

Guemes Island Ferry Technical Advisory Group (TAG) May 11, 2025 Meeting

Anacortes Public Library

5:30-7:30 PM

Draft Summary Notes

Attendees

In-Person

TAG Members

Allen Bush, Sandy McKean, Tom Fouts, Ryan Monahan, Becca Fong

Skagit County Staff

Rachel Rowe, Ferry Operations Division Manager

Other Attendees

Hilary Wilkinson, Maul Foster & Alongi, Facilitator

Online:

Other Attendees

Claire Moerder, Maul Foster & Alongi

Skagit County Staff

Marie Lambert, Public Works Assistant Director/Controller

TAG Members

Jonah Petrick

TAG Members Not Present

Adam Paull, Paul Bieker, Corey Joyce

Welcome and Introductions

Recap of Meeting #6 and Tonight's Agenda

Sandy McKean called the meeting to order and shared that the preliminary Advisory Report draft would be circulated to TAG members on Tuesday, May 12.

Hilary Wilkinson explained that today's meeting would include reviewing the TAG decisions and discussions to date, and connecting this recap to the draft recommendation in the Advisory Report. She also asked TAG members to accept the final summary notes from Meeting #6 after circulating printed copies.

- There were no further edits or comments to the meeting summary. **TAG members approved them as final.**

Hilary Wilkinson also opened the floor for any relevant updates. Neither of the County staff present had any updates to share.

Tom Fouts briefly shared his research on US Coast Guard regulations and guidance on small, hybrid ferries, including a short overview of the relevant International Safety Management (ISM) Code. He noted how positive the regulatory language was around small hybrid vessels, noting the redundancies of hybrid propulsion contribute to greater reliability. He also spoke about recent examples of local and other shipyards to build ferries with this type of technology. He passed around printed notes.

TAG Operations

Finalizing the Recommendation

Hilary Wilkinson stepped through a PPT deck of the TAG decisions and discussions to date.

TAG members discussed how funding may be another key consideration for which propulsion option the TAG recommends, given that grants are more likely to be available for electric or hybrid propulsion systems. However, one member felt that continuing to delay and deliberate with the hope of "green" grants may lead to being priced out of a new vessel. Another member shared how most heavy vehicle manufacturers are moving away from diesel mechanical propulsion systems because of how impractical it's becoming due to a general industry shift toward electrification.

Sandy McKean then articulated how he pulled together the "blended" recommendation for the Advisory Report. He thanked members for their comments and for sharing industry news and trends with the group, noting how important this information was to bring everyone up to speed and inform the TAG's recommendation.

His proposal was that maintaining the existing ferry—which has just had its engines replaced and which he said has an expected useful life through 2039—while planning toward a replacement,

plug-in hybrid vessel in the next five to ten years offers a blended recommendation. In this solution, both options help solve the problem of their counterpoint. Planning for a hybrid system in five to ten years, instead of immediately, leverages available and expected funding, and it allows hybrid propulsion technology to evolve to a more proven state. Ferry service would be reliably maintained, and the existing vessel would not be decommissioned too far in advance of the end of its useful life.

This recommendation is predicated on the charging systems Ryan Monohan presented in Meeting #6, which do not require extensive battery storage or shoreside infrastructure. This type of hybrid vessel would not be running on electric propulsion all of the time, but it would still lead to a significant reduction in emissions to be attractive to federal and state funders.

TAG members also discussed the continuing evolution of the maritime industry in exploring alternative fuel sources such as hydrogen or biodiesel.

Hilary Wilkinson asked TAG members if they could support the blended recommendation Sandy presented. All six members present at the meeting voiced support for it. Details follow.

Jonah Petrick said he supports this recommendation. He noted that much of the tugboat industry outside California still operates diesel equipment, so he is comfortable continuing to use the existing vessel while hybrid marine propulsion technology continues to mature.

Becca Fong noted she wants to catch up on the recording from last week's discussion, since she was absent, but she is still comfortable with and supports this recommendation.

Ryan Monahan said he is generally comfortable with this recommendation. He expressed concern that if the TAG only recommends keeping the existing ferry, five years could pass and the Board could end up revisiting the replacement decision from scratch. He emphasized the importance of having a plan and clear accountability to advance a new propulsion system within a defined timeframe. He also noted that federal support for electrification could shift after the next presidential election.

Ryan later asked if the County could ask Puget Sound Energy (PSE) how much extra electrical capacity is available or expected to be available at the ferry dock.

Sandy McKean noted that TAG members are encouraged to review and if needed, update how he's written this up in the draft Advisory Report. Members also discussed how including a *Proposed Timeline* section may be a useful addition, potentially in the form of a high-level, five-year plan with proposed near-term actions.

In response to Ryan's comment about a shift in political will, Sandy acknowledged this could be a good thing to capture in the *Other Considerations* section of the report.

Rachel Rowe explained that for the County to ask PSE about expected electrical capacity, the answer would not come quickly enough to incorporate into the TAG's recommendation. She suggested that he may get faster results by asking PSE directly. Ryan agreed to do this.

Allen Bush noted that there are multiple big investments underway, such as the bridge replacement at the ferry dock. A concern he voiced was to make sure that not only is the TAG recommendation for the vessel propulsion system future proofed, but it needs to work with upcoming improvements and be considered alongside any new infrastructure investments. He said that the County needs to ensure the system is flexible enough to accommodate a potentially bigger vessel and additional charging systems when the time comes to replace the current ferry.

Hilary Wilkinson reflected that these are important nuances to weave into the *Other Considerations* section of the Advisory Report. She asked Allen to clarify whether he was comfortable with the blended recommendation, so long as these nuances are captured, and he agreed that he was.

Members discussed and suggested including plans for the proposed charging system (roughly the size of two refrigerators) in the *Future proofing* section. That way, it could easily be referenced when considering any new infrastructure work between now and when the ferry would be replaced. Rachel Rowe also clarified that any new vessel will be designed specifically to fit whatever dock infrastructure exists and is needed to run the new ferry.

Tom Fouts said he was comfortable with the blended recommendation. He also asked whether the costs of running the existing ferry for another ten years have been estimated.

Rachel Rowe said it would be possible to maintain the current outdrives for another ten years, and when asked what the cost would be, she said would want to run the numbers on a 10-year scenario. The County has good support for maintenance/parts/service, which is possible as long as the County's sole source vendor does not go out of business, and she has no concerns about this happening. New outdrives are \$500,000 each, plus upgrades to the steering systems. The other important thing to note is she doesn't currently know the vessel's retirement date. Without knowing this, it's challenging to plan an efficient maintenance program. The County currently maintains the MV Guemes as if they will have this vessel forever, and to avoid catastrophic failure.

Hilary Wilkinson recapped that there seems to be unanimous support for the blended recommendation as discussed. All TAG members would have the opportunity to weave in the necessary nuances into the draft Advisory Report.

Next Steps

Sandy McKean and Becca Fong stepped through the draft Advisory Report and assigned writing tasks to each TAG member, noting they would share the list of tasks and the shared working draft

via email the next day. Each TAG member agreed to complete their assignments and provide a short biography by June 1.

Hilary Wilkinson asked members to make sure they do their tasks in Tracked Changes (Becca Fong will set the shared document to this setting). Sandy McKean asked every TAG member to provide a biography that highlights the perspective and expertise they bring to the TAG.

TAG members asked what the Advisory Report Presentation on would look like, and how it was being publicized. Rachel shared that the Advisory Report Presentation would be held on July 7 from 8:30 to 10:00 a.m., and Sandy McKean would be presenting as TAG Chair. The Presentation would be announced in the County newsletter and would most likely be covered by the Skagit Valley Herald and other local news outlets (including local television).

Sandy McKean asked members to come, noting how powerful it would be for them to be there to show support and provide context and answers to potential questions from the Board. Multiple TAG members agreed they would attend.

Action Items

Skagit County will

- Distribute the meeting summary and Zoom link for the next TAG meeting.

TAG members

- Sandy McKean and Becca Fong will share the draft Advisory Report link and writing assignments with the TAG members.
- All TAG members will complete their assigned tasks from today's discussion by June 1.
- Sandy McKean will incorporate TAG members' edits and contributions prior to the next TAG meeting on June 8.

MFA will

- Draft summary notes.