

Article: Ferry service for Fort Belvoir, Quantico studied



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Tim Cherry, The Belvoir Eagle |

Local and state stakeholders are sponsoring a year-long study to examine the possibility of using ferries to shuttle commuters to work along the Potomac River.

The Commuter Ferry Market Analysis, conducted by the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, examines potential costs, travel directions, schedules and additional information.

Study organizers are working with jurisdictions in Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Virginia, including military organizations like Marine Corps Base Quantico and Fort Belvoir to gauge the interest of stakeholders along the Potomac River.

One of the potential routes to be investigated would be a ferry that would provide Fort Belvoir commuters another option for traveling to and from work. The boat would travel along the Potomac into Gunston Cove and drop commuters off at Tompkins Basin Park during rush hours. Potential ferry prices, schedule and boat size will be included in the study's conclusion.

"We're fully invested in assisting the Northern Virginia Regional Commission in their market analysis," said Chris Landgraf, Fort Belvoir Directorate of Public Works master planner.

A north-bound ferry could allow commuters to avoid traffic on the congested Interstate 95/395 and U.S. Route 1 corridors. An east-west bound ferry could carry commuters crossing state lines to cut across the water, instead of traveling over the Woodrow Wilson Bridge or other bridges.

Landgraf said a commuter ferry could benefit Belvoir by reducing the amount of people traveling through Belvoir's gates, which could help reduce traffic congestion and car emissions on and around Fort Belvoir.

Stakeholders navigated the Potomac River Oct. 17 to view the potential landing infrastructure of the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Indian Head Division, Marine Corps Base Quantico and Fort Belvoir. The group left from Founders Pier at Alexandria City Marina and traveled down to Quantico and back on a three hour trip.

Kevin Moran, President of the National Ferry Corporation/DC Harbor Cruises, provided a catamaran, Patriot II, for stakeholders to use.

The boat, which has external and internal seating, accommodates about 150 people and travels up to 27 miles per hour. The boat also has climate-controlled cabins and wi-fi.

Jon Moro, Patriot II captain, who ferried commuter boats in New York for six years prior to coming to Virginia, said the commuting time can be spent relaxing and performing tasks.

"Being on the water sets them free," Moro said of commuters. "It beats being crammed in car traffic."

The multi-purpose boat is currently used for commercial tours during the day but Moran hopes to add a rush-hour ferry service.

As a small business owner, Moran hopes Belvoir, or any other organization, would be willing to share the financial risk associated with the service.

Access to Belvoir's shoreline and dock to store ships overnight are among the items Moran would expect Belvoir or other partners to provide. If partners provide the docks, Moran said he'd pay to store his boats overnight when necessary.

"Somebody's got to share the risk, whether that's the military or the transportation department," Moran said. "We brought the boats to the party."

In terms of feasibility, Belvoir's leadership would have to determine if dredging a channel, constructing a security check center and developing an internal shuttle service to transport commuters to work stations is a worthwhile investment, according to Juanita Green, U.S. Army Sustainment Command transportation demand management coordinator.

"This may work better in the long-term planning," Green said.

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