LUMMI ISLAND FERRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (LIFAC)

Work Session #3

October 1, 2013

CALL TO ORDER

Mike McKenzie called the work session to order at 6:35 p.m. in the Lummi Island Fire Hall. Bellingham, Washington.

ROLL CALLS

Present: Mike McKenzie, Greg Brown, Stu Clark, Chuck Antholt, Chris Colburn, and Bob Busch.
Absent: Josh Zender

FLAG SALUTE

MINUTES CONSENT

1. Minutes were approved for the September 3, 2013 LIFAC Meeting.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION / WORK SESSION

(This presentation was originally scheduled for an earlier meeting, but due to conflicts was postponed)

Colburn brought two guests (co-workers @ WTA Operations) Pat Simons and Mary Sweeper. Pat and Mary work in the Para-Transit area. They brought the electronic equipment that is used by the transit operators in order to demonstrate to LIFAC how much data can be easily collected using it. This topic is of great interest to LIFAC as related to proposed electronic ticketing programs for the Lummi Ferry. A proposed system will also need to provide reliable ticket data and service information. See the attached Outline provided for the Presentation.

Colburn pointed out that this was not a sales pitch for this equipment as it physically would not work on the ferry. He went on to say that this system is used to collect large amounts of information for their service. By demonstrating a concrete example of a working system the LIFAC members and public in attendance would see what the system can do rather than just continue to talk about abstract systems. Colburn went on to talk about the history of the system that has been in service for the last six years. Last year WTA Para-Transit provided ~180,000 one-way trips that are expensive rides for people with disabilities and it is the WTA’s responsibility to be as responsible as it can. What this means is to be efficient by being able to group rides together. This newer system replaced a system that included paper manifests that were kept by the drivers. There are about 200 data fields that are used for a single one-way trip for one person. Colburn commented that when coming across on the Ferry this evening he thought that there might be dozens of data fields that might be collected with an electronic system. Bits of data that are easily acquired will provide valuable information for the service. Over the six years of service there was only one significant down time which was highly unusual service failure from overseas that remains unexplainable. The equipment being demonstrated is for indoor use (inside a Transit Bus) and would not be applicable for the ferry. Basically the units are touch screen tablet computers without a keyboard (has a dropdown keyboard like a smart phone). The system has a dispatching system, canned text entries, free text entries, display geography, jpeg picture/diagram/map files for locations like trailer parks, etc. In reference to maintenance on damaged equipment, there are back-up units. If the WTA shop can’t fix them they are sent to the IT services. Colburn pointed out that out of over 600 riders on a work day that WTA must know what they are doing, did they get delivered, are they on the bus, have they been picked up yet, etc. With the old paper system it could take 6-10 weeks to transcribe all of the usable information into a system for management, organizational or scheduling use. Now
this information is available is some cases immediately but usually by the end of the day or the next day. He pointed out that NOBODY misses the old paper system! There was a little resistance to change at first, but it only lasted about 15 minutes when they system was kicked off. The new system was transformative in providing more attention available for focusing on safe driving and on servicing riders.

After a quick explanation of the system and question as to how much of the equipment might need to actually be on the ferry, Colburn passed out information on the Getac PS336 Handheld system that works on a cellular system (attached). The WTA system uses a cellular network to communicate between their field equipment and their base. It also includes a GPS antenna for location information.

Pat and Mary demonstrated how the system displayed a service area map (zoom in/out pan, etc., run stops (nursing homes, medical facilities, apartments, mobile courts, w/location maps etc.), display of scheduled trips, odometer checks, dialog boxes, message tabs, manifest tabs, times (depart, arrive, perform, dwell, etc.), rider name, pickup location, drop off location, number of riders and attendants (how is this tracked on the ferry?), mobility aid, disability codes, comments, tracking fares (still use fair boxes - don't swipe cards), payroll system, and personal care attendants.

Antholt asked how was software selected? In his job Colburn traced software companies that provide this type of service. This was "off the shelf" software.

Clark asked about the data base and was told that there is a central data base in the WTA office for the most important information and only minimal data is kept on the field units.

Brown asked if the system would work should the ferry have to locate in Fairhaven and was informed that this would not be a problem.

McKenzie pointed out that this would make the ferry system more transparent. He also commented on the large number of fields being used. Brown commented that the ferry system would only be able to use and enter the number of fields that the purser has time to do.

McKenzie asked if this system eliminated man-hours, and response was that if they went back to the paper system, WTA would require more buses and drivers. It may take the driver a little more time to enter the information, but it takes much less time to generate and use the data.

Antholt asked if the software calculated the least cost in terms of time and distance. He was told that the software will organize the information received based on the number of runs, demands, etc., and makes an estimate. WTA actually has someone who works the day before to set up schedules.

McKenzie asked what the new software was going to cost for the system. Colburn answered that it was around $225,000, based on a unit rate to include license fees, warranties, software modifications, enhancements, etc.

Colburn again addressed the Getac PS336 Handheld unit pointing out that it is an example (made by the same provider of the WTA system equipment) that is much less expensive, that is rugged for the ferry service, has an attachment for Bluetooth, card scan, barcode reader, and that can be used by the pursuer. In summary, the ferry is a bus route with two stops, high frequency, and a much simpler solution than WTA, but the demonstration should show that the capability is there to have an electronic system to meets the need of the Lummi Island Ferry.

As the folks packed up and some walked out the door McKenzie commented that he heard from a County Council person that the docks have been rewired and bolstered with signal power for receiving phone service. The County has begun testing of a Beta System that the Abart said was going to be done. They have been using county credit cards and that signal is not a problem. Their biggest issue is the effects of salt water and reliability.

OPEN SESSION

Lummi Island Ferry Advisory Committee, 5/21/2012,
(During open session, audience members can speak to the council on any issue. Each speaker should state his or her name for the record and will be given three minutes to address the council. Council staff will keep track of time limits and inform speakers when they have thirty seconds left to conclude their comments.)

McKenzie commented that the public comment could be done after the presentation as the presenters were time limited to the 7:50 pm Ferry.

Bill Lee was curious if any of the LIFAC members have heard anything about how Public Works plans to implement the fine for no fare payment. Can anyone describe what the operational mechanism will actually be? He raised this issue because operationally this could be very significant and he is concerned about this. McKenzie commented that he sent out a letter for the Council Packet from LIFAC stating that the committee supported PLIC in its objection to such an Ordinance.

Candy Jones thanked the County for getting Lummi Lake fixed. She also talked about parking during drydock. She objected to the parking areas set aside for the County Workers rather than making them park across the street. The areas designated should be for handicapped people who should not have to walk across the traffic and long distances. Late one evening she was unable to find a parking space in a reasonable walking distance for her and had to return to down for the night.

Jim Dickenson requested a working copy of the NPV model so that he could change some of the data based on more reasonable information. As the data is changed, how does that affect the overall evaluation results?

Bill Lee as an addendum to ferry fine business is that a lot of the motivation for this comes from the State of Washington Auditors Office.

Jim Dickenson pointed out that the State does not recognize the ferry as an essential service. It is the only way for some to get home.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Replacement Ferry Discussions: Antholt passed out a document titled “Draft, Planning for disruption of Lummi Island Ferry Service”. This document is an example of some of the contingency planning that he feels LIFAC should do. The document presents three different issues meant to get us thinking about contingency planning. McKenzie said that this can be on the agenda for next month. Brown commented that this was much the same a risk analysis issues that we have brought up at previous meetings. Antholt will send a copy to Rhayma Blake so that it can be reviewed by PLIC.

NEW BUSINES

1. McKenzie commented that the ferry was out of service today due to repairs to a latching mechanism that the ferry crew was working around that put them in an unsafe position. Also there is a steering mechanism that has failed and Foss Shipyard is coming in on Thursday with the repair parts to fix the problem. He also commented that there were no surprises in drydock, but they did have to replace a generator that cost an extra day or two. They saved some money by grinding the apron on the way across to drydock with the crew rather than hiring a sandblaster. Antholt asked if LIFAC was going to get a copy/report of repairs and the condition of the vessel. McKenzie said to expect that in 3-4 weeks (next LIFAC Mtg?). We might also receive some information on this from the Coast Guard as well.

2. McKenzie questioned the County how LIFAC would get an official opinion in writing about what kind of shape the Chief is in and an estimated length of service. The answer was that nobody could answer that question in a quantitative way.

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TENTATIVE AGENDA FOR THE NEXT MEETING OR WORK SESSION

The date for the next meeting is Tuesday July 24th.

CALL TO ORDER
ROLL CALL
FLAG SALUTE
MINUTES CONSENT
TOPICS
   Ferry Replacement Contingency Issues
   NPV Model Review

ADJOURN

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The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

The Committee approved these minutes on 11/19/13, 2012

ATTEST:

Michael McKenzie, Committee Chair