

Transportation

Invest in Washington's vital ferry system

Washington's ferry system — the largest in the United States and second largest in the world — provides a vital marine highway for millions of people throughout Puget Sound. But our ferry system faces significant challenges that will increasingly make it harder to provide reliable service. Severely limited vessel availability and a lack of trained staff led to extraordinary service challenges at Washington State Ferries during the summer and early fall of 2021.

As essential workers, Washington State Ferries employees continued to work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and have been on the front lines providing ongoing transportation service to ferry users. Yet, WSF experienced crewing challenges due to COVID-19, compounding underlying worker shortages the system has faced for years.

WSF vessels are crewed by maritime professionals credentialed by the U.S. Coast Guard. There are persistent challenges filling the required vessel crew positions, in part due to a global shortage of maritime workers. Additionally, our ferry system has an aging workforce, with about half of the employees who work aboard vessels over 55 years old and nearing retirement.

Our ferry fleet is also aging, with more than half of the vessels over 30 years old, including three over 50 years old. Meanwhile, due to necessary vessel retirements, the fleet has shrunk from 24 to 21 vessels. WSF currently

does not have a relief vessel to maintain service during unplanned repairs. And with ferries in service more than 20 hours each day, finding time for maintenance is difficult.

Gov. Jay Inslee is proposing significant new investments to help address these challenges.

His supplemental transportation budget includes nearly \$324 million over three years to fully fund the first 144-car hybrid-electric ferry, build a second 144-car hybrid-electric ferry, convert a second Jumbo Mark II vessel to hybrid-electric and add needed electric-ferry charging infrastructure at three terminals (supported by a one-time transfer from the state General Fund). For more information on the governor's ferry electrification plans, see [the budget and policy climate section](#).

The budget will also provide WFS with more resources and better tools for recruiting and retaining qualified personnel. Most of the additional funding through the Puget Sound Ferry Operations Account will be supported by a one-time transfer from the state General Fund.

Attract new employees

The budget includes \$1.1 million (Puget Sound Ferry Operations Account) to:

- Move from seasonal-based hiring practices to ongoing, year-round recruitment and hiring efforts. Doing this will help WSF connect with a greater pool of potential candidates and provide opportunities for workers to join the ferry fleet.

- Hire an external recruiting firm to better represent WSF at national maritime recruitment fairs, better position WSF at a national level as an employer of choice and, most importantly, identify ways to actively recruit from diverse communities and organizations to improve diversity within the ferry workforce.
- Hire additional staff to support moving applicants through the hiring process more quickly.

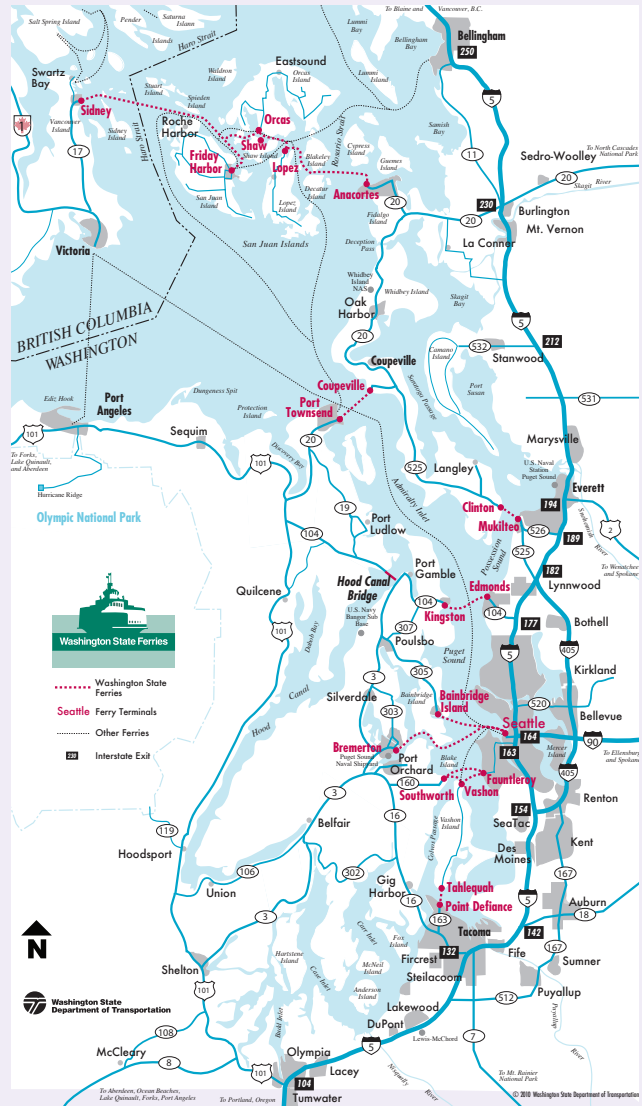
Retain ferry employees

The budget includes \$26.0 million (\$24.5 million PSFOA; \$1.5 million Multimodal Account) to:

- Enhance employee retention by providing guaranteed work hours and pay for entry level mariners.
- Increase training and professional development opportunities and provide adequate pay and hours for employees to participate in these opportunities.
- Expand the successful Pre-Apprenticeship and Supportive Services (PASS) program to support women, minorities, veterans and other disadvantaged individuals to succeed in ferry jobs. Support services that could be provided to future and new ferry workers include assistance with transportation, child care, or necessary Coast Guard required certifications.

Improve efficiency on and off vessels

The budget includes \$14.1 million (\$14 million Puget Sound Capital Construction Account; \$100,000 PSFOA) to support two key efforts to improve efficiency. First, it includes funding to support a recent agreement between labor



partners and ferries that allows the ferry system to move vessel crew members – engine room and deck – from nonoperating vessels (tied up for maintenance and/or due to a lack of available crewing) to cover service elsewhere. Additionally, funding will help the state acquire a new dispatch system to modernize how the ferry system dispatches employees to vessels that need additional crew to sail.

Advance ultra-high-speed ground transportation

The governor recently signed an agreement with leaders from British Columbia and Oregon to make ultra-high-speed transportation a priority for the Cascadia region. The memorandum of understanding reaffirms a shared commitment to develop a sustainable “Cascadia Innovation Corridor” and is a commitment to work together to advance a high-speed ground transportation project. The governor’s transportation budget supports the MOU and recognizes the state’s opportunity to compete for potential high-speed rail planning dollars from the federal government. Specifically, the budget includes:

- \$4 million for the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to form a policy committee, begin work outlined in the MOU and develop and lead a collaborative approach with our partners to prepare and apply for potential federal funding. (Multimodal Account supported by one-time transfer from General Fund-State)
- \$50 million to support the state match to better position us to apply for and receive potential federal funding. (Multimodal Account supported by one-time transfer from GF-S)

Support clean transportation

As part of the state’s effort to address climate change, in addition to supporting electrification of the ferry system, the governor’s transportation budget includes \$148.1 million to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in our transportation sector. For more information on the governor’s clean transportation proposals, see [the budget and policy climate section](#).

Increase diversity, equity and inclusion in transportation

The governor’s transportation budget recognizes we need to do more to diversify the workforce and improve inclusion and equity in the state’s transportation agencies. The budget will:

- Fully fund WSDOT’s work as it relates to the HEAL Act to make sure it incorporates environmental justice principles into the agency’s decision process. (\$.5 million Motor Vehicle Account)
- Provide the Washington State Patrol with \$1.4 million to expand the agency DEI program. This includes helping staff enact agencywide DEI initiatives and address disparities in hiring and recruitment. The agency will hire an outside consulting firm to focus messaging to and recruiting from diverse audiences and to study barriers in recruiting commissioned officers. This program also includes funding to contract with an external psychological exam services for new recruits. (\$1.1 million State Patrol Highway Account; \$300,000 GF-S)
- Provide \$1.4 million to WSDOT to promote access to construction careers for women, people of color and communities that are underrepresented in the construction and transportation trades. Additionally, WSDOT will advance DEI training by hiring additional staff with expertise in federal and state civil rights’ provisions to supplement statewide DEI trainings. (\$1.1 million Motor Vehicle Account; \$300,000 Puget Sound Ferry Operations Account)

New resources for transportation

New federal funds

The recently approved federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will bolster transportation funding for Washington by reauthorizing and increasing existing funding formulas while also providing new formula-driven programs. The governor's budget allocates these new federal funds toward preservation programs and includes proposals to use new federal funds to support electric vehicle infrastructure as well as improving bicycle and regional trails and pathways.

New state funds — Climate Commitment Act

The governor's budget considers new state funds that the newly enacted Climate Commitment Act should generate. An estimated \$127.3 million could be available in the last quarter of the current biennium and the state must use it for clean transportation activities. The act calls for funding transportation activities in overburdened communities and directs the Environmental Justice Council to provide spending recommendations to the governor and Legislature. The governor proposes using at least 50% of the new funds for transportation activities in overburdened communities.