

Denham J Kelsey, F C A  
PO Box 5-6,  
Thetis Island, B C, VOR 2Y0  
(Tel & Fax 250246-3950)

E-mail - denkelsey@telus.net

May 23,2007

The Honorable Kevin Falcon  
Minister of Transportation  
Province of British Columbia  
PO Box 9055, Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC, V8W 9E2

Dear Mr. Minister,

Section 38 of the Coastal Ferry Act (see the Appendix 1 to this letter, titled "Public Interest") sets out the principles which the British Columbia Ferry Commission is to follow in regulating ferry fares. The thrust of these principles is towards making the ferry services financially self-sufficient, with users bearing an increasingly greater portion of the costs on all types of routes.

Realistic goals are good for people and governments: they focus attention and effort, and when they are reached they bring not only the benefits sought, but also the satisfactions of achieving them. Unrealistic goals are bad: they distract attention and effort which might otherwise be directed constructively towards achievable ends, and they result in friction and ultimately frustration from failure.

It is unrealistic to imagine achieving financial self-sufficiency for ferry routes such as, for example, that which links Vancouver Island with Thetis and Kuper Islands. Fare revenues from the users of that route now contribute less than one fifth of the costs of the service. To achieve anything near break-even would call for massive increases in the fares. Few people could afford them, and accordingly there would be set in train a vicious spiral of declining usage, declining revenues and consequent service cuts, with the ultimate result that the lifeline of the ferry service could no longer be kept alive. If this artery was choked off, the healthy and vibrant lives of our community here on Thetis, and that of our First Nations friends on Kuper, would simply wither and fall apart. So would the lives of many communities along the coast.

Surely this result is not intended. It would be disastrous.

There is a rational and simple way to make some sense of the situation. It is to change the wording of principle "( f)" in the Act by adding words (*italicized*) so that it would read:

"( f) the designated ferry routes are to move towards a greater reliance on a user pay system so as to reduce, over time, the service fee contributions by the government, to the extent possible without damaging the viability and quality of life of communities which are dependent on the ferry service."

Such an amendment would enable the Commissioner to set fares without his judgment being blinkered by the offending and unrealistic legislated "principle" that he should, in effect, ignore the impacts on people.

It is unseemly that, as the law presently stands, the Commissioner has, in his words, " ... no statutory or contractual duty to consider affordability of the fare-paying travellers, or the broad social and economic impacts on communities ... " when making his decisions on fares. (see the Appendix 2 to this letter, Question 13)

Such an amendment would also give a solid legislative basis, presently lacking, for welcome statements which you have made recently in replies to letters from people concerned about these matters. Recognizing that "the health and vibrancy of B.C.'s island and coastal communities depend on an affordable ferry service", you have spoken of making "sure that the provincial government's commitment to these ferry services remains substantial". You have also expressed pride that you are "helping to protect the unique communities and lifestyles on our islands and coasts" and have given comforting assurance that you "will continue to work to maintain a lasting and financially stable ferry system for our coastal and island communities".

Also underlying this issue, and strengthening the suggestion I have made above, there is the unexplained illogicality, indeed inequity, in the fact that that the lifeline needs of communities which are separated by masses of land are treated differently from those separated by water. I am not aware of any situation in which the people of a remote town or hamlet, connected by road to the rest of the Province, are called upon to pay tolls to meet the costs, which are often very substantial, of building and maintaining their connections. Should people be discriminated against because they live along the coastline?

In one way of looking at it, the people of those inland communities are being given a "free ride". The people of our coastal and island communities are not asking for that. They simply believe, thoughtfully and passionately, that it would be unjust and wrong to be "taken for a ride" down a road which leads to damage or even destruction of their cherished communities and ways of life.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Honorable Gordon Campbell, the Honorable Carole Taylor and the Honorable Stan Hagen.

Yours truly,

Denham Kelsey