

Article: Fast Ferry demonstration still planned aboard PATRIOT II



November 15, 2012|By Jon Cawley, jcawley@dailypress.com | 757-247-4635

A proposal to test the viability of a Hampton Roads fast ferry commuter service is arguably adrift but not dead in the water.

Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation director Thelma Drake said Tuesday her department is "in the midst" of receiving proposals from one or more fast ferry-related companies that want to demonstrate the feasibility of a network of catamaran-style ferries to transport commuters between various shoreline locations throughout Hampton Roads.

But a Nantucket-based vessel that organizers had initially intended to use for the demonstration is now out of the mix and efforts are being made to secure a different ferry for the exercise that was originally planned for October.

The pitch was made in July by Alexandria-based MetroMarine Holdings, Inc., a company that previously ran the HarborLink ferry between downtown Hampton and Norfolk from 1999 to 2002 before closing shop due to a lack of ridership. At that time, MetroMarine proposed using a Nantucket-based ferry for the Hampton Roads demonstration when it passed through on its way to winter in Florida.

Since then, the extent of MetroMarine's involvement, and the status of the exercise in a broader sense, has been difficult to determine.

On Tuesday, Drake acknowledged the Nantucket ferry would not be involved. When that boat "went away," Drake said her department began looking for alternate options and is anticipating receiving proposals from one or more companies.

"We are very much hoping to do the trials before the weather gets bad," she said.

One of those proposals could involve National Ferry, a firm that operates excursions on the Potomac River. The company is currently involved in a study analyzing the possibility of establishing a system to ferry commuters around the Washington D.C. region, said Kevin Moran, CEO of National Ferry and its subsidiary D.C. Harbor Cruises.

Moran's company came to be involved because it will be transporting the Patriot II — an 87-foot, high-speed, catamaran-style ferry capable of carrying 149 passengers — to Deltaville after Thanksgiving for routine winter maintenance and is available to participate, he said.

Moran is a third-generation ferry operator who previously ran the Circle Line in New York City, with 2.5 million annual passengers, before starting National Ferry three years ago.

"We're very bullish on the future of ferry services," Moran said, of a ferry operation's potential in Hampton Roads.