

Kitsap Transit offering up \$3.50 ferry rides to Seattle

By Ed Friedrich

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PORT ORCHARD — Kitsap Transit, wanting boats full of passengers for its Rich Passage wake research, will price tickets to compete with the state car ferry. The agency figures \$3.50 each way and a 30-minute crossing ought to entice 118 riders per trip between Bremerton and Seattle.

Washington State Ferries charges \$7.50 per round trip, collected in Seattle. People walk on for free in Bremerton. Many riders use Wave2Go multi-ride cards that cut the cost to \$6.05, or monthly passes that reduce it further.

"Having a full boat would be nice, but it's not an absolute requirement," John Clauson, Kitsap Transit executive director, said Monday during a public meeting in Port Orchard. "I expect we won't have a problem getting people to take advantage of it when you can get to Seattle in half the time."

The state's car ferries take about an hour to make the 15.5-mile crossing.

Kitsap Transit is taking public comment on proposed ticket prices for the ferry service, and on a demonstration program to give bus tickets to homeless people so they can get to needed services. Meetings are 2 p.m. Tuesday and 7 p.m. Friday at the Poulsbo fire station, 911 Liberty Road, and 7 p.m. Thursday and 2 p.m. Friday at the Harborside Building, 60 Washington Ave., second floor, in Bremerton. Two meetings were held Monday in Port Orchard.

The five-month service is one of the last parts of a federally funded research project to see whether the low-wake ferry Rich Passage I can carry riders through Rich Passage without damaging beaches or bulkheads. Kitsap Transit plans to make two round trips during the morning rush and two during the afternoon commute, from about June 1 to Nov. 1. A midday round trip might be added.

The schedule hasn't been set. Staff will be asking potential riders when they need to be in Seattle and need to come back, then try to work out those times at the busy Seattle dock, Clauson said.

Under the proposal, disabled people, those with low incomes, youths 6 to 18, seniors 65 or older and Medicare card holders will ride for \$1.75 each way. Washington State

Ferries also gives discounts to most of these groups. Kitsap Transit will only accept cash or ORCA cards for the ferry and won't issue monthly passes.

"You can't beat that," said Daniel Fontanez of Bremerton, the only person to attend the Port Orchard meeting. "As seniors, it's good for us. We'll spread the word."

Washington State Ferries director David Moseley said last week during a passenger-only ferry forum that the goal is to increase the number of people who use transit service, not shift them from one provider to another.

Even if Kitsap Transit doesn't expect much attendance, if any, it must advertise and hold public meetings whenever it changes its fare structure.

The fast ferry shouldn't have a problem attracting riders. If anything, it'll probably draw too many. When the state's 350-passenger Chinook was making 30-minute crossings, people would show up a half-hour early to make sure they'd get on, even though the wait wiped out the benefit.

Kitsap Transit's policy with new service is if it starts at mid-month, it's free until the end of the month because people don't buy passes for a partial month. The agency expects to do the same with the ferry, even though there will be no monthly passes, Clauson said. It'll be first come, first served.

The agency has about \$600,000 in federal funds to operate the research service, but no money to continue it after that.

Public comments will also be taken and reviewed during the transit board meeting at 9:15 a.m. April 17 at the Norm Dicks Government Center, 345 Sixth St. in Bremerton.

Comments can be mailed to Kitsap Transit Executive Director John Clauson, 60 Washington Ave., Suite 200, Bremerton, WA 98337, emailed to ktexecutive@kitsaptransit.com, or phoned to 360-478-6230. The deadline is April 16.



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