

NEWS RELEASE FROM Ferry Advisory Committee Chairs

PROPOSALS FOR SUSTAINABLE FERRY SERVICE TO COMMUNITIES

VICTORIA, May 3, 2007 – The Ferry Advisory Committee Chairs (FACC) have presented the provincial government with a package of urgent proposals that they believe will help mitigate the serious situation facing users of 22 ferries routes to coastal communities in BC.

The FACC met with senior staff of the Transportation Ministry on Friday. The Ministry is in the process of deciding what it will contribute to ferry service for the second term of its service contract with BC Ferries (PT2). The Province must finalize its decision by June 30.

The FACC has identified several key issues for government:

1. Unprecedented fare increases are harming coastal communities. Preliminary fares for PT2 are more than three times the projected rate of inflation. They come on top of average increases of more than 50% that took effect in the first term of the service contract (PT1.) Only the Province's contribution can lower the announced fare hikes.
2. The long-term viability of ferry service is in question. It is unlikely to generate projected ridership and revenue in PT2, given the flat or decreasing figure in PT1, during a time of increasing population. Additional PT2 fare increases will only aggravate the trend.
3. Current and future ferry travellers are bearing the cost of past infrastructure neglect.
4. The legislated mandate to move the smaller routes toward user pay, which is already happening, and to reduce the Province's contribution over time, is causing widespread concern. Pursuing this mandate will precipitate a crisis in ferry service on the 22 routes.

The FACC proposes the following:

1. The Province develop, with FACC and BC Ferries, a "Ferry Dependent Community Strategy" to ensure long-term viability of service on the affected routes. The strategy would be reflected in the contract adjustments for PT2.
2. The Province consider adjusting the service fee contributions for PT2, as it has for the northern routes, with respect to capital costs and the fuel cost backlog.
3. Provincial contributions through PT2 be adjusted in accordance with the rate of inflation.
4. The contract for PT2 include flexibility to accommodate service level adjustments for more efficient and effective service, as measures are identified.
5. The contract include a consultation protocol among all parties involved in ferry service: the Transportation Minister, BC Ferries, the BC Ferry Commissioner and the FACC, which comprises 12 committees, with representatives selected by local governments.

As the Province considers its next step, the FACC is urging all people who use and depend on affected routes, and who recognize the importance of transportation across the province, to contact provincial representatives to convey their experience and views.

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