

Guemes Island Ferry Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

December 8, 2025 Meeting

Anacortes Public Library

5:30-7:30 PM

Draft Summary Notes

Attendees

In-Person

TAG Members

Adam Paull, Allen Bush, Becca Fong, Corey Joyce, Paul Bieker, Ryan Monahan, Sandy McKean, Tom Fouts

Skagit County Staff

Rachel Rowe, Ferry Operations Division Manager

Other Attendees

Hilary Wilkinson, Maul Foster & Alongi, Facilitator

Online:

TAG Members

Jonah Petrick

Skagit County Staff

Marie Lambert, Public Works Assistant Director/Controller; Tom Weller, County Engineer

Other Attendees

Claire Moerder, Maul Foster & Alongi

Welcome and Introductions

Hilary Wilkinson: introduced the agenda after circulating printed copies. She reminded TAG members of this meeting's objectives:

1. Review outcomes and status of action items from Meeting #1.
2. Elect a TAG chair.
3. Review and discuss Draft TAG workplan.
4. Discuss options for a communications and information-sharing platform.
5. Discuss alternative ferry propulsion studies conducted by the County.

TAG Operations

Recap of Meeting #1

Hilary Wilkinson reminded TAG members of the outcomes of the November meeting and asked for the TAG to adopt the summary notes. She invited TAG members to share if there was anything else key to note from last month's meeting, but there were no comments.

- **TAG members accepted the summary notes from Meeting #1 as final.**

Election of TAG Chair

Hilary Wilkinson reminded TAG members of the duties of the TAG chair and went over the process of nominating and electing the chair. She also reminded members that the results of the TAG election will need to be confirmed by the Board of Commissioners.

Sandy McKean nominated himself and noted he would like to contribute his experience as a management consultant for 20 years to the group. He has also been involved in this project for a long time, since it got started.

There were no other nominees.

- **Sandy McKean was elected unanimously as the TAG chair.**

Review of Draft TAG Workplan

Hilary Wilkinson shared the draft TAG workplan and gave the TAG members a few minutes to review the document. Copies were circulated for TAG members to individually review.

TAG members discussed how the task of comparative analysis of different ferry propulsion methods would probably take longer than three months.

Multiple TAG members were interested in coordinating with Whatcom County on this effort, since they are neighboring counties working toward the same goal of identifying a suitable ferry replacement, and working together could significantly defray costs of design, build, and operation. Sandy recommended TAG members review the Lummi Island ferry report that Adam sent out to the group. Members agreed this would be a good starting point for the January meeting.

Questions & Answers

Question: What bounds on funding do we have if we don't include an electric propulsion system?

Answer: The presentation on propulsion studies will get at some of this question. In addition, the Board of Commissioners may not adopt the TAG recommendation—there will also be the value engineering study they will be considering.

Questions: Could you say more about what the value engineering study is? It seems odd they're moving forward with this design and we're going back to the drawing board. Why aren't these processes one after the other?

Answer: Value engineering combined with risk assessment (VE-risk assessment) is a common requirement for WSDOT projects. There is a framework that lays it all out. Skagit County will work with a consultant and the vessel systems designer on this and use the template WSDOT provides to lay out all the considerations for the all-electric ferry. Because the design and a full bid package for an all-electric ferry already exists, the VE-risk assessment is for an all-electric ferry.

The Board wants to know how to bring the cost and complexity of the all-electric ferry down to a level that fits with existing funding; and they want to know what the stakeholders think. That is why there are two separate efforts, happening in tandem. It is admittedly an unusual order of operations, but this is the process the Board wants. Part of the reasoning is the unexpected barrier of shoreside charging being so complex and costly, and significant community feedback on this option. As they are seriously considering how to make an all-electric ferry work, the Board is also considering letting go of the all-electric option, but they want to make sure whatever they move forward with, they have community and stakeholder input in the decision.

Part of the VE-risk assessment process includes stakeholder engagement, which is why the TAG is being involved now, instead of before or after it's already completed. The TAG's participation is what will make the VE-risk assessment more meaningful.

TAG members discussed how although battery technology has made significant leaps in recent years, technology ends up being a few years behind, due to US Coast Guard (USCG) requirements. The group discussed how although the current design has received approval from USCG, sometimes requirements can change based on new information.

Review of Propulsion Studies

Rachel Rowe shared a presentation on three past propulsion studies which were completed back in 2016, with the caveat that certain things, such as costs and battery manufacturers, may have changed since the studies were published.

She also flagged that there is a framework included in the Glosten Concept Design Report which weights different propulsion options and could potentially be reworked by the TAG to help with forming their recommendations. Another member has the automated spreadsheet that ties to that framework, which the group can use.

Questions & Answers

Question: Can using more, smaller generators (parallel gen-set) help optimize efficiency?

Answer: This is a good follow-up item to ask the naval architects.

Comment: The propulsion system lifespan should be re-evaluated for the all-electric vessel.

Answer: This will be part of the VE-risk assessment.

Question: Is there a level between the series hybrid and the plug-in hybrid where fuel costs could be reduced by rebalancing the generators?

Answer: That's a good question to ask.

Question: At some point, a 40% reduction in operating expenses was touted for an electric propulsion system. Are we now past that? What about the cost of building? Are battery replacements included in these estimates?

Answer: These estimates are from 2016 and do not include upfront costs. This is just a comparison of the options from 2016. The repower costs in this chart include replacement batteries.

Question: Will dredging the terminal have to be a capital investment in coming years?

Answer: That's not a part of these studies or the work done to date. It will need to happen regardless of the propulsion system we select.

Question: How often are you replacing engines?

Answer: We had our previous engines for 20 years. The cost of rebuilding was about the same as the direct replacement cost for those engines.

Question: What can't the current vessel last longer? It has 1% wear on the vessel body. And we just replaced the engines.

Answer: The surveyor reports done in 2019 have a lot of thorough analysis on how long we can, and how much it would cost, to maintain the current vessel. We also looked at whether Skagit County will be able to afford the cost of replacement in 20 years.

Decisions

- Sandy McKean was elected unanimously as the TAG chair.
- TAG members accepted the summary notes from Meeting #1 as final.
- The framework included in section 3, pages 26-61 of the Concept Design Report will be reviewed and considered as a potential framework for the TAG to compare and contrast options.

Action Items

Skagit County will

- Distribute summary notes to TAG members.
- Include the meeting Zoom link in the email with read-ahead materials from now on.
- Establish a Teams channel for group communications and file sharing.
- Work to get unanswered questions addressed (e.g., parallel gen set and hybrid/plug-in hybrid, etc.)

TAG members will

- Members will review:
 - New Lummi Island Replacement Ferry Propulsion System Selection Study (emailed by Adam Paull on December 8).
 - Framework included in section 3, pages 26-61 of the Concept Design Report.
- Chair McKean will:
 - Participate in Core Team meetings going forward.
 - Share an excel spreadsheet that will be helpful as the group compares and contrasts options.

MFA will

- Draft summary notes
- Get Core team meetings established and ensure Sandy is invited.