

Progress Report on the Toronto Ferry Service

Date: October 21, 2025

To: Executive Committee

From: Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, and Deputy City Manager,
Community and Emergency Services

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide City Council with an update on key directives pertaining to the Toronto Ferry Service, including the implementation status of recommendations arising from the operational review, progress on the fabrication and delivery of the new electric vessels and actions to improve the customer experience at Jack Layton Ferry Terminal.

In October 2024, City Council directed staff to conduct a review of the Toronto Ferry Service. Staff provided the findings of the review in a report to City Council in March 2025, including recommendations to strengthen fleet maintenance, asset management, safety oversight, and workforce planning. The review also included guiding principles for organizational alignment, which informed staff's decision to reposition the ferry operation within the Fleet Services Division. Parks & Recreation and Fleet Services continue to collaborate to prepare for this transition, which will take place on November 1, 2025, ensuring continuity of service, knowledge transfer, and effective change management.

The fabrication of the City's two new electric vessels is underway, with the first ferry scheduled for delivery in Q4 2026 and the second in Q2 2027. Extensive coordination of shoreside infrastructure, vessel commissioning, federal (Transport Canada) regulatory certification, and crew training is being carefully sequenced to prepare the ferries for passenger service. The project remains on track, within budget, and positioned to enable the future evolution of Toronto's ferry service.

The City's ferry ticketing system has reliably supported operations for over a decade and will remain in use under the current contract through 2030. Currently, staff are analyzing options to modernize the system while maintaining a strong focus on improving the overall customer experience at the terminal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, and the Deputy City Manager, Community and Emergency Services recommend that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no new financial impacts beyond those identified in previous reports. Any future financial implications related to the City's ferry system will be submitted for consideration through the City's budget process.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on March 26 and 27, 2025, City Council adopted EX21.3 – Toronto Ferry Service Operational Review. The Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, was directed to report back to the Executive Committee by the fourth quarter of 2025 on the progress of implementing the recommendations from the operational review.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EX21.3>

At its meeting on October 9 and 10, 2024, City Council adopted report EX17.3 entitled "Electric Ferries Shoreside Infrastructure Work Plan" and directed the City Manager to conduct a review of the organizational structure best suited to address the asset planning, management and maintenance, and operations and user experience of the City's ferries, the Jack Layton Ferry Terminal and the Island ferry docks and to report back to the Executive Committee in the first quarter of 2025.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EX17.3>

At its meeting July 24 -25 2024, City Council adopted Report IE15.2 - Toronto Island Park Master Plan. This report directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to undertake all efforts to accelerate the delivery of the two new ferries and report back to City Council in the third quarter of 2025 on the progress of the contract to construct and deliver the vessels. The report also directed staff to provide updates and recommendations on timelines, vessel naming, and fittings and finishes. In addition, staff were asked to report back by the second quarter of 2025 on the results of the review of a modernized ticketing solution, including a plan for its implementation.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.IE15.2>

At its meeting on July 24 and 25, 2024, City Council adopted Item 2024.GG14.8 - Process for Award of Negotiable Request for Proposal Document Number 4053424337 for the Construction of Two New Fully Electric Ferry Vessels, authorizing the General

Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to negotiate and execute an agreement with Damen Shipbuilding 5 B.V., the top-ranked proponent, for the construction, delivery, commissioning, and warranty of two fully electric ferry vessels (RoPax and Pax).
<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.GG14.8>

COMMENTS

Update on the Operational Review of Toronto's Ferry Service

In October 2024, City Council directed staff to conduct an operational review of the Toronto Ferry Service. The review was summarized in a staff report to Council in March 2025. The report included recommendations to enhance service across key areas and to report back to the Executive Committee on implementation progress.

The following section outlines the progress to date.

- **Advancing the Development of an Asset Management Plan:** A comprehensive condition assessment of all four operational ferries was completed in October 2025. In addition, work is underway to integrate the vessels into the Fleet Management Information System (FMIS), enabling digitization of ship logs, engineer checklists, preventive maintenance schedules, and incident reporting. Fleet Services is also establishing a critical parts program with its parts supply vendor to enable just-in-time delivery. Finally, a condition assessment of the island docks is planned as part of ongoing state-of-good-repair work.

Ferry operations have also been increasingly integrated into Fleet Services' procurement and contract management processes to enhance efficiency and consistency. Ferry maintenance requirements have been integrated into key contracts, with further coordination planned for other operational and marine-specific needs as required.

- **Ongoing Efforts to Optimize the Safety Management System:** City staff are advancing a Safety Management System (SMS) for all active vessels, including the new electric ferries, to meet new federal regulations. The SMS is scheduled for submission to Transport Canada in early November 2025, with full implementation targeted for Q1 2026.
- **Progress on the Marine Operations Unit:** A clear reporting structure has been established that provides the Fleet Services General Manager with direct oversight of the service in areas including terminal and passenger experience, vessel operations, safety and training, and asset management. Recruitment for key leadership positions is underway, with several roles filled and others expected for later this year.
- **Update on the Ferry Engagement Forum and Mission/Vision Development:** The City is establishing a Ferry Engagement Forum (Ferry Reference Group) to provide structured input and guidance on ferry service planning and operations. The group will meet quarterly to support ongoing engagement and decision-making.

- **Developing a Recruitment & Retention Strategy:** There is a need for a proactive approach to developing the next generation of marine professionals. Initiatives being explored include career pathing, technical trades apprenticeship and mentorship programs, and enhanced training supports.
- **Progress on the Strategic Communications Plan:** The City has a comprehensive communications plan to support the modernization of Toronto's Ferry Service. The plan captures broad public and stakeholder engagement, as well as targeted engagement with key stakeholders, such as residents and businesses that use and rely on the service.

On November 1, 2025, Fleet Services will assume full operational responsibility for the Toronto Ferry Service, with ongoing collaboration with Parks & Recreation on broader parks operations. Leadership and staff from both divisions will continue to work closely during the transition period to ensure continuity of service, operational efficiency, and a seamless passenger experience.

2025 Summer Service Performance

In addition to managing the transition and operational review recommendations, City staff focused on modernizing the service and enhancing the customer experience, achieving positive outcomes across multiple areas:

- The total number of extra trips completed by a relief vessel during busy periods on the Centre Island route was up 12.5% from 2024 to 2025, achieved by extending operating hours and additional staffing.
- As a result, crowding on the Centre Island route dropped significantly, with trips over 95% capacity falling from 10% in 2024 to just 2.4% in 2025.
- Online ticket sales increased to 45.1% of all tickets in 2025, up from 42.7% in 2024.
- An accessible waiting area and dedicated service line were implemented to improve passenger accessibility.
- Wayfinding was enhanced through Customer Service Representatives, staffed information booths on Queens Quay and Centre Island, a new Toronto Island visitors map, and the installation of large wayfinding pillars.
- Additional terminal improvements include the installation of a large shade structure in the terminal and shade tents in line-ups, a large mural, and refreshing gates and terminal walls to enhance the terminal's overall appearance.

Update on Ferry Construction and Delivery

Two new electric ferry vessels are currently being manufactured at Damen Shipyards in Romania. The design and construction of both vessels are progressing on schedule and on budget. The delivery schedules for both vessels remain aligned with the original contractual commitments:

- The ROPAX (vehicle & passenger) ferry is scheduled for delivery in Q4 2026
- The PAX (passenger only) ferry is scheduled for delivery in Q2 2027.

Beyond commissioning and delivery, additional steps are required to ready the vessels for passenger service.

- **Shoreside Infrastructure:** CreateTO, leading an integrated project team, manages the shoreside infrastructure project at the Jack Layton Ferry Terminal. The project remains on schedule and within budget, with major construction expected to conclude by the end of 2026. Key upgrades include high-voltage servicing, installation of three e-houses with transformers, critical switching infrastructure, two charging towers, and in-water structures. Construction sequencing minimizes disruption to the existing ferry service. Once construction is complete, the shoreside system will undergo testing and commissioning to prepare for the arrival of the new vessels.
- **Vessel Commissioning:** This includes sea trials at Damen Shipyards; completing the Transport Canada flagging process, which involves federal registration, equipment inspections, and approval of operational and safety manuals; and connecting the vessels to the terminal's electrical system to ensure integration and operational readiness for passenger service.
- **Employee Familiarization & Training:** A comprehensive training program is being developed to ensure staff are fully prepared to operate the new vessels. Captains and mates will complete simulator-based navigation and emergency response training, while engineers and senior crew will take part in familiarization sessions to observe commissioning and system integration. Once the ferries arrive, on-site training will cover vessel operations, safety, maintenance, and charging procedures. Final trials will include operational and emergency drills in Toronto Harbour before passenger service begins.

Vessel commissioning and training are expected to take several months from the time the vessels arrive in Toronto Harbour.

Assessment of Schedule Acceleration Feasibility

In July 2024, City Council directed staff to assess the feasibility of advancing the delivery of the new electric ferries. During negotiations as part of the ferry procurement process, staff worked with the shipbuilder to ensure that all potential acceleration measures were incorporated into the contract executed in August 2024. Per City Council direction, staff conducted an additional review, confirming that all potential early-delivery opportunities had been captured through the contract.

Delivery cannot be accelerated due to limits on shipyard capacity, availability of specialized workers, production and shipping times for critical components, required shipping schedules, and the seasonal closure of the St. Lawrence Seaway. In addition, the schedule for shoreside charging infrastructure has been optimized through significant coordination and acceleration efforts, including partnerships with CreateTO and Toronto Hydro. Considering these factors, the current schedule represents the earliest feasible completion timeline.

Interior Design Survey Results

An online public survey was conducted from June 18 to July 8, 2025, to gather feedback on the interior design of the new vessels. The survey presented three design concepts, and more than 9,100 respondents provided input, generating over 2,000 comments.

The Art & Social concept received the highest level of support, with 51% of respondents selecting it as their preferred design. Drawing inspiration from Toronto's arts and cultural spaces, the concept aims to create a welcoming environment that promotes social interaction during transit between Toronto Harbour and Toronto Island Parks (Appendix 1: Image of Art & Social Design Concept). Detailed plans are now being developed based on this concept for integration into both the ROPAX and PAX ferries.

Naming Strategy for New Vessels

In accordance with the City of Toronto Property Naming Policy, staff are developing a process and framework to guide the naming of the new ferries, including opportunities for broader public engagement. The approach aims to build public excitement for the arrival of the new ferries and foster community pride as the vessels prepare and enter into service.

Ferry Ticketing System Modernization

The existing ferry ticketing system has supported the terminal for over ten years, and the contract with the current provider is in place until 2030. The system continues to perform effectively, supporting online and in-person sales, group ticketing, barcode scanning, and vehicle permits. Simultaneously, staff are exploring opportunities to modernize the ticketing system, including options for a low-income discount program and integration with other transit payment systems, such as PRESTO. Implementation of any new system is contingent on the system's readiness, cost and value for money, and staff will continue to monitor opportunities as they arise.

Staff are also set to bring forward a broader Payments Modernization Strategy in Q4 2025, which will establish customer service standards for key payments made to the City, which would inform any longer-term change to the ferry ticketing system. In the interim, staff will continue to assess any near-term improvements that can be made within the current contract and associated costs.

CONTACT

Jill Cheyne, Acting Director, Transformation, Corporate Services, 437-236-1558
jill.cheyne@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

David Jollimore, Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services

Kate Bassil, Deputy City Manager, Community & Emergency Services

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix 1: Image of Art & Social Design Concept

