

RESOLUTION NO. _____

**SUPPORTING A WHATCOM COUNTY FERRY FARE INCREASE
AND ALLOCATION OF AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN FUNDS**

WHEREAS, Whatcom County Code 10.34.030 requires fare revenue to cover 55% of adjusted total operating expenses associated with the Whatcom County Ferry; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County ferry ridership has declined over time resulting in reduced fare revenue collection that will create a future fare box deficit; and

WHEREAS, ridership further suffered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, aging ferry infrastructure and overall inflation has resulted in increased operational expenses; and

WHEREAS, since 2022, annual fare revenue has not kept pace with annual expenditures resulting in prior year's fare box surpluses covering the difference over the last couple years; and

WHEREAS, the 2023 fare shortfall of \$740,000 brought the fund balance down to \$272,000, and with a forecasted shortfall of \$706,000 in 2024, would result in a year-end fare box deficit of \$434,000; and

WHEREAS, the last fare increase for operation costs was implemented in 2010 as a \$3 surcharge; and

WHEREAS, these projected budget shortfalls are not sustainable and swift action must be taken; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County must urgently consider a multi-pronged approach to resolving these challenges, including but not limited to, allocating American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and a series of fare increases; and

WHEREAS, Ordinance 2022-090 provides the County Executive with authority to add new fees or adjust fees set by the Unified Fee Schedule by way of Executive Order; and

WHEREAS, after consideration of this resolution, amendments to the Whatcom County Code may be made to alter the implementation timeline for a ferry rate increase.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council request the Executive, in consultation with the Public Works Department and the Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee, to use his executive authority to increase the Whatcom County ferry fares; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the implementation timeline for this Executive Order fare increase follow WCC 10.34 as it currently reads and as it may be amended; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council supports appropriating \$358,000 of ARPA funds to the Ferry Fund; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council requests that the Executive issue an update to the Whatcom County Unified Fee Schedule that would institute a smaller and more predictable annual fare increase to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Ferry Fund over time.

APPROVED this ____ day of _____, 2024

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Royce Buckingham/by email 3/11/2024/ch
Civil Deputy Prosecutor