

Lynn ferry makes trial trip

By Jeff McMenemy / The Daily Item | Posted: Thursday, September 1, 2011 12:00 am

LYNN - State Sen. Thomas McGee, D-Lynn, convinced a boatload of city and state officials, along with area businesspeople, to spend two hours Wednesday aboard an MBTA commuter ferry.

McGee said the trip from the Seaport Landing to Boston sought to build support and momentum for the completion of the effort to run a daily commuter ferry from Lynn, while showing riders what the daily trip will be like.

"It's a big piece in a large economic development puzzle," McGee said during the ride back from Boston to Lynn.

And a big part of his job in pushing the Lynn commuter ferry and the planned development of the roughly 100 acres along the waterfront is to get people out on the water to realize the potential the site has, he said.

"I haven't had a chance to go up and down the East Coast," McGee said, when asked how unique it was to have roughly 100 acres of open waterfront land to develop so close to Boston. "But I don't think there's anything on the East Coast that can beat us."

He sees the commuter ferry dock as being the first piece of the waterfront's development that will ultimately lead to the building of restaurants, housing, stores and other destination attractions, much like the launch of the Hingham commuter ferry paved the way for development there.

"Five years ago Hingham was empty except for the commuter ferry. There was literally an old shipyard there," McGee said while roughly 70 people enjoyed the view of the coastline and the sunny 80-degree temperatures on Wednesday.

Lynn Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy said she had initially been "skeptical," about the plan to run a commuter ferry from Lynn to Boston, but she now believes it could be an important part of the waterfront's overall economic development.

Standing on the Seaport Landing dock after the two-hour trip from Lynn to Long Wharf in Boston and back, Kennedy said even many long-time city residents don't realize the beauty of Lynn's waterfront.

"I don't think too many people, even Lynners, know that we have this beautiful waterfront," Kennedy said.

James Cowdell, Executive Director of Lynn's Economic Development and Industrial Corporation, said the project already has received more than \$2 million, including \$1.3 million in August to rebuild the retaining wall and dock where the ferry will leave for Boston at the end of the Blossom Street

extension off the Lynnway.

But the project can't be completed without the final \$2.5 million for dredging work, he said.

Still, Cowdell believes the final phase of the project will be paid for and the Lynn-to-Boston commuter ferry could be operating within two-and-a-half years.

"There's no way the state would pay for the first two phases of the project and then not pay for the final part," he said.

Ralph W. Sevinor, president of the Board of Directors of the Lynn Area Chamber of Commerce, called the planned Lynn commuter ferry a "great starting place."

He also pointed to the development of the Hingham waterfront and said the ferry would be good for commuters but also important to starting the economic development in Lynn.

He hopes the ferry will bring people to Lynn to frequent the city's attractions, which will ultimately lead to more development and more jobs.

"Jobs are the key," he said.

Bruce Berman, spokesperson for Save the Harbor, Save the Bay, said Lynn has an incredible and unique opportunity to let the commuter ferry be the first part of the waterfront development.

"The economic development opportunity is extraordinary," he said during the ride into Boston. "It's a once-in-a-generation opportunity."

Richard A. Davey, the General Manager of the MBTA and incoming Secretary and CEO of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, said projects like the Lynn Commuter ferry have proven to spark economic development.

"We've seen, like in Hingham, where commuter terminals can be the anchor for development," Davey said.

But he cautioned that finding money for any transportation projects now can be difficult.

Asked if there's a chance the final phase of the project might not be funded, Davey said, "I don't know."

Officials connected to the project said it's unclear now how much it will cost to ride the ferry in and out of Boston, and how many days a week it will operate.

But Davey said Gov. Deval Patrick's administration has consistently supported efforts to increase alternative forms of transportation and to decrease the amount of cars on the road.

"It's a nice way to travel in and out of Boston, particularly on a beautiful day like this," Davey said. "Although it can get a little cold in January."

But ferry supporters said because the Lynn ferry actually spends so little time out in the open ocean,

it can likely operate 365 days a year and the trip would take less than 30 minutes each way.

Lynn Ward 5 City Councilor Brendan Crighton said while he is "certainly concerned," about how the economy could affect funding for transportation projects, he remains "confident," that the final phase of the project will be funded.