

Something Fishy About Bridgeport's New Dock, Something Airy About It's Plans for a Ferry

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There must be something in the water. How else can we explain Bridgeport, our state's largest city, and what goes on there?

Bridgeport politics are infamous. The fact that they keep re-electing convicted felons to high office should tell you a lot. But on the transportation front the locals' behavior is equally hard to understand.

Case in point: the city's latest dreams of a high speed ferry.

Actually, more than dreams. Because money is being spent, yet again, and this time not just on a study but a new dock — without a ferry. As Brian Lockhart writes [in the CT Post](#), the city started back in October building a new dock on Water Street (near the existing slow-speed ferry terminal).

The \$11.2 million dock is being paid for with \$10.5 million federal money and \$700,000 kicked in by the local Bridgeport Port Authority, just as goodwill.

Normally such a project would be announced with fanfares, but not in Bridgeport. Why the stealth? Well, they may be building a dock but they don't have a ferry to operate there.

After the dock is built the city will then issue an RFP (request for proposals) for a company to run a ferry service. Usually such projects are done by seeking expressions of interest from vendors, then doing the

construction — but not in Bridgeport.

I have written any number of times why ferry service makes no sense: ferries can't offer the frequency of trips, the fares will easily be double the train fare, they can't operate in all weather, they're fuel inefficient and may end up being slower than Metro-North.

A Bridgeport ferry would probably stop in Stamford on its way to New York City, maybe even in Glen Cove, New York, too. That Long Island bedroom community built a beautiful \$17 million high speed ferry dock, but it has sat empty for the last six months because the ferry couldn't get enough passengers.

There are successful high speed ferries in the NYC area, but they're all heavily subsidized and don't operate in direct competition with rail service. And the operators of those ferries could very easily start service from Connecticut — if they thought there was a demand. But they haven't, because there isn't.

Ferry Tale

Bridgeport is no stranger to water transport experiments. You might remember back in 1976 the city hosted a private hovercraft service operating from that same Water Street location.

Bridgeport native Robert Weldon hoped to bring gamblers to the city's new jai alai fronton on a 60-passenger, 50-foot-long craft. In addition he would whisk fat cats to Wall Street in as little as 35 minutes.

But cutting travel times (compared with Metro-North) came with hefty fares: \$125 a month compared to the railroad's \$80 commuter pass. The noisy craft first departed Bridgeport at 6:45 a.m. on June 26, stopping in Huntington, Long Island on its way to the city. By November the service was stopped, having never achieved better than a 30% load factor.

Ah, Bridgeport! The city where expensive dreams never die — especially when they're spending other peoples' money.

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