

Next generation of ferries to be modeled after popular Kennedy class boats

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With a full load of passengers returning from a day's work, the Staten Island Ferry John F. Kennedy pulls into St. George. (Photo courtesy of Terrence Murray)

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Don't mess with the classics.

At 50 years old, the John F. Kennedy ferryboat is in the autumn of its life in New York Harbor. It will be retired in several years, along with two Barberi class boats — the Andrew J. Barberi and the Samuel I. Newhouse — to make way for two brand new, storm-resilient vessels.

But even after the Kennedy's last departure, the boat's distinguishing features, like its outdoor promenades and extended foredecks, will live on, serving as the inspiration for the design of the next class of ferries.

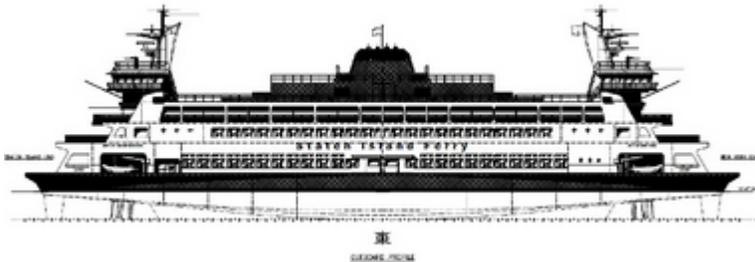
"Lord knows one of the greatest things in the world to do is to be on the ferry in summertime, watching the harbor go by," said John Waterhouse, chief concept engineer at Elliot Bay Design Group, on the pleasures of the Kennedy's outdoor seating.

Last August, the Department of Transportation awarded Waterhouse's Seattle-based design group **the contract to design the new class of two ferries**, which are estimated to cost the city around \$309 million to build.

Elliott Bay began its design process with a Preliminary Design Investigation, which involved passenger surveys and taking many trips on each boat to comprehensively evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.

The group found the Kennedy boat to be a commuter favorite, preferred over the newer Barberi and Molinari vessels, primarily because of its ample open-air passenger space. It's aged well, especially compared to the most recent Molinari class. Plagued by constant mechanical malfunctions, local officials deemed the three Molinari-class ferries "lemons" **shortly after they went into service in 2005 and 2006**.

EVERYONE LIKES THE KENNEDY



An early concept profile for the two Staten

Island Ferry boats that will be replacing the John F. Kennedy as well as the Barberi class's Andrew J. Barberi and Samuel I. Newhouse ferries. (Image courtesy of the DOT)

While Elliott Bay is still in its nascent design stages, Waterhouse said his group will be incorporating the favored aesthetic components from the Kennedy ferry while looking to equip the new vessels with more modern technology from the two Barberi class boats, which entered service in 1981 and 1982.

"Everyone likes the Kennedy," he said during an interview with the Advance. "So as much as possible we're trying to make the public spaces and the passenger flow onto the

vessel similar to the Kennedy class. But for mechanic systems, fuel efficiency and reliability of service, we're looking at drive system and technology in Barberi class as our starting point."

The ships will be built to hold 4,500 passengers -- 1,545 more than the Kennedy, but about 700 less than the Barberi boats. Each boat in the Molinari class can carry 4,427 riders.

Waterhouse said the limitations of the harbor's water depth, dock terminals and departure scheduling prevent the group from making any radical changes to the ferry design -- not that Elliot Bay would want to.

"[DOT] has a very efficient system," Waterhouse said. "There are no radical changes that would make it better. We're looking at the small things. We're looking everywhere we can with the small things to find opportunities to improve.

"Commuters will be very comfortable with what the boats are going to be like," he added.

MODERN SAFETY MEASURES

The boats will not be complete Kennedy clones. Not every feature can be carried over. For instance, its wooden seats aren't compliant with current marine fire regulations. The new boats will be modernized takes to meet current passenger and crew safety standards.



Workers are dwarfed under the hull of the John F. Kennedy ferry boat on September 20, 1987. (Staten Island Advance / Steve Zaffarano)

"I've heard some people say, 'Well why can't you just remake the Kennedy today?'" Waterhouse said. "The fact is that the Kennedy wouldn't meet modern requirements for structural fire protection and safe egress from the boat."

In September, officials announced the Staten Island Ferry fleet **would be updated as part of a \$255.4 million resiliency project** developed in response to Hurricane Sandy. Much of the storm resiliency will be focused on the terminals, but Waterhouse said his group is paying close attention to performance during storms.

"We are looking at issues of **freeboard** on the vessels," he said. "If there is an increase in sea level, how does that effect the ferry's ability to get in and out of terminals? If there's a storm surge, can they still keep operating? At what point do they have to stop operating in terms of wind and waves? These are all aspects of the design that we're incorporating."

Waterhouse aims to have the contract package for all of Elliott Bay's design work ready for submission to regulatory authorities by end of 2015. From there, the DOT will have to begin a bidding process for shipyards interested in building the vessels, which can take several years. The DOT has said it's too early to talk about when the new vessels will take to the harbor.

"It's very much a privilege to work with Captain James C. DeSimone and the people at the Staten Island Ferry," Waterhouse said. "We work with ferry systems all over North America and I can certainly say Staten Island is a well-run, well-managed system.

"The Staten Island Ferry is a world-recognized icon. What a pleasure to be involved in that."