

A new vision for our ferry system.

Andre Lemieux, December 2013

Introduction

In December 9 2002 the provincial government news release stated on the first line “**B.C. needs a reliable ferry system that provides superior service to British Columbians with no financial risk or additional debt burden for taxpayers**”. Then it went on to say “...**A major focus of the new company will be to improve customer service and provide more customer choice...**” Obviously the vision is gone or has changed!

Taken from the 2012 Consultation process:

“The **BC Ferry Commissioner** has estimated that with the current trends of labour and fuel cost increases, and anticipating the need to replace aging ferry infrastructure, funding shortfalls from 2016 to 2020 could average \$56 million per year, while from 2020 to 2024, they could continue at \$85 million per year.

(A total of \$649 million)

The Province is committed to a long-term vision to connect coastal communities in an affordable, efficient and sustainable manner. It is clear that BC Ferries and BC taxpayers need a long-term plan to fund or avoid the predicted shortfalls.“

The predicted shortfalls are now knocking at the door and we are going to have to come up with a vision for the future

First, what is wrong?

1. The Provincial Government does not recognize the ferry system as an extension of our highway system
2. A management model not suited for the different fleets.
 - a. The management structure is designed to serve the Major Routes
 - b. Local decisions on Minor Routes made by managers not aware of local needs.
 - c. Local routes being assessed unnecessary management and administrative costs to show profitability for the Major Routes as the Minor Routes are the ones getting the government subsidies.
 - d. No attempt to synchronize Minor Route Schedules with the Major Routes
 - e. No attempt to synchronize with local public transportation utilities.
 - f. Little effort in matching schedules and pricing to manage demand.

3. Lack of cooperation between BC Ferries and the Provincial Government in a new vision for truly improving the ferry service.
 - a. A third attempt is being organized to provide foot only passenger service between Nanaimo and Vancouver.
 - i. The first two have failed because of lack of capital
 - ii. The third one begging for tax and service concession before giving it another try.
 - b. Too many terminals and too many long routes between Vancouver and Vancouver Island

The system is therefore inefficient, badly managed and lacks vision to make it affordable, sustainable and environmentally friendly.

But the problem can be solved with a New Vision that will make the ferry system affordable and sustainable.

1. The Provincial Government must treat the Minor Routes as part of the highway system
2. The Major Routes structure should be reviewed to provide a real meaning to efficiency, affordability and sustainability

A terminal at YVR and one on Valdes Island would cut the distance between Vancouver and Vancouver Island in half.:50 minutes crossing instead of 1:40

- i. The three ferry terminals in Nanaimo would disappear after being sold to pay the cost of the new system.
- ii. Tsawwassen ferry terminal could be sold to Kinder Morgan so they would not have to use Vancouver Harbour for their monstrous tankers and consequently provide the funds to build the new terminal at YVR(Iona Island)
- iii. It would become the major route between Vancouver Island and Vancouver
- iv. The concentration of foot passengers at those two locations would be conducive for public transport facilities. The Canada Line is already at YVR!
- v. The need for new capital to build new ships would be greatly reduced
- vi. Fares could be reduced by almost 50%
- vii. Economic activities would be given a boost on both sides of the Salish Sea creating employment and improvement in the standard of living.
- b. The minor routes should be:
 - i. Under the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
 - ii. Allowed to be managed by local authorities
 1. They would then be sensible and aware of local needs
 2. Revenues would come from senior governments, local taxation and fares.
 3. Property of ships and docking facilities would remain with the Province
 4. Fares to be calculated to cover cost of operations and not capitalization.
 5. Fares would become directly connected to operational costs.

- c. A passenger only ferry service should be started between Nanaimo and Vancouver under BC Ferries
 - i. A new vision has to deal with the reduction of Green House Gases (GHG)
 - ii. It should be partly financed by the carbon tax and fares.
- 3. The Northern Routes should stay under BC Ferries.
 - a. A route from Vancouver to Prince Rupert should be added. In October 2010, BC Ferries proposal for Opportunity for Enhanced Efficiency stated "...BC Ferries continues to believe this service offers tremendous potential to create additional ridership and revenue, at the same time generating additional economic benefits to the north coast...."
 - i. It would open a market for foot passengers from the lower mainland.
 - ii. It would open a market for tourism.
 - iii. It would boost the coastal economy with stops at coastal communities
 - iv. It would create a seamless connection with the Alaskan Ferry System.
 - v. It would improve the sustainability of our northern communities.
 - vi. It would increase the profitability of BC Ferries and improve service.

Andre Lemieux

andre@andrelemieux.ca