

TO: CHAIR DONOVAN AND MEMBERS OF THE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

FROM: JOHN WARNOCK, CAITY GILDART, MIKE BRYAND AND NICK MAVODONES

DATE: FEBRUARY 20, 2025

RE: *DRAFT* PROPOSAL FOR PEAKS ISLAND VEHICLE RESERVATIONS

Foreword: This memo contains the initial staff proposal for Peaks Island Vehicle Reservations (initially presented to the operations committee in January 2025), including synthesized comments received from the public via email from the period February 3, 2025, to February 13, 2025, and from comments provided during the operations committee workshop on February 13th, 2025. The memo has been prepared to inform staff, operations committee, and board members of the evaluations of the initial draft proposal, and for the public's benefit and information.

The following outlines District staff's proposal for a vehicle reservation system to and from Peaks Island. Listed below is a summary of the components of this proposal followed by additional narrative with further explanation.

- All personal and commercial vehicles transported must have a reservation
- Reservations can be made online, in person and via telephone
- A reservation "office" and phone number will be staffed with one person Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM until 4:00 PM
- Reservations will be one way only
- There will be no charge for reservations
- Commercial and non-commercial vehicles over 6,000 gross vehicle weight (GVW), trailers and other heavy equipment, will not be permitted to make reservations online

- Vehicles cannot get in line prior to 30 minutes before departure time and no later than 15 minutes before departure time
- A fee will be assessed for any cancellations, no shows or changes
- Reservations will open 30 days prior to the beginning of each month
- When space is available, reservations are open up to one hour before departure
- There will be no standby line in Portland or at Peaks
- Determination must be made on how to handle bulk purchase of “blue tickets”

Analysis of Public Comments regarding the Vehicle Reservation Proposal:

The primary concerns raised by residents regarding the proposed vehicle reservation system for the Peaks Island ferry include:

1. Inconvenience and Unpredictability:

- *Difficulty in predicting exact travel times due to traffic, medical appointments, and unforeseen delays.*
- *Added stress and inconvenience, especially for those traveling long distances or with children, pets, and baggage.*

2. Impact on Daily Life:

- *Disruption to the daily routines of both year-round and seasonal residents.*
- *The current first-come, first-served system, despite its flaws, is considered more predictable and manageable.*

3. Accessibility and Fairness:

- *Potential discrimination against those with mobility issues, the elderly, and those not tech-savvy.*
- *Calls for discounts or preferential treatment for island residents to ensure they are not disadvantaged.*

4. Economic Impact:

- *Negative impact on local businesses and tradespeople may find it difficult to adhere to a strict reservation system.*

- *Concerns that tourists might monopolize reservations, leaving residents at a disadvantage.*

5. Health and Safety Risks:

- *Potential health and safety risks in emergencies if residents cannot secure a reservation for urgent medical care or veterinary services.*

6. Enforcement and Administration:

- *Doubts about the feasibility and practicality of enforcing the reservation system, including managing lines and handling no-shows.*
- *Increased staffing needs and higher operational costs to manage the system.*

7. Community Discontent:

- *Frustration and dissatisfaction among residents who feel their needs are not being prioritized.*
- *Potential for conflicts between reservation holders and those needing to travel on short notice.*

8. Environmental Impact:

- *Increased idling and traffic congestion if vehicles arrive early and cannot queue up, leading to environmental pollution.*

Overall, these concerns highlight the potential negative impacts of the proposed reservation system on the daily lives of residents, local businesses, and the overall community.

ALL VEHICLES MUST HAVE A RESERVATION

Staff believes this is would significantly mitigate congestion at the Portland Terminal and on Welch Street on Peaks Island. Only vehicles with reservations would be permitted to queue up at either location. Drivers could do so no earlier than 30 minutes prior to departure.

RESERVATIONS MADE ONLINE, BY PHONE OR EMAIL

Staff believe offering multiple ways for customers to make reservations is the best approach. Online reservations for personal vehicles could be made at any time; however, those customers who would prefer to make reservations via phone or email could do so by contacting the “reservation office” during business hours. It is proposed the “reservation office” be open Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM until 4:00 PM. One staff member would be assigned to handle reservations made via telephone or in person.

RESERVATIONS WILL BE ONE WAY ONLY

In order to implement this system, it will be necessary to scan the bar code on the ticket. By doing so the reservation can be validated for that particular trip and, consequently, not be accepted again. Provided customers know the return date, they will be able to purchase two one-way tickets in order to complete their round trip; however, should the return trip date and time be unknown, the customer can simply purchase a one way ticket and, at a later date, purchase a one way ticket for the return trip.

THERE WILL BE NO CHARGE FOR RESERVATIONS

It is contemplated that there will be no charge for vehicle reservations under this proposal. It is important to note that there are currently regulations in the Tariff that allow reservations for commercial vehicles. In fact, the District generates about \$20,000 per year in revenue from commercial vehicle reservations; however, under the proposed system, we do not believe that charging a certain class of vehicles, and not another class, would be appropriate. Consequently, the recommendation is to not charge an extra fee as all vehicles would be required to have a reservation.

COMMERCIAL VEHICLES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO MAKE RESERVATIONS ONLINE

Given the various sizes and shapes of commercial vehicles, and that impact on available deck space, these vehicles will have to make reservations through the “reservation office” either in person or over the phone.

Public concerns about the impact of the proposed reservation system on commercial vehicles:

- 1. Specifically, respondents highlight the potential negative impact on service providers, contractors, and businesses that rely on the ferry for transporting goods and services.*
- 2. There is a suggestion to address commercial traffic separately by encouraging large commercial vehicles to use a barge instead of the car ferry to reduce congestion. This recommendation aims to alleviate some of the pressure on the ferry system and ensure that essential services and deliveries can continue without significant disruption.*

VEHICLES CANNOT GET IN LINE PRIOR TO 30 MINUTES BEFORE DEPARTURE AND NO LATER THAN 15 MINUTES BEFORE DEPARTURE TIME

The purpose of these time limitations is to reduce congestion at the Portland Terminal and on Welch Street on Peaks Island. Under this system, a fixed number of vehicles will

be allowed to make reservations per trip, so the vessel crew will know how many and which vehicles are scheduled each trip. Therefore, only those with reservations will be permitted to queue up for that particular trip. The 30 minute requirement ensures vehicles are not arriving too early and, consequently, taking up space where there is very limited real estate. The 15 minute requirement ensures all vehicles will be in the staging lane in time for the crew to manage loading of the vessel in an orderly fashion.

Public concerns regarding the vehicle waiting line for the Peaks Island ferry:

- 1. Increased Idling and Traffic Congestion: There is a concern that vehicles arriving early and unable to queue up could lead to increased idling and traffic congestion, resulting in environmental pollution.*
- 2. Virtual Line System: A recommendation is made to introduce a virtual line system where people can take a number and wait for a notification to board, similar to a deli counter. This would help manage congestion without the need for strict reservations.*
- 3. Traffic Management: It is suggested to assign staff to manage traffic and direct vehicles during busy periods, using reflective vests for visibility and better signage to guide passengers and vehicles.*
- 4. Enhanced Queuing Systems: The document recommends reorganizing the queuing system on Peaks Island to reduce congestion, such as extending the car line up Welch Street instead of Island Avenue.*
- 5. Employee Parking Review: There is a suggestion to reevaluate the use of employee parking areas near the ferry terminal to create more space for vehicle queuing and reduce congestion.*

These comments and recommendations aim to address the potential negative impacts of the proposed reservation system on vehicle waiting lines and overall traffic management.

A FEE WILL BE ASSESSED FOR ANY CANCELLATIONS, NO SHOWS OR CHANGES

A penalty fee will be assessed for any cancellations or changes in reservations not made at least 72 hours in advance of the scheduled reservations. These will be assessed to the credit/debit card used to book the original reservation. The purpose of this fee is to discourage last-minute changes or customers who decide to book several different times for convenience with the intention of only using the one that best fits their schedule. Customers that do not show up for their scheduled reservation will be assessed the entire cost of the fare.

RESERVATIONS OPEN 30 DAYS PRIOR TO THE BEGINNING OF EACH MONTH

It is contemplated that reservations will open 30 days prior to the beginning of each month for the following month. This would provide sufficient advance opportunities for reservations; however, at the same time, it would not allow reservations, that in some cases could be placeholders, to consume to calendar.

Public concerns provided for advance reservations and the potential difficulties residents may face include:

- 1. Accessing essential services.*
- 2. Dealing with unpredictable travel and responding to emergencies due to the reservation system.*
- 3. Recommendations include maintaining flexibility, allowing for last-minute changes, and implementing a hybrid system to accommodate both reservations and walk-ons.*

WHEN SPACE IS AVAILABLE, RESERVATIONS ARE OPEN UP TO ONE HOUR BEFORE DEPARTURE

This flexibility would allow someone to make a reservation on short notice on those trips where the vehicle deck is not yet full. This would provide some flexibility for those who, for whatever reason, must make plans on short notice.

NO STANDBY LINE IN PORTLAND OR ON WELCH STREET ON PEAKS

Again, we believe a reservation system will significantly reduce congestion in Portland and at Peaks. Therefore, given the limited real estate at the Portland Terminal and on Welch Street on Peaks, that any sort of standby lines should not exist. Should a standby system become desirable, we would suggest that it be located offsite.

Public Concerns regarding not considering vehicle standby line:

- 1. Several public comments regarding suggestions and concerns that imply the need for flexibility in the reservation system.*
- 2. Recommendations for maintaining some flexibility by reserving a few spots on each ferry for non-reserved island residents or allowing for last-minute bookings. This could be interpreted as a form of standby line, where residents and other travelers who do not have reservations can still have a chance to board the ferry.*

- 3. The overall preference for a more flexible approach suggests that a standby line could be a viable solution to address the unpredictability and inconvenience concerns raised by the respondents.*

DETERMINATION MUST BE MADE ON HOW TO HANDLE THE BULK PURCHASE OF "BLUE TICKETS"

Currently, customers are allowed to purchase an unlimited number of tickets at the winter rate just before the summer rates commence. In accordance with the tariff, these can be used during the following 60 days. In the event they are not used, the customer can return them for a refund. Such an arrangement would not align with the vehicle reservation system as contemplated. This topic will require further discussion going forward.

Analysis from public comments:

The proposed reservation system for the Peaks Island ferry could significantly impact the daily lives of residents in several ways:

- 1. **Access to Essential Services:** Residents may face difficulties accessing essential services such as medical appointments, grocery shopping, and emergency services due to the need for advance reservations.*
- 2. **Unpredictable Travel:** The system may not accommodate the unpredictable nature of travel, making it challenging for residents to leave the island on short notice for unforeseen events.*
- 3. **Health and Safety Concerns:** In emergencies, the inability to secure a reservation could pose significant health and safety risks for residents needing urgent medical care or veterinary services for pets.*
- 4. **Impact on Service Providers and Businesses:** Contractors, delivery personnel, and service providers may struggle to schedule and complete jobs on the island, potentially reducing the availability of services and increasing costs for residents.*
- 5. **Economic Impact:** The reservation system could complicate travel plans for tourists and short-term renters, potentially reducing the number of visitors and impacting the local economy.*

6. **Administrative and Enforcement Challenges:** *Enforcing the reservation system could be complex and resource-intensive, requiring additional staff and leading to higher operational costs.*
7. **Community Discontent:** *The system may lead to frustration and dissatisfaction among residents who feel their needs are not being prioritized, potentially creating conflicts between reservation holders and those needing to travel on short notice.*

Overall, the reservation system could disrupt the daily routines of residents, making it harder to manage essential activities and respond to emergencies.

*The **primary concerns** raised by residents regarding the proposed vehicle reservation system for the Peaks Island ferry include:*

1. **Inconvenience and Unpredictability:**

- *Difficulty in predicting exact travel times due to traffic, medical appointments, and unforeseen delays.*
- *Added stress and inconvenience, especially for those traveling long distances or with children, pets, and baggage.*

2. **Impact on Daily Life:**

- *Disruption to the daily routines of both year-round and seasonal residents.*
- *The current first-come, first-served system, despite its flaws, is considered more predictable and manageable.*

3. **Accessibility and Fairness:**

- *Potential discrimination against those with mobility issues, the elderly, and those not tech-savvy.*
- *Calls for discounts or preferential treatment for island residents to ensure they are not disadvantaged.*

4. **Economic Impact:**

- *Negative impact on local businesses and tradespeople who may find it difficult to adhere to a strict reservation system.*
- *Concerns that tourists might monopolize reservations, leaving residents at a disadvantage.*

5. Health and Safety Risks:

- *Potential health and safety risks in emergencies if residents cannot secure a reservation for urgent medical care or veterinary services.*

6. Enforcement and Administration:

- *Doubts about the feasibility and practicality of enforcing the reservation system, including managing lines and handling no-shows.*
- *Increased staffing needs and higher operational costs to manage the system.*

7. Community Discontent:

- *Frustration and dissatisfaction among residents who feel their needs are not being prioritized.*
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8. Environmental Impact:

- *Increased idling and traffic congestion if vehicles arrive early and cannot queue up, leading to environmental pollution.*

Overall, these concerns highlight the potential negative impacts of the proposed reservation system on the daily lives of residents, local businesses, and the overall community.

*Based on the concerns raised by residents, here are some **recommendations** for addressing the issues related to the proposed vehicle reservation system for the Peaks Island ferry:*

1. Maintain Flexibility:

- *Consider maintaining a first-come, first-served system or implementing a hybrid system that allows for both reservations and walk-ons. This would accommodate those with unpredictable schedules and reduce stress.*

2. Implement a Virtual Line System:

- *Introduce a virtual line system where people can take a number and wait for a notification to board, similar to a deli counter. This would help manage congestion without the need for strict reservations.*

3. Provide Resident Discounts and Preferential Treatment:

- Offer significant discounts and preferential reservation slots for island residents, similar to systems used by other island communities. This would ensure residents are not disadvantaged by the new system.

4. Increase Communication and Transparency:

- Improve communication with residents by prominently displaying proposals, meeting minutes, and updates on bulletin boards or a dedicated kiosk at the terminal. Ensure residents are well-informed about any changes and have ample opportunity to provide feedback.

5. Adjust Ferry Schedules and Pricing:

- Consider adjusting ferry schedules to add more trips during peak times and implementing dynamic pricing to manage demand. Higher fares during busy times and lower fares during off-peak times could help balance traffic.

6. Allow for Last-Minute Changes:

- Design the reservation system to accommodate last-minute changes and cancellations without heavy penalties. This would provide the necessary flexibility for residents dealing with unforeseen delays.

7. Research and Learn from Other Communities:

- Conduct thorough research on how other small island communities manage similar issues. Implement best practices and tailor them to fit the specific needs of Peaks Island residents.

8. Pilot Program and Feedback Loop:

- If a reservation system is to be implemented, start with a pilot program and actively seek feedback from residents. Use this feedback to make necessary adjustments before rolling out the system fully.

9. Improve Traffic Management:

- Assign staff to manage traffic and direct vehicles during busy periods. Consider using reflective vests for visibility and better signage to guide passengers and vehicles.

10. Enhance Queuing Systems:

- Reorganize the queuing system on Peaks Island to reduce congestion, such as extending the car line up Welch Street instead of Island Avenue.

11. Provide Additional Ferry Runs:

- *Schedule extra ferry runs during peak times to accommodate increased demand and reduce wait times.*

12. Review Employee Parking:

- *Reevaluate the use of employee parking areas near the ferry terminal to create more space for vehicle queuing and reduce congestion.*