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Increased Funding Agreement Presented to Cave-in-Rock Ferry Authority *Operator rejects offer and suspends operations*

FRANKFORT, Ky. (July 2, 2026) – Through the Ohio River Ferry Authority, the operator of the Cave-in-Rock Ferry service notified the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) and Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) this week that it has ceased operations after rejecting an increased funding offer from the two states.

The two states, which jointly subsidize the cost of the privately-owned ferry, initially offered a \$1.88 million-per-year contract for fiscal years 2027 and 2028 that matches the funding the authority and its operator have received over the last two years.

Team Kentucky understands the vital role the Cave in Rock Ferry plays in helping Kentuckians and regional commuters get where they need to go, which is why despite KYTC's very tight road fund budget, the Cabinet took additional steps to avoid a service disruption and spoke to representatives of the Ferry Authority on June 30 and offered a 10 percent increase, bringing state annual funding support to over \$2 million a year.

The ferry operator rejected the state's 10 percent funding increase, stated their desire for an annual increase of almost 40 percent compared to the original offer (roughly \$2.6 million a year), and notified travelers on social media that "ferry operations will be suspended indefinitely" beginning July 1.

"We made a substantial offer to subsidize the ferry service because all modes of travel are critically important, including the Cave-in-Rock Ferry, and the other six ferry services Kentucky

supports,” said Transportation Secretary Rebecca Goodman. “With limited road fund dollars, we simply have no more funding to offer to subsidize the privately owned service.”

KYTC remains willing to work with the Ferry Authority to support the long-term future of the ferry service. If desired, the Ferry Authority and the operator have the flexibility to independently explore and implement other funding options to supplement the state’s subsidy, such as charging fares or making operational changes.

Cave-in-Rock Ferry Funding

The current state-funded agreement with the Ohio River Ferry Authority expired on June 30, 2026. The Ferry Authority was created by the Crittenden County Fiscal Court to oversee the management and operation of the privately-owned ferry. The 16-hour-per-day, 7 day per week ferry service is equally funded by Kentucky and Illinois.

Since 2018, bi-state reimbursements to the Cave-in-Rock Ferry have more than doubled, from \$804,000 to \$1,878,060 for Fiscal Year 2026. During that same period, Kentucky’s other state-funded ferry operations have seen significantly smaller increases in operational costs. Two of those ferries, Dorena Hickman and Augusta, charge a fee in addition to receiving state funding support. The operator’s latest funding request would bring the annual payment to triple the amount paid in 2018.

Through the Ferry Authority, the ferry operator submitted an initial pricing proposal that listed a significant 47% increase of \$2.7 million in state funding support for no increase in services. The operator’s new funding request to the Ferry Authority of \$2.6 million per year for the next two years represents a nearly 26% increase over the state’s proposal to increase the subsidy by 10%.

The Cave-in-Rock Ferry carries about 300 vehicles per day at no cost to travelers. As a privately owned operation, decisions regarding service levels and future operations are made by the ferry operator, who holds an exclusive geographic franchise for Ohio River ferry services in the area.

The shortest alternative route between Cave-in-Rock and Marion would use the KY 56 Shawneetown Bridge and take about 35 minutes longer than the ferry.

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