocating service. To do this, WSF takes into consideration a number of factors, including:

- **Minimum Service.** A minimum of one vessel needs to remain on any given route to maintain basic transportation connections.
- **Alternative Routes.** WSF considers whether an impacted route has an alternative route via another ferry or a drive-around/bridge-access detour. This also includes the status of service on nearby routes (i.e. whether a potential detour route is already on reduced service).
- **Customer Impact/Ridership.** WSF considers how many people use the route, its utilization rate and mix of traffic. On routes with higher commuter traffic, a service disruption on a weekend is more tolerable than a service disruption on a weekday. On some routes serving recreational destinations, it is often more crucial to maintain full capacity on weekends.
- **Special Events.** Community and sporting events, or other high-travel events may prioritize one route over another to address specific circumstances (e.g., Seahawks or Mariners games, summer festivals).
- **Reservations.** WSF's current vehicle reservation system does not allow it to redistribute reservations to other sailings. WSF may temporarily adjust the reservation system's business and operational rules to address the issue until normal service is restored and resulting traffic impacts are mitigated, but cancelling a customer's reservation that they've planned on in advance has widespread impacts. To the extent possible, WSF will prioritize travel for customers holding a reservation for any sailings during the service day over customers traveling from the same terminal without a reservation.
- **Vessel Capacity.** The capacity of vessels to carry vehicles and passengers based on demand.
- **Resources.** Crew availability and watch schedules, availability and proximity of maintenance resources (Eagle Harbor, drydock).
- **Other Impacts.** Terminal construction work, nearby highway projects, etc.
- **Duration of Disruption and Cumulative Impacts.** How long the disruption is expected to occur coupled with whether a route has experienced other service disruptions recently or is projected to. WSF tries to fairly spread the impact of downsizings and service disruptions systemwide.

In the event WSF cannot operate its "baseline" level of service with 15 vessels and must reduce service even more, it will prioritize routes already on reduced service and then consider ridership, service performance, availability and directness of travel alternatives, and vessel and crew availability when making decisions on which routes to downsize.

Vessel Assignments

Vessel assignments are based on availability and the factors noted above, and not necessarily assigned as they were pre-2020. For example, the Seattle/Bainbridge Island route has historically operated with two Jumbo Mk II class vessels, or a Jumbo Mark II and a Jumbo. Under this Service Contingency Plan, WSF will assign one Jumbo Mark II class vessel at a minimum, but this could be paired with a variety of other vessels including the 124-vehicle Issaquah class or 144-vehicle Super or Olympic classes.

CUSTOMER INFORMATION AND SERVICE DISRUPTION COMMUNICATIONS

To allow customers to plan their travel, WSF works hard to communicate any service disruptions to the traveling public and to the broader community. WSF shares service information and context around service disruptions, and provides travel information in the following ways:

- **Text or Email Alerts:** Bulletins or rider alerts are sent to customers who have subscribed for this service at <http://bit.ly/WSFalerts>. Customer service web agents are on staff from 4:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. to send out alerts. At most times of day there is usually only a single staff member posting bulletins, so they are unable to provide real-time travel information for all routes. In the overnight hours, WSF operations staff can send out limited rider alerts if needed.
- **Customer Contact Center:** Customer Service is open daily from 7 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. and can be reached by calling 206-464-6400 or 888-808-7977, or by dialing 511 from within the state of Washington. Agents are also available to respond to emails at wsfinfo@wsdot.wa.gov.
- **WSDOT App and Online Travel Tools:** The [WSDOT app](#) includes ferry schedules, real-time maps and service bulletins. WSF also provides several trip planning tools which customers find particularly useful during periods of reduced service including:
 - [Sailing schedules](#)
 - [VesselWatch](#), a real-time map showing the position and status of every vessel in the fleet
 - Terminal [wait time and camera information](#)
- **Social and Traditional Media:** Rider alerts automatically post on the [WSF website](#) and on [WSF's X \(formerly known as Twitter\) account](#). Additionally, WSF's communications team monitors social media accounts Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and post more detailed information and answer customer questions about service impacts and disruptions. They staff a 24/7 media hotline and contact media outlets as needed to share details on breaking news.
- **Emails to Elected Officials and Key Stakeholders:** For major service impacts, WSF sends emails to affected legislators, local elected officials, and Ferry Advisory Committee representatives so they can share information with their constituents and fellow community members.
- **Highway Signs and Information:** Customer service staff work with WSDOT highway operations to update messages on the Highway Advisory Radio System (HARS) and the Variable Message Systems (VMS) that are accessible from state routes leading to ferry terminals.
- **WSF Weekly Update Newsletter:** WSF sends out a weekly newsletter that often provides more in-depth information about vessel and crew availability constraints, past and future service disruptions and sailing schedule changes. Customers can view each newsletter and subscribe to the Weekly Update [online](#).

With nine routes and 20 terminals spanning Puget Sound from Tacoma to the San Juan Islands, WSF is unable to provide information on wait times, delays and operational impacts in real-time for all vessels and all routes. Customer service focuses on the highest impacts situations in a fast-moving marine operating environment.

CONCLUSION

The significant challenges that the current service reductions present to WSF customers is real, especially those who live in ferry-dependent communities and rely on WSF as their only mode of transportation. Despite these challenges and the many constraints facing our ferry system, WSF makes every attempt to maintain service for as many people as possible and to maintain vital links in the state highway system for vehicles and passengers. We do this by putting the safety of our passengers and employees first, and then by considering how to balance customer service for the thousands of ferry customers who count on WSF each day while keeping in mind a number of other factors, including our employees' well-being, the condition and long-term viability of our publicly owned assets, costs to taxpayers, and other operational concerns. While service disruptions are an inevitable reality of mass transit systems today, WSF hopes this Service Contingency Plan offers passengers some insight into the many trade-offs that WSF makes and how these difficult decisions are made, while also providing clarity into what service customers can expect over the next several years.