



Mayor Greg Wheeler

greg.wheeler@ci.bremerton.wa.us
Tel 360-473-5266
Fax 360-473-5883
345 6th Street, Suite 100
Bremerton, WA 98337-1873

September 16, 2022

Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee:

We are writing to express the need for the temporary expansion of Kitsap Transit passenger-only ferry service on the current Washington State Ferry (WSF) Bremerton-Seattle route. The Mayor of Bremerton and part of the Board of Commissioners for Kitsap Transit raised the topic on this possibility at the Kitsap Transit September Board meeting. The Board has representation from Kitsap County and all of the cities. Verbal support and encouragement was received from all Board members to bring this matter to your attention.

For seven decades, WSF has provided essential access to connect communities, including the City of Bremerton. WSF states on its website that “our routes act as a marine highway.” Ferries serve as an indispensable transportation link in the state’s highway system and cross spans of waterways as alternatives to miles of bridges and tunnels across Puget Sound. The Federal Highway Administration also recognizes the WSF in this capacity, recently awarding millions of dollars in distribution in funding to the agency.

Kitsap County has 250 miles of saltwater coastline and relies on state ferry routes as crucial marine highways to support the free flow of people, goods, and services between our local communities and the major economic center of Washington state. Having full WSF ferry operations is essential to our economy as well as the quality of life of our citizens.

We have seen an increase in WSF service cuts due to a lack of workers, increased retirements, vessel maintenance, among other issues. While the reductions have had a significant impact on our communities, the Bremerton route is located in an urban area that serves areas of persistent poverty and has fewer transportation opportunities. The Bremerton ferry faces hours-long gaps between sailings, which is expected to continue until at least 2023. Hundreds of thousands of passengers that depend on a stable and reliable WSF Bremerton marine highway are encountering serious hardship and financial impacts due to reduced service levels. We agree a pressing need exists to address this issue for residents.

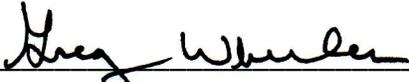
We are in a moment that offers the State of Washington an opportunity to meet the urgent need and provide some relief for Bremerton and surrounding communities. Together, we support a request to the state to fund an increase in Kitsap Transit passenger-only ferry (POF) sailings on an interim basis to assist WSF with their current Bremerton-Seattle schedule until it can be fully restored. We support a temporary alternative for the following reasons:

The WSF Bremerton region remains under-served. We are encouraged by WSF's recent focus on restoring full service to Kitsap County ferry routes. However, the Bremerton route has been one of the hardest hit by significant reductions to service and WSF has indicated these levels are expected to persist until Spring 2023. Service cuts to the route have gone beyond a major inconvenience and have rendered the system unusable to numerous residents. Many have few options to work remotely and must commute to their jobs in health care, construction, equipment repair and other essential employment in the Seattle region. They face increased job losses, financial costs and less time with their families because of time spent in traffic "driving around" to Seattle or waiting hours in a terminal to get home because of WSF's current schedule. In addition, medical patients are confronting more travel time and stress to attend appointments or receive treatment. Small businesses still in economic recovery are also experiencing higher costs and lost productivity due to reduced operations on WSF's Bremerton marine highway route. With diminished service in place for an extended period, we anticipate the burden and impacts on individuals, families and businesses will only increase over time.

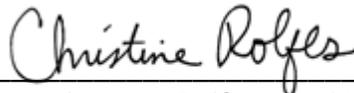
WSF ferry routes in Kitsap County are still under strain. While service has improved in areas, several WSF ferry routes in Kitsap County continue to experience delays due to high demand and ferry service disruptions. One-boat service on the Bremerton route has also resulted in long intervals between sailings. In some instances, there have been additional delays and sudden cancellations that have complicated commutes and left few transportation alternatives for passengers. Increased POF service by Kitsap Transit would help ease the burden, increase access and add reliability for Bremerton-area residents who need alternatives to already busy Kitsap County ferry routes and Bremerton's one-boat ferry service to get to work or have other obligations.

As part of the state's highway system, the WSF Bremerton marine highway route serves a critical role by supporting the free flow of commerce and providing vital access for work, doctor's appointments, and other essential travel. We believe that the current level of WSF ferry service will not be able to support existing needs of the Bremerton community for an extended period. Adding temporary Kitsap Transit passenger-only trips would add capacity, improve access, support livelihoods, and assist in strengthening the local economy.

Sincerely,



Greg Wheeler
Mayor, City of Bremerton



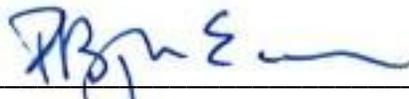
Sen. Christine Rolfes, 23rd Legislative District



John Clauson
Executive Director, Kitsap Transit



Sen. Emily Randall, 26th Legislative District



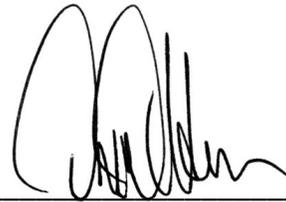
Becky Erickson
Mayor, City of Poulsbo



Rep. Tara Simmons, 23rd Legislative District



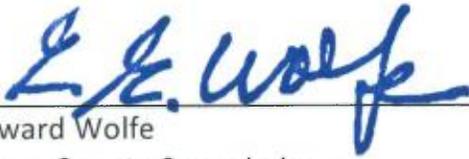
Rob Putaansuu
Mayor, City of Port Orchard



Rep. Drew Hansen, 23rd Legislative District



Joe Deets
Mayor, City of Bainbridge Island



Edward Wolfe
Kitsap County Commissioner



Robert Gelder
Kitsap County Commissioner



Charlotte Garrido
Kitsap County Commissioner



Councilmember Leslie Schneider
Bainbridge Island