

March 31, 2009  
Final,  
Front page A1

## Portland a possible destination for new year-round ferry route

TOM BELL Staff Writer

Officials in southwest Nova Scotia want to establish a new year-round ferry service between Yarmouth and New Brunswick to accommodate commercial trucks.

Yarmouth officials are eyeing Portland as a partner, but they are also looking at Portsmouth, N.H., and the Massachusetts and Boston.

The vessel would be a conventional single-hull ferry - larger than the old Scotia Prince but slower than The Cat that carries tourists between Portland and Nova Scotia in the summer.

The ferry would save truckers time and fuel by providing an alternative to the 300-mile trip by road, said Dave Whiting, manager of the Port of Yarmouth and the Yarmouth Area Industrial Commission.

Most of the truckers would be hauling fish and wood products, he said. The ferry also could carry containers.

In the summer, it would operate in place of The Cat and serve tourists as well, he said.

"It's a realistic vision. We think it will work," Whiting said.

The proposal is part of the port's long-range plan released this month. It calls for \$20 million in investment in developing a U.S. customs clearance facility in Yarmouth for truckers and ferry passengers.

Portland's primary drawback as the possible U.S. port is that it is farther away from Boston, the destination of cargo. But Whiting said Portland and Yarmouth share a common history.

"We always lean toward Portland because of our relationship with them," he said.

There has been ferry service between Portland and Yarmouth since 1970, when the Prince of Fundy began operating. The Prince operated from 1982 to 2005, and The Cat took over in 2006.

Another link is Jeff Monroe, who until last year worked as the director of ports and transportation for the city of Yarmouth and worked for Yarmouth as a consultant on the plan.

Monroe said the service initially would be subsidized by the province of Nova Scotia, which is now subsidizing The Cat's conventional ferry service between Digby, Nova Scotia, and Saint John, New Brunswick.

Nova Scotia last year provided Bay Ferries, operator of The Cat, with \$5 million. This year, it has agreed to cover the coming season, with a cap at \$12 million.

The Cat eliminated some trips at the end of last season because of high fuel costs and the lack of growth in passenger traffic.

The Digby-Saint John ferry is also struggling. The Canadian government and the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have pledged enough financial support to keep the service afloat until 2011. Digby is about an hour's drive from Yarmouth.

The question for the Nova Scotia government, Monroe said, is whether it should "put all its eggs in one basket" the year-round ferry service between Yarmouth and New England. He said the new ferry service would be a su right kind of vessel -æa modern, fuel-efficient ferry of the kind used in the North Sea.

Portland officials were not aware of Yarmouth's plan Monday, but said they want to get involved.

"We have had a long-standing relationship with Nova Scotia and are looking forward to talking with them about what opportunities there are to expand services between our two communities," said city spokeswoman Nicole

Bay Ferries officials could not be reached for comment.

The year-round ferry service would have several obstacles, said Christopher Wright, who lives in Digby and wo ferry companies around the world.

Wright said it's unclear whether there is enough demand for shipping cargo between Nova Scotia and New Eng harbor maintenance tax levied by the U.S. government on all imports would add more than \$300 to the shipm truckload of fish.

Not only that, the fee is billed to each shipper, causing a huge "hassle factor" in extra paperwork, he said.

However, Wright said, Congress might eliminate the tax in order to encourage the movement of goods between United States on waterways. The federal government is now encouraging so-called "short sea shipping" because emissions, highway congestion and the wear and tear that trucks cause on the nation's roads.

A bill recently introduced in Congress provides a tax exemption for cargo transported between any two U.S. po between a Canadian port and a U.S. port on the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway System. The legislation red that Nova Scotia ports are included, Wright said.

Another problem, Wright said, is that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security likely will require that goods t U.S. Customs officials 96 hours before arrival. That's impossible for cargo that is fresh fish, he said.

"Ninety-six hours before the fish get to the U.S., it's still swimming around," Wright said.

Monroe disagreed. He said reporting requirements for trucks boarding ferries are about one hour before the ve:

The ferry trip between Portland and Yarmouth would take 11 hours, about twice as long as The Cat requires.

Monroe said some tourists don't mind the extra hours.

He said people often view time spent on a ferry as being part of the vacation. Passengers would be able to slee and arrive in Nova Scotia the next morning, he said.

Monroe said The Cat's capacity for carrying trucks is limited.

A large conventional vessel would have room to fit more trucks, thus lowering the cost for individual truckers, l

In Digby, the proposed ferry service is viewed as a threat to the Princess of Acadia, the service between Digby ferry serves passengers and truckers.

Besides bringing tourists to Digby, the Princess of Acadia allows fishermen to ship fresh fish to Boston, said Jim official who is a leader in a coalition of businesses and communities advocating for continual government supp

"I won't want to see one community fight against another community," he said.

"Hopefully, if Yarmouth is to get into the trucking industry, the two ships can continue to exist."

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