
Gabriola Transportation Advisory Commission and Ferry Advisory Committee



Report to the Gabriola Local Trust Committee on the impacts of the proposed cancellations of sailings on BC Ferries Route 19: Gabriola-Nanaimo

By:

Steven Earle (Chair, Transportation Advisory Commission), and
John Hodgkins (Chair, Ferry Advisory Committee)

With contributions from:

Dyan Dunsmore-Farley, Judith Roux, Jim Ramsay, Kathy Ramsey and Phillip Vannini

Gabriola Island
December 12th, 2013

Table of contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Information gathering	3
On-line survey	3
On-ferry surveys	3
Nanaimo business survey	4
Information from Gabriola community organizations	4
Summary of results	4
Summary of impacts	13
Recommended response	15

Attachments (digital)

- 1) TAC-FAC-on-line-survey-questions.pdf
- 2) TAC-FAC-on-line-survey-reponses.xlsx
- 3) TAC-FAC-on-board-survey-reponses.xlsx
- 4) DNRIA-on-line-survey-questions.pdf
- 5) DNRIA-on-line-survey-reponses.xlsx
- 6) GICC Position statement – BCF service cuts.pdf
- 7) GAC-BC-Ferries-letter-Nov-2013.pdf
- 8) GHMS-letter.pdf
- 9) GRS- ferry cuts impact on rec services.docx

Introduction

At the request of the Gabriola LTC, the Transportation Advisory Commission (TAC) and the Ferry Advisory Committee (FAC) have worked together to examine the impacts of the proposed ferry cancellations on the Gabriola-Nanaimo ferry route. We have carried out surveys both on and off the island and on the ferry sailings slated for cancellation. We have also contacted numerous community organizations and asked for their evaluation of how they will be affected by the cuts. The results of our work are presented in this report.

Information gathering

In November and December 2013 the TAC and the FAC worked together to gather information about the likely impacts of cancellations of 32 Route 19 sailings (including all evening sailings after 9 PM) on the residents, organizations and businesses of Gabriola Island.

The following activities were undertaken:

- preparation of a 59-question on-line survey (902 responses as of Dec. 11th)
- interviews of passengers on 26 of the sailings in question from Nov. 26 to Dec. 1 (307 responses)
- preparation of a 12-question on-line survey for businesses in down town Nanaimo (37 responses to Dec. 11th)
- invitations to local organizations to provide feedback

On-line survey

The questions asked in the on-line survey are included in digital form as Attachment 1 (on-line-survey-questions.pdf). The survey includes a few questions about place of residence and age, and then a series of questions about the impacts of the specific proposed cancellations, including how often the respondent uses the sailing, what the typical uses are, and how the anticipated cancellation will impact that person. This is followed by a number of questions addressed to owners and operators of business on Gabriola, including their type of business, and the anticipated impacts of the proposed sailing cancellations on their number of employees and their overall revenues. The final question is general in nature and addresses the respondents overall view of the impacts of the cuts. Because participation in the on-line survey was voluntary we have no illusions about the statistical significance of the results. The 902 responses to the survey (collected between Nov. 25th and Dec. 11th) are included in Attachment 2 (on-line-survey-reponses.xlsx).

On-ferry survey

The survey form used on the sailings at-risk in the evenings of Tuesday Nov. 26th to Sunday Dec. 1st and in the morning of Saturday Nov. 30th is shown below. Pairs of volunteers from the community went on board the relevant sailings and interviewed both foot passengers and vehicle drivers and passengers. In total of 307 passengers were interviewed on the 26 sailings. In all cases but one there was time for the two volunteers to interview every passenger on board the ferry. In that case one of the cabins and a few of the cars were missed so it is unlikely that the results were biased. We have good confidence in the reliability and statistical significance of these data. The results are included as Attachment 3 (on-board-survey-reponses.xlsx).

Ferry Passenger Survey • Nov/Dec 2013 • Gabriola Transportation Advisory Commission

Date: _____	Nanaimo to Gabriola departure <input type="radio"/>		Gabriola to Nanaimo departure <input type="radio"/>		
Car driver or pass. <input type="radio"/> (# in car w/ similar responses _____)	Commercial vehicle driver <input type="radio"/>		Foot pass./cyclist <input type="radio"/>		
Reasons for travel (check all that apply):	Work related <input type="radio"/>	Social <input type="radio"/>	Entertainment <input type="radio"/>	Shopping <input type="radio"/>	Health-related <input type="radio"/>
	Education <input type="radio"/>	Sport or recreation <input type="radio"/>	other <input type="radio"/>	_____	
How many times in a typical month do you use this sailing? _____ Did you or will you connect with another BC Ferry? _____					
How important is this sailing to you? (circle one)		V. important	Important	Unimportant	V. unimportant
If this sailing was to be permanently cancelled how likely are you to:					
Change work shifts (or lose work opportunities):	V. likely	Likely	Unlikely	V. unlikely	not applicable
Change jobs (or lose a job):	V. likely	Likely	Unlikely	V. unlikely	not applicable
Change where you live (e.g., leave Gabriola):	V. likely	Likely	Unlikely	V. unlikely	not applicable
Change or lose an educational opportunity:	V. likely	Likely	Unlikely	V. unlikely	not applicable
Change social, entertainment or shopping habits:	V. likely	Likely	Unlikely	V. unlikely	not applicable
Comments on the back					

Nanaimo business survey

With the cooperation of the Downtown Nanaimo Business Improvement Association (DNBIA) an on-line survey was provided for use by Nanaimo businesses. The 12 survey questions are included in digital form as Attachment 4 (DNBIA-on-line-survey-questions.pdf). There are a few questions about type and location of business, and then a series of questions about the impacts on the business of the proposed cancellations. The results are included as Attachment 5 (dnbia-on-line-survey-reponses.xlsx).

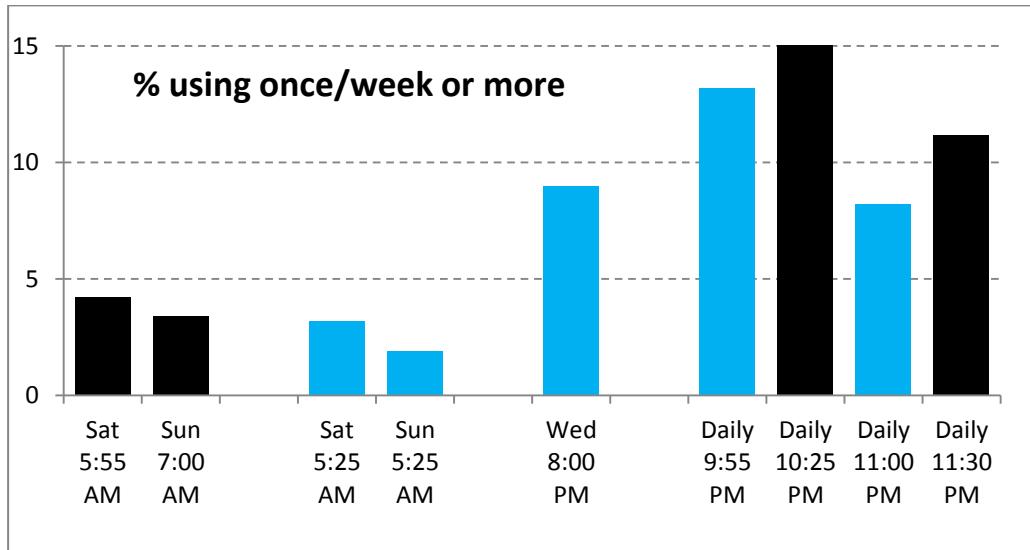
Information from Gabriola organizations

We contacted a number of Gabriola Community organizations to get their views on the impacts of the proposed cancellations. We received feedback from Gabriola Island Chamber of Commerce, Gabriola Arts Council, People for a Healthy Community, Gabriola Historical and Museum Society and Gabriola Recreation Society .

Summary of Results

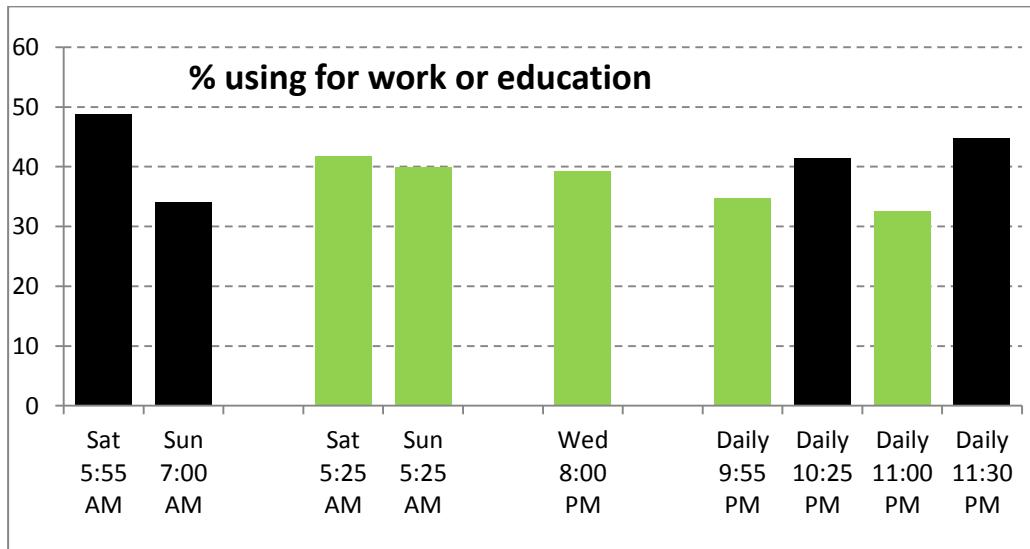
On-line survey

The main part of the on-line survey was a series of questions about the use of the various sailings slated for cancellation, and the perceived impacts of those cancellations. The full results are included in Attachment 2 and the responses to some of the questions are summarized below in a series of graphs. Not all of the respondents answered all of the questions and in most cases, these graphs are based on between 700 and 800 responses. Written responses were also encouraged for all of the scenarios, and those are included in Attachment 2.



Per cent of respondents that use the specific sailings at least once a week. The early-evening sailings are used slightly more than the late-evening sailings. Note that the first 5 of the sailings shown are only once a week, so comparing the results to those of the multi-day evening sailings is not valid.

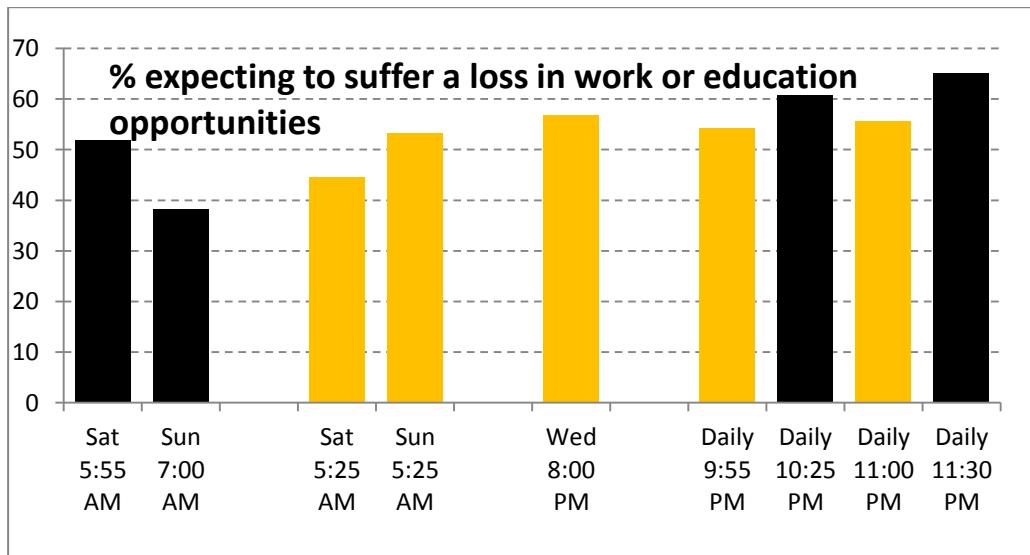
(Black bars are sailings from Nanaimo and blue bars are sailings from Gabriola)



Per cent of respondents that use the specific sailings for work or education purposes.

All of the sailings in question are used for work or education by between 30 and 50% of respondents.

(Black bars are sailings from Nanaimo and green bars are sailings from Gabriola.)



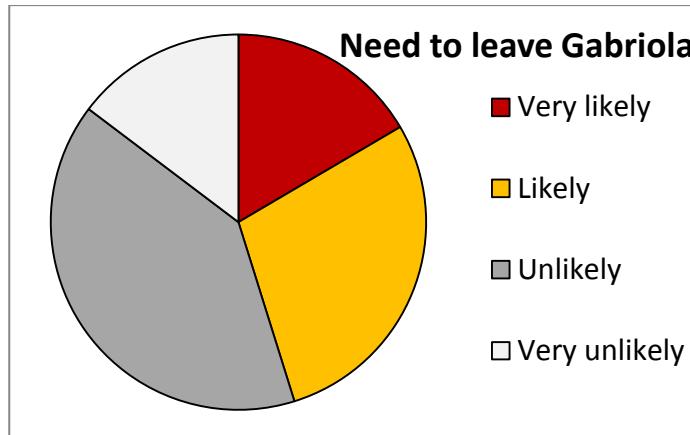
Per cent that expect to suffer loss of work or education opportunities in the event of cancellation.

In almost all cases, between 40 and 60% of respondents expect that the loss of the sailing will result in a loss of work (in most cases) or educational opportunities. For evening sailings the proportion is between 50 and 70%

(Black bars are sailings from Nanaimo and yellow bars are sailings from Gabriola.)

The final summary question was: *In light of all of the proposed cuts to the ferry service, what is the probability that you would consider moving away from Gabriola?*

Very likely	112	16.0%] 45.6%	
Likely	207	29.6%		
Unlikely	279	39.9%		
Very unlikely	101	14.4%		
Total				699



46% of those responding to this question stated that they would be **likely** or **very likely** to move away from Gabriola if the cancellations come into effect. While it is improbable that these responses are representative of all Gabriolans, and probable that some respondents have exaggerated their position on this question, we believe that it indicates a very widely held conviction that the proposed cancellations will make it impractical for a significant proportion of current Gabriola residents to remain here. It's probably not 45%, but we believe that it could easily approach 20%.

Selected comments

"I think we are going to turn Gabriola into an island of old stubborn or wealthy (or both) people. Just like a boring gated community. All the young vibrant people will leave the island and our house prices are going to drop like a frozen turkey from the skies."

"These cancellations will make impossible for anyone working shift work to live on island, so once again the little guy is taking the hit."

"It's a disaster. Will result in reduced diversity on this island, a community that is accessible only to those who aren't actively working (retirees) or summer cottagers. This is the worst plan ever for enriching regions that are working hard to build community!"

"My family have resided on Gabriola for 65 years. In most of that time the minimum ferry service has been from 6:15 am through 11:00 pm. We have raised our family and our business based on that access to Nanaimo and beyond. Making us pay because of inept management and choices at BC Ferries is heinous."

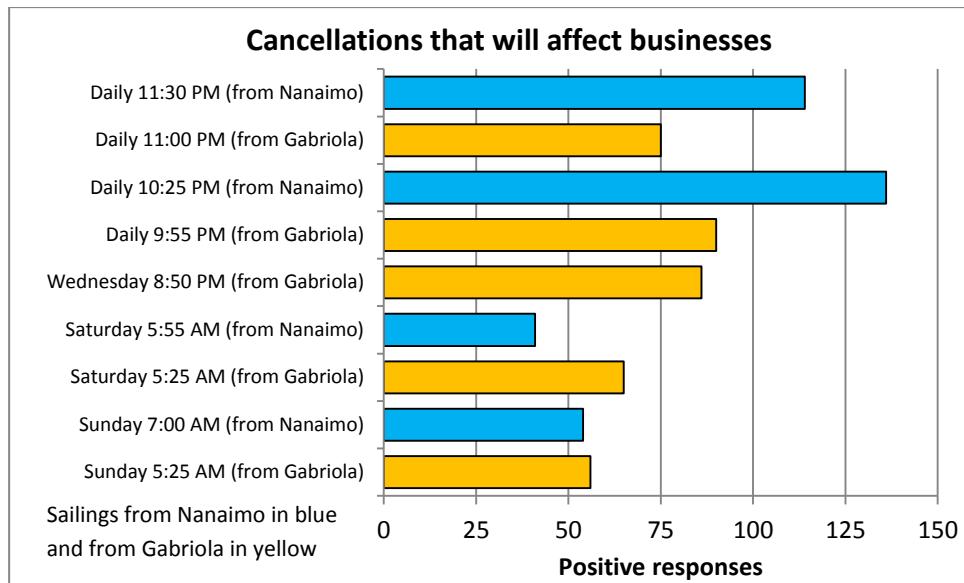
"It is heart-breaking to personally suffer and see my community suffer from the ongoing incompetence of greedy, overpaid and uncaring BC Ferries management. They have ruined a once-proud service by ignoring communities, hiking fares which reduce ridership and revenue, wasted huge sums of money on bonuses, inappropriate and inefficient vessels and stupid ideas. The board and managers should either resign in disgrace or be fired and the service restored to the public."

"The reason we choose Gabriola rather than any other Gulf Island was because of the proximity to Nanaimo and the ferry service available. We won't stay with the evening ferry cuts. Our adult children frequently come over after work on Friday but will no longer be able to do that. They are not in situations where they can leave work early on Fridays and my quality of life here as a senior will be affected by their not coming over."

"Tourism is a great factor for us. A large part of our summer business is weekenders that come after work from the mainland. Without them our business would suffer greatly. Families moving away would impact our business greatly as well. If we suffered this loss we will be out of business."

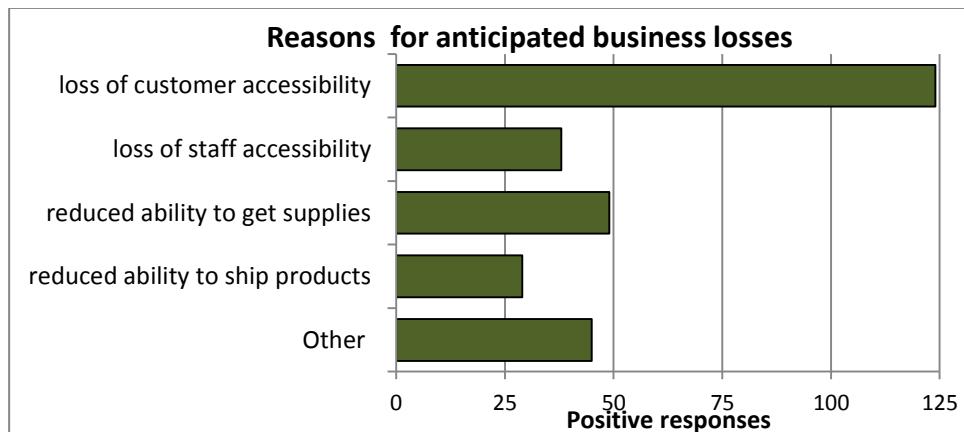
Questions directed to Gabriola businesses

The following results are from a section of the on-line survey that was specifically directed to owners, operators or managers of businesses on Gabriola Island. A total of 190 Gabriola businesses responded to the questions.



Gabriola businesses operators expect that the cancellations of the late-evening sailings will have the most impact on their prospects, especially the late sailings from Nanaimo that bring visitors from the mainland.

Since many visitors have to leave on an early-morning ferry to make it home in time, the cancellation of the early weekend sailings from Gabriola is also considered to be a significant problem.



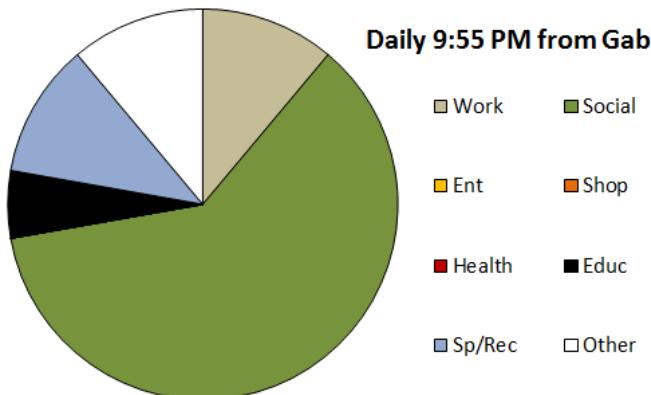
The main reason given for loss of business is that customers will not be able to get to and from Gabriola as easily as before. For example residents of the lower mainland that work a full day on Friday will simply not be able to reach Gabriola by Friday evening. Many potential visitors will choose to go elsewhere.

Business operators were asked: *How many full-time equivalent jobs could be lost as a result of the cancellations?* The responses from 90 on-Gabriola business operators range from 0.5 to 15 FTE on-Gabriola jobs expected to be lost. The total number of expected job losses on the island by these businesses is 176 positions.

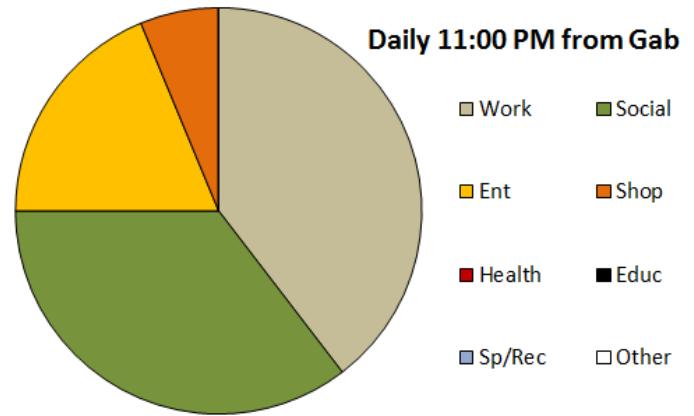
Business operators were asked: *How much revenue (\$/year) could be lost as a result of the cancellations?* The responses from 120 on-Gabriola business operators ranged from less than \$1000 to over \$500,000 per year. The total expected annual loss of revenue at these businesses is \$5,734,800.

On-board surveys

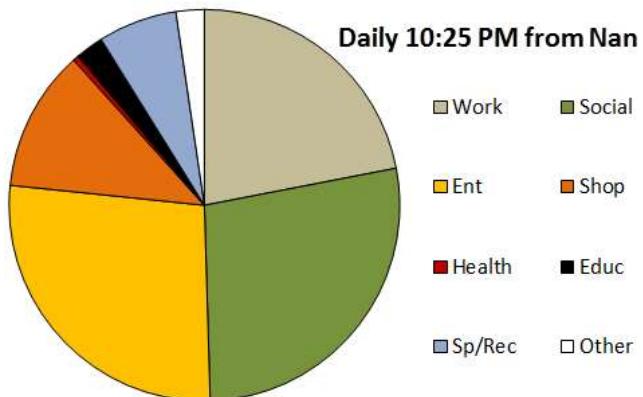
The results of the on-board survey are summarized below.



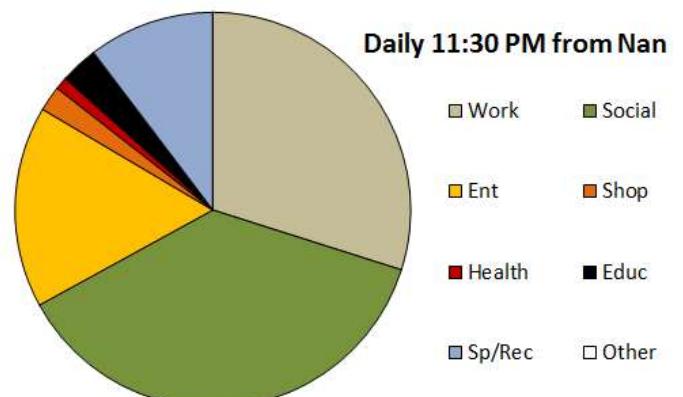
n=20



n=35

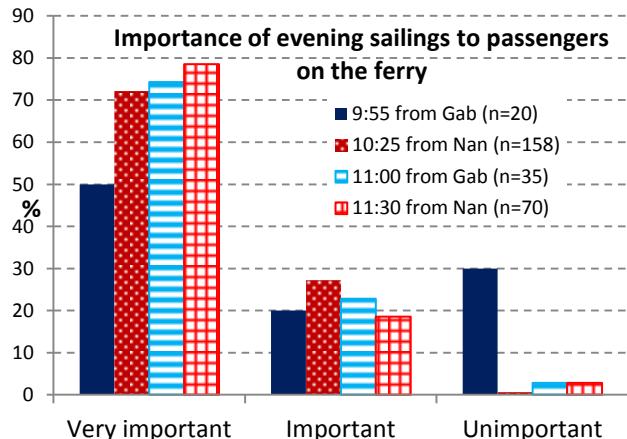


n=160

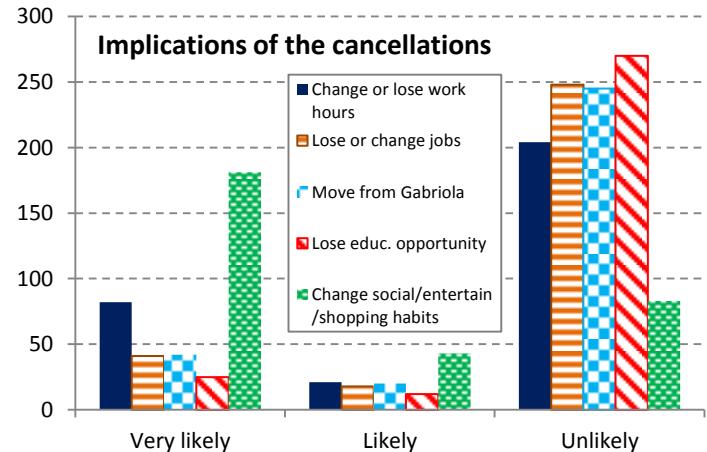


n=71

We surveyed 286 passengers on the last 4 evening runs. The question was: *“What are your reasons for being on this ferry?”* 35% of passengers were going to or returning from work or education. Most of the rest were attending social or entertainment events, shopping or engaged in sport or recreation. (Multiple answers were allowed for this question.)



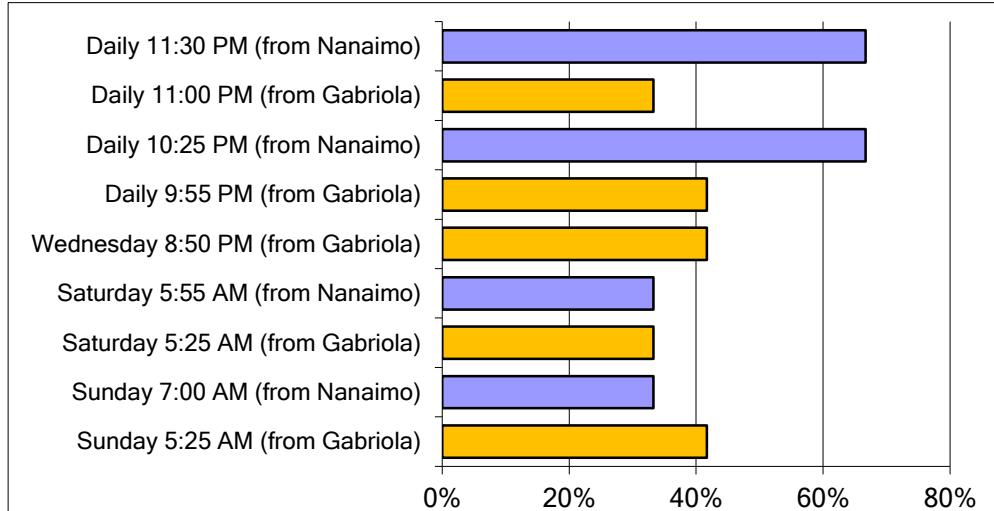
n= 286 The question was *“How important is this particular sailing to you?”* 90% of passengers described the sailing they were on as Important or Very important. The evening sailings from Nanaimo were considered more important than those from Gabriola, and the later sailings (11:00 PM from Gabriola and 11:30 PM from Nanaimo) were considered more important than the earlier sailings.



n= 307 Passengers were asked about the implications of cancelling the run that they were on. 34% said that it was likely or very likely that they would lose work hours, 19% that they would lose their job altogether, 20% that they would have to leave Gabriola, 12% that they would lose educational opportunities and 73% that they would have to change social, entertainment or shopping habits. (Multiple answers were allowed for this question.)

Survey of Nanaimo businesses

Although there were a total of 39 respondents to the survey, there were fewer than 20 responses to most of the questions, so the value of the information is suspect. 91% of those that responded indicated that their businesses would be affected because a reduced ability of Gabriola customers to access their businesses. 64% were concerned that their Gabriola-resident staff would have difficulties getting to work.



Respondents were asked: *Which of the following sailing cancellations could affect your business? (select all that apply)*. As shown in the graph to the left, the greatest concern is for the last two evening sailings from Nanaimo.

(Sailings from Nanaimo are shown in blue. Sailings from Gabriola in yellow.)

Information supplied by community organizations

We asked a number of community organizations to give us feedback about the impact of the proposed cuts to their activities. We received responses from:

- Gabriola Island Chamber of Commerce (Attachment 6)
- Gabriola Arts Council (Attachment 7)
- People for a Healthy Community
- Gabriola Historical and Museum Society (Attachment 8)
- Gabriola Recreation Society (Attachment 9)

Their comments are summarized below.

Gabriola Island Chamber of Commerce

It has been well-documented by the provincial government and BCF that increasing fares have negatively impacted ferry passenger volumes and revenue. The GICC believes that continued fare increases combined with the proposed service cuts, will relegate our island economy to permanent decline, with the immediate impact of these proposed service cuts resulting in a dismal business year like we had in the 2009-10 economic downturn.

Based on GICC experience and member input, a few of these impacts are as follows:

One of the most difficult challenges we face as a community is to maintain demographic diversity and it's critical for a healthy community's social fabric and sustainable economy both from a consumer and workforce perspective. Feedback received from GICC member businesses in retail, restaurants and other amenities, indicates the proposed service cuts will greatly impact many young families with children, students, shift workers and lower-income wage earners as they do not have the flexibility with their

employment/education/extracurricular activities to make the proposed 9:25 pm final sailing. The reality is many will be forced to move off-island, and the GICC estimate is between 200-300 full-time residents will be lost from our current population of 4,200 (2011 federal census).

There are financial impacts for Nanaimo from these service cuts as well. It will be impossible for Gabriolans to attend shows at the Port Theatre or movies unless they have a place to stay overnight in Nanaimo. Also, there are young Nanaimo workers (e.g. culinary students from VIU) that work on Gabriola in the restaurant business and depend on later sailings to return home. These entertainment and employment options will be lost with the cuts of later sailings, to the detriment of both communities.

As a renowned tourism destination, as well as home to several hundred part-time weekend and more than 1,000 summer residents, Gabriola's merchants are economically dependent on tourism to provide the extra cash flow that maintains the full-range of retail services and employment at their businesses in the low tourist season. Late-evening sailings on Thursdays and Fridays are vital, and tracked by one hospitality business on Gabriola that regularly sees last-sailing visitors arrive here for weekend getaways from their big city lives. Without that late service, those "stealing away" for the weekend will choose another destination (non-ferry dependent) to be able to get as much precious time away as possible. Gabriola will definitely lose those dollars spent in the stores, services, restaurants and accommodation providers.

The GICC believes it is time for the BC Government to finally acknowledge that coastal ferries are an extension of the highway system and to support them in a manner that is equitable to all British Columbians.

Gabriola Arts Council

The Arts Council believes that the proposed cancelled runs—in particular the last two runs every evening—will have a significant negative effect on arts and culture on Gabriola Island.

The importance of the arts to personal and community wellbeing, and to social and economic development have been well proven, and indeed this philosophy is what fuels much of the mandates of the government organizations and ministries that provide funding to arts and culture. We struggle to understand how decisions about cutting ferry services have been made in isolation from other stated goals and mandates of provincial and federal levels of government, especially when they so clearly threaten initiatives and achievements supported by those governments.

The Gabriola Theatre Festival should celebrate its sixth successful season in 2014. Organizers have worked hard to draw off-island visitors with an event attractive to a performing arts audience from across Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland. In 2013, an estimated 20% of our audience members came from off-island, and more than 80% of those were attending evening performances. Those visitors, and potential new audience members responding to the festival's increased profile, will no longer be able to attend these main-stage performances. The cuts to evening ferry service could cost this small festival an estimated \$5,500, or 15% of our operating revenue. This Festival is supported by the BC Arts Council, BC Gaming and the federal Department of Canadian Heritage. It seems short-sighted to provide funding with one hand while reducing revenue-generating opportunities with the other.

Through the Isle of the Arts Festival, we invite Gabriolans and off-island visitors to participate in arts- and culture-related workshops and professional development opportunities. Many of these events are scheduled in the evening. Not only are off-island participants going to be limited, but so are presenters and artists who

might deliver workshops or classes, the impact on the Festival is both financial and artistic. As with the Theatre Festival, this festival is supported by the BC Arts Council, BC Gaming and the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Gabriola has a vibrant music and performance community, with regular opportunities for locals and off-island visitors to enjoy a variety of forms of musical presentations at venues across Gabriola Island. These are almost exclusively evening events, and—as with the Theatre Festival—audiences will be adversely affected by decreased access to and from Gabriola.

A number of years ago, the Gabriola community voted (via referendum) to support the Port Theatre in Nanaimo via a tax allocation managed by the Regional District of Nanaimo. The Port Theatre—steps from the Gabriola Ferry Terminal—is a popular destination for Gabriolans wishing to attend theatre or musical performances. As well, a number of Gabriola children attend evening music programs at the Port Theatre. Without evening ferry service, these opportunities disappear.

The City of Nanaimo has invested significant resources in the development of a Cultural Plan. Members of the Gabriola Arts Council participated in this process, and the outcome should lead to an even more robust and rich arts community in this region, with even greater opportunities for local people—including Gabriolans—to participate in arts and culture. Diminished ferry access eliminates these opportunities and leaves Gabriolans unable to participate in off-island cultural events.

People for a Healthy Community

Client	IMPACT of ferry price increases	IMPACT of sailing reductions
Seniors	Approximately 80 clients are Seniors. All of whom live on or below the poverty line. Currently ferry trips are focused on medical appointments, shopping and family gatherings. Some who are undergoing treatments travel weekly; most would travel at least 1-2 times per month. The reduction of the senior discount will mean these clients will not travel at all, making trips accessible only to those with medical appointments.	Little impact on sailing reduction as most do not travel at night.
Low income Individuals and Families	Most of our clients are low-income, all of whom need to travel to Nanaimo for job searches, government appointments, and doctor/mental health reasons. The removal of the ability to purchase a ferry card for less money than the minimum purchase has been a barrier to travel.	Many low income occupations are in the service industry and require evening shifts (e.g. restaurant, cleaning, mall cashiers, etc.). They rely on the early and late ferries to get from and to home.

Gabriola Historical and Museum Society

The GHMS is concerned that the cancellation of the last two evening round-trip ferries will have a negative impact on museum events, most of which are held from 7 to 9 PM on weeknights. If the last sailing from Gabriola is at 8:50 PM, it will be difficult or impossible for speakers and audience members from Nanaimo to attend these functions. GHMS is also concerned that fewer sailings will mean fewer summertime visitors to the island and to the museum.

Gabriola Recreation Society

The Gabriola Recreation Society co-ordinates local recreation services, includes the entire Island in its membership base, and serves over 1200 program participants annually. Having access to a variety of recreational pursuits for all ages is essential to the overall health of a community. While all possible venues on Gabriola are used for recreational purposes, as a small Island community we simply do not have the typical facilities or resources that people take for granted in a larger centre – no arenas, swimming pools, theatres, public gyms, fitness studios or dance centres. Not only are these services not available “on Island”, our tax dollars go towards supporting municipal facilities in Nanaimo and elsewhere throughout the Regional District which, obviously, require a ferry trip to get to.

Many Gabriolans using the ferry to travel for recreational purposes are families, young adults and working people – those most often utilizing evening and early morning ferries. This is also the demographic essential for sustaining a healthy, diverse community. By hampering access to recreational outlets or pursuits “off Island”, these cuts are guaranteed to result in further reductions in ferry travel overall, and more drastically, in families moving off Gabriola. This will have a dramatic trickle-down effect on the whole community.

These cuts will be detrimental locally, and also to the organizations and services in Nanaimo that include Gabriola residents or benefit from their patronage. Some areas directly affected:

- Arena bookings for recreational hockey: 8/year. These are usually evening bookings, involving 30 Gabriolans each session, ending at 9:30 p.m. Participants will not be able to get home.
- Young people involved in school or community sports such as football, soccer, hockey, and baseball commonly have practices or games in the evening. Many others are involved in dance, drama, and arts activities in Nanaimo. These youth depend on the 10:25 p.m. ferry to return to Gabriola.
- People travelling for lessons, tournaments, or activities both in Nanaimo and elsewhere in the region usually access early morning weekend ferries and return late at night.
- Anyone coming to Gabriola to teach or present an evening program, or attend a special event such as a play, concert or workshop will not be able to leave Gabriola if the last 2 ferries are cut. Vice versa, Gabriolans working or attending classes or evening events on Vancouver Island cannot make a 9:25 p.m. ferry, so again, will be unable to get home.

The GRS believes that the spiralling cost of ferry travel coupled with cuts to ferry services will escalate the exodus of people from Gabriola, and prevent potential new residents from choosing to come here. It is a losing proposition all around – for Gabriola and for B.C. Ferries.

Summary of impacts

The impacts of the proposed sailing cancellations on Gabriola, based on the results presented above, can be summarized under a number of different headings, as follows:

Direct impacts to:

- individuals that commute for work or education
- individuals that travel for other reasons
- businesses on Gabriola Island
- businesses in the Nanaimo area
- community organizations on Gabriola Island

Indirect impacts on:

- the real-estate market on Gabriola
- the quality of life on Gabriola

Commuters

While many people that use the ferry for work or education will not be impacted by the proposed cuts, there is a significant segment of the population that will be adversely affected. This includes anyone with a work schedule that involves either very early or late shifts, or most people that have to travel farther than central Vancouver Island to work or go to school. We found that approximately 35% of the travellers on the at risk sailings (i.e., over 100 passengers) were travelling for work or education, and that a similar proportion of the on-line survey respondents cited use of these sailings for work or post-secondary education at least once a week. These people will either have to change their work patterns, or their jobs, or their education aspirations, or leave Gabriola.

Over 200 Gabriola students that attend high school in Nanaimo, and travel by ferry, would be unable to participate in educational or extra-curricular activities that finish past 8:30 PM Monday through Sunday, or 7:30 PM on Wednesday. This could be the most significant impact on families with children and their decision whether to remain on Gabriola or to leave.

Other travellers

Almost all of the other 200 passengers that we interviewed on the at-risk sailings were travelling for social, entertainment, sport, recreation, or health reasons. While it may be considered by some that these passengers are less dependent on the early or late ferries than the commuting passengers, the availability of these sailings is key to their quality of life on Gabriola, and in our opinion, is part of the social contract that exists between BC Ferries and Gabriola Island. The Gabriola Recreation Society has told us that Gabriolans will face significant restrictions on recreation opportunities on Vancouver Island, many of them in facilities that we support with our tax dollars. For example, Gabriolans pay \$14,000 annually to support the Port Theatre. The proposed cuts will prevent Gabriolans from attending the theatre, unless they opt to stay overnight.

Businesses on Gabriola Island

Gabriola businesses depend heavily on the ferry to bring customers and supplies to the island, and they have expressed strong concerns that cancellation of late evening sailings in particular will hurt businesses such as accommodation suppliers, cafes, restaurants and pubs and artists of all types. Construction businesses on the island are also concerned that out-migration from Gabriola will lead to a significant reduction in demand, and it is widely believed that demand for housing and house prices will drop dramatically as the population decreases. Gabriola businesses have estimated that annual losses will total nearly \$6 million, and that as many as 176 jobs may be lost.

Businesses in Nanaimo

Over 90% of businesses operators that responded to our survey indicated that their businesses would be affected, mostly because Gabriola-based customers would be forced to leave Nanaimo over two hours earlier than at present.

Community organizations on Gabriola

A number of Gabriola community organizations have indicated that the sailing cancellations will have impact on their activities, in most cases because of reduced mobility in the late evenings for both Gabriola residents and visitors.

The real-estate market on Gabriola

Estimates of the number of people that will be forced to move from Gabriola because of the proposed sailing cuts range widely, and it's not something that is easy to predict. The fact is that some have already decided they can't stay, and if sailings are cancelled, many more will follow. Whether it's 100 or 500 or more that end up leaving, the impact will be severe, both on those leaving and on those remaining. The real estate market on Gabriola will be impacted even by rumours of people leaving. Prices will drop, and people needing to sell their properties so that they can establish a life elsewhere will be under pressure to drop them even more. Everyone that owns property will lose equity, and the losses will almost certainly be in the tens of millions of dollars.

The quality of life on Gabriola

Apart from the direct effect of reduced access to entertainment, shopping, social events, sport, recreation and travel, Gabriolans will experience a broad deterioration of the quality of life on the island if the proposed cancellations come into effect and there is a significant decrease in the population. Community organizations and public institutions will suffer from reduced funding and reduced volunteer support. The average age of the island will increase, and the level of diversity will drop. Important services, such as health-care, social services, road maintenance, fire protection, on-island transportation (e.g., the GERTIE community bus), recreation programs and art and culture will be reduced. Businesses will suffer a dramatic loss of revenue, and many service providers that Gabriolans have come to rely on will be forced to close.

Recommended response

The members of the Transportation Advisory Commission and the Ferry Advisory Committee recommend a very strong response to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and to B.C. Ferries.

- 1) We feel that it is critical to stress that Gabriola has had late evening and early morning ferry service for several decades, and therefore that the majority of individuals and families living here now have moved here on the understanding that they will be able to travel back and forth from Vancouver Island at times that will allow them to engage in shift work, take advantage of cultural and recreational opportunities, and travel to other areas. We feel that this represents a social contract between BC Ferries and the residents of Gabriola, and that to change it arbitrarily and without meaningful consultation, as they have proposed to do, is a breach of that contract.
- 2) We have found that the implications of the proposed sailing cuts will be both profound and widespread. They are likely to result in hundreds of job losses, millions of dollars in business losses, tens of millions of dollars in property losses, disruption of the lives of thousands of residents and non-resident property owners, and deterioration in the quality of life for all Gabriolans.
- 3) We believe that the extent of sailing cuts proposed for the Gabriola-Nanaimo route (19) is disproportionate and must be reduced. According to the ministry data provided, Route 19 has the second highest utilization factor of all of the southern Gulf Islands minor routes, and yet the proposed cuts on this route are greater than any of these routes.
- 4) The overwhelming message, from those that we have surveyed and those that expressed their views at the Gabriola Community Engagement meeting on December 10th, is that the late evening and early morning sailings on Route 19 are an essential part of our essential ferry service. There have been numerous suggestions that if sailing cuts need to be made they should be in the middle of the day. We have also been informed that the Quinsam could achieve significant savings in fuel consumption if operated at a slower speed. We would be strongly in favour of an option that reduces greenhouse gas emissions.
- 5) At the BC Ferries Engagement meeting on Gabriola on December 10th, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure spokesperson Kirk Handrahan promised that the Ministry and BC Ferries would be returning to Gabriola “in the new year” in order to meet with the Ferry Advisory Committee and others to discuss alternative options for changes to the Route 19 schedule. We recommend that organizations on Gabriola, led by the Local Trust Committee, take a pro-active approach in regard to this meeting, including insisting on the following:
 - that it be held early in the new year (sometime between January 18th and February 16th 2014) so that we can find a solution to this question before even more damage is done to the lives of Gabriola islanders and to the island’s economy,
 - that the list of Gabriola invitees include at least the following: the Ferry Advisory Committee, representatives of both the officers and crew of the ferry, the Local Trust Committee, the RDN Regional Director and representatives of the Transportation Advisory Committee, Gabriola Island Chamber of Commerce and Gabriola Arts Council,
 - that the Ministry send a representative who is actually able to commit to a decision, and
 - that the meeting be organized and run by Gabriola-based facilitators.