

FERRIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

INTRODUCTION

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Long a vital means of transportation in areas with major lakes, rivers, bays, and sounds, ferry travel is reemerging as a major link in the nation's transportation system. In the state of Washington, the state-operated ferry system annually transports nearly 27 million riders and 11 million vehicles on a fleet of 29 vessels. Ferry systems serve as extensions to both the highway and the transit systems.

Many earlier ferry operations were replaced by bridges in the late 1800s and throughout much of the 20th century. Recently, however, ferry travel has seen a resurgence, as populations have grown in areas traditionally served by ferries and as land-based transportation systems have become increasingly congested in areas without ferry operations. The advent of fast ferry technology has enabled a more creative deployment of vessels, introducing viable alternatives to congested landside facilities.

The articles in this issue of *TR News* present the broad spectrum of opportunities and challenges facing further development of ferry travel. Martha Bewick's article sets the stage by tracing the national and international initiatives that are shaping the operating environment for current and anticipated ferry systems. Bob Gorman next describes the context and some of the preliminary findings of the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Ferry Study; he outlines the evolution of ferry travel in the United States, identifies current and developing trends, and cites three examples of active and proposed ferry systems.

The article by Alex Farrell and James Corbett delves into the environmental issues affecting ferry transportation. The role of the ferry in reducing motor vehicle travel and pollution and the need to control emissions as well as other impacts from ferry vessels are discussed in the context of current and proposed systems.

Capt. Bob Doll discusses the challenges facing the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS). He explains the circumstances in which the AMHS was built and shows how changing financial realities, societal shifts and expectations, and advances in vessel technology can lead to an entirely different approach to route structure and service.

Finally, Gregg Ward provides an operator's point of view on how the regulatory environments in the United States and Canada are hindering the development of efficient cross-border ferry operations.

Ferry transportation continues to be important for the movement of passengers, vehicles, and freight across water. It has emerged as a viable alternative in areas where landside transportation has become increasingly congested. The demand for new ferry services is growing in an operating environment that has become much more complex. Concerns about environmental impacts, congested waterways, and the financial capabilities to operate and provide necessary vessel and terminal investment will influence how ferry transportation systems evolve in the 21st century.

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