

Tacoma, WA - Wednesday, June 25, 2008

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Property tax hike to support ferry

JOSEPH TURNER; The News Tribune

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The King County Council is likely to decide by November how much extra property tax to collect to operate passenger ferry service to downtown Seattle.

The council voted in April to create a countywide ferry district, but it delayed a decision on taxes until Metro Transit planners develop a proposal for how the district would operate.

Mike Beck, Metro Transit contract administrator, said planners are looking at a property tax increase of between 1 and 3 cents per \$1,000 in values, or \$3 to \$9 a year for a \$300,000 home. Each penny would raise about \$2.4 million a year.

The deadline for the council to act is Nov. 30. Although the ferry district is a separate taxing entity, the nine County Council members would be its governing body.

The catalyst for creation of a King County ferry district is the Legislature's desire to get out of the passenger-only ferry business. The route between Vashon Island and Seattle is the last of the state's foot-ferry routes. The state has agreed to subsidize that route for one more year – through June 30, 2008 – but thereafter, state lawmakers want the county to take it over.

Meanwhile, the Puget Sound Regional Council is developing a regional ferry plan for Pierce, King, Snohomish and Kitsap counties.

King County Councilwoman Julia Patterson, D-SeaTac, said that study will examine the feasibility of such routes as Gig Harbor to Tacoma to Des Moines and other possible routes across Puget Sound.

"We are home to a major ferry industry, but have limited service," Patterson said. "We know that long-term, based on forecasts, we will see huge increases in passenger demand."

Stephen Kiehl, a regional council planner, said the \$250,000 study will examine the possibility of service within the four counties, including cross-Sound routes to Bremerton, Kingston and Bainbridge Island and South Sound communities.

The study also will look beyond the four counties, he said.

The report should be done by April 2008.

Beck said the Metro Transit plan will focus on King County communities since its taxpayers will be subsidizing the ferry service.

Beck, who currently oversees the summertime water taxi that ferries people between West Seattle and downtown, said planners are looking to recommend year-round service for the water taxi and another route across Lake Washington to carry people between King County's Eastside suburbs and Seattle.

The Legislature has authorized the sale of two state passenger-only ferries and plans to turn the money over to King County so it can buy new boats for the Vashon-Seattle service. That could amount to \$9 million, Beck said.

Joseph Turner: 253-597-8436

joe.turner@thenewstribune.com

How to get involved

A Seattle think tank is hosting a panel discussion Monday, "Return of the Mosquito Fleet to Puget Sound."

WHAT: Public and private sector stakeholders share perspectives about passenger-only ferry service on Puget Sound. Hosted by the Discovery Institute's Cascadia Center for Regional Development.

WHEN: 5:30-8 p.m. Monday

WHERE: Salty's on Alki, 1936 Harbor Ave. S.W., Seattle (Alki Room)

contact: Natalie Quist, Cascadia Center; nquist@discovery.org, 206-292-0401, Ext. 120 (free; limited seating; space still available)

More information: www.cascadiaproject.org

Topics will include

- King County Ferry District – impact on Elliott Bay, Vashon Island and Lake Washington
- Puget Sound Regional Council passenger ferry study
- Kitsap Transit and community efforts in West Sound
- South Sound Triangle Route (Tacoma-Gig Harbor-Des Moines/SeaTac shuttle)
- North Puget Sound initiatives from Port Roberts to Whidbey Island
- Olympic Peninsula-Hood Canal passenger ferry opportunities
- Potential for a Puget Sound-area agreement to expand passenger ferry service to complement the state ferry system

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