



CITY OF BAINBRIDGE ISLAND

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Coburn/McCain Report Lacks Some Facts

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, December 10, 2009 – Senators Tom Coburn and John McCain issued a report yesterday criticizing the investment of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds in what they assert are “silly and shortsighted projects.” The report, *Stimulus Checkup: A closer look at 100 projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*, identifies a \$190,000 Department of Homeland Security, ARRA-Port Security Grant Program grant to the City of Bainbridge Island as an example of such funding.

The grant, awarded in August 2009, would fund equipment for the City’s police boat which would enable officers to rapidly detect and identify explosive materials that might be a threat to other vessels in Puget Sound.

The report identifies Bainbridge Island as a “tranquil hamlet” and suggests that the community has “little need” for such protection.

“It is apparent that there is significant relevant data which must not have been available to Senators Coburn and McCain as they made their determination on this project,” said Bainbridge Island Interim City Manager Lee Walton.

Walton noted that the report fails to recognize Bainbridge Island as the terminus of the most heavily used route in the state’s ferry system – a significant “marine highway.” The Washington State Ferries (WSF) have been identified by the FBI as a high risk Homeland Security target.

WSF reports that ferries travelling between Seattle and Bainbridge Island in 2008 transported 6.2 million riders. Ferries travelling between Bremerton and Seattle, which pass through waters under Bainbridge Island Police jurisdiction, transported an additional 2.5 million. Together, these routes carried 38% of WSF’s riders. Ferries between Edmonds and Kingston, which transit just five police-boat minutes away from the island,

carried another 4 million riders that year. (Source: Washington State Ferries Traffic Statistics Rider Segment Report, V3.11.)

“The FBI has determined that WSF boats, which carry as many as 2,500 passengers during peak hours, could be attractive targets for terrorists seeking a loss of life comparable to that which occurred at the World Trade Centers,” said Bainbridge Island Chief of Police Jon Fehlman. Fehlman noted that the popular television show Gray’s Anatomy gained significant attention for a storyline demonstrating the dramatic potential of such an attack.

A look at the statistics reveals that an attack on the Bainbridge-Seattle ferry line would have significant impacts on communities far beyond the island. While WSF does not track place of residence for its riders, a calculation using their 2008 statistics reflects 16,948 rider trips per day on the Bainbridge-Seattle run. The current island population is 23,290, which strongly suggests that a significant number of these riders are non-residents. Recent U. S. Census Bureau documents estimate that 2,995 island residents commute using public transportation, further supporting the conclusion that a significant number of riders on the Bainbridge-Seattle Route are non-residents. (Source: Ibid; 2009 Washington State Office of Financial Management; U. S. Census Bureau 2005 – 2007 American Community Survey 3-year Estimates.)

Bainbridge Island is also home to WSF’s only Maintenance Yard, which serves all of the ferry system’s vessels and terminals. “This further increases the significance of island security in protecting the state-wide transportation system,” Fehlman said. “With the nearest Coast Guard facility 10 miles across the Sound, the Department of Homeland Security has determined that, if properly equipped, the Bainbridge Island Police Department can play a valuable role in supplementing Coast Guard efforts.”

“It is unfortunate that Senators Coburn and McCain were apparently unaware of the significance of Bainbridge Island in our state and regional transportation when they developed their report,” Walton said. “It seems clearly evident that an investment of \$190,000 is a worthwhile expenditure to protect the thousands of human lives and significant infrastructure which could be impacted by a terrorist act against WSF. We believe that this is a prudent investment and are proud of this expression of confidence in the Bainbridge Island Police Department.”

Fehlman stated, “The inclusion of the Bainbridge Island Police Department’s police boat in this report reflects grossly inadequate investigation. Our boat is equipped to provide protection and service as needed when called upon. This is not ‘silly and short-sighted’. On the contrary, it is an example of utilizing available funding and resources to provide optimum protection to our community, the State of Washington and the general public.”

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