

# Kitsap Sun

## Support Grows for Foot Ferries ... But Enough for Another Try?

### But, leaders wonder, is the gain from 2003 enough to make another try at convincing voters worthwhile?

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Sunday, February 11, 2007

Kitsap Transit stretched support for its passenger ferry proposal farther from the ferry terminals than it did four years before, according to precinct totals from Tuesday's election.

But it wasn't nearly enough to pass its plan to add passenger-only ferries.

The agency's 2003 plan was approved in precincts near port towns Bremerton, Kingston and Southworth — and on most of Bainbridge Island — en route to garnering 38.4 percent of the vote. All three areas already have state ferries, but only Bremerton's connects to downtown Seattle, and it takes an hour to get there.

According to the plan up for election last week, Bremerton was to get eight round trips each weekday and two each on Saturday and Sunday by this summer. Kingston would have received the same by the end of the year. Service to Port Orchard would have started in 2009 and to Southworth in 2010. The sales tax increase to support the system would have been 3 cents on a \$10 purchase.

In Tuesday's election, the agency picked up 6.5 positive percentage points over its first try, to 44.9 percent. Had Kitsap Transit shrunk the transit district boundaries to eliminate outlying areas, as it sought, it still wouldn't have gained more than 47 percent of the vote.

Of the county's 184 precincts, 25 that rejected the 2003 proposal approved the 2007 version, bringing the total to 52. The highest number of swings — nine — were in northeast Kitsap, where the ferries gained support in precincts from Indianola north to Hansville. Bremerton approval grew from three precincts to nine, and seven precincts between Port Orchard and Southworth came aboard.

Kitsap Transit captured the only Bainbridge precinct that didn't support it in 2003 — Fort Ward — but lost another — Liberty.

It didn't make much difference to Port Orchard voters that they had a ferry to Seattle in this proposal but not in the earlier one. Just one precinct approved the plan, up from zero the last time.

There won't be a third election, at least for a while, say the group of local politicians who govern the agency.

Port Orchard mayor Kim Abel, the incoming chair, said everybody on the board supported the measure and was dismayed when it failed.

"From our perspective, transit agencies need to go hand-in-hand with cities to work on the Growth

Management Act," she said. "We need to figure out a way to get people to and from our cities, and all of our cities are on the waterfront. Ferries make a lot of sense to handle that."

A ferry system will be a hard sell in the near future, Abel said, but she's hopeful it will eventually get done. Kitsap Transit tried switching up its proposal, removing motor vehicle taxes and adding private operators, but voters still didn't buy it.

"The solution we came up with was not palatable to them," she said of the voters. "If we can find a better way to make it work and still serve our urban centers, I'm sure we would consider that."

"But I don't know if it'd be anytime soon."

The voters have spoken, she said, but just about that particular plan. They don't want to spend 3 cents on every \$10 for fast ferries, but there may be ways to keep trying other things that might result in a more palatable plan.

Chris Endresen, a county commissioner and outgoing transit board chair, says it's time to concentrate on buses for a while.

"I'd be hard-pressed to support another ballot issue at this time," she said. "We have a lot of other work we need to do — to provide good transit service and make sure we keep it efficient and running well and look at ways to improve it. This passenger ferry, I believe, would've been a good thing for the county."

"I believe it is the right thing for the county, but the majority of those who voted don't."

For that reason, ferries are off the table, she said.

"I'm not saying never, but anytime soon," she said. "The voters have spoken and we need to honor that."

Richard Hayes, the Kitsap Transit director, has found himself looking for a plan after the failed election.

"A lot of folks are calling and asking what do we do now. If I knew I would tell them," he said. "We've got to look at the numbers first and see if there's anything that makes sense."

"A lot of people said, Please don't give up on this," Hayes said, "so I'm kind of torn."



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