

Kitsap Transit moves closer to introduction of fast ferry services

The board of commissioners of Kitsap Transit last month agreed to use tax credit funding to partially finance continuing research into “an ultra low wash boat”, an order for a fast ferry and the operation of a trial service between Bremerton and Seattle, Washington.

The tax credit funds would increase \$4.2 million available from federal grants and local sources to \$6.0 million. Kitsap Transit intends to spend \$3.75 million on a foil assisted catamaran designed by Teknikraft Design and built by All American Marine.

If all goes according to plan, construction will commence at AAM's yard in Bellingham in May or June and the vessel will be tested in passenger service during March-November 2009. Current funding is sufficient to fund the trial service but not operations beyond that.

Tax credits are designed to attract low cost capital to development projects in low income areas. If a non-profit organization can contribute 70% of the cost of a project, the remaining 30% is made available in the form of a loan from an equity investor who receives federal tax benefits in exchange.

After seven years, the lender effectively waives the loan because it has received the tax credits. As Kitsap Transit is not a non-profit organization, its federal and local funds will be lent to the Marine Transportation Association of Kitsap, which will receive the tax credit funding. Seven years later, the MTAK will give the foil assisted catamaran to Kitsap Transit in return for a write off of the original loan.

Additional tax credit funding will be sought in 2009 to continue operating after the end of the trial period. If this is not forthcoming, Kitsap Transit could lease the vessel for two years to King County, which is to take over the operation of fast ferries between Vashon and Seattle from Washington State Ferries in July 2009.

WSF catamaran returns to layup...

A temporary return to Washington State Ferries service of AMD 385 *Snohomish* ended on February 18. The catamaran was operated as an emergency replacement for several of WSF's passenger/vehicle ferries which had been either deemed unfit for further service, withdrawn for annual overhaul or required emergency repairs.

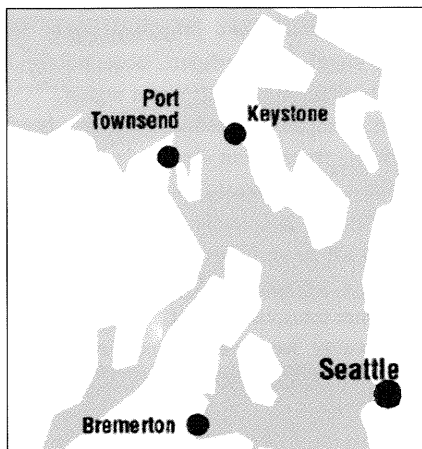
Snohomish may have been reactivated from WSF's reserve fleet for only 12 weeks but it was a eventful period, the vessel appeared on three different routes and was involved in three accidents.

The catamaran had been laid up for more than four years when it entered service on WSF's Port Townsend-Keystone route on November 27. Ten return crossings were operated each day, scheduled trip time was about 15 minutes.

During the Christmas and New Year period, *Snohomish* was transferred to a new route from Port Townsend to Seattle. WSF deputy executive director Traci Brewer-Rogstad reported, “We wanted to do everything we can to help the community while there is no vehicle service on the route [Port Townsend-Keystone]. We plan to run this temporary shuttle service between Port Townsend and Seattle through the holidays and then reevaluate it in early January.”

Four return crossings a day were operated from December 13 until January 6. Scheduled trip time was 1 hour 30 minutes. The new service proved to be very popular with passengers but the fare of \$6.70 for a return crossing was heavily subsidized.

WSF confirmed that although the service had been “successful”, it had to end



WSF AMD 385 catamaran *Snohomish* was operated on three Puget Sound routes during November-February

because “the Legislature directed WSF to get out of the passenger only business and because it's costly”. According to figures released by the company, during the first 15 days of the service the net loss had been approximately \$12,000 per day.

Based on peak daily traffic figures of just over 600 passengers, or a total of 300 round trips, WSF estimated that a return fare of \$56 would be required to break even. The 44m AMD 385 catamaran has 360 seats but capacity was limited to 149 passengers during its return to service due to limited safety certification.

While *Snohomish* was operating on the Port Townsend-Seattle route, a passenger only service between Port Townsend and Keystone was maintained by a leased medium speed passenger ferry.

After what WSF described as “three days of much needed maintenance”, *Snohomish* returned to service on the Port Townsend-Kingston route on January 10 and remained there until it was replaced by a leased passenger/car ferry on February 8.

Snohomish was immediately transferred to WSF's Seattle-Bremerton route to replace a passenger/vehicle ferry that had been damaged in a berthing incident. Six daily return crossings were operated, scheduled journey time was about 45 minutes. *Snohomish* remained in service for a further ten days.

During its final week on the Port Townsend-Keystone route, *Snohomish* was twice struck by large waves, on February 1 and February 7, which resulted in water entering the main passenger saloon through the bow doors. However, damage to the vessel was slight and on both occasions it returned to service within hours.

A few days later, on February 11, the vessel came into contact with the berth in Bremerton at the end of a crossing from Seattle. The US Coast Guard reported, “*Snohomish* struck the mooring dock at approximately 5 pm, causing five reported minor injuries. Upon verification that *Snohomish* sustained no significant damage, the Coast Guard authorized the ferry to return to normal service at 7.15 pm.”

...and another appears on eBay

Washington State Ferries attempted to sell AMD 385 catamaran *Chinook* last month on the eBay auction website. The vessel was offered for sale for a minimum of \$4.5 million. No bids had been received when the ten day auction period ended on February 24.

In the listing, WSF advised, “The vessel is in good condition but needs an exterior paint job and engine overhaul. Washington State Ferries has activated ‘sister ship’ *Snohomish* for temporary ferry service and it will be sold at a future date.”