

Wednesday, September 27, 2006



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Superferry still full steam ahead

by Carolyn Lucas
West Hawaii Today
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Despite controversy surrounding the project, Hawaii Superferry officials are moving forward with plans to launch its interisland ferry service, officials said during Tuesday.

The first vessel, about 90 percent complete, will undergo sea trials in December and is expected to arrive in Hawaii in May. Service from Oahu to Maui and Kauai is expected to begin in July.

The second vessel, which will service Big Island routes, is currently under construction in Mobile, Ala., and should be completed by late 2008. Superferry could make its inaugural call to Kawaihae as early as 2009.

Asked how many vessels are needed to service the Hawaiian Islands efficiently, Superferry president John Garibaldi said, "Four vessels would not be beyond imagination."

The Superferry will run between Honolulu and Kawaihae, with arrival on the Big Island at 11:45 a.m. and departure at 12:45 p.m. The one-way trip will take about four hours. This is a preliminary schedule, subjected to Department of Transportation and Public Utilities Commission approval.

Traffic assessments preferred this schedule because it avoided the busiest traffic times. In 2004, DOT found about 12,000 vehicles per day travel down Kawaihae Road to Akoni Pule Highway and Queen Kaahumanu Highway. Superferry staff will manage vehicles' arrival and departure by directing traffic on adjacent roadways.

No short-term or overnight parking at Kawaihae exists, officials said.

The ferry will provide \$16.5 million to the DOT Harbor fund within the first four years of service, and another \$16 million to the state's general fund in excise tax payments, said Terry O'Halloran, Superferry director of business development.

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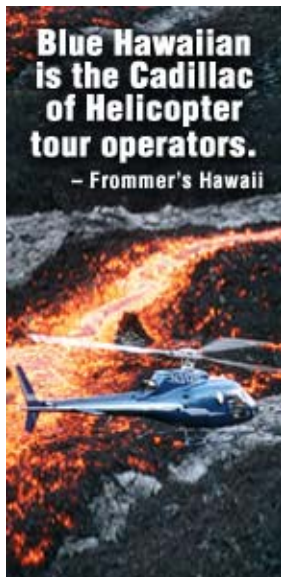


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Officials anticipate that the hiring of crew and port staff for the first Superferry will begin in March. They hope to employ about 300 people by the time both ferries are in service.

The project has sparked opposition from some residents, who believe an environmental impact statement should be required for the Superferry. However, the U.S. DOT Maritime Administration and the state Office of Environmental Quality Control determined there is nothing about the project that requires an EIS. Such an assessment is not necessary for other vessels, such as cruise ships or barges, in the state. However, DOT officials will conduct an EIS on harbor master plans as they are developed during the next year.

Every evening, the Superferry will be in port in Oahu, where it will be refueled, restocked and cleaned. The wastewater generated during the daily cruises will be discharged into Oahu's sewer system to keep the ocean clean, said Terry White, executive vice president of operations.

To prevent the introduction of alien marine pests, the Superferry has ultra-slippery, nontoxic bottom paint and no ballast tanks. Officials dismissed claims that Oahu residents will disrupt the native ecosystem and overfish ocean resources. They plan to work with the state Division of Aquatic Resources to develop educational materials about proper fishing techniques and marine protected areas.

Officials are collaborating with the Department of Agriculture Plant Industry and Animal Industry Divisions to develop policies and screening procedures. Rules will be more restrictive than state regulations. For instance, certificates of inspection will be needed for plants. Vehicles with accumulated or caked dirt will not be allowed aboard.

During a three-year period, whale researchers and other experts helped the Superferry develop a whale avoidance policy, which was approved by the Hawaiian Island National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council last May.

According to the policy, the Superferry, which has no propellers, will change routes during whale season to avoid whale-dense areas. It will also slow down in waters less than 600 feet to 29 mph or less, the speed other vessels typically travel. Aside from the captain and a navigation officer, there will be two crew members dedicated to spotting whales with their motion stabilizing and night vision binoculars.

The vessels will carry up to 866 passengers and 282 cars, or a mix of vehicles with the capacity to carry 28 trucks and 65 cars. Projected fares begin at \$65 for Internet-purchased, off-peak, one-way fares between the Big Island and Honolulu for passengers with a car. Base passenger fares start at \$52 for off-peak, Internet-purchased fares.

Transporting cars would cost \$65 to \$75, while fees for pickups and vans would be \$100 to \$110. Fully loaded delivery trucks would cost \$500 to transport, while a school bus would cost \$788. Moving surfboards and canoes atop of cars will be free. Officials are working on the prices and logistics for pet transportation.

For more information, visit <http://www.hawaiisuperferry.com>

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