

# Seattle Post-Intelligencer

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## Decision by November on tax boost for foot ferries

### Regional system might be modern 'mosquito fleet'

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**By LARRY LANGE**  
P-I REPORTER

By November, King County voters will know whether they'll pay more in property taxes to support foot-ferry service across Elliott Bay, Puget Sound and Lake Washington.

And by early next year, residents may know whether it makes sense to support a system of passenger-only boats regionwide.

Experts, meanwhile, are trying to design a high-speed boat that won't damage shorelines with powerful wakes.

King County Council members expect to decide by Thanksgiving whether to impose a special property tax of 2 to 3 cents per \$1,000 of valuation to finance a takeover of the Vashon-to-Seattle foot ferry service, which the state is expected to drop next year.

County Councilman Dow Constantine, whose district includes West Seattle, said he expects the council to act on the tax proposal by the holiday, deciding whether to impose it and how much it should be.

Depending on the level, the tax would cost the owner of a home assessed at \$400,000 \$8 to \$12 a year.

Constantine said he thinks most of the council's nine members will support a tax. "I think it'll happen, because it's a good deal," he said after speaking to a mostly pro-ferry crowd at a West Seattle restaurant.

Constantine said the idea is to use the tax to support not only the Vashon service when the state gives it up, but also the West Seattle water taxi, which the county has been operating for several years. A new countywide ferry district could also use the tax to test a third foot-ferry route on Lake Washington between Kirkland and the University of Washington.

"Waterborne transit is a very important component" of the region's transportation system, Constantine told the crowd, particularly given plans to tear out and rebuild the Alaskan Way Viaduct and the Evergreen Point Bridge.

Constantine said congestion-relief money from those two projects might help finance the ferries.

King County Councilwoman Julia Patterson, also addressing the forum organized by the Discovery Institute, said she thinks a regional foot-ferry system may be needed to handle all the commuters, establish uniform financing and "avoid turf battles" over service. She said the region should consider foot ferries as far north as Bellingham and south to Olympia.

"I think we should think big," Patterson said. "People travel outside King County."

A study of a regional system by the Puget Sound Regional Council is expected to be completed in early 2008, she said. It could become a modern-day "mosquito fleet" similar to the flotilla that carried people and goods across Puget Sound from the 1850s to the 1930s before the advent of railroads and cars.

The state shut down its fast foot-ferry service between Seattle and Bremerton because of high operating costs and a lawsuit from shoreline property owners over wake washes from the high-speed boats. Now, officials of Pacific International Engineering and boat builder All American Marine said vessels with new designs are cutting fuel costs.

A study of a new lower-wake hull design should be complete and a prototype tested, by this year, they said.

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