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LYNN FERRY'S FUTURE BUOYED BY REPORT

BY THOMAS GRILLO | October 2, 2017



Despite high operating expenses, a conservative Boston think tank found ferry service is cost effective compared to other MBTA options.

A study of water transportation by the Pioneer Institute suggests more ferries could provide an opportunity for the cash-strapped transit agency to expand service without the expensive investment of extending commuter lines or buying new trains.

The T operates ferries in Hingham, Hull, Charlestown, downtown Boston, Logan International Airport, and until last week, from Lynn to Boston.

State Sen. and mayoral candidate Thomas M. McGee said he and his staff were consulted by the survey's authors.

"The study strongly reflects what I've felt for a long time, that water transportation is a sensible investment for the region," he said. "It's an opportunity we need to take advantage of."

Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy could not immediately be reached for comment.

Officials from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation declined a request for an interview. In a statement they said the Pioneer study includes helpful information, and they look forward to a continued dialogue on water transportation issues.

In an email, MBTA spokesman Joe Pesaturo said "The MBTA appreciates the fact that ferry service has the highest fare recovery ratio and the best on-time performance of any of the T's modes of transportation. Commuter boat service has some of the most dedicated and satisfied customers at the T, and this fall's arrival of two new catamarans will allow us to continue to provide high quality service between Hingham and Boston."

Pesaturo also said the T looks forward to a study from Boston Harbor Now, which will examine places where ferry services could complement other T services and maintain the fare recovery ratio and on-time performance rates offered by the T's current ferry operations.

With more than 1.3 million trips annually, T ferry routes comprise a small percentage of ridership. But the service is critical to coastal communities that lack other transit options, the survey said.

In 2015, the T ferry recovered more of its costs through fares at 68 percent, than any other T service, the study said. It also had the highest fare revenue per passenger mile and was one of the most popular modes among its users, researchers found. A big reason for its popularity is that the ferry boasts the best on-time performance of any T transit option, they said.

MBTA water transportation was relatively cost effective compared to its peers, scoring in the top three out of the six operators on four of six measures, although it ranked last in terms of trips per revenue hour and per revenue mile.

In an analysis of data between 2002 and 2015, the study found ferry service required the least capital investment of any T transit mode. At 41 cents, it also required the lowest subsidy per passenger mile, second only to the commuter rail at 38 cents over the same period, the study said.

This efficiency comes despite having high operating costs. In 2015, ferry service had the highest operating expenses per vehicle mile, revenue hour, and unlinked passenger trip of any T mode. It also had higher operating expenses per passenger mile than the average of all T service modes analyzed.

The survey was authored by Pioneer Institute Research Director Gregory Sullivan, and policy associate Matthew Blackburn.

They compared MBTA ferry service to five other ferry operators including the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District and San Francisco Bay Area Water Emergency Transportation Authority in the Bay Area; Greater New York City's Port Imperial Ferry Corp. and BillyBey Ferry Co.; and the King County Ferry District in Seattle.

The MBTA has signaled its recognition of water transportation's potential to reduce congestion and deliver environmental benefits. Despite comprising a tiny percentage of its overall operations, the T's FY2015-2019 Capital Investment Program dedicates \$42 million to ferry service, or about 1 percent of overall capital expenditures.



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Thomas Grillo is an award-winning business reporter who has worked at Boston's major newspapers covering real estate trends such as the emergence of Assembly Square in Somerville and chronicling the growth of Boston's Seaport District. In Lynn, Thomas covers City Hall and commercial real estate development including the transformation of Lynn's waterfront into a mixed-use neighborhood. Follow him on Twitter [@BosBizThomas](https://twitter.com/BosBizThomas).

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