

MARYLAND

Chesapeake Bay ferry would showcase Crisfield among scenic Maryland destinations



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A passenger ferry from Crisfield across the Chesapeake Bay to the western shore could boost tourism as five Maryland counties explore the possibility.

"It's not just about connecting destinations. It's about being connected to the Chesapeake Bay," said Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County Executive Director Kristen Pironis.

The five-county tourism consortium, which includes Calvert, Queen Anne's, Somerset and St. Mary's counties, is spearheaded by Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County.

Clint Sterling, director of Somerset County Recreation Parks and Tourism, noted the project is an extension of ferry services to Smith and Tangier islands. A larger cruise line also uses the city periodically to dock.

"We feel the time is right for this type of project. Our mission is to increase exposure to the county and drive visitors to locations in Somerset County. This is a project getting statewide attention, and we're at the table with four other counties trying to work towards our mission," Sterling said.

Increased visitation to the area, Sterling noted, would be a "rising tide that lifts all boats," if the landing is approved.

Potential scenic destinations along the route

The tourism consortium began accepting proposals to determine the financial and operational viability of providing passenger ferry service as well as conducting cost-benefit and economic impact analyses.

The five counties in consideration have a combined \$125,000 in matching funds ready, with the consortium receiving a \$125,000 grant by the U.S. Commerce Department in

October for the feasibility study.

WHAT'S GOING THERE: Squeaky's Café is expanding to Princess Anne's Washington Inn and Tavern

Sterling added this project will highlight the Chesapeake Bay.

"Somerset County is proud to be a part of this transformational statewide project that will position Maryland as a singular destination for water-based travel," said Craig Mathies Sr., president of Somerset County Commissioners. "Somerset County is committed to a sustainable tourism model that will strengthen our economic growth in the Somerset area for all county businesses and residents by using the Chesapeake Bay as a connector for visitors to experience our county, while providing an economic boost to the area."

According to Pironis, if the study determines passenger ferry service along Maryland's portion of the Chesapeake Bay is feasible, it will "be one step closer to providing equal and equitable access to the bay, and that would be a game changer."

In the introduction to the feasibility study, the initiative listed potential ferry destinations along the Chesapeake Bay including Annapolis, Galesville, Chesapeake Beach, Solomons, St. Mary's City, Leonardtown, Crisfield, Cambridge, St. Michaels, Easton, Kent Narrows, Rock Hall, Chestertown, Chesapeake City, North East, Havre de Grace and Baltimore.

BY BOAT: New ice breaker for Smith Island ready as winter lifeline and tribute to longtime captain

Proposals are due by Feb. 15. The consortium expects to award the job to a qualified bidder on or before March 15.

Didn't Crisfield consider a ferry before?

This is not the first time a Crisfield ferry plan has spurred excitement at the prospect of generating tourist dollars.

A plan in the early 2000s for a ferry crossing from Crisfield to Reedville, Virginia, was dashed after both Maryland and Virginia transportation official concluded it would not be profitable. The original plan called for the transportation of both passengers and vehicles, and had sparked interest in building a hotel, conference center and outlets, among other business ventures.

The Crisfield ferry would have been operated by a private company with no public subsidies. By contrast, the Cape May-Lewes Ferry in 2003 took in \$14.4 million but ran an

annual deficit of about \$3.5 million, and was subsidized through tolls on the Delaware Memorial Bridge.

In 2002, the Maryland General Assembly allowed a bill to die that would have allowed Somerset County to grant a ferry franchise. By 2005, money the city earmarked from the federal transportation bill for a ferry landing was instead diverted to improving the City Dock.