

## Research ferry wake tests beginning

By Ed Friedrich

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BREMERTON — Seven years after Kitsap Transit's wake research project began, the agency is finally ready to start testing a passenger ferry that could rip through Rich Passage without tearing up the beach. Beginning this week, the Rich Passage I will be put through the paces in Port Orchard Bay, between Illahee and Bainbridge Island, before graduating to its namesake waterway next spring. The trials have been a long time coming.

"I'm a raving lunatic optimist, so I always thought we would get here," Kitsap Transit executive director Dick Hayes said of on-water testing. "It was much more important to get here with the right boat than to just get here period. I'm real happy with where we are."

The boat is a 118-passenger catamaran with a lightweight composite cabin, low-wake hull and computer-controlled foil and interceptor system. The original foil fell off on the third day of sea trials in Bellingham Bay in April 2010. After a long delay, Kitsap Transit and boat builder All American Marine agreed to split the cost and hire renowned marine designer and structural engineer Paul Bieker to redesign and oversee production of a new and better one.

The new foil and boat performed much better in recent sea trials in Bellingham, and the Rich Passage I cruised into Port Orchard on Wednesday.

Next up will be acceptance testing in which the ferry will make about 270 runs over five to eight days. The boat will operate at different speeds and trims during the mile-long passes. Equipment on two buoys will measure the wake's height and energy. If they're within height and energy limits, Kitsap Transit will accept the boat from All American Marine. Then there'll be another 400 to 500 runs over about a month to validate models and predict how the \$5.3 million boat will perform in Rich Passage. The testing shouldn't create any problems.

"That's a much wider channel than Rich Passage is," Hayes said. I don't think they'll hear much noise or see much wake at all. That's why we're doing it there, to be sure there won't be noise or wake, before we go to the passage."

The boat will be dry-docked over the winter while scientists crunch the numbers. Then, from next May to October, it will carry passengers through Rich Passage as the final stage of the research. Kitsap Transit has no funding to operate it after that.

The research program was begun by the state, which was forced to slow every passenger-only ferry it ever ran through Rich Passage to cut down on shoreline damage. Waterfront property owners sued, the state lost and got out of the fast ferry business. Kitsap Transit inherited the study. Many believe that 30-minute crossings between Bremerton and Seattle are a key to the area's economic development. The study will determine whether that's feasible.

The project has been funded by federal grants.



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