

# Potential loss of Anacortes ferry 'devastating to this community,' mayor says

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The ferry Elwha squeezes through the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks in Ballard in July on its way to Lake Union for repairs. The Elwha will be retired... (Mike Siegel / The Seattle Times, file) **More**

By

[JACQUELINE ALLISON](#)

*Skagit Valley Herald*

ANACORTES — The Elwha ferry will be retired from service if the Legislature cuts funding for it, a move that would impact the Anacortes to Sidney, British Columbia, route and further strain the Washington State Ferries (WSF) system.

Gov. Jay Inslee's supplemental budget does not include funding to operate the 52-year-old Elwha, which is out of service and in need of repairs, said WSF spokesman Ian Sterling.

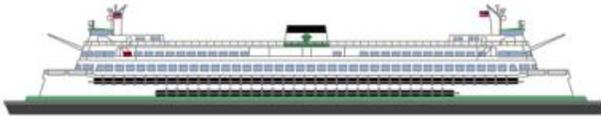
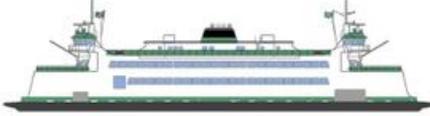
If the Elwha is retired, the only ferry certified to make the international crossing would be the Chelan.

Losing the Elwha would leave WSF with 21 boats in its fleet. Sterling said while the ferry system needs 19 to operate its summer routes, at least two ferries are out for maintenance at any given time, and breakdowns and incidents such as crab-pot entanglements take boats out of service.

# Washington's ferry fleet

The 22-vessel fleet may lose one of its only two ferries certified to make the international crossing from Anacortes to Sidney, British Columbia. The Elwha ferry will be retired from service if the Legislature cuts funding for it.

**Ferry certified to make international crossings**

CLASS:		FERRIES:	BUILT	
<b>JUMBO MARK II</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Length: 460 ft.</li> <li>Passengers: 2,500</li> <li>Autos: 202</li> </ul>		Wenatchee	1997
			Tacoma	1998
			Puyallup	1999
<b>JUMBO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Length: 440 ft.</li> <li>Passengers: 2,000</li> <li>Autos: 188</li> </ul>			<b>BUILT</b> <b>REBUILT</b>
			Spokane	1972 2004
			Walla Walla	1973 2003
<b>SUPER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Length: 382 ft.</li> <li>Passengers: 2,000 (Kaleetan) 1,868</li> <li>Autos: 144</li> </ul>			<b>BUILT</b> <b>REBUILT</b>
			<b>Elwha</b>	<b>1967 ('91)</b> ← <b>Passenger capacity on international service: 1,090</b>
			Kaleetan	1967 2005
			Yakima	1967 2005
<b>OLYMPIC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Length: 362 ft.</li> <li>Passengers: 1,500</li> <li>Autos: 144</li> </ul>			<b>BUILT</b>
			Tokitae	2014
			Samish	2015
			Chimacum	2017
			Suquamish	2018
<b>ISSAQUAH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Length: 328 ft.</li> <li>Passengers: 1,200</li> <li>Autos: 90</li> </ul>			<b>BUILT</b>
			Sealth	1982
				<b>BUILT</b> <b>REBUILT</b>
			Issaquah	1979 ('89)
			Kitsap	1980 ('92)
			Kittitas	1980 ('90)
			Cathlamet	1981 ('93)
			<b>Chelan</b>	<b>1981 ('05)</b> ← <b>Passenger capacity on international service: 1,090</b>
<b>EVERGREEN STATE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Length: 310 ft.</li> <li>Passengers: 1,061</li> <li>Autos: 87</li> </ul>			<b>BUILT</b> <b>REBUILT</b>
			Tillikum	1959 ('95)
<b>KWA-DI TABIL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Length: 274 ft.</li> <li>Passengers: 748</li> <li>Autos: 64</li> </ul>			<b>BUILT</b>
			Chetzemoka	2010
			Salish	2011
			Kennewick	2011

Source: Washington State Ferries

MARK NOWLIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

He said the state has funded a new vessel — a hybrid-electric ferry — but it is not expected to be in service until 2023.

Anacortes Mayor Laurie Gere said in an emailed statement Wednesday that the state should continue to fund the Elwha until it builds new ferries.

“The reduction in service would be devastating to this community,” Gere said in the statement. “The (Anacortes-to-Sidney) international tourism route contributes to the multi-billion dollar tourism industry in our state. ... We believe the best path forward is to keep the international ferry route whole and work to fund building of new ferry vessels. It is short-sighted to reduce this self-supporting ferry route.”

Gere said the route generates an estimated \$1.6 million in annual tax revenue for Anacortes, such as tax collected by hotels and motels.

A 2007 report prepared for the Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County found the Anacortes-to-Sidney ferry service directly and indirectly supported more than 1,400 jobs, \$30 million in annual payroll and \$126 million in annual spending in the Northern Puget Sound region.

“We’ve had (the run) for 99 years,” said Stephanie Hamilton, executive director of the Anacortes Chamber of Commerce. “It’s a great economic tie to the community.”

She said the chamber board passed a resolution Tuesday in support of strategies to save the Elwha ferry.

In 2019, about 116,000 people rode the Anacortes/Sidney route, according to WSF statistics.

Funding for transportation projects has been in jeopardy in light of Initiative 976 — the voter-approved measure that cut car-tab fees to \$30 and is expected to lead to a loss of \$1.9 billion over six years.

Sen. Liz Lovelett, D-Anacortes, said Tuesday it was difficult to find support among legislators for continuing to fund the Elwha.

“(The Elwha) is riddled with problems even after dumping money into it,” she said. “It was hard to figure out a path forward to finance keeping a nearly 60-year-old boat going at this point.”

Lovelett said her focus is on maintaining service on the Anacortes/Sidney and Anacortes/San Juan Island routes, where the Elwha also operates.

“I’m putting my effort into making sure the schedule stays intact and continuing to have the same level of service,” she said.

Lovelett said she opposed a bill — which died in committee — that would have allowed a private ferry to operate between Anacortes and Sidney.

The only member of the public to speak in favor of the bill was David Gudgel, CEO of Clipper Vacations, which operates the Seattle to Victoria, B.C., ferry.

Lovelett said legislators from districts where ferries operate plan to meet next week to further discuss funding ferries.

Sterling said the Elwha recently underwent a \$23 million upgrade to replace steel on its passenger deck. He said the ferry’s vehicle deck also has corroded steel, and WSF is looking into options to complete repairs in sections, if funding comes through.

“There is some light at the end of the tunnel,” he said. “We have a governor and Legislature that understand the importance of ferries — we are still able to build new boats. But we’re a couple years away from seeing a new vessel built again.”

***JACQUELINE ALLISON***