



Chebeague Transportation Company
16 North Road
P.O. Box 27
Chebeague Island, Maine 04017

January 7, 2021

John Kennelly
Chief of Planning
US Army Corps of Engineers
New England District
696 Virginia Road
Concord, MA 01742-2751

Dear Mr. Kennelly:

I am writing on behalf of both the Chebeague Transportation Company as well as the community we serve to emphasize how important it is to complete the upcoming dredging project as expeditiously as possible.

CTC has provided passenger ferry service to and from Chebeague Island for nearly five decades. Our service is used by commuters going to jobs on the mainland as well as those coming from the mainland to work here. These workers provide an essential economic foundation for our community. CTC is relied upon by the teachers who come to teach our pre-K through fifth graders at the island school. It's used by our school kids who are in 6th grade and above to commute to school on the mainland and participate in various after-school activities. It is also used, of course, by almost all of our islanders to get to the mainland to do the routine tasks of life, such as grocery shopping, doctors' visits, and everything else one might go to town for.

Perhaps the most essential user of our service is the Chebeague Emergency Medical Service. We are the vital link that connects our Island EMS team with mainland EMS who ultimately transport patients to the hospital. In 15 minutes, our ferry can deliver sick or injured passengers to a waiting ambulance. We provide around 65 EMS transports annually and are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We know we have saved lives.

Islanders are accustomed to occasional trip cancellations due to weather events or, in rare instances, mechanical problems on the ferry. What they are not accustomed to is the kind of service interruptions that we are increasingly forced to make now: cancellations based on tides.

As I'm sure you are aware, while our berth at the Stone Wharf on Chebeague has the benefit of being well protected from most storms, the approach channel to the pier is not a natural deep-water channel. Historically, this channel has required regular dredging,

with maintenance dredging occurring approximately every ten years to prevent silting in. It has been approximately 20 years since the channel was last dredged. The result of this delay is a channel that is no longer safe for us to navigate our passenger ferry at tides below -1 feet. The boat becomes extremely difficult to handle. The risk of picking up debris from the bottom is exponentially higher. This is a working harbor, servicing an active fishing fleet, and the channel floor is littered with abandoned line and gear. The risk of outright grounding, causing disruption in service either due to damage to the vessel, Coast Guard investigation or waiting for the tide to come in, increases as well.

This has created an untenable situation where we are regularly cancelling trips due to the lack of dredging in this channel. The disruptions already are severe. School schedules must be revised so teachers can get home when boats must be canceled. Commuters must leave work early or arrive late due to these cancellations. When we are forced to remain tied up because of low water, the Chebeague EMS has had to transfer patients to the mainland using a boat that must travel 10 miles into Portland instead of the mile and a quarter we travel to our normal mainland landing.

The channel continues to fill in. When we made the decision that we cannot operate at anything less than -1' tide, it was with the understanding, through our own manual soundings, that any tide above that would leave us with at least 6-12 inches of water under us. That was in February of 2020. During a recent tide of -.8' we saw 5.5' on our calibrated sounder, which is exactly the draft of our two ferries. We were obviously very close to pushing through mud. Based on our soundings, we estimate that the channel has filled in an additional 6" over the past year.

We have braced ourselves for the reality that dredging will not occur until fall of this year. As a company, we may need to implement a cancellation policy for tides lower than -.8' or more if the silting continues unchecked. Further delays in dredging will only exacerbate the issue, posing added risks and disruptions.

Life on an island is already difficult for our users. Making it more difficult by being forced to cancel trips due to dredging delays is having a direct impact on all of our school children, commuters, Emergency Medical Service as well as every single person on this island. Any further delay will only increase the difficulties faced, creating a direct threat to the sustainability of our year-round population.

We implore the Army Corps of Engineers to do everything possible to complete dredging project in 2021. The sustainability of our operation, along with that of the Chebeague Island community, depends on it.

If CTC can be of any assistance in keeping this project moving along, please let us know. We stand ready to help.

Sincerely,



Matt Ridgway
General Manager