

Bremerton Fast Ferry Update, 5/11/19

Meeting Summary

Check In / RSVP

Kitsap Transit received 89 RSVPs for 114 attendees between April 18 and May 11. The RSVP included a brief survey (see Attachment A) to gauge opinions on key topics before the event.

Staff asked the public to sign in at the community meeting. The sign-in sheet shows 55 people.

Upon checking in, attendees were given three colored dots – blue if they are a regular reservation system user, orange if they are not – to use during the audience participation segment of the program.

Presentation

John Clauson, Executive Director of Kitsap Transit, presented an update on ridership, capacity and reservations (see Appendix for reservation data). Curtis Pierce of Four Nines Technologies then presented key takeaways from the study his firm conducted for Kitsap Transit (see Attachment B for the presentation slides).

Pierce encouraged the audience to engage with six stations at the back of the room. A poster at each station presented a key question about reservations on which the audience was asked to weigh in.

STATION	TOPIC	QUESTION(S)
1	Allocation of Reservations	Should they be allocated in a different fashion, and if so, how?
2	Convenience Fee	Does a reservation have value? What is a guarantee of a seat on the fast ferry worth?
3	Cancellation Window	What do you think is the “best” cutoff time for allowing users to cancel a reservation?
4	Penalizing No-Shows	How should KT identify and penalize no-shows given how easy it is to “hide” your identity?
5	No Reservations	Should Kitsap Transit experiment with running service without reservations, especially once additional vessels go into service?
6	Reservation Software	Should Kitsap Transit change to a different software vendor?

Attendees were invited to write comments on Post-It notes and stick them to the relevant poster as well as to allocate their dots to topics they wanted the agency to prioritize and discuss as a group. Pierce clarified that he wasn't asking attendees to vote for or against a topic, just their level of interest in the topic.

Audience Participation

During this segment of the program, attendees provided feedback on the posters and jotted additional topics on a flip chart (“Parking Lot”). Comments on the posters and flip chart were transcribed (see Attachment C).

The results of the dot-voting exercise are summarized below. Blue dots represent votes by regular reservation users, while orange dots represent votes by those who do not regularly use reservations.

STATION	TOPIC	TOTAL DOTS	BLUE DOTS	ORANGE DOTS
4	Penalizing No-Shows	38	33	5
5	No Reservations	37	31	6
6	Reservation Software	26	26	0
1	Allocation of Reservations	22	15	7
2	Convenience Fee	22	19	3
3	Cancellation Window	15	11	4

The table indicates a total of 25 orange dots, representing about 8 attendees who don’t regularly use reservations, and 135 blue dots, or 45 regular reservation system users. This snapshot suggests only 1 in 8 of the attendees represented the interests of walk-ups and others who don’t use reservations regularly.

It’s worth noting an apparent divide between regular reservation users and non-users: Among regular reservation users, who constituted the majority of the attendees, they wanted Kitsap Transit to focus discussion on the question of Penalizing No-Shows. Among the minority who do not regularly use the reservation system, their highest priority for discussion was Allocation of Reservations.

Both groups also indicated a strong interest in the topic of No Reservations, a topic that was explored in the discussion segment of the program. Photos of the six posters are included as Attachment D.

Group Discussion

In the second hour of the program, Carla Sawyer, Kitsap Transit’s fast-ferry project manager, kicked off the group discussion with the results from the dot-voting exercise. The two top-vote getting topics were “No Reservations” and “Penalizing No-Shows.”

The consensus of the attendees was that Kitsap Transit must have a reservations system but that there is a high level of distrust in and dissatisfaction with the current software provider. Sawyer asked the opinion of attendees who self-identified as walk-up customers, and these attendees said they were not

in favor of a reservation system *unless* the system was modified so they could get reservations too. All attendees seem to acknowledge a reservation is highly valued.

Sawyer moved on to the question of penalizing no-shows by reading comments on post-it notes and asking the group what they thought. The group raised concerns about the integrity of the reservation software and whether penalizing reservation-holders was fair.

Software integrity

Some attendees expressed doubt in the data on no-show rates and number of empty seats, saying that people are routinely turned away at the dock because the ferry is full. As one attendee put it, "I don't see 40 to 50 percent of us going through the hell of this system and then not showing up." Another attendee said she was not confident that RocketRez was displaying an accurate count of the number of reservations booked; yet another attendee said she was skeptical of the accounting of check-ins because at the dock "the scanner does not work."

A common fear among attendees is that when they have tried to cancel a booking, the software cancels not just the booking for one sailing but an entire week's worth of bookings. One attendee said this happens about 25 percent of the time. When Sawyer asked whether this was a common problem, many raised their hands. The consensus seemed to be that the risk of having all of their reservations cancelled by the system was an unacceptable risk after they have gone through a lot of effort to obtain them.

Another attendee pointed out how the software makes the cancellation process confusing: When reservations are booked online, the system displays orders by the *first* day of the week. But when the order confirmation arrives by email, the orders are displayed by *last* day of the week. Users trying to cancel a booking must track down the barcode for that sailing, and the interface is not mobile-friendly, which is how nearly all users need to access the system. One attendee said it would be helpful to have a graphical calendar showing all the reservations he had made.

There seemed broad agreement that Kitsap Transit's system must make it easier to cancel reservations.

Penalizing no-shows with a financial penalty also raised concerns about software integrity and security. One attendee said the Kitsap Transit website is not secure currently and that asking the public to enter sensitive details (i.e. credit card number) without greater security would not be feasible. Another attendee had concerns about the software not charging users properly and additional hoops users would need to jump through to obtain refunds. Several attendees expressed a fundamental lack of trust and confidence in the current software.

Fairness

There are valid reasons that reservation holders might not show up at the dock, and any penalty needs to take that into account, attendees said. Kitsap Transit requires customers to redeem their reservation at least 10 minutes before a scheduled sailing; if they do not, those reservations are released, and the seats go to people standing in the walk-up line.

One attendee said he reviewed his unredeemed reservations and was able to track down the cause in three-quarters of them. Half of the time, the attendee said, the cause was that a Kitsap Transit bus was running late and the driver did not communicate that fact to the dock; other reasons were illness, waking up late or a work-related delay. If Kitsap Transit shortened the cancellation cutoff from two hours to just minutes before a scheduled sailing, he said, he would have been able to cancel the reservations.

Other attendees concurred that some factors were beyond their control and that a shorter cancellation window would help bring down the number of “no-shows.”

Other attendees countered that on peak sailings they often see a high number of unredeemed reservations and the ferry leaving with empty seats. As one attendee put it, “as a taxpayer, you have to have something to charge for empty seats that were reserved.”

Another major theme during the discussion was that reservation-system users feel they have to do things they otherwise wouldn’t because of poor system design. For example, many attendees admitted they have two accounts because of the need to race through the system when the booking window opens and snap up reservations before they’re all gone; one attendee with two accounts described how her husband books her morning sailings for her, while she books her afternoon sailings.

Another attendee described how she got no response from Kitsap Transit after she reported that she accidentally booked two tickets on an afternoon sailing; even after canceling one of the tickets, this attendee said the system wouldn’t allow her to book any more trips for that day, and so she resorted to creating a dummy second account to book the other trip she needed. “You have to solve your own issue because no one will solve it for you,” this attendee said.

An attendee took extensive notes at the meeting and contributed these minutes (see Attachment E); the minutes offer a detailed account of the group discussion.

Evaluation

The last thing attendees were asked to do before the meeting adjourned was to fill out an evaluation form. The form asked three questions:

1. What is your overall assessment of today’s event? (1=poor, 5=excellent)
2. Comments and suggestions on event itself (including activities you think would be useful in the future)
3. Did you have any additional feedback on the topics discussed today that you wanted to share with Kitsap Transit?

Thirty-five evaluation forms were received and are included as Attachment F. The average score on the first question was 4 on the scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being excellent.

In general, participants applauded Kitsap Transit for taking the time to listen to the concerns of the community and signaling a willingness to make improvements. They said the program was well done

and appreciated the interactive stations and facilitated portion of the meeting; however, some said there was too much lecturing and wished there had been more time for discussion and questions and that engagement like this needs to happen more often. One person said it might have been useful to have someone from the reservation software provider present.

Participants used the third question to summarize their thoughts. In general, participants said they perceived consensus that Kitsap Transit needs better software/approach to facilitate ease of booking, cancelling and tracking redemption of reservations. Others said they perceived a tone of hostility toward riders in the first half of the program, and that Kitsap Transit needs to “talk about the carrot, not the stick” to address the no-show problem. A few suggested that Kitsap Transit take advantage of the expertise of some fast-ferry riders in software and partner with the community to develop a workable app.