

U.S. Congresswoman Emily Randall (D, WA-06)
Press Conference on FERRIES Act
May 8, 2026

Congresswoman Emily Randall: Thanks, folks, for joining us. I'm Congresswoman Emily Randall. I proudly represent the sixth congressional district -- you can see in the background behind us -- and I'm a frequent rider of Washington State ferries.

I grew up excited about ferries, as so many people in our community do, riding the boat to a field trip at the Seattle Center, or to come to a specialist in Seattle where my sister had many appointments, or, you know, just a family trip out to dinner.

I have so many constituents who ride the ferries every day to commute to their jobs, whether that's in the healthcare space or in tech or a small business owner, and being able to rely on constant and steady funding for our ferries is so important. We all know what it feels like when you just miss a boat, or when your run is canceled and you can't get to work, or you can't get to your appointment.

And working at the state level, we were able to make some unprecedented investments in our ferry system during my time in Olympia, but we kept running up against roadblocks in which there wasn't enough federal funding or federal funding that was available -- wasn't available to Washington State Ferries because of different red tape and restrictions in those grant opportunities.

And so I knew when I got elected to Congress that so important to my work and to my constituents and to the State of Washington was to fight for more ferry funding and to look for more ferry allies in this work.

That's why I'm really proud to have co-founded the Congressional Bipartisan Ferry Caucus alongside co-chairs, John Garamendi, a Democrat from San Francisco, Nicole Malliotakis, a Republican from Staten Island in New York, and Nick Begich, Republican from Alaska, and together, we have introduced the Bipartisan FERRIES Act, which calls for record setting investments in ferries, expansion of grant opportunities, and funding so that Washington State Ferries can benefit, systems like Kitsap Transit passenger only ferries can benefit, Alaska, and New York, and California, and ferry systems across the country -- of which there are more than I ever knew -- can benefit. And we're hopeful that this [FERRIES] act will be included, at least some of it, in the next Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act, which is scheduled for our first hearing coming up in the next couple of weeks.

My magic eight ball on whether or not bills pass this Congress is a little rusty, but we are doing everything we can to increase support and to ensure that we have all the momentum behind us as possible so that we can invest in various systems like ours and across the country, in our boat building and ship manufacturing experience, expertise, and industry and in workforce development, and some of our strongest allies in this work are right here in Washington state, including our Governor Bob Ferguson.

Governor Bob Ferguson: Thank you so much, Congresswoman, and I just like to start by, you know, really thanking you for your incredible partnership from her time in State Legislature, but now in a different capacity for both of us, and she's just such a strong ally and great representative for your district, so we appreciate it, and so I'm not surprised that the Congresswoman is really helping to lead the fight on this really, really, really critical investments from federal government for our ferry system.

First, if I just say a few words, I just want to obviously thank our workers. The Congresswoman and I deeply appreciate the workers here at the ferries who really keep the system working and work extremely hard. We're deeply grateful for their service.

The Congresswoman mentioned there's an awful lot of ferry systems around the country. We're the largest, and our service served more than 20 million riders last year, and that ridership continues to grow. I think, between the summer of 2024 and summer of 2025 we added 500,000 riders. So, the system is popular. It's iconic to our state, and from day one as Governor, I've been laser focused, as a Congresswoman knows, on trying to improve our ferry service.

I've traveled the State, Orcas to Bainbridge, Whidbey to Seattle, to meet directly with individuals who rely on the service. And we all know people depend on it. I appreciate what you mentioned, whether it's getting care that folks need, or for field trip for students, or just to live your lives. We understand how critical this system is for Washingtonians all across our state. It is a literal lifeline. Support from the federal government is critical for our ferry system.

In 2025 just give you a sense of scale, federal funding comprised 16% of our ferry system's operating budget and 5% of the capital budget. Those investments are critical, and frankly, we need more, and that's why I so appreciate the Congresswoman's leadership on this issue.

Just to give you a sense of what we've made progress on in the last year, we've returned to full domestic service for the first time since 2019, but there's a caveat there, and I emphasize this, that progress is fragile, primarily because our fleet is aging, our system is aging, and so while we've made significant improvements on cutting down canceled routes, further investment from the federal government would be a true lifeline for us to continue the momentum that we've started.

Again, I just really deeply appreciate you know the Congresswoman and her leadership on an issue that impacts so many Washingtonians, obviously is not just folks in her district, but all around so this kind of leadership that doesn't just help her constituents, but really Washingtonians in many, many different parts of our state, and I'm deeply grateful for her work. Thank you so much.

Dan Twohig – Vice President of the International Masters, Mates, and Pilots Pacific Region:

I'm Dan Twohig, I'm the vice president of the International Organization of Masters, Mates, and Pilots for the Pacific Maritime Region, which is actually the whole west coast, Alaska, California, Hawaii. We're the MMP, and what we do as a Maritime Union is workforce development. That's our thing. And so as the Congresswoman said, there's an awful lot of ferries around here, and there really are. And not only do we deal with the Alaska Marine Highway and Washington State

Ferries, but Whatcom County, King County, Pierce County, Wahkiakum County, McNeil Island, and the ferries down in San Francisco.

I had the honor of meeting Emily Randall last summer, shortly after the announcement of the ferry caucus in its existence. And we were in Alaska. We were riding a ferry. We spent the whole day together eating off paper plates and talking about the maritime world and all the changes that we needed to have in it. And what I realized was that I was talking to a leader.

Shortly after that, I was invited to go to the first meeting of the Congressional Ferry Caucus. And this is the first time that we heard about the FERRIES Act. It was the first time we really started talking about it. And it's an infrastructure bill. It really is. But at the same time, infrastructure means jobs, and jobs is workforce development, and that's what we do.

About a month later, I invited Emily Randall to come to our training facility in Baltimore, not only to see the simulation facilities that we have, but also to speak to a group of young women called in a conference called Women on the Water, which, of course, you know the acronym is WOW.

But there were 150 young women. They were the cadets from all of the academies, maritime academies in the country, Maine Maritime, Mass maritime, Great Lakes Maritime, Fort Schuyler Kings Point, Cal maritime, and Texas A&M.

There were 150 girls there between the ages of about 18 and 22 and when Congresswoman Randall came in for lunch to speak to these women, I sat in the back of the room. I watched them put down their forks and knives, and they were riveted by what she had to say.

She talked about her story, she talked about leadership, she talked about the challenges in Congress, and I watched a group of women that I knew were going to be leaders in the future. And it was a leader speaking to leaders. It was very, very impressive.

I'm the leader of a Maritime Union. I'm a Master, I'm a mate, I'm a ship pilot. And our commitment here today is to say that the labor partners that you have are here, Governor, we're going to be right with you as you lead this state. Emily will be right with you as you lead us in Congress. And so, all we really have to say is this is a good bill. The Masters Mates & Pilots will do everything we can to push it across the finish line. Thank you.

Kate Walters – Kitsap County Commissioner: I'm Katie Walters, a Kitsap County Commissioner, and I'm also Chair of the Kitsap Transit Board. And for Kitsap County, our identity is really deeply connected to the water and to the ferry system, quite literally.

And beyond just what you had mentioned, the commuters the need to get over between Seattle and Kitsap County for work, or to go to a Mariners game or Seahawks game, to go to a medical appointment, to go to school. You're deeply connected.

But beyond that is really the visitor economy. Just riding the ferry over today, so many people were taking selfies. Like the Washington State Ferry system is the number one tourism attraction for Washington State. It's iconic. Every movie you hear about Seattle, right? You see

the iconic skyline. So it's so important to us, it's what people first see. That's their introduction to Washington State, a lot of times.

And so that first impression is so important, and tourism is a vital part of our local economy. Across the state, visitors support our small businesses, our restaurants, our lodging, our arts community, our historic downtowns and reliable ferry service is essential to making all of that possible.

And what we're finding the summer with the World Cup coming, that's even more important. And so as we're planning for this, we just know that when reduced ferry service happens, or when it's unreliable, it has an immediate effect on our economy, in Seattle and across the state, as well as in Kitsap.

Weekend visitors choose other destinations, day trippers, they aren't able to come, so we feel that impact right away. But simply put -- that the ferry service and tourism are directly connected.

So the FERRIES Act, which I'm so excited about, and I was in DC, we got to unveil your logo, and the FERRIES Act recognizes that reality, and it's really about stabilizing and strengthening our system in a critical way that is beyond daily commuters. It really is tied to our visitor economy as well, and so for Kitsap County, this is way more than just about convenience.

It's really about economic vitality. So we have the opportunity with this act to invest in a system that serves residents and visitors alike. A strong ferry system means a strong tourism economy, and a strong tourism economy benefits the entire state.

John Clauson, Executive Director Kitsap Transit: Thank you, Commissioner, Governor, Congresswoman Randall, nice to see you. My name is John Clauson and I'm the Executive Director of Kitsap transit. And we operate the fast ferry program from Kitsap County that connects into downtown Seattle, as well as some other routes in our community.

It's almost 10 years, in fact, November this year, it will be 10 years since the voters of Kitsap County approved the creation of a fast ferry program for Kitsap Transit. So, we've been in existence for quite a while in our fast ferry program now, and just to give you a little bit of a background, we have a fleet of 10 vessels, and I was just thinking a minute ago, out of all 10 of our vessels, every one of them was built in the State of Washington, which I think is an example of what this bill will do for us as we go forward and our economy here in the State of Washington.

Just to give you a quick reference of our system, as I mentioned, we have 10 boats that we operate. In 2025, we carried about 1.28 million rides on our service in that 12 month period. About 70% of those rides were on our fast ferry program that operated to downtown Seattle.

Our Commissioner mentioned the importance of connection to this side of the water for our folks on the Kitsap side for as she mentioned, entertainment, sports, education, medical, all of those are very, very important for our folks.

To give you an example of what Congresswoman Randall's bill is going to do for us is, as I'm sure all are aware, it's fairly expensive to operate a ferry program. These boats are expensive, as we've learned. Washington State Ferries is working to update their fleet.

We've been looking at our fleet and looking to the future as to when we need to replace them, and I could tell you that over the next 50 years, we projected a need of over \$442 million just to replace our fleet and keep that fleet up to par so that we can maintain the reliable service.

So, without the support of the bills that Congresswoman Randall submitted, it would be very, very difficult for us in the local community to be able to support that kind of increase. So, it is very, very important for the future of our system, and I'm sure I work closely with Washington State Ferries, avid support from the federal government is going to be essential for their program as well. Thank you.

Jodi Davis, small business owner and ferry commuter: Hi, everyone. My name is Jodi Davis. I've commuted daily for 20 years from Bremerton to Seattle for my livelihood, for work. I love my fairy commute. I share photos on Instagram proudly with the hashtag, "My commute is better than yours."

My livelihood lies on the ferry system to get me to and from work, it serves as literal life, life for many Kitsap County residents who cannot access health care they need locally. My friend Armel, a single mom who commutes her for chemotherapy treatments. When service is disrupted, she's forced to ask friends to forfeit their day and drive a three plus hour highway commute to Fred Hutch with her. And my young friend Brooke, who commuted Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to meet the Children's Hospital [inaudible] right across the street for her weekly treatments while her parents worked and tended to their siblings.

Bremerton and the surrounding area is a working class community. Our city is rich with talent across all sectors of the workforce. Among my fellow committers, I ride the ferry with people in the service, medical, and construction fields. And like most families, we rely on childcare, elder care, and pet care to support our work and away from home hours.

When ferries are unreliable, it places an undue burden on the people who support us, not to mention the very real financial impact, particularly at a time when household budgets are stretched thin with little in reserve.

Ferries also serve as a direct conduit to family and cultural events. Unreliable service means missed birthdays, forfeited tickets to sports and concerts, hours spent waiting at the terminal, or worse, for those of us who can afford it, that need to book a hotel room.

As a small business owner, I'm acutely aware of the impact on commerce. Our community shows up for us, they're the reason we stay in business, but we need surrounding communities to engage with us and our fellow small business neighbors.

It's disheartening to hear that people hesitate to visit because of ferry unreliability. We all recognize there are factors beyond anyone's control that may affect service. We all want safe

ferries. We want workplace conditions to be safe for ferry workers, and we rely on a sustainable fleet that will serve generations to come.

I'll end where I started. I love my commute. I've made my lifelong friends over the commuting years riding the boats. It's truly the best way to get to work. My commute is indeed better than most. Thank you. Washington State Ferries, everyone doing good, hard work to maintain our marine highway.

Congresswoman Randall: I'm so grateful to have partners like you heard from today, from the Governor, to Kitsap Transit, our county commissioners, our neighbors, our labor partners.

I'm grateful to represent a community of folks who all love our ferries so desperately and are united in creating and attracting the investments that we need, the investments that we need to keep constructing boats here, to maintain our fleet here, to provide opportunities for workforce and to get folks where they need to go.

And thank you all for joining us. And I think we're happy to take questions.