

The Lynn ferry is not your typical commute

By Sen. Thomas McGee | Posted: Friday, September 25, 2015 3:00 am

Over the past two summers, the Lynn commuter ferry has seen ridership grow steadily and exceed initial projections.

It has not, however, exceeded my expectations.

The communities of the North Shore have embraced water transportation for what it offers: convenient, affordable, stress-free commuting that highlights the waterfront and our proximity to Boston. Water transportation will spur economic growth, development along the waterfront and increases in property values in surrounding neighborhoods.

The Lynn commuter ferry is the catalyst for change that our city and region needs and that our residents deserve. The time is now for residents, business owners, students and tourists to endorse the continuation of the ferry and send a clear message that the region supports this mode of transit as a permanent, year-round service.

In fact, one commuter wrote to my office to suggest we promote the ferry in communities west of Lynn as an efficient way to get to Boston in less than an hour and for a reasonable price. He drives 25 minutes from a western suburb, against traffic, and then takes the boat for 35 minutes while using Wi-Fi to get a head start on his workday.

The desire of commuters to spend less time in their cars and yet not be standing on a train for 30 minutes makes the ferry a perfect solution to commuter woes. Not only are commuters taking advantage of this mode of traffic-free travel in and out of Boston, but the community has embraced the ferry ride itself as an opportunity to gather and take in the beauty of the waterfront while enjoying music, food and drink and supporting local businesses and organizations.

During last winter's record snowfall, the MBTA's Hull ferry continued to transport South Shore commuters in and out of Boston. So while the Lynn ferry has been a truly pleasant, reliable and expedient option for fair-weather commuters over the past two summers, there is a strong case for maintaining year-round operations to keep the North Shore connected to Boston even during stormy winter weather that causes severe delays on our roads and tracks.

We have already seen development along Lynn's waterfront move forward for commercial, recreational and residential projects — projects that will bring jobs and prosperity to the city — as a direct result of the federal, state and local investments made to bring water transportation to Lynn and to connect the entire North Shore to downtown Boston.

Stephanie Pollack, secretary of transportation, recently spoke about the value of transportation in

connecting people to opportunities. The Lynn ferry not only connects employees to jobs, but students to institutions for higher education, elders and others to medical resources in Boston, and tourists to a region rich in history and recreational options.

With plenty of parking and a viable plan for year-round operations, the ferry from Lynn to Boston takes drivers off our congested roadways and gives commuters a stress-free 35 minutes to enjoy the natural beauty of the waterfront or to get a jump start on the day ahead.

The Lynn Economic Development and Industrial Corporation recently conducted a survey of ferry riders and both the data and the comments received indicate strong support from riders to maintain and expand the ferry service. Ridership of the Lynn ferry is exceeding projections and momentum is building.

As the ferry pilot program comes to an end today, I ask that you join with me in urging MassDOT to extend the Lynn ferry pilot program and consider year-round operations to better serve the residents of the North Shore.

Given the opportunity to build on the momentum we have seen so far, I know the ferry service will continue to grow and succeed beyond the expectations of many to truly transform our region.

Sen. Thomas M. McGee, D-Lynn, is chairman of the Joint Committee on Transportation.