**SSA Update – FEBRUARY 2023**

INTRODUCTION:

Working closely with the Port Council members John Cahill and Joe Sollito, we have served the interests of the island and have worked to balance the needs for transportation to support islanders. I would point out that islander’s needs can be contradictory – in some cases desiring more vehicle capacity, in other cases wanting to restrict vehicles travelling to and from the island.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Reliable transport, clear communications and economical passage remain the focus of my attention as one of the five Board Members. In terms of reliability, the SSA in 2022 ran 17,021 Vineyard one-way trips and had 58 cancellations for mechanical reasons – the mechanical cancellation rate was less than 1% - in fact, it was .34% - significantly better than the 5% goal for Washington State Ferries. (See graph below) Because the Vineyard has so many trips - 20 trips each way scheduled per day in off season, 26 per day in shoulder season and 31 weekdays/28 weekends in summer season - we tend to view the boat line as a bridge and react strongly to any interruption of schedule or service.

The purchase of three identical, low-profile vessels meets the desire I voiced in March of 2020 to move to a fleet of identical boats to minimize training, spare part inventories and provide hull designs suitable for conversion to alternative fuels when that conversion is practical. There is an option to purchase a fourth such vessel.

This past year, the SSA responded to the Island need for more excursion spaces due to increased island population and visitors causing growing demand for vehicle spaces by increasing the number of spaces held for Islanders booking 24 hours and 7 days in advance of sailing day; further the SSA is looking at creating 30 day advance of sailing vehicle spaces. Starting this year, due to increased Island demand, the amount of advance Headstart bookings were doubled for Islanders.

Contrary to a recent assertion written to the Vineyard paper, the SSA model is not “to bring over as many cars as possible.” The service has run the same capacity on the Vineyard routes since 2018. The SSA works with the MV Commission on several issues, including climate and traffic, but is not an arbiter of how many cars are allowed on the island.

I would note that during the Covid pandemic of 2020 and 2021, the SSA managed its finances well and, astonishingly to me, never had to cancel a trip due to lack of healthy crew. The financial situation of the SSA remains solid and provides the ability to focus resources on the activities in process.

The SSA is the only ferry service in the US that is totally funded by its users – there is no state or federal funding of operations. Although the SSA works with multiple sources of grants, costs are borne by island travelers. This makes the economics of decisions an important element of Board decisions. In 2022, the SSA Board approved a Memorandum of Understanding with CCRTA (Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority) to be able to access $28.1million in federal funds which will be used to convert the three new vessels.

Regarding Islander fares and economics, there are no limits on the number of islander excursion vehicles on each trip. Regarding excursion fares, the excursion rate goes up in the season as a reflection of demand on space in general; SSA has had requests in the past to assess a flat rate all year, but as that would increase the off season fares, it proved unpopular as most islanders travel less frequently during the season. (Excursion travel has always been less in the summer than the remainder of the year.) SSA could revisit that if there was significant demand.

As a note, regarding trips and volume, through 31 January advanced reservation vehicle spaces are up 10.9% compared to last year.



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IN PROCESS:

The recent Board decision to appoint a working group of a board member, a port council member, and a member of management to work with an outside consultant to review the SSA IT infrastructure is imperative as it addresses enterprise risk to the SSA and to its customers stemming from existing systems, hardware, and applications. IT was an issue raised in meetings and in reports; I am pleased that this is being addressed.

Additionally, in relation to technology, the SSA is working with a new vendor to update the WiFi equipment on all vessels. About this time last year, the Board awarded a contract for a new web-site and mobile app, which has been in development through 2022 with launch anticipated later this year. For the ESL travelers, the new website will have the ability to be translated into multiple languages including Portuguese and Spanish. As part of the SSA Title VI policy implementation, SSA is reviewing signage and other passenger communication protocols.

The SSA needs to develop a proactive communication plan – both to inform islanders with consistent and clear messages on their travel and to provide timely, information to islanders regarding issues and progress. This has been raised with management and the Board.

Additionally, there are business decision and process issues that need to be addressed so that actions can be taken in a timely manner and communicated internally across the SSA organization and on to the travelling public. These issues have been raised to management and to the Board.

In looking forward, the SSA is in the early stages of a strategic planning initiative. Additionally, the SSA recently commissioned and received a report on alternative propulsion for vessels. The 3 newly purchased vessels are more suitable for conversion to hybrid or elect power than the current fleet, but to make electric vessels a reality, it will take regional planning beyond SSA. The issue balances, in my opinion, on a fulcrum of economics and practicality. Having said that, the SSA continues to attend and meet with ferry operators, designers and consultants on alternative fuels while working cooperatively with the MVC Climate and Energy groups

Regarding green initiatives, the SSA is bringing electric buses online and is installing solar canopies at the Landers Road Parking Lot and the new Woods Hole Terminal. SSA is seeking proposals to add solar canopies at the Palmer Ave Parking Lot.

The new WH terminal complex is designed to meet net zero efficiency ratings, with solar power and geothermal heating/cooling as part of design. The new shoreside and marine facilities in WH are designed to accommodate a 2-foot rise in sea levels through a combination of raising the elevation of the landside site, dry-floodproofing the terminal and utility building, and designing the piers so that can be raised to accommodate future sea level rise as necessary.

The hiring of a Chief Operating Officer has a goal of mine since 2020, but had to be put on hold during the Covid pandemic. The process is underway. I have advocated for this position to free up the General Manager from the multiple issues that demand his attention and to allow the organization to operated more effectively and to execute more quickly.

Attached first graph below is included to demonstrate the islands reliance upon morning truck trips to the island and afternoon return to the mainland.

The second graph is to illustrate the volume of calls for reservations on opening day. Clearly people get in early in effort to secure favorable scheduling and volume drops dramatically through the morning. The SSA is looking at breaking the opening into smaller segments and determining how to deal with issues where travel spans multiple periods.

