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Agreement Presented to Cave-in-Rock Ferry Authority for Continuing Ferry Service

Potential expiration of agreement on July 1 could impact ferry service

FRANKFORT, Ky. (June 26, 2026) – Team Kentucky, in partnership with the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), has presented the Ohio River Ferry Authority (Ferry Authority) with a two-year agreement to provide continued financial support for the Cave-in-Rock Ferry, which is a key transportation link between Kentucky and Illinois.

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

By solidifying the states' funding now, the Ferry Authority can continue to meet the local transportation demand while it works with the ferry operator to consider other supplemental funding options, if needed.

“Given the vital role the ferry serves in regional transportation, we’re offering to maintain the same level of funding even as our agency faces declining budgets,” said **Kentucky Transportation Cabinet Secretary Rebecca Goodman**. “This is a substantial commitment to support not just the ferry but the businesses and residents who rely on it.”

A new funding agreement with the Ferry Authority must be signed before July 1, 2026, to avoid the potential disruption to the Cave-in-Rock ferry service. Should a new agreement not be

reached, and ferry service becomes affected, travelers should be prepared to use an alternate route between Cave-in-Rock, Illinois, and Crittenden County, Kentucky.

Cave-in-Rock Ferry Funding

The current state-funded agreement with the Ohio River Ferry Authority will expire 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.

State operational budgets are declining over the next two years but because the ferry provides a key transportation service between Kentucky and Illinois, KYTC is proposing a continuation of the ferry service at FY 2026 contract funding levels for Fiscal Years 2027 and 2028 – \$1,878,060 per year.

While the states have not received a funding request from the Ferry Authority, the ferry operator submitted a pricing proposal to the authority that listed a 47% increase in state funding support for no increase in services.

"While the states will continue to provide the same level of funding and support the Ferry Authority and its mission to oversee operations of the Cave-in-Rock Ferry, we can ill afford to increase the level of state financial support for the ferry over the next two years," Goodman said.

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.

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

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