



Loudoun County, Virginia

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NEWS RELEASE

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Loudoun County Completes Potomac River Ferry Service Study

During its Tuesday, November 16, 2021 meeting, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors will receive a presentation on the completed White's Ferry study.

Board of Supervisors Meeting

The meeting is scheduled to begin on November 16 at 5:00 p.m. in the Board Room at Loudoun County Government Center, located at 1 Harrison Street SE, Leesburg. The meeting will be televised on Comcast Government Channel 23 and Verizon FiOS Channel 40 and livestreamed at loudoun.gov/meetings.

- [Read the staff report and study.](#)

Study Scope & Background

The study of White's Ferry operations was commissioned by the Board earlier this year and was conducted jointly with Montgomery County, Maryland. The study evaluated the short-term options for resuming ferry service between the two counties, long-term benefits, and issues and opportunities for operating the ferry. Ferry service across the Potomac River is recognized as an important part of the region's transportation network.

Prior to closing, White's Ferry transported approximately 600 to 800 vehicles per day across the river and connected bicyclists and pedestrians between the two counties. White's Ferry ceased operations on December 28, 2020, following a broken ferry cable and a Circuit Court opinion in a private lawsuit over the use of private land for the ferry landing in Virginia.

Summary of Study Findings

Among the study's findings include issues associated with facilities and properties needed to operate a ferry, such as limited road widths and the lack of shoulders on the access roads leading to White's Ferry. In addition, space for parking and vehicles that are waiting for the ferry is limited.

While not required for immediately restarting ferry service, the study also identified a number of improvements that could be considered for the sustainability of the ferry in the future. These include operational challenges where the previous ferry service delivered two round trips per hour (15-minute overall trip time one way), which the study indicated would be insufficient to meet projected future demand from commuters. Additionally, the study indicated that the existing ferry would need to be replaced in the next decade.

In addition, the study showed that without the ferry service, travel time between the Town of Poolesville in Maryland and the Town of Leesburg in Virginia will increase considerably in the future. According to 2018 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 11,100 jobs for which commuters could use the ferry between Loudoun County and Montgomery County. In 2019, around 4% of the potential 11,100 workers used the ferry to commute. The forecasted volume of trips between the two counties is projected to increase by 40% between 2019 and 2040.

Potential Ferry Alternatives

The study highlighted potential service alternatives to restore ferry service in the short term, enhanced ferry service in the long term and a no-ferry alternative.

In the short term, the study estimated that restarting the ferry service would require minimal low-cost actions. These include inspecting the existing vessel to confirm its seaworthiness, hiring staff and restringing the ferry cable.

In the long term, changes in infrastructure, including improvements in staffing, roadways enhancements to support queuing vehicles, fare collection, lighting, and vessel capacity could be considered to improve the system's capacity.

Economic Impact

The study conducted an analysis to quantify the economic impacts of the ferry service on the region. Market impacts of resuming ferry operations include travel time savings, travel cost savings, safety savings, the value of emissions avoided, and the value of trips not taken.

- Under the restore ferry service alternative, total impacts are estimated to be a little over \$9 million in 2023 and \$13 million in 2040.
- Under the enhance ferry service alternative, total impacts are estimated to be approximately \$9 million in 2023 and \$24 million in 2040.

Ferry Options

The ferry study reviewed resumption of operations assuming a number of operating and land ownership scenarios including private operator/private landowners; private ownership/public landowners and public operator/public landowners. While operating the ferry under various ownership models does have different issues and cost responsibilities to be aware of, it is feasible to operate a ferry service under any of these scenarios. While the study does not specifically discuss nor recommend a preferred path towards resolving the operator/landowner relationship, successful resolution does remain relevant as an outstanding issue.

Public Input

Members of the public may provide input to the Board in writing, by phone and during its public meetings. To learn more about how to provide feedback to the Board of Supervisors, visit loudoun.gov/bos.

More Information

More information about the White's Ferry study, including a link to sign up for updates, may be found on the [study webpage](#).

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