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## [Nova Scotia ferry service looks unlikely for next year](#)

**The premier says two proposals for resuming a route – one of them to Portland – don't justify a subsidy.**

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Like the steep tides in the Gulf of Maine, the prospects of restoring ferry service between Portland and Nova Scotia in 2011 have ebbed and flowed over the past year.

Now, the tide is going out again.

Nova Scotia Premier Darrell Dexter told a Halifax radio station that neither of the two proposals for resuming service from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, to New England is detailed enough to justify a provincial subsidy. Without government startup money, the service won't be financially viable.

One of the plans involves Portland. The other destination hasn't been publicly named, but it likely is Boston.

News of further trouble in Yarmouth was reason for optimism Friday in Halifax, where businesspeople have been preparing a competing proposal to connect Nova Scotia's capital and Portland in 2012.

"This gives momentum for our run in 2012, due to the fact that Yarmouth won't have a ferry service," said Bruce McNeil, spokesman for Scotia Cruises.

But Yarmouth officials say that conclusion is premature. Dexter's comments were downplayed by David Whiting, who heads the Yarmouth Area Industrial Commission.

Whiting acknowledged, however, that he and the provincial government are waiting for specific financial information from the prospective ferry operators, and that time is short to get a ship in the water for the spring of 2011.

"It may very well make sense to wait a year, but we're not at that point yet," Whiting told The Portland Press Herald. "We'd rather do that than have something start and fail."

Whiting confirmed that any ferry operator that tries to offer service next spring wouldn't have much time for marketing and would lose money in the first year.

Portland officials and Maine's tourism industry have been following events in Canada with interest. Portland and Bar Harbor lost seasonal ferry service to Yarmouth last year when Bay Ferries Ltd. stopped running the high-speed Cat, citing falling traffic and its loss of operating subsidies from the province.

The return of ferry service would be welcome on Portland's waterfront. In the Yarmouth area, it's a matter of economic survival.

Businesses in southwestern Nova Scotia were hard hit this summer by the loss of tourist traffic. That has made the ferry a political issue in the province.

This week, Yarmouth Mayor Phil Mooney was quoted in media reports saying he had spoken to Dexter, and the province was looking favorably on the subsidy request. But on Wednesday, Dexter was interviewed by CJLS Radio and said the two proposals are broad and need "a lot of work" before public funding would be considered.

He said any subsidy would be only for the service's startup, not for operations.

A spokeswoman for Dexter's office confirmed Friday that the premier needs more information before making any decisions about subsidies. "He has made it clear that he needs to see a solid business case," said Janet Lynn McNeil.

All parties agree that there's room for only one ferry service between Nova Scotia and New England. In Halifax, Scotia Cruises is using Yarmouth's latest predicament to reassure its investors that it will win out as the sole ferry operator.

The company is negotiating to use the Ile de Beaute, a 31-year-old international ferry that has most recently been chartered in the Mediterranean. Seen on the website [Marinetraffic.com](http://Marinetraffic.com), it resembles a larger version of the Scotia Prince, which sailed between Yarmouth and Portland until 2004.

The Ile de Beaute can carry 1,500 passengers and 460 vehicles, according to Bruce McNeil.

In Yarmouth, Whiting said the prospective operators have identified vessels, but he has been waiting two weeks for additional financial information from one of the parties.

He declined to speculate on when it will be too late to get ready for service next year, saying that decision is up to the vessel operators.

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