

Officials: Despite Salem schedule shuffle, Lynn ferry to Hub on track

By Chris Stevens / The Daily Item | Posted: Monday, September 19, 2011 12:00 am

LYNN - Several local officials insist they are not concerned about the future of a proposed commuter ferry from Lynn to Boston even though Salem officials announced last week plans to trim its ferry schedule from seven days to three.

“It’s like looking at two totally different plans of operation,” said state Sen. Thomas McGee, D-Lynn.

McGee has been a force behind the plan to bring a commuter ferry to Lynn and he said Friday the Salem situation does not concern him.

The Salem ferry has been operating on a seven-day schedule throughout the summer, but according to a release from Boston Best Cruises, which operates the ferry, it will switch to a Friday, Saturday and Sunday schedule beginning today.

The major factors contributing to the change are reportedly a decline in ridership and gas prices, according to the press release.

In August, McGee took a boatload of city and state officials and area businessmen for a cruise from Seaport Landing to Boston aboard an MBTA commuter ferry to give them taste of what commuter life could be like in Lynn.

James Cowdell, Executive Director of Lynn’s Economic Development and Industrial Corporation, who went on the boat ride and is working with McGee on the ferry project also said there was no need for concern.

“We’re full of optimism here,” he said. “The Salem ferry is not a commuter ferry, it’s a tourist ferry and that is the big difference.”

McGee noted that where the Salem ferry took an hour to get to Boston, Lynn’s commuter ride would take only 30 minutes and the amount of time spent in open water would also differ greatly. The Lynn



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From left, Lynn EDIC Executive Director Jim Cowdell, state Sen. Thomas McGee, Capt. Jim Mondello and LHAND Executive Director Charles Gaeta on the bridge of the MBTA ferry on its way to Boston on Wednesday, Aug. 31. (Item Photo / Owen O'Rourke)

ferry would spend four to five minutes in open water, versus the Salem ferry that spent 25-30 minutes in open sea.

City Councilor Brendan Crighton said since Salem's ferry is more of a seasonal one, it only makes sense to cut back its hours in the fall. He is optimistic Lynn's commuter ferry will maintain a steady ridership of commuters.

McGee was also quick to add that he is supportive of the Salem ferry and believes it will go back to a full schedule next summer.

"Now if you said Hingham's ferry had cut its schedule — that would alarm me," Cowdell said.

Hingham runs a commuter ferry that is similar to the one McGee is proposing and its success is an inspiration for the Lynn project. Cowdell said he has gone into Boston and watched the Hingham ferry dock "and it is completely filled to capacity all the time."

Cowdell said during the next EDIC board meeting on Sept. 27, they will award the contract to rebuild the retaining wall and dock at the end of Blossom Street extension. That is where the proposed ferry will leave for Boston.

"That phase of the project will take about six months," he said. "And we just submitted (Thursday) a grant application for phase three of the project."

Phase 3 includes \$2.6 million needed for dredging and again Cowdell said he is optimistic the city will get the grant.

"And then we're done," he said with a laugh. "If only it were that easy."

The ferry is at least two-and-a-half years away from launch, but Cowdell said he is excited about the project and its progression.

"We'll see work begin in the next 30 days and it will continue for the next six months," he said.

McGee is excited as well.

"I think it's an important piece of the waterfront," he said.