

Suit to block new Alcatraz launch dropped

[Robert Selna, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)
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Hornblower Yachts is scheduled to take over ferry service to Alcatraz Island on Sept. 25 after a nonprofit waterfront group dropped a lawsuit to stop the move.

Citizens to Save the Waterfront on Friday ditched their effort to halt Hornblower's plans to transfer the Alcatraz ferry operation from Pier 41 at Fisherman's Wharf to Pier 31 1/2, about a half mile away.

In May, Hornblower won a \$16 million, 10-year contract from the National Park Service to run the Alcatraz ferries. Most recently, the Blue and Gold Fleet operated the service from Pier 41.

Save the Waterfront had argued that the 1.3 million new passengers expected annually at Pier 31 1/2 due to the Alcatraz service would create pedestrian and vehicle traffic near the pier and along the Embarcadero and that those impacts should be studied before the operation changed locations.

But the group gave up its fight when a state commission responsible for the care of the bay and waterfront determined that Hornblower's takeover of Alcatraz service would not violate a permit it already held with the state to provide bay cruises.

"It's disappointing that the commission failed to vigorously exercise their authority to protect San Francisco's waterfront. ... There are a lot of politics at play here," said John Golinger, spokesman for Citizens to Save the Waterfront.

The group's lawsuit argued that in addition to traffic, the move to Pier 31 1/2 would "draw hawkers and others such as jugglers ... bongo drummers, clowns, pedicab operators and food vendors" to a location that, unlike Fisherman's Wharf, can not accommodate the activity.

Will Travis, executive director of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, said the permit that has authorized Hornblower to use the pier for cruise boat operations since 1985 does not restrict the number of passengers the company services at the dock. He quibbled with the idea that the location change would create congestion.

"Admittedly there will be more people, which is what public access is all about," Travis said. "To suggest that someone walking to a boat to get on the bay is interfering with someone walking to not get on the bay makes no sense -- they're both allowed to be there."

Terry MacRae, president of Hornblower, said studies conducted by his company showed that the change in venue would cause no significant change in traffic and pedestrian levels or parking.

But some city officials who studied the issue weren't convinced. Port of San Francisco executive director Monique Moyer and City Attorney Dennis Herrera were troubled by the move, absent an independent look at what the environmental impacts of the move might be.

Moyer wrote a letter to Travis in July expressing concern about the overflow of passengers and others at the new ferry launch.

"We are concerned that the attraction of more than a million persons annually to the premises, in addition to the current passenger load, fundamentally changes the use of the premises," Moyer wrote.

The National Park Service award of the Alcatraz contract to Hornblower was opposed by labor unions. For the previous 33 years, the contract was held first by the Red and White Fleet and later by Blue and Gold, both union operators. Hornblower is not.

E-mail Robert Selna at rselna@sfchronicle.com.