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June 19, 2020

Margaret E. Curran, Esq., Chairperson
Public Utilities Commission
89 Jefferson Boulevard
Warwick, RI 02888

Linda George, Esq., Interim Administrator
Division of Public Utilities and Carriers
89 Jefferson Boulevard
Warwick, RI 02888

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PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Re: Informational Notice – Interstate Navigation Company – COVID-19 Scheduling

Dear Chairperson Curran and Administrator George:

This office represents the Interstate Navigation Company d/b/a The Block Island Ferry (“Interstate”). As you know, Interstate operates the lifeline passenger, vehicle, and freight ferries from Point Judith to Block Island.

As we begin the late arrival of the busy summer season, due to the COVID-19 emergency, Interstate is being presented with a number of obstacles to providing adequate service to the Island. First of all, working with the Office of the Governor and the Town of New Shoreham, we have voluntarily reduced our passenger capacities to about 50% to conform with the state’s social distancing guidelines for ferries. Also, because of shipyard delays caused by the effects of COVID-19, the repowering and rehabilitation of the M/V *Anna C* has been delayed by about a month. Therefore, the M/V *Anna C* will not be entering service until the middle of July at the earliest.

Because we feel it is imperative that, as the lifeline ferry to Block Island, we do everything we can do to meet the demands for service, we have come up with a schedule (the M/V *Block Island* and the M/V *Carol Jean*) that we feel will be adequate to handle the vehicles and freight that are already booked. However, there are still gaps in the morning schedule departing Point Judith and in the afternoon schedule departing Block Island. We therefore will need to add another vessel to fill these schedule gaps to meet the demand for passengers.

In order to address this need, we are planning to run the fast ferry M/V *Athena* and to also temporarily add the fast ferry M/V *Islander*, which usually operates on the non-lifeline discretionary run from Newport to Block Island, to the vessels that run out of Point Judith. The M/V *Islander* will operate opposite of the M/V *Athena*. In that way, we will have more departures at peak travel times.

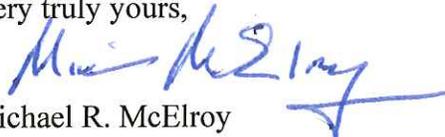
Normally the M/V *Block Island* holds 1,000 passengers, the M/V *Carol Jean* holds 1,110 passengers, the M/V *Anna C* holds 1,150 passengers, and the M/V *Athena* holds 250 passengers. With the COVID-19 restrictions, the M/V *Block Island* will only be able to carry about 500 passengers, the M/V *Carol Jean* only about 555 passengers, and the M/V *Athena* only about 125 passengers. The M/V *Anna C* is out of the mix for the time being, probably until late July. The M/V *Islander* will be able to carry about 185 additional passengers.

We do not want to cancel the discretionary Newport fast ferry run for the 2020 season. However, we need to delay the start of the Newport run for now in order to provide sufficient capacity from Point Judith. We will reassess the Newport run when the M/V *Anna C* returns to service. At that time, we will evaluate the status of the COVID-19 crisis and capacity restrictions which may exist and then determine whether the M/V *Islander* should return to Newport or whether she will need to stay at Point Judith for the remainder of the summer of 2020.

We want to emphasize that this is a temporary, emergency solution to the COVID-19 emergency capacity restrictions imposed by the state's ferry guidelines. Those guidelines state that ferries may operate additional vessels on the routes to deal with the capacity restrictions (copy enclosed).

We expect to place the M/V *Islander* in service on the Point Judith run on or about July 1st.

Very truly yours,


Michael R. McElroy

cc: Susan E. Linda
Town Clerk, Town of New Shoreham
Certified Mail RRR # 7019 1120 0001 6953 0889
Christy Hetherington, Esq.
John Bell
Katherine A. Merolla, Esq.

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Phase II ferry operation and sightseeing operation guidelines

Beginning on June 1, 2020, ferry and sightseeing operations may continue essential lifeline services and continue seasonal service. In accordance with the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) emergency regulations, ferry and sightseeing operators must prepare and implement a [COVID-19 Control Plan](#). The RIDOH emergency regulations can be found [here](#). The State prepared a [guidance document](#) to assist businesses in meeting the requirements outlined in these RIDOH regulations. Ferry operators and sightseeing operators must comply with RIDOH regulations and active [executive orders](#).

The guidelines below summarize **additional** steps Rhode Island is asking ferry and sightseeing operators to take. If you have any questions about this guidance, please contact Joseph Masino at Joseph.Masino@governor.ri.gov.

Phase II Operations:

- **Physical distancing:** Passengers, whenever possible, must maintain six (6) feet of physical distance between themselves and others who are not part of their household, especially on the vessel when moving about, as corridors and walkways are narrow. Passengers are responsible for maintaining physical distancing at all times possible. Operators can assist with physical distancing on the vessel if they so choose, this includes but not limited to, boarding by party size and assigned seating. In addition, to allow for adequate distancing, ferry operators will limit cabin capacity and request passengers to remain with their vehicles, if safe to do so, or on deck during the duration of the trip (weather dependent). Operators should place spacing demarcations at ticket booths, concessions, and boarding lines.
- **Capacity:** In order to maintain physical distancing, capacity should be limited to 30% to 60% of the operating vessel's capacity (based on ridership demand, weather elements, and sea conditions). **If needed, ferry operations will be allowed to operate additional vessels to run the routes (based on ridership demand, weather elements, and sea conditions).** When weather and sea conditions limit outdoor seating, ferry operators should limit capacity to 30%-40%. When outdoor seating is not limited, operators should limit capacity to 50%-60%.
- **Screening Signage:** COVID-19 screening signage should be posted at the entrances and high traffic areas. For lifeline ferries, added safety protocols should be posted for boarding passengers needing transport for residence, medical or essential services.
- **Cleaning Procedures:** All cabins and commonly touched surfaces such as handrails, tabletops, and restrooms on the vessel must be sanitized between runs and at the end of the day. The entire vessel also must be thoroughly cleaned at least once a day.
- **Food & Beverage Sales:** All food and beverage sales shall follow the most recent Executive Orders, regulations, and/or guidance related to restaurants.



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- **Bookings:** All ticket sales should be done online whenever possible to eliminate the need for paper tickets and to encourage cashless transactions. Service providers should inform customers of encouraging cashless transactions through social media and on company website.
- **Face Coverings:** All persons (employees and passengers) are required to wear face coverings in accordance with RIDOH regulations and [Executive Order 20-30](#). Face coverings shall not be required of those who are developmentally unable to comply, including young children who may not be able to effectively wear a mask. Nothing in this guidance shall require a place of business to refuse entry to a customer not wearing a face covering.
- **Customer Service:** Employees must wear face coverings while working in customer-facing roles. Employees are required to wash and sanitize their hands on a routine basis. Employees in positions that require direct contact with customers should wear gloves only if normally required to do so, along with their face coverings.

