



## MEMORANDUM

February 7, 2019

**TO:** MEMBERS, PORT COMMISSION  
Hon. Kimberly Brandon, President  
Hon. Willie Adams, Vice President  
Hon. Gail Gilman  
Hon. Victor Makras  
Hon. Doreen Woo Ho

**FROM:** Elaine Forbes  
Executive Director

**SUBJECT:** Informational Presentation on the Water Emergency Transportation Agency (WETA) Small Vessel Feasibility Study

**DIRECTOR'S RECOMMENDATION:** No Action – Informational Presentation

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In March 2018, the San Francisco Water Emergency Transportation Authority (WETA) Board directed WETA staff to conduct a study to explore the opportunity to integrate ferry service using small vessels into WETA's water transportation services. The WETA Board believes there is strong potential for small vessel operations to increase water transportation capability and ridership from existing ferry facilities, and supplement its large ferry vessel operations.

The study work was led by a WETA Board Advisory Committee and supported by a team from ARUP Consultants and WETA staff with the skills and knowledge necessary to provide a concept-level analysis. This review includes concepts for small vessel services and operational needs and develops associated capital and operating cost estimates. The study was additionally supported by a Technical Advisory Committee with planning and transportation professionals representing the Bay Area including, Port staff.

The small vessel feasibility study identifies opportunities for WETA to pursue the development of a small vessel fleet and services. The study identifies specific routes that are best suited for small vessel services and a potential "pilot" program where small boats could be used to test market potential for new and/or expanded ferry service. The study identifies specific areas that would require further study prior to the WETA Board

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taking future actions to make the necessary financial obligations to build and operate a small vessel fleet.

The feasibility study envisions a fleet of up to eight small vessels in operation at full buildout. For purposes of the study, the consultant assumed that a small vessel is approximately 30 feet in length and capable of carrying up to 75 passengers.

This staff report will provide an overview of:

- a. the types and sizes of vessels analyzed
- b. the potential service areas and operational cost considerations
- c. next steps

## **PORT STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

The WETA Small Vessel Feasibility Analysis addresses the following Port Strategic Objectives:

- **Evolution:** Transform the waterfront to respond to changing public and Port needs.
- **Engagement:** Increase the public's awareness of the purpose and benefits of Port functions and activities.
- **Productive:** Attract and retain tenants that build an economically viable Port.
- **Equity:** Ensure Port activities advance equity and public benefit, and attract a diversity of people to the Waterfront.
- **Sustainable:** Practice environmental stewardship to limit climate change and protect the Bay.

## **OVERVIEW**

WETA is a regional public transit agency tasked with operating and expanding ferry service on the San Francisco Bay and with coordinating the water transit response to regional emergencies. WETA carries over 2.8 million passengers annually utilizing a fleet of 14 high speed passenger-only ferry vessels. WETA currently serves the cities of Alameda, Oakland, Richmond, San Francisco, South San Francisco and Vallejo. WETA is committed to working with cities, communities and stakeholders to establish new ferry routes where the proposed route reduce traffic congestion in the transit corridor, is cost effective and financially viable.

The Port has and continues to collaborate with WETA, Golden Gate Bridge and Transportation District and other private water transportation providers to enhance water transportation along San Francisco's waterfront. The Port and WETA are actively working together to create two new projects now underway to expand the waterfront transportation network along the San Francisco waterfront: 1) The expansion of the Downtown Ferry Terminal; new Gate G opened for service in December 2018; and 2) creation of a new Mission Bay Ferry Landing. Port staff provided the Port Commission a status update on the Port's various water transportation projects at the June 12, 2018

commission meeting<sup>1</sup>.

The WETA small vessel feasibility study identifies opportunities for WETA to pursue the development of a small vessel fleet and services. The study includes specific routes that are best suited for small vessel services and potential “pilot” routes where small boats could be used to test market potential for ferry service. The study also identifies specific areas that would require further study prior to the WETA Board taking separate, future actions to make the necessary financial obligations to build and operate a small vessel fleet. Prior to implementing a small vessel operation, WETA would need to undertake a detailed analysis of market demand and operating cost, investigate vessel design and procurement options, and a funding strategy. Pending input from the full WETA Board of Directors, the results of this study will be finalized into a WETA Small Vessel Exploratory Plan and presented to the WETA Board for consideration at a future date.

The feasibility study envisions a fleet of up to eight small vessels in operation at full buildout. Similarly-sized vessels are currently in operation at the Port of Long Beach, where they are operated by a contract operator for Long Beach Transit. The vessels are assumed to be compatible with WETA’s existing facilities, using a high freeboard that is therefore optimal for accessibility. Such a vessel could also potentially operate as a pilot project at low freeboard marinas and docks with a temporary ramp structure to ensure accessibility is maintained. A key assumption in the study is that small vessels can be delivered in half the time it would take for larger vessels, approximately one year for delivery. Actual vessel size and specifications would be developed as a part of any further analysis of the small vessel operating concept.

As part of the study, the consultant developed a series of small vessel implementation principles and service design guidelines to help focus the planning effort and guide future development of a small vessel fleet. Among the implementation principles proposed are that small vessels would be compatible with existing WETA facilities, adhere to WETA’s ride quality standards, and be operated in a manner consistent with public transit service ensuring affordable fares, accountability, and integration with the regional transit network. Additionally, the consultant proposes service design guidelines to define potential small vessel applications that are consistent with these implementation principles. Potential applications include operating small vessels to enhance existing services during period of lower demand and providing local service consisting of short haul, high frequency routes.

## **NEW SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES**

Based on these implementation principles and service design guidelines, specific services that were identified through the study for small vessels include: connecting service to a new Mission Bay terminal from the San Francisco Ferry Building, service between a new Treasure Island terminal and the Ferry Building, and supplemental service during periods of reduced demand at central bay terminals such as Oakland,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sfport.com/sites/default/files/Commission/Item%2011B%20Informational%20re%20Water%20Transit%202.pdf>

Alameda, Harbor Bay, South San Francisco, Richmond and San Francisco. In addition, the study recommends pursuing new or “pilot” projects with small vessels, as a way to test new markets or new service periods. Pilot projects along San Francisco’s waterfront may include service to Fort Mason and Hunters Point. Pilot projects would be implemented in a later phase of the program and would likely occur in the 2023 - 2025 time range.

At a cost of \$3 million per vessel, the study estimates the proposed fleet of eight small vessels costing up to \$24 million. A small vessel berthing facility is projected to cost \$5 million and will be necessary as a fleet of eight boats will need to be stored overnight and maintained. Operating expenses could total up to \$14 million annually at full buildout.

The feasibility analysis aligns with WETA’s Strategic Plan, which was adopted by the WETA Board in 2016 and presented to the Port Commission at its September 27, 2016 meeting.<sup>2</sup>

## **NEXT STEPS**

This feasibility analysis was presented to the WETA Board at its January meeting. The Board responded favorably about the study. The WETA Board will consider moving forward with a small vessel Plan at its March Board meeting. Port staff will continue to coordinate with WETA staff on how the Port can assist and facilitate the small vessel operations should it be implemented.

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<sup>2</sup>[https://sfport.com/sites/default/files/Commission/Documents/Commission%20Meeting%20Staff%20Reports/2016%20Commission%20Meeting%20Items/SEP27/Item%2010A%20WETA%20Strategic%20Plan\\_%20final.pdf](https://sfport.com/sites/default/files/Commission/Documents/Commission%20Meeting%20Staff%20Reports/2016%20Commission%20Meeting%20Items/SEP27/Item%2010A%20WETA%20Strategic%20Plan_%20final.pdf)