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## [New ferry to Nova Scotia expected in spring](#)

**Five ship operators show interest in service to Portland offering amenities such as shows and casino gambling.**

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PORTLAND - A resumption of ferry service between Portland and Nova Scotia next year appears increasingly likely.

Five operators have expressed interest in establishing a new service between Portland and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, said Dave Whiting, CEO for the Yarmouth Area Industrial Commission.

Their proposals are due Oct. 15, and if an operator is chosen as expected, a year-round ferry service carrying passengers and vehicles could reconnect Maine and Nova Scotia by next spring, Whiting said Wednesday.

"We are expecting to have a ferry service in place next year, and Portland is certainly at the top of our list," said Whiting, whose commission operates the terminal in Yarmouth.

Whiting was responding in part to an announcement made Wednesday by Bruce McNeil, spokesman for Scotia Cruises, that his company has decided not to operate a ferry between Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Portland next year.

McNeil said a group of investors met two weeks ago and decided that it was too late in the season to properly market Halifax-to-Portland service and make arrangements with tour operators and hotels for 2011.

Scotia Cruises has not ruled out starting the service in 2012, McNeil said.

"People are creatures of habit. They book their summer vacations the year before," he said. "You need at least 12 months in advance to market a service. It's a matter of economics. In our professional opinion, it would be business suicide to try to do this in six months."

Ferry service between Portland and Yarmouth ended last year after Bay Ferries Ltd. stopped running the high-speed Cat. Bay Ferries cited falling ridership and the loss of an operating subsidy from the province.

The Scotia Prince, the cruise ferry that operated between Portland and Yarmouth for years, ended its run in 2004.

The latest proposals for Yarmouth do not involve high-speed ferries. The ships that are being

considered would carry passengers and vehicles and provide such amenities as spas, casino gambling and shows.

Whiting said the operators he has spoken with have looked at other ports, including Portsmouth, N.H., and Boston, but all appear to favor Portland because of its proximity to Nova Scotia. It would take a ferry about 11 hours to make the crossing from Portland.

Whiting said the prospective operators realize they will have a limited time to market their service, which will likely lead the provincial government to offer what he called a "one-time operating subsidy" in 2011.

"No one expects to catch that tourism market in the first year. They know they are going to lose money," Whiting said. "This is about building a business."

Yarmouth plans to invest \$15 million to replace a ferry terminal that is outdated, said Whiting, who also serves as Yarmouth's port director.

Jeff Monroe, Portland's former transportation director, is now a transportation consultant with HDR, an international firm. He said studies have shown that there is enough traffic to support just one ferry service between Nova Scotia and New England.

Monroe said he believes that an operator will have ample time to market a ferry service for 2011, and that, to be successful, the service must be year-round.

To fill the down times, such as midwinter, the operator should go after trucking companies, Monroe said. Ferrying commercial trucks across the ocean saves on fuel costs and reduces pollution, and gives truckers more time to rest and get back on the road.

"It's going to boil down to one simple thing: People will want to see this vessel in place before they buy into it," he said.

Portland officials are excited about the prospect of having ferry service return. Such a service would need a lease agreement with the city for docking space. The ferry would dock at the Ocean Gateway terminal, said Nicole Clegg, spokeswoman for the city.

Construction is set to start in two weeks on a \$4.8 million deep-water pier that will increase docking capacity at Ocean Gateway.

Clegg said the foot traffic generated by a ferry service, combined with cruise ship passengers, would boost the city's economy.

A record-setting 73 cruise ships carrying 75,731 passengers are expected to dock in Portland during 2010.

Clegg said an economic impact study by the University of Maine showed that in 2008, 47,841 passengers from 31 cruise ships spent more than \$80 million in Greater Portland.

"Our hope is to have a ferry service restored as soon as possible," Clegg said, "but we are also realistic in that it might not happen in 2011."

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