

Kitsap Transit's fast ferry passes wake test

By Ed Friedrich

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BREMERTON — The Rich Passage 1 is no longer experimental.

Kitsap Transit's low-wake research ferry demonstrated it can operate in Rich Passage without damaging beaches and bulkheads, according to preliminary findings.

The 117-seat catamaran can make 30 trips a week between Seattle and Bremerton, lead scientist Jessica Coté of Golder Associates told the agency's passenger-only ferry subcommittee Friday. The ferry made five round trips six days a week before research concluded Nov. 1.

"This boat is world-class," said Coté, who's been working on the project for six years. "Most of the property owners we have talked to said they don't even notice when it goes by."

Fast passenger-only ferries that cut the hourlong crossing of a state car ferry in half have been an easy sell to riders. They loved Washington State Ferries' Chinook and Snohomish, but the 350-passenger boats' wakes scoured the sand and gravel from the shoreline. Waterfront property owners sued, and won. The state got out of the fast ferry business in 2003.

Kitsap Transit took over WSF's 2-year-old Rich Passage wake research project in 2005. After nine years and \$12.7 million in federal grants, the search is over.

"It appears we have found the correct vessel, or at least as close as we're going to get," said Kitsap Transit executive director John Clauson.

Rich Passage 1's hull was designed for an ultra-low wake. Its cabin was built of lighter composites instead of metal. A hydrofoil and interceptors can be adjusted to keep it light on the water.

The boat produces the smallest wake when it's going fast, around 39 knots. Once it gets through Rich Passage, it slows down to conserve fuel.

Scientists conducted a variety of research in Rich Passage, monitoring it continuously from 2004 to 2009 and starting up again in 2010.

During the experimental ferry's operations, they were surprised that East Bremerton beaches were affected to the degree they were, but believe it was because the boat was slow to get up to speed leaving Bremerton and can be easily corrected. Point Glover on the Port Orchard side of the passage is the trickiest spot. When the ferry speeds around the corner there, it creates two wakes.

Coté said she wouldn't recommend running more than 30 trips a week.

"There is a response," she said. "It's measurable."

The transit board had avoided talk of providing service until it research was completed. Now it can.

"If they direct us to see how it would work, we'd go ahead and develop the options available for funding it," Clauson said.

A draft plan will presented to property owners and the transit board of commissioners in about a week. Their input will be included in a final report in March.

While on its way to Port Townsend this week to be taken out of the water for the winter, the ferry ran aground. Clauson said the vessel was not damaged.



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