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# Could expanded ferry service be a reality at Contra Costa's waterfront cities?

Pittsburg latest city to sign on to study possibility of expanding San Francisco Bay Ferry to new parts of Contra Costa

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Pittsburg is the latest city to get on board with a plan to study the feasibility of expanding ferry service to parts of Contra Costa County's waterfront.

The City Council unanimously agreed last week to share in the estimated \$200,000 cost to complete the planning work for expanding such service. Pittsburg's \$40,000 share will come from the city's waterfront fund.

"The potential benefits include affordable and an efficient transit option," Pittsburg analyst Sara Bellafronte told the council.

Bellafronte said there is regional interest in expanding the existing San Francisco Bay Ferry service to Contra Costa. The newest – and farthest eastern route – was to Richmond, established in 2018.

Antioch, Hercules and Martinez, along with Contra Costa County, Eastern Contra Costa Transit Authority and the Contra Costa Transportation Authority have all previously expressed interest in expanding ferry service in the county, Bellafronte said. The Antioch City Council on Oct. 25 also approved an agreement to help pay for the new feasibility study.

Though some cities like Antioch began considering the option of commuter ferries more than a dozen years ago, it wasn't until 2015 that the Contra Costa Transit Authority, in cooperation with the Water Emergency Transportation Authority, which operates the San Francisco Bay Ferry, commissioned an expansion study. That study included direct services to Richmond, San Francisco, Antioch and Martinez, as well as combined routes among the four locations.

That cooperative study showed costs of \$2.25 to \$11.25 for adults, depending on the route, with discounts for youths and seniors and free tickets for those under 5.

"With short hops, those 10-minute routes would be about 50 cents to \$1.25," she said.

Commuting by ferry doesn't take long, Bellafronte added, noting the average trips would be 10 minutes to 60 minutes, with the longest at 120 minutes from San Francisco to Antioch. Trips to Richmond would take 60 to 90 minutes, and trips to Hercules and Martinez would take 30 to 45 minutes.



Another plus is accessibility and convenience, Bellafronte said, noting the ferries would be ADA-accessible and tickets would be sold online, on apps or in person.

The 2015 study also estimated 411 daily weekday riders would use the expanded East Bay route to San Francisco and more than 1,000 would use the Antioch-Martinez-Hercules interconnect system.

Besides creating jobs for the operation of these extended routes, the 2015 study showed other economic benefits, she said.

“It’s possible that a ferry terminal could have positive economic multiplier effects in creating jobs and bringing visitors, although further study would need to be done to confirm potential economic impacts relative to other potential development opportunities and or activities,” Bellafronte said.

And, besides being environmentally friendly, the ferries could help provide emergency response when land and air transportation aren’t possible, she said.

Other current Bay Area ferry routes include Treasure Island ferry service, Golden Gate Ferry, Larkspur, Sausalito, Tiburon, Angel Island and Alcatraz ferry services. Another ferry service, a San Francisco-based private company, Tideline Water Taxi, provides custom service out of several locations in San Francisco, Marin County and the East Bay, including Berkeley and Oakland, designed for small parties.

But while ferry service from San Francisco extends northeast to Solano County, the only ferry terminal in Contra Costa County is in Richmond.

Mayor Holland Barrett White said he supported an agreement to study a possible ferry system in Contra Costa County.

“I think that when we look at the funding availability at both the federal and state level, there are unprecedented dollars to help us see something like this into fruition for our community,” he said.

The mayor added that he thinks Pittsburg is well positioned with its location and infrastructure to become part of such a service.

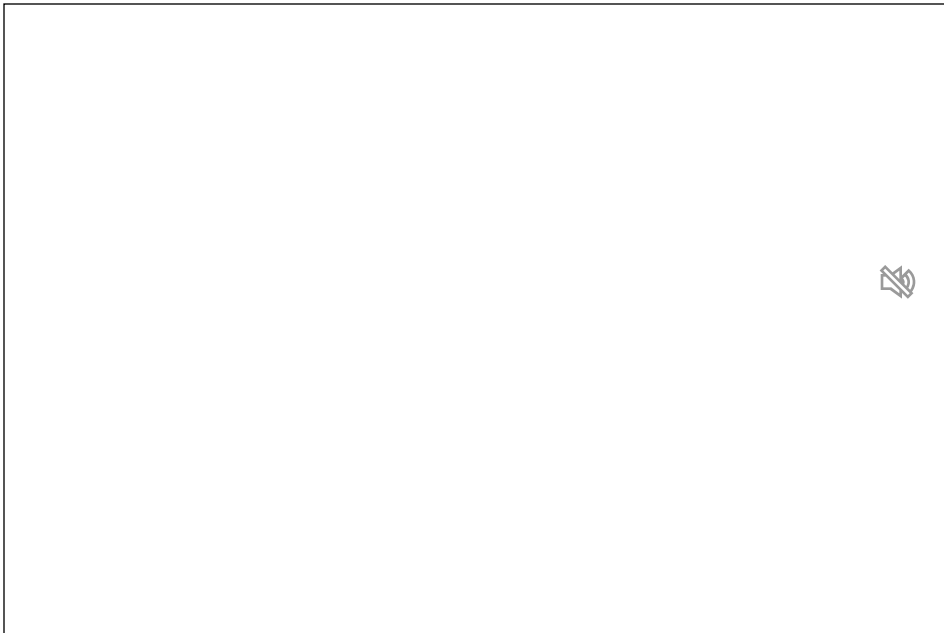
“I hope that this doesn’t just stop at a feasibility study, but it actually turns into an opportunity for us to open up new pathways of travel for the people that live in our community but also what to visit for recreational and other things that that most cities benefit from in terms of tourism here locally,” he said.

Councilman Jelani Killings also supported the study, noting the city must do its “due diligence” to see what it would take to make a ferry system operational.

“I think that this study, obviously, is that first step in understanding (what it would take)...” he said.

The planning work for the expanded ferry service is expected to begin in early 2023 and to be completed by the end of that year. In addition to investigating estimated ridership, evaluating fare structure, and assessing operational and maintenance costs, the study will also assess the feasibility of using no-emission vessels for the service.





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## Judith Prieve | East County journalist

Judith Prieve is an East Bay journalist. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, she has worked as a reporter, features editor and assistant metro editor at newspapers in Wisconsin and Northern California and has been at what is now the Bay Area News Group for more than 25 years.

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