

Steamship Authority gets \$12 million in federal aid in wake of reduced ridership during coronavirus pandemic

By [Travis Andersen](#) Globe Staff, Updated May 20, 2020, 11:42 a.m.



A Steamship Authority ferry going from Woods Hole to Martha's Vineyard, pictured in 2018. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

The Steamship Authority has received \$12 million in federal aid, including \$9.8 million in coronavirus relief, according to US Representative Bill Keating's office.

Keating, a Bourne Democrat, announced the funding in a statement on Wednesday.

The congressman said that in addition to the \$9.8 million in COVID-19 relief provided by the CARES Act, the Steamship Authority, which runs ferry service to Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, also received an annual allocation of \$2.45 million from "existing [Federal Transit Administration] sources."

The statement said all the funding was contingent on the Steamship Authority being designated as a commuter service by the FTA, a designation that was in doubt earlier this year.

The FTA had announced earlier this year that it intended to decertify the Steamship Authority as a commuter service. But the agency reversed course, the statement said, once Keating, working closely with the Steamship Authority and Cape Cod Transit Authority, provided the FTA with "new evidence" of commuter traffic on the island ferries.

"The stoppage in Steamship Authority service was a real threat and the ceasing of that service would have been catastrophic for our region," Keating said in the statement.

His words were echoed by Steamship Authority general manager Robert B. Davis.

"Without Congressman Keating's intervention with the Federal Transit Administration, these vital funds would not have been expedited as quickly as they were," Davis said.

The Steamship Authority has lost millions of dollars due to reduced ferry service to Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard amid the [COVID-19 pandemic](#).

On its website Wednesday, the authority said its high-speed vessel, the M/V Iyanough, will return to service Memorial Day weekend, offering four round trips daily between

will return to service Memorial Day weekend, offering four round-trips daily between May 21 and May 26.

“The vessel will then be inactive until at least mid-June as demand for the service past the holiday weekend remains low,” the site said.

As of May 14, the Steamship Authority had seen 376,386 passengers this year, a sharp dip from the 641,950 riders who had used the service at the same time in 2019, according to statistics provided by the quasi-public agency.

The authority’s website laid out a number of safety precautions the authority has taken amid the pandemic.

According to the website, “the use of cloth face coverings is now required for passengers while they are boarding, disembarking, and traveling in an interior passenger area, including freight decks, while on board one of its vessels.”

In addition, concession sales have been suspended, and cleaning also remains a top priority.

The authority has faced scrutiny in recent years.

A [report](#) from outside consultants released in December 2018 said the authority was badly understaffed, suffered from a “penny-pinching” mentality, and was hampered by sparring internal factions. The report followed a May 2018 review that found the authority had canceled 550 trips from January through April of that year, about 15 times the yearly average.

Davis said when the consultants’ report was released that the ferries were safe and that problems in the spring of 2018 resulted from “a lot of items that came together at the same time.”

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more recently, the authority's [website was unable to book online reservations](#) for several hours on Jan. 21 of this year, the first day to schedule summer travel to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket for the summer season.

Globe correspondent Jeremy C. Fox and [Matt Rocheleau](#) of the Globe staff contributed to this report.

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