



2012 Census of California Water Transit Services

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The U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics conducts a nationwide census of ferry boat operators for the U.S. Department of Transportation and that collected information is used for statistical purposes. The Caltrans Division of Local Assistance was asked by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to gather current data regarding ferry operations under MAP-21, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act.

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The research team compiled a spreadsheet and accompanying maps that include ferry boats, routes, and operators along with a number of related characteristics including ownership (public or private), daily trip counts, regulation of fares, terminal locations (street address and coordinates), boarding statistics, and route segment lengths.

Study Methods

Preliminary research revealed that water transit vessels in California provide services beyond what is commonly considered to be traditional “ferry” operations, and this necessitated the creation of three primary classifications of water transit service:

- Commuter services are commonly understood as “ferries” and provide essential, “point A to point B” transportation, such as traditional vehicle or passenger ferries.
- Non-commuter services also provide “point A to point B” operations but provide a variety of connecting services beyond those that are essential for vehicle and passenger commuting purposes.
- Recreational/“circular” services begin and end at the same terminal and include services such as dinner cruises or sport fishing operations.

During our research we also learned of a number of “water taxis,” small vessels that transport passengers on either a fixed-route or non-fixed route basis for short-distance trips. With the three-tiered classification scheme in place, we contacted 22 water transit operators in the state of California by telephone, specifically those that qualified as providing commuter or non-commuter services, and collected the following variables:

- Type of service (commuter, non-commuter, water taxi)
- Operates within (ocean, bay, river)
- Total number of segments
- Segment name (e.g., “Angel Island to Tiburon”) and length in nautical miles
- Advertised fares and regulatory authority
- Hours of operation
- Number of vessels
- Seating capacity
- Capacity for automobiles and bicycles
- Passenger boarding statistics and daily trip counts

- Projections for future service expansion, if provided
- Ownership and operator type (public or private)
- Name and contact information for chief executive officer
- Primary contact (name, email address and/or telephone number)
- Website
- Address and latitude/longitude coordinates of terminal locations

Findings

All of the collected data was summarized in a series of tables and route/terminal maps, organized by major California region. Examples of each are provided below:

Summary of Commuter and Non-Commuter Water Transit Services in the San Francisco Bay Area (incl. Santa Cruz)*

TYPE	TOTAL NUMBER OF OPERATORS*	TOTAL NUMBER OF VESSELS	TOTAL NAUTICAL MILES	OWNERSHIP (OW) / OPERATOR TYPE (OP)	
				TOTAL NUMBER OF PRIVATE	TOTAL NUMBER OF PUBLIC
COMMUTER	4	28	188.5	OW: 2 / OP: 2	OW: 2 / OP: 2
NON-COMMUTER	3	15	46.25	OW: 2 / OP: 3	OW: 1 / OP: 0
WATER TAXI	4	8**	N/A	OW: 3 / OP: 3	OW: 1 / OP: 1

* Two operators in this region provide both “commuter” and “non-commuter” services; see individual operator tables for more detail and thus are double-counted. There are nine unique operators in the region.

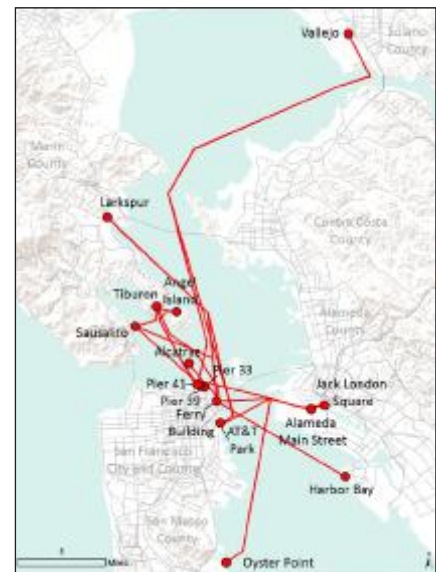
** Some operators in this region did not respond to repeated requests for information; table entries reflect data available at the operator’s website.

Policy Recommendations

This report provides a listing of 37 operators that were classified as “circular”/recreational in nature. These services were not directly relevant to the scope of this census since they do not meet the threshold for essential water transportation for California residents and commuters. However, future researchers might wish to reference this list as the operators may provide water transportation in cases of major regional emergencies.

About the Authors

Richard Kos is a full-time lecturer in the Masters of Urban and Regional Planning program at San Jose State University and Asha Weinstein Agrawal, Ph.D. is Associate Professor and Chair of this program. Brent Carvalho and Maria Louise-Javier are graduate student assistants in the Masters program.



OVERVIEW OF SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA WATER TRANSIT SERVICES

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1133.html