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Local shipyard to build four ferries

By **Susan Gilmore**
Seattle Times staff reporter

A local shipyard with long ties to Washington State Ferries has been selected to build four state ferries worth up to \$223 million.

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Todd Pacific Shipyards of Seattle was the only one of five interested companies with the technical and financial ability to build the ferries, Mike Anderson, acting director of the state ferry system, announced yesterday.

The state will negotiate a design-and-construction contract with **Todd**, which built the last state ferries, the Jumbo Mark II class, between 1997 and 1999. That contract produced the ferries Tacoma, Puyallup and Wenatchee.

Todd also built two Jumbo Class ferries in 1972, the Spokane and the Walla Walla.

"This is a big step toward getting the ferries under construction," said Anderson. "These boats are urgently needed. They are replacing boats over 75 years old."

The state hopes construction can begin in November 2006 and the first boat could be ready for service in 2008.

The new ferries will replace the steel-class boats built in 1927 that operate on the route between Port Townsend and Keystone and the interisland runs in the San Juan Islands.

The state ferries also picked Valley Power Systems, a California company, to build the propulsion system for the vessels, a \$44 million contract for the four vessels.

The new boats, each capable of carrying 130 cars and 1,200 passengers, will be paid for by an existing nickel-per-gallon tax on gasoline and through the ferries' revenue base. "We have the money and we're moving forward," said Anderson. "This is a real project." The boats will be the size of the Issaquah-class ferries built in the late 1970s.

Local shipbuilder

Todd Pacific Shipyards was founded in 1916 by William H. **Todd** and has about 750 employees. **Its 46-acre facility** has three dry docks, including the largest floating dry dock in Puget Sound.

Its seven piers offer nearly 4,500 feet of berthing space.

Eleven labor unions are represented at **Todd**.

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Steve Welch, chief operating officer of **Todd**, said he expects the contract will produce about 500 jobs over four years. The Seattle shipyard, headquartered on Harbor Island, has been in business for 88 years and employs about 750 people.

"The Washington State Department of Transportation clearly recognizes that **Todd Pacific** can provide unmatched quality and value because we've demonstrated it time and again in our work for the ferry system," said Welch.

The announcement is good news for a company that has struggled, as other shipbuilding companies have, with the economic downturn in the Northwest. Last year, **Todd** won a contract worth up to \$133 million to repair and maintain the Navy's Puget Sound-based aircraft carriers. But that followed an announcement that **Todd** was laying off 500 workers because the Navy decided to cancel a planned overhaul of a large supply ship and decommission it instead.

Todd bested two other finalists, J.M. Martinac Shipbuilding of Tacoma and Nichols Brothers Boat Builders of Whidbey Island. State law requires that the ferries be built by a Washington company.

While Anderson said no decision has been made about where to place the new boats, he said the initial plan is for one in the San Juan Islands, one on the Port Townsend-Keystone route, one on the Mukilteo-Clinton run and the fourth on the Seattle-Bremerton trip.

The new boats will replace the Illahee, which operates in the San Juan Islands, the Klickitat, which runs between Port Townsend and Keystone, and the Nisqually and the Quinault in dry dock. Naming the new boats will be up to the state Transportation Commission.

The state will begin negotiating the cost of building the boats and start design work. Because **Todd** was the only company that met the state's requirements, the ferry system wants to ask the Legislature to allow for a contract award based on a negotiated contract without going out to bid.

"Competitive bidding is almost always the preferred procurement process," said Doug MacDonald, Washington transportation secretary. "But the shipbuilding business has changed in the Puget Sound region — and throughout the country — and you just don't have the competition today that there was even 10 years ago."

The state ferry system operates 28 vessels.

Todd didn't build the troubled Issaquah class ferries, six boats built by Marine Power & Equipment of Seattle between 1979 and 1982. Those ferries were plagued with mechanical troubles, forcing the state to spend millions on repairs and generating years of lawsuits with Marine Power, which settled out of court in 1985 and filed bankruptcy in 1986.

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