

TOWN OF ISLESBORO
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December 4, 2024

Bruce Van Note
Commissioner, Maine Department of Transportation
16 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0016

Dear Commissioner Van Note,

We send this letter to support Mr. Jeremiah MacDonald's recent correspondence of November 20, 2024 sent to you on behalf of the Select Board of the Town of North Haven that letter addresses proposed changes to Maine State Ferry Service emergency service.

Following the October 10, 2024 meeting of the Maine State Ferry Service Advisory Board, the Islesboro Select Board received a copy of a document entitled "MaineDOT – 2024 Strategic Update and Emphasis Areas" which is stamped, on the upper right hand corner of page 1 of the document, with "Draft – August 8, 2024."

Our concerns are in regard to Section 5(b)(2) of the "2024 Emphasis Areas" section of the document, relating to the Ferry Service entitled "Deliver Multimodal Improvements." That section, as part of DOT's strategic update, states the following: "Improve reliability, efficiency, and customer service by... providing emergency boats (capital from state/fed, ongoing operations from towns), and thereby allowing all ferry vessels and crews sleep on the mainland (except for 1 of the 2 boats servicing Vinalhaven...."

To the best of our knowledge, no one here on Islesboro, and, for that matter, on any of the islands serviced by the MSFS, was consulted or had any input in regard to these substantial proposed changes. That circumstance, given the public safety considerations for all the MSFS serviced islands, is both unfortunate and regrettable.

This proposal is a very significant departure from the current emergency services provided by the MSFS to its island communities as set forth in the current tariff, which, as far as we know, is a continuation of all preceding tariffs. In our estimation, this raises important and critical public safety issues. As such, we believe this plan deserves comment, discussion, and significant consideration, before implementation.

As you are well aware, every island served by the Maine State Ferry Service, with the exception of Matinicus, has a ferry that berths overnight on the islands, thereby providing transportation from the islands to the mainland in the event of emergencies, including medical emergencies requiring ambulance transportation. On Islesboro, that, we think, has been the case since vehicles arrived on the island in 1933.

The current system, despite the challenges of island living, works well. We agree with North Haven that public safety is of paramount importance. Our public safety personnel have consistently worked toward a standard of high excellence. In regard to medical emergencies, as a general proposition, if transport to the mainland is possible without the ferry, our EMS personnel strive to use water taxi, or other available vessels. Our EMS personnel are well aware that emergency runs adversely impact the regular ferry schedule with significant consequence.

As with North Haven, our personnel can call upon Life Flight as a last resort. However, that service is subject to the vagaries of the weather, often quite a bit more so than the ferry. It is also very expensive. Indeed, some of our residents have proved to be reluctant to even use the ferry, worried, as they are, regarding the potential mainland ambulance expense.

More important, as North Haven has pointed out, there are medical situations that arise that simply require the use of an ambulance for appropriate patient transport. That might be as a result of the difficulties inherent in patient transfer, e.g., on a winter's night at low tide in adverse conditions requiring the use of a Stokes basket. Even more concerning, however, are situations in which our EMS personnel determine that the patient's medical condition requires continuous ambulance care.

We agree with North Haven that the costs placed upon our communities under this plan are also a significant concern. Indeed, a subcommittee here previously investigated the viability of a town run emergency transportation operation and ultimately concluded that simply was not realistic from a cost standpoint.

You may be aware that there has been a recent initiative to establish an island wide (the geographic area of which is not yet clear) EMS system headquartered in Carver's Harbor. We previously provided a letter of support to such a venture, assuming sufficient funding can be found. However, as we understand it, the cost of the proposed vessel is in the realm of \$5 million and the proposed the annual operating costs are estimated at \$2.5 million. Even a fraction of that amount is completely out of the question for our small community. Our letter of support, which also references our anticipated continued reliance upon the ferry service, among other things, is attached for your consideration.

The concept of not having the ferries stay on the islands overnight raises a number of other issues, many which have been raised by North Haven. The impact upon North Haven's scheduling issues are particularly concerning.

For Islesboro, and our friends and neighbors in Lincolnville, there are additional concerns. There exist legitimate questions as to whether it is even possible to safely berth a ferry at night in Lincolnville, particularly with a southeasterly blow. Having recently met with the Lincolnville Select Board we also understand that access to their working waterfront at Lincolnville Beach and access to the two floats currently available at low tide may be compromised by the current charging plans for the successor to the *Margaret Chase Smith*. Obviously, continued access to those facilities, which Lincolnville kindly provides, is essential, whatever the eventual outcome of these recent developments.

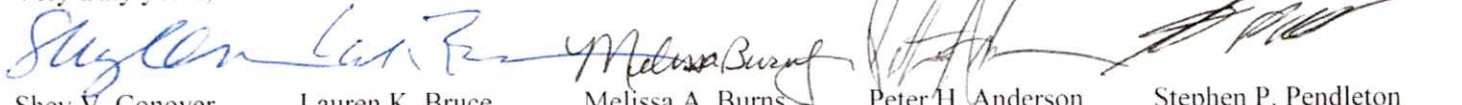
As a side point, it was our impression from the DOT workshop that took place here regarding upgrades to Grindle Point that the plans included an electrical upgrade that would provide our ferry so-called "hotel parking" meaning that the vessel would be here on the island at night. Apparently, that is/was not really the case.

We have grave reservations as to the process and the substance of this scheme. Substantively, this proposal makes many major changes to the current policies that raise significant and important public safety issues. Procedurally, the fact that this proposal, which is significant, comes from your office without any public comment, discussion, or stakeholder input, is, to us, astonishing and very unfortunate. Frankly, we expect better than this type of treatment from the executive branch of our state government and find this very disappointing. Why and how these decisions are being made without any input from the communities being impacted is very concerning.

We can't really join Mr. MacDonald to say that we are committed to continuing the conversation, since from our perspective, up until now there has not been any conversation to continue. However, we do agree with Mr. MacDonald that going forward we are willing to work collaboratively to secure a continuing service that meets the needs of all our communities.

Thank you in advance for your attention to these concerns.

Very truly yours,


Shey V. Conover Lauren K. Bruce Melissa A. Burns Peter H. Anderson Stephen P. Pendleton

Islesboro Select Board