Senator

Diane J. Savino

23rd State Senate District

Ferry Report 2009

Introduction

When it comes to quality of life issues on Staten Island, there is no bigger issue than transportation. Staten Island continues to be plagued with road congestion and an aging infrastructure that is still based on colonial road networks. These issues, along with high tolls and no feasible pedestrian way off the island, compounds the overall stress of the average resident.

The Staten Island Ferry is the only non-vehicular mode of transportation between Staten Island and Manhattan and is therefore one of the key modes of transportation for residents. It provides 20 million people a year (60,000 passengers a day not including weekend days) transportation service between St. George on Staten Island and Whitehall Street in lower Manhattan, making it Staten Island's single most used form of transportation.

With this in mind, Senator Savino's office has attempted to reach out to ferry riders to ask them questions regarding quality of life issues on the boats and in the terminals. We did this by creating a "Mobile District Office" in the St. George/Staten Island Terminal, as part of a constituent outreach program, during which staff members handed out the "Staten Island Ferry Report Card", for the purposes of surveying riders on the ferry service. The survey took place from June 29th through July 1st, 2009, between the hours of 7:00 am to 9:00 am and 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm on Tuesday June 29th.

Since taking office in 2005, Senator Savino's office has, from time to time, received complaints regarding the Staten Island Ferry. These span a wide range of concerns, from the condition of the boats, security on the bus ramps, to unwanted noise on the ferry. Staff members normally address each concern case by case, however we felt a more pro-active and holistic approach would be the best way to improve the service.

Staten Island Ferry Background

The New York City Department of Transportation (NYC DOT) operates and maintains the nine vessel fleet, as well as the St. George Ferry Terminal on Staten Island and the Whitehall Ferry Terminal in Manhattan. Its sole purpose is to transport Staten Islanders to and from Manhattan.

In 1898 Staten Islander's overwhelmingly voted to consolidate the boroughs into a Greater City of New York based upon the promise of frequent municipal ferry service between Manhattan and Staten Island. The five mile, twenty-five minute ride takes just as long as it did in 1898, when Fulton's Ferry made the same run under steam.

A typical weekday schedule involves the use of five boats to transport approximately 60,000 passengers daily (109 daily trips). During the day, between rush hours, boats are regularly fueled and maintenance work is performed. Terminals are cleaned around the clock and

routine terminal maintenance is performed on the day shift. On weekends, three boats are used (75 trips each Saturday and 68 trips each Sunday). Over 35,000 trips are made annually.

In 2003 legislation was passed by the City Council increasing the ferry service to 24 hour, half-hour minimum service. Mayor Bloomberg vetoed that legislation and a compromise increase in service was initiated, including expanded late night and morning service during the weekdays.

Summary and Methodology for Survey

Survey respondents were asked to evaluate their ferry service. Respondents filled out the Staten Island Ferry Report Cards in both the Staten Island/St. George Terminal and the Manhattan/Whitehall Terminal. Those cards where then collected by staff members. Survey respondents also had the option of mailing in the survey themselves. As of the writing of this report, we have received 46 in the mail.

Staff collected 546 responses, or 21% of the cards handed out. This would be considered a high response rate from any survey and indicates that ferry riders were enthusiastic about being given the opportunity to evaluate the service.

Respondents were asked to evaluate fifteen separate categories as Poor, Fair, Good, or Excellent. A final "Overall Opinion of The Ferry Service" section was provided, as well as space for additional comments.

The evaluations were assigned numbers, i.e., Poor is a 1, Good a 2, and so forth. Grades were then assigned to each of the categories, utilizing a 4.0 grading system, which were averaged for a letter grade, i.e., 4.0=A, 3.0=B, 2.0=C, etc. (See chart available on page 4)

The report divided responses into four categories: Poor, Fair, Good, and Excellent. Rankings were determined by finding the average of each column presented to us on the card. Once those averages were found, they were placed into different categories, based upon the calculated means, and assigned a letter grade.

For example, "Security of the Bus Ramps" had a 2.15 average, or a grade of C. "Cleanliness of the Bus Ramps" had a 2.36 average, or a grade of C+, and "Frequency of the Bus at the Terminal" had a 2.41 average, also a grade of C+. The above-mentioned categories had the three lowest averages and were therefore put in the Poor category.

This process was then repeated in determining which category each column would fall into throughout the sheet. Included in each category is a brief synopsis of the views of the constituents.

The next sub-section used in analyzing the data was a chart computing the number of Poor's, Fair's, Good's, and Excellent's that were received on the Staten Island Ferry Report Cards. The process was calculated using the Excel Program.

Out of the 546 respondents, 422 added their own comments on how to improve the ferry service. A breakdown of those comments is available on page seven. It is telling that 77% of respondents chose to take additional time to make a comment.

The methodology for "State Senator Diane Savino's Ferry Report Card" is as follows: 2,500 cards were dispersed during rush hours of 7:00 am to 9:00 pm to workday commuters on the following dates: Monday June 29, 2009, Tuesday June 30, 2009 and Wednesday July 1, 2009. Cards were also dispersed on Tuesday June 29, 2009 from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm. These two time frames represent the highest level of ridership, according to a 2003 study conducted by the New York City Council and data from the New York City Department of Transportation Ferry Division.

Ferry Grades

Comments	Respondents
More shops i.e. (tavern, McDonald's, Wendy's, pizza, upscale restaurant, CVS or Duane Reade, dry cleaners, barber shop/shoe repair)	140
More frequent service (especially 9:15 a.m. weekday boat from SI, weekend and late night service)	93
Lack of security on bus ramps extend boat and terminal patrols onto ramps especially at night, security cameras needed	27
Complaints about preachers	24
More frequent cleaning/upkeep of boats	24
More proactive employees	21
Announcements are too loud	15
Would like delays announced including details	14
Like to see muted closed captioned TV's in terminal	12
Seeking the return of car ferries	11
Compliments with overall ferry performance	9
Seeking live entertainment/cultural enhancement inside terminals or on boats	7
Problems with the homeless	6
Complaints about closing doors before passangers board	5
Overcrowding	5
Troubling catching, or making, train and bus connections	4
Want more surveys	2
Improvements sought in how the ferry docks	1
MetroCard/newspaper service on the boat	1
More representation of minority groups among employees	1
Total	**422**

What Ferry Riders are Saying

Bus/Subway/SIRT service

- Bus ramps have no security
- The "no smoking" rule on ramps is ignored due to complete lack of enforcement
- Commuters found connections on buses, subways, and the Staten Island Rapid Train service to be difficult

"No coordination of bus dispatcher and ferry boat captain during rush hour, a drug store and more coordination during rush hour on the Staten island side-St. George"

"The 1 train and the W train sit on the tracks UNTIL it is certain that we have missed the ferry! Coordinate this! "

Can you please try and eliminate persons from smoking and hanging out in the walkway to the buses. This is becoming a serious problem."

"Smokers stand right under "no smoking signs" in bus ramps and nobody says anything. Ramps fill with smoke it stinks. Sometimes packs of kids, beggars etc in bus ramps can be scary."

"Please STOP people from smoking on the bus ramps. I literally choke every day."

"Taxi drivers must be made to wait in their cars do not allow them to block terminals stairs or approach riders."

Cleanliness

- Bathrooms require greater, or more frequent attention
- Bathrooms are regularly lacking soap, or paper towels, etc

"There is never toilet paper or napkins in the bathrooms."

"Bathrooms in the terminals regularly lack soap and require greater attention"

"Manhattan side bathrooms in terminal are awful!"

Security of Ferry Boats and Terminals

- Both ferries and terminals have improved greatly and generally, passengers feel safer and more secure in terminals
- There is much better presence of uniformed personnel and police

"Security on the ferry has improved."

Ferry Boats

- Poor frequency of ferry boats on nights and weekends
- Riders requested quicker ferry rides
- Complaints of delayed, late, and cancelled boats
- Riders suggested announcements in advance, of delayed or cancelled boats via an RSS info blast text alert or on Twitter.
- Complaints about the preachers on the boats
- Riders wanted metro card service on the boat
- TVs with closed captioning to help keep commuters informed, preferably on local channels, such as NY1

"Pleas designate a "quiet area" on the boat free from cell phone chatter and preachers then have the crew enforce it."

"I would like the ferry to run every 15 minutes from 4-8pm then every 20 from until 9 PM people are working later and later these days, a person's work is no longer 9AM-5PM."

"Heavy handed security, bike commuters are treated like terrorists no car service on boats. Seattle Washington has no problem moving hundreds of cars. What's our problem?"

"Please stop the preachers; it is a violation of my rights as I am trapped on the boat with no escape"

Ferry Terminals

- Commuters requested more vendors with a greater variety and more affordable prices
- Current vendors were found too expensive for the average commuter
- Suggestions included, dry cleaners, drug stores, fast food places, ATM machines, delis, and cafes.

"Should be variety of vendors at the terminals i.e. Pizza Hut, McDonald's, Subway sandwiches."

"Shops, restaurants, closed captioned TV's. What happened to ALL the amenities that we were going to have in the new terminals?"

"Starbucks, Dunkin Donuts, McDonalds, Cosi, better hours for the post office."

"A florist shop, photo shop, bakery (a real one, not a place to buy muffins in the morning) dry cleaner, pizza-now a major suggestion: ferry service on the weekends is now pretty bad-I work weekends, as do many others,-hour schedule is a real pain! Why not simply ½ hour schedule <u>always</u> 24/7."

"Closed-caption TV would be great for weather and news. A Clothes shop for men/women…and where is the pizzeria? A fast food restaurant, preferably a Wendy's"

"Dry Cleaner, shoe repair, pizzeria, upscale restaurant in the terminal with views a café style restaurant."

"Add a fast food chain, more recreational activities i.e. live music, flea markets, more frequent service every half hour, beer at the terminals, keep the police presence, more places to eat!, thank you for keeping it free!, No more preachers! "

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Average
Cleanliness of boats	85	287	108	21	2.87
Cleanliness of bathrooms on boat	44	203	179	59	2.48
Cleanliness of terminal bathrooms	45	229	161	48	2.56
Cleanliness of bus ramps	30	179	177	75	2.36
Cleanliness of terminals	138	266	81	10	3.07
Service from deckhands/pilots	102	269	94	20	2.93
Service from terminal personnel	81	247	120	30	2.73
Service from vendors	63	226	132	45	2.66
Audibility of the announcements	126	222	103	42	2.88
Frequency of ferry service	70	224	119	69	2.61
Frequency of bus service at the terminal	40	180	155	73	2.41
Frequency of subway/SIRT service at terminal	72	210	86	38	2.78
Security on boats	116	256	85	35	2.92
Security in terminals	136	241	75	33	2.99
Security on bus ramps	41	135	137	146	2.51
Overall opinion of the ferry service	53	264	110	25	2.76

Suggestions From Riders for Improved Service

1) Make ferry rides more enjoyable:

- Quartering off the preachers into a "free speech zone" due to the confined space limitations
- Lower the volume of announcements and have signs posted for the hearing impaired
- Post on ramps some auditory or visual sign as too when the doors are open, closing and closed
- Allow vehicles on boats
- On weekends and during off-peak hours, run boats more frequently
- Purchase smaller faster boats, with less headway
- Bathrooms should be more frequently cleaned

Help keep New Yorkers and tourists informed and on time:

- Use the screens already installed to also indicate delays and cancellations
- Create a system that informs ferry riders of bus, subway, and SIRT arrival / departure times
- Install muted closed-captioning TV tuned to local news stations
- Post subway/bus maps in terminals and on boats to help their commute run more smoothly
- Install metro card machines in more convenient locations, such as on the boats
- Install WI-FI on the boats and in the terminals
- Install a large clock at both terminals

Make the time spent off the Ferry enjoyable for riders as well:

- Continue to host the farmer's market and local artists and performers
- Riders requested food vendors, ranging from fast food, to sit-down restaurants.
- Sports bar or tavern in the Whitehall and St. George terminals
- Commercial coffee shops, such as Dunkin Donuts and Starbuck's were requested
- Pharmacy
- Deli or convenient stores to purchase basic groceries and necessities
- Dry cleaners, barber and shoe shine/repair vendors

Make time in and around the terminal and on boats more secure

- Security cameras on the bus ramps
- Extending NYPD patrols onto the bus ramps
- Signs posted on bus ramps and SIRT station "under 24 hour surveillance"

Conclusions

Impediments to Retail

By far the number one concern was the lack of retail options in the Ferry Terminals. Out of the 422 separate comments that that the riders filled out, 140 of the comments where concerning vendors in the terminals. Since 2005, when store space on the St. Georg Ferry Terminal became available, only two tenants have been secured. An outreach campaign to the Staten Island business community did not begin until this year.

According to Jeanne Giordano Ltd., the company selected to lease retail space in the St. George Terminal, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) is asking for rent of $80 to $110 per square foot, whereas street front rent in the surrounding area is $22-$45 per square foot. In addition, there is no internal infrastructure built into the retail spaces and, therefore, business owners are entirely responsible for the cost and installation of running water, electrical connections, gas lines, wastewater systems, etc. Typically, landlords will either provide the basic infrastructure or reimburse tenants for the cost of installation.

This report's conclusion is that both the high cost of rental space and cost of construction of the internal infrastructure have been the largest contributing factors to the lack of vendors. Rental space should have been made more affordable, in order to attract more local businesses, or a greater effort should have been made to seek out larger companies who could afford the exorbitant cost of renting space in the terminals.

The terminals themselves were completed in the Spring of 2005, with the retail outlets ready to be leased by January of 2007. A full two years have passed and the glaring lack of vendors led the City Council to hold hearings on the subject. The NYCEDC testified that they would work to have the spaces rented out by the end of this year.

Both the NYCEDC and Jeanne Giordano Ltd., state that commuters should expect to see new retail stores beginning in Fall of 2009, over two half years after the original projection. The amount of loss revenue due to the lack of businesses is difficult to quantify, however, it is easily in the millions.

According Jeanne Giordano Ltd., the St. George Terminal is 75 percent leased and the Manhattan Terminal is almost 100 percent leased. However, the City's inability to rent the spaces, up to this point, has led us to be skeptical.

It is our belief that the City should be updating the community and ferry riders on a regular basis on the progress of the retail space development.

More Frequent Service

The second most suggested improvement, with 93 of 422 separately written comments, was for more frequent service.

Currently the last rush hour service leaving Staten Island is 9:00 am, after which there is no service until 9:30 am. **Riders requested a 9:15 am weekday boat to Manhattan, to accommodate the later schedules of many commuters.** Many companies are allowing for more flexible schedules, so that employees can run errands or see their child off to school before work, for example. Unfortunately, this is not an option for many Islanders because of the limited ferry service after 9:00 am. Adding an additional morning boat would allow commuters to take advantage of more flexible work schedules.

Weekday ferry service between the hours of 1:30 am and 5:30 am is on an hourly schedule. The majority of the people taking these boats back from Manhattan are service industry workers with no commuting alternative. **Commuters requested a weekday 24 hour, half-hour ferry service.** This will accommodate hard-working and, often, low-wage earning, second and third shift workers and allow them to spend more time with their families.

During the weekend, the ferry service begins running hourly starting at 7:00 pm, to Manhattan, and starting at 7:30 pm to Staten Island, imposing a curfew on Staten Islanders who desire access the nightlife and cultural aspects of Manhattan. In the past decade, ideas for filling this service gap have been floated, including: hourly bus service between the Whitehall and St. George terminals to serve riders missing hourly boats, smaller faster boats allowing for the same staffing while crossing the harbor more frequently, as well as half-hour service. **The present disparity of round the clock transit options between Staten Island and the other boroughs should not be allowed to continue.**

Lack of Security on Bus Ramps

The third highest independent suggestion was for improved security on the bus ramps on the St. George/Staten Island Terminal. Respondents felt uneasy when entering or leaving the terminal due to lack of inadequate lighting, as well as the number of individuals loitering or soliciting. Currently, riders enjoy new terminals that are well maintained and patrolled, as well as new ferries. However, when one leaves the confines of the terminal there is a definite lack - of security. **Cameras, new lighting and the expansion of terminal patrols to include the bus ramps would greatly improve this situation. Increased security of the bus terminals should also include enforcement of the non-smoking policy in the bus ramps.** Currently, there is a flagrant disregard for the no smoking policy on DOT property and commuters must wade through a cloud of smoke when exiting the terminal.

Quiet Deck

Everyday thousands of Staten Islanders cross the Harbor on their way to work or school. Most riders start their voyage much earlier, on a bus or car ride to the ferry. With the longest commute times in the city, many Staten Island residents must travel over an hour before reaching their final destination, suffering through transfers, traffic, and road construction. One would hope that a trip on the ferry should be a welcome respite from the stress of commuting.

However inconsiderate preachers, cell phone talkers, blaring music, loud video games and other nuisances, make the trip unbearable for many. While the constitution rightly upholds the right to free speech, past court cases have made allowances for limiting areas where one can express themselves, particularly in cases where individuals are in confined spaces. For example, an individual cannot yell, "fire" in an emergency room or a theater, or a public library can enforce a "no talking" policy. A quiet ride would be a tremendous improvement in the quality of lives of thousands of riders spending an hour a day on the ferry.

A quiet zone or deck on the ferry should be established. The City is within its rights to designate a "quiet deck," where cell phone use, loud music, video games, and loud talking is restricted. Long Island Railroad, Metro North Transit, and Amtrak riders all have access to quiet cars. Staten Islanders have just as much of a right to a peaceful ride as other commuters.

State Senator Diane J. Savino – Staten Island Ferry Report Card

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Cleanliness of boats				
Cleanliness of bathrooms on boat				
Cleanliness of terminal bathrooms				
Cleanliness of bus ramps				
Cleanliness of terminals				

Comments:

Service from deckhands/pilots				
Service from terminal personnel				
Service from vendors				
Audibility of the announcements				

Comments:

Frequency of ferry service				
Frequency of bus service at Terminal				
Frequency of subway/SIRT service at Terminal				

Comments:

Security on boats				
Security in terminals				
Security on bus ramps				

Comments:

Overall opinion of the ferry service				

Suggestions for the Staten Island Ferry (i.e. shops you would like to see, closed-captioned televisions in the terminal, etc.)

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Staten Island Ferry Report Card

Thank you for taking the time to fill out the "Staten Island Ferry Report Card". Your opinions matter! Please mark the answers to the questions as indicated and return them to one of my staff members wearing a yellow and blue t-shirt.

Again, thank you for evaluating Staten Island's world famous mass transit option.

Sincerely,

New York
State Senator
Diane J. Savino
23rd District