

Transit board passes free rides for homeless, establishes fast ferry fares

By Ed Friedrich

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BREMERTON — The Kitsap Transit board approved fast ferry fares, gave homeless people free bus trips and settled a dispute with a boat builder during its monthly meeting Tuesday.

After a public hearing at which nobody spoke, the nine-person board of commissioners unanimously passed two changes to the fare structure. It approved a demonstration program to provide Kitsap County's growing number of homeless with free bus tickets and transfers so they can get to shelters, food banks, social service agencies and [training they need to get back on their feet](#). It'll cost about \$400 to print the tickets. Kitsap Community Resources will distribute them. The program will run from May 1 until the end of the year, then re-evaluated.

As part of the same resolution, the board gave the go-ahead to sell tickets for passenger-only ferry Rich Passage I. Capping years of wake research, the 118-seat boat will [carry passengers between Bremerton and Seattle](#) from about June 1 to Nov. 1. It'll make two half-hour crossings in the morning and two in the evening.

Staff proposed one-way fares of \$3.50 be collected at each end to draw riders from Washington State Ferries, which charges \$7.50 for a round trip and only charges in Seattle.

That could be a problem, said board member and Poulsbo Mayor Becky Erickson, because people will ride the "free" but slower car ferry from Bremerton and stampede the half-price, twice-as-fast Rich Passage I in the evenings. When the state offered 30-minute fast ferry crossings years ago, a 350-passenger boat often filled up and left customers on the dock.

"Why not just charge the fare on the Seattle side?" she asked. "The worst thing we can do is set ourselves up for a bad customer experience right from the get-go."

County Commissioner Josh Brown went a step further, suggesting an online reservations system be set up like the airlines have. That also would reward those who paid to ride in the morning by guaranteeing them a seat on the way back.

"We won't have that problem of competing with Washington State Ferries in the morning where they're not charging and you'll be paying much less to get home twice as fast (in the evening)," Brown said.

Transit Executive Director John Clauson said staff will look into the suggestions, but both would rule out using the ORCA system as the agency had planned.

The fare changes required a public process. A total of 17 people attended six meetings and seven sent emails.

Kitsap Transit and Devlin Designing Boat Builders split the difference on cost overruns on the Admiral Pete ferry. The agency expected a bill of \$978,000, but was charged \$339,000 more for lengthening the boat and installing new motors. Some costs were legitimate because of design changes recommended by Kitsap Transit, Coast Guard requirements and discovery of defects in the boat. Each of the many change orders was examined and the total was reduced to \$171,000, which Devlin agreed to.

Kitsap Transit will take the money from the project's contingency fund, savings on Carlisle II repairs and Puget Sound Naval Shipyard Transportation Incentive Program funds.



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