

Passenger ferry to kick off next year

Pilot to determine if ferry is feasible from Vancouver to Lake Oswego

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Plans are moving forward with a \$9.4 million pilot ferry project along the Willamette River, which could see ferry boats carrying passengers from Cathedral Park to Tom McCall Waterfront Park by next summer.

Expected to open in 2022 and run through summer 2024, Frog Ferry will run from St. Johns in North Portland south along the Willamette to the downtown core, with more steps planned. It's the biggest step yet by the nonprofit group Friends of Frog Ferry to bring a public passenger ferry service to the Portland area.

"You will hear from folks that ride passenger-only ferries, anywhere around the world, they really enjoy the trip to work," said Ron Wille, president and chief operating officer of All American Marine, which plans to bid to build the ferry. "It's a quality-of-life enhancement. Instead of spend-



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Ron Wille, president and chief operating officer of All American Marine of Bellingham, Washington, shows off a design for a passenger ferry along the Willamette River. A pilot program will run from 2022 to 2024. Friends Frog Ferry founder Susan Bladholm (left) looks on.

ing an hour in the car, you just sit down at a table or a chair, and you're zipping along the waterfront."

At a news conference next to the Cathedral Park boat ramp on Tuesday, June 8, backers explained the \$9.4 million pilot project will spend the next year designing and building the first ferry and preparing

docks. The city of Portland is applying for \$3.3 million in federal funding to assist the program. The Oregon Department of Transportation also is supplying a \$500,000 grant for the project, funded by the state transit tax.

Should the pilot program prove successful, Friends of Frog Ferry revealed several

proposed stops the ferry may make in the future, including Vancouver's new waterfront, as well as the Oregon Convention Center, Salmon Street, Riverplace and the Oregon Museum of Science & Industry. Other proposed stops include Milwaukie, Lake Oswego and Oregon City.

Final stops will be deter-

mined based on demand. Backers said a trip from Vancouver to Salmon Street by ferry could take about 44 minutes.

No cars allowed

Friends of Frog Ferry is selling the concept as an environmentally friendly alternative to driving. If 1,000 passengers take the ferry each day, backers said, that would cut out about 600 car trips. The ferry also will be affordable and encourage tourism.

Tickets for the ferry will be \$3 one-way for adults, \$2 for senior citizens and free for minors.

Proponents of Frog Ferry say Portland is the only major waterfront city, along with Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and St. Louis, Missouri, without a passenger ferries.

Frog Ferry founder Susan Bladholm said the ferry will avoid long lines or queueing. All ticketing will be done by mobile app.

"In Brisbane, you scan your phone and you just keep walking. I was in Oslo, Norway, right before COVID, watching people and they're literally swinging off their bikes and walking onto the ferry. ... We don't want people queuing up. We certainly don't want people left behind on the docks."

Friends of Frog Ferry will

spend the two-year-long pilot program gathering data on everything from engine size to commuters' seating preferences, with plans to expand the program in future years.

The pilot will begin with a single vessel holding about 70 passengers, along with comfortable indoor seating, concessions and TV screens. No vehicles will be allowed on the ferry.

On weekdays, the ferry would serve just St. Johns and downtown Portland, but Bladholm said it would be flexible and could try out new times and destinations, especially on weekends.

The company expects to operate as many as seven boats by 2026.

"The overall project cost for the pilot project is \$9 million and for the full seven vessel, nine-stop ferry service, out there in the future, will be \$40 million," Bladholm said.

Wille, of All American Marine, said his company specializes in diesel-electric hybrid ferries, such as the 600 passenger Hydra in San Francisco Bay. The first Frog Ferry probably will run on diesel, but can be converted to electric later. The full route would need charging stations. Smaller boats would work downriver, bigger, express boats would serve Vancouver.