

Summary of the Ferry issue, March 2016

High speed passenger ferry service to Westpoint marina has been operating for a few months and there have been some problems with small boats, including swamping large rowing shells and flipping smaller sculling boats. These issues were discussed in a meeting of port users on Mar 8, 2016 and some actions agreed on to improve safety.

The **ferry is hazardous to small boats** in two ways:

- **Speed** – fast enough to give reduced time to see and avoid contact
- **Wake** – it produces an unusual wake that is hazardous to rowing shells and other small boats

The **most critical area is from the mouth of Westpoint slough out to about marker 9**. The ferry operator wants to maintain his schedule and does not want mandated low speed zones.

- **Schedule** – Weekdays at 8am, 9am, 4:30pm and 6:45pm, plus or minus 10-15 minutes
- **Round trips** – ferry will go inbound to Westpoint, then outbound around 10 minutes later

If you feel unsafe around this ferry, **consider avoiding the channel during these times**.

Actions the ferry and small boats should take to mitigate the hazard

When the ferry is approaching a small boat or boats from the rear, i.e. both travelling the same direction, the ferry will slow down to a low wake speed. **The small boat should stop** to allow it to pass. Once clear, it will resume normal (fast) operating speed.

When an encounter occurs near the mouth of Westpoint slough, it will slow to a low wake speed and allow the small boat user to get across the mouth (past the “crayon buoys”) to Marker 13. The **small boat user should stop at Marker 13** and allow the ferry to get past at low speed, so it can then resume normal (fast) speed.

If possible, **multiple small boats should form a single group** so it can get past easier.

Increased lateral distance helps with the wake – leave space for the ferry to operate by moving to the side.

General tips and reminders for small boat safety

- Always remember – **you are primarily responsible for your own safety**
- **Stay to the side of the channel**. Outside the channel may be better when the tide is high enough, but shallow water may make wake encounters worse, so use caution.
- **Make yourself visible** – wear bright clothing during the day and use good lights the dark
- **Never wear earbuds on the water** – use all your senses to remain aware of other boats
- **Use extra diligence** near the mouth of Westpoint slough, through the wires and out to about Marker 9. This area is where the space constraints make the hazard most acute.

Any small boat users who have a dangerous incident, especially if you are capsized or injured, **should report the details** so authorities can be notified. Reports can be made to BIAC at sculling@gobair.org or board@gobair.org. **Emergencies should always be reported via 911.**

A follow up statement from the ferry operator is included on the following page. A more detailed summary of the meeting that was held are on subsequent pages.

Statement from the ferry operator

We are happy that most clubs have been able to work with all commercial traffic in the channel. And while we understand the confusion that comes with a change in the status quo and want to understand everyone's concerns we want stress that all of our captains are educated and experienced professional Mariners equipped with newest most modern navigation and safety equipment.

At Prop our values are not focused on making money though we rely on it to make it work, the company was founded on making people's lives better. The areas number one concern for large employers and the populous at large is traffic. We all share the traffic and commute frustration. We move our families and take jobs based on commutes. Our friends loved ones and our spouses drive frustratingly long and stressful commutes sometimes to go a few miles. The Bay Area moves less than 10% of the ferry traffic that other cities with similar access to water take. Props modern low wake, shallow draft vessels represents a step forward in efficiency and with low shore side effect.

Prop is the first commercial, private NON SUBSIDIZED ferry carrier in the Bay Area. We have invested our own money to develop a public carrier, with design and delivery of the first boat to the area with the dream of improving the lives of the people in our community. By no means has this been easy, the legal hurdles and management challenges outside of the cost of operating a business like Prop has been a massive and at times a trying challenge. Outside the legal and financial realm, the support from agencies, cities and most of all the public has kept our motivation high as it's clear, relieve is here and it's long over due.

By adding scheduled service to Redwood City we bring sorely needed relief to the problematic 101 commute and Bay Bridge and San Mateo bridge. The challenge is the distance to Redwood City, to make it financially feasible we need to perform 3 trips in the morning and two in the evening to make the project work financially. 2 trips would be the absolute minimum to make it work. Slowing down for a full 10 minutes in and 10 minutes out in open water would effectively eliminate the potential to run a second trip within the commuter window.

We hope to engage the channel users at large on a semi regular basis to create and convene with a channel safety committee as an additional step to make our skills expertise and time available to this who have a concern or just want to learn more about us. To this end we hope to maintain our current course and actions to slow when needed so that we all can use the commercial channel to its potential safely without confrontation or angst.

My name is James Jaber the founder of Prop and thank everyone for being professional and courteous. Further I am here for questions, introductions or to provide background or additional information.

Sincerely,

James

james@bayareafastferry.com

<http://www.propsf.net>

Summary of the March 8, 2016 port users meeting regarding the Ferry

Strictly from memory, by Jon Carlson

Estimate of attendance, 30-40 people.

Ferry captain, "Capt Andy" (sorry, do not remember his last name), represented the Ferry.

Lt. John Gunderson of RWCPD mediated.

Others included rowers (Stanford coaches, BIAC coaches, Norcal coach, Redwood Scullers, Santa Clara coach, several individual scullers), sailors, recreational boaters, Sea Scouts, Coast Guard, Marine Science Institute, and the Head of the Port of RWC.

Capt Andy initiated discussion by talking about wanting to work with other users in the interest of safety. However, he was adamant about his right to use the waterway within the legal bounds, including the speeds at which he operates. He was unwilling to commit to any kind of "no wake" or "low speed" zones. He expressed that if a small boat felt unsafe using a "commercial waterway" with traffic like the ferry then perhaps the small boat user should evaluate whether it was safe to use that waterway in that type of boat at all.

He expressed that his experience with small boat encounters was frustrating for him in that there is a lot of inconsistency. Not following the traffic pattern, not giving way when appropriate to allow him to safely pass, and generally having numerous groups and individuals being "strung out" all along the channel. He stated he would not be able to commit to slow down to pass rowers and small boats because there were frequently many groups or individuals and so there was no common location at which he could resume his desired speed.

He stated several times that his schedule is very consistent within a relatively small window (+- 10-15 minutes) and that if small boats felt unsafe operating near him they could plan to avoid the channel during those windows of time. His scheduled timing is roughly:

- Weekdays – 8:00am, 9:00am, 4:30pm, 6:45pm

These times are approximate, and he is typically coming into the harbor/Westpoint a few minutes before and then departing the harbor/Westpoint a few minutes after, though based on my experience there is some natural variability. All trips involve a round trip – arrive, drop off/pick up passengers, depart.

Many rowers expressed concern for their safety relative to wake size and operating speed of the ferry. Two main hazards are risk of being flipped or swamped by the wake and the risk of a collision. It was emphasized to him that his wake is physically unusual for whatever reason and that it seems to have a greater risk of flipping or swamping a rowing shell than the wake of other large boats, even tugs or ships. It was emphasized to him that space/distance helps – the hazard presented by his wake dissipates somewhat with distance and is particularly hazardous when he is close to a shell. It was also emphasized to him that his operating speed made it more difficult to see, anticipate, and react to an encounter with the ferry. A boat at rowing speed does not have very much time to react because of the speed at which the ferry moves.

Many rowers and other port users emphasized the waterway is a "mixed use" waterway.

It was discussed that the most hazardous area is generally between marker 13 (mouth of Westpoint) and marker 9 (about where the bay begins to open up). This is because the channel is physically constrained by islands on both sides, on low tide there is mud on both sides that makes outside the markers unavailable even to rowing shells, the wake gets reflected by the shoreline resulting in it not dissipating as quickly, and the number of users that go through there leads to increased traffic density. Further out, the bay opens up and small boat users begin to naturally spread out and also have less expectation about being as protected from wind, waves and larger boats. The space in the more open water also allows the wake to dissipate better and gives the ferry somewhat more space to avoid small boats.

Capt Andy said he thought he could take the following actions to help reduce the risk to small boats:

- If he is approaching a small boat from the rear, i.e. both are travelling the same direction, if the small boat stops to allow him to pass he is better able to slow to a no wake speed for a moment to pass and then resume. However, this does not work if the small boat does not stop because he must slow down so much he can't get past. He does not want to do this all the way out the channel, so to the extent he can do it for a small group or cluster of boats at once, it helps his ability to do that.
- At the mouth of Westpoint slough, if a small boat is crossing that area (i.e. near the red/green "crayon" buoys), he could slow for a moment until the small boat crosses, then once across the small boat stops momentarily at marker 13, he can make the corner slowly to get past the small boat before resuming his speed. Kind of a conceptual "cross walk area" across the mouth of Westpoint slough, assuming the small boat stops on the other side to allow him to get past.

My personal takeaways, which may be obvious but worth re-emphasizing anyway:

- Above all else, **I'm the only one who is truly looking out for me!** Pay attention out there!
- **Regardless of who has what legal right of way**, if I am in a dangerous encounter with the ferry while sculling, **I'm physically going to lose**. So I will do what I can to reduce the odds of getting run over!
- **Being on the correct side of the channel is very important**. It gives the ferry more room to use the full width of the channel to go around, and it increases the likelihood that groups of opposite direction rowing traffic will not effectively block the whole channel. Using the correct traffic pattern is more crucial than ever. Keep in mind the ferry simply cannot go outside the channel markers.
- I am going to **wear bright clothing** to help be seen by a faster, larger boat.
- In the dark, I am going to **use the brightest lights I can find**, recognizing that while better than nothing, all of the small portable lights available may still not be terrifically visible to a faster, larger boat. For me personally, I buy and maintain my own lights because they are brighter than the club lights.
- When rowing near the ferry's scheduled trip times, I need to **be extra diligent about looking carefully before going between markers 15 and 13, i.e. crossing the mouth of Westpoint slough**. The ferry comes in and out of there at relatively high speed. The "cross walk area" concept, while nice if it works, should not be 100% relied on by small boats.
- **Don't wear earbuds on the water**. You need all your senses to keep your awareness sharp on the water.