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Ferry service to New England by 2012: Operator

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Scotia Cruises is buying a ferry to make a Halifax-New England run starting in April 2012.

Bruce McNeil, spokesman for Scotia Cruises, wouldn't disclose the price tag in an interview Thursday, but said the ship will carry 1,500 passengers and 460 vehicles.

"Right now our consultant over in Norway is in acquisition phase on our behalf on a ship called The Isle."

McNeil said he's 100 per cent sure his ferry service will happen because of their international team and investors, and because they received a green light from a lending institution to buy the ship.

Once the contract is signed, McNeil said, the ship will be taken for renovations at the Irving Shipyards.

It will leave Halifax every second day at 8 p.m. arrive in New England (most likely Portland, Maine) at 4 p.m.

"We are looking for people who want to make this trip as part of their vacation package. And I don't know anybody who's in a hurry when they're on vacation."

McNeil said he's offering the price of a ferry with the amenities of a cruise ship, but this ferry will only call Halifax home for half the year. In the winter months, it will sail out of Florida for trips to the Bahamas.

There is another company, Karlens Shipping, trying to start up a Halifax-Boston ferry service, but McNeil said it's not a competitor.

"We're keeping each other abreast of what we're doing. Whether something would merge in the future, that hasn't been stated yet, but I'm not ruling it out."

And Friday is the deadline for operators to get in their proposals to run a Yarmouth-New England ferry.

"I wish Yarmouth the best of luck, but at this time I think myself and a number of people are wondering where they're actually going," McNeil said.

Metro Halifax