

Getting on a Washington ferry for the first time since the pandemic? Here's what you can expect.

(Courtesy of Amanda Zhou, Seattle Times)

Traffic is starting to return on ferries as more people start to venture out of their homes.

Washington State Ferries, vehicle ridership is returning to pre-pandemic levels and has fully recovered on some routes, particularly on weekends.

“The summer really is the Super Bowl for the ferry system,” spokesperson Ian Sterling said.

But walk-on ridership — primarily made up of commuters — remain down by nearly 70%, he said.

For those who haven't taken a ferry since before the pandemic, there are a couple of [things to know before taking a trip](#) this summer.

Lines could be long. The Washington State Ferries is operating [fewer boats than normal](#) and hiring has not kept up with the wave of retirements during the pandemic, Sterling said. The Edmonds Kingston route, which is popular among tourists, had a two hour wait last Sunday, he said.

Avoid rush hour. The busiest times are on Friday afternoons and on Sundays. The best time to travel is early in the mornings and later at night. The Washington State Ferry website has [a tool to help check traffic](#).

Keep your face covered. Since ferries are governed by federal law, masks are required any place outside a personal vehicle. That includes decks, bathrooms and indoor seating areas. Those in vehicles are also encouraged to stay in their cars.

Galleys remain closed. While snack and drink vendors are still closed, vending machines are available. Think airplane rules: Remove face coverings only when eating or drinking. Sterling said discussion are ongoing to reopen galleys by the end of June.

You may be greeted at a distance. Washington State Ferries are using a new selfie stick credit-card-reader device at toll booths. They encourage travelers to buy tickets online.

Schedules of the ferry routes [are available online](#).