

Gabriola Island Ratepayers Association
635 Rollo Road, Gabriola Island
British Columbia, V0R 1X3
December 8, 2013

Minister Todd Stone
Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
Parliament Buildings, Victoria, British Columbia
V8V 1X4

Regarding the service proposals for BC and specifically, Gabriola Island

Dear Minister Stone;

Well your ferries' team has just served up a very unpleasant services prospect that crosses many personal "lines in sand" here on the BC Coast. Gabriola Island Ratepayers Association convened a public meeting last week in order to try gauging public sentiment as to the proposed service changes for the Island and it was not pretty. Emotions ran the gamut from anger to fear to despair. Some residents have given up entirely and have listed their properties for sale because the service proposals directly impact their ability to keep their employment or to keep attending education programs on Vancouver Island. It is probably accurate to say that all coastal communities, including Vancouver Island, have just experienced a personal loss in property value from somewhere between \$10,000 and \$25,000. That means the Government has just had a direct hand in making 20% of the province's population a lot poorer by its actions regarding ferries.

Long ago one of your predecessors, Judith Reid, made great promises to the coastal communities as to the long-term stability of ferry services designed to be fair and supportive (see attached December 2002 news release). Since then our fares have dramatically increased and now we all face the prospect of diminished services.

Just in case you might think the folks living on the Islands have been uninvolved/indifferent on this topic I have enclosed a copy of some of the submissions and recommendations we have made over the past 10 years that in almost every case have either been ignored or dismissed. Many of these representations were about either increasing revenues or reducing costs. You will find numerous examples at "ferry.gabriola.org".

Regardless of the upbeat rhetoric of 2002 the bad old ways have prevailed and because they have been costly you folks want to victimize us for having no part in making BC Ferries a financial failure. Had we been asked we would have vetoed the purchase of the last three vessels from Germany. Because they are too large and too heavy on fuel and at least one sits idle at the dock in Departure Bay for a large portion of the week.

Because BC Ferries is a poster operation for the pejorative term, “legacy carrier”, their operations are costing as much as 30-40% more than they should. Also, because it is a monopoly business, it plays with its costs and revenues, and displays irrational and arbitrary pricing and government allocation practices. I can illustrate this last point by directing you to the reports by the Ferry Commissioner. Bowen Island receives financial contributions from both the Federal and Provincial Governments totaling \$6,818,000. In contrast, Gabriola Island received from the same sources \$3,437,000. If you follow this through, as you should if you are interested in fairness, you can readily see that the per capita support for Bowen is about \$2,000 and for Gabriola it is about \$838. That is a benefit for Bowen travellers 238% more than here on Gabriola. I have to think that this is not an anomaly as you might want to claim.

In the 1970s, during the period of federal “wages and price “ controls, I had the task of finding new revenues for our company, Pacific Western Airlines. Confronted with an illogical fare structure I had to devise a way of getting different fare increases for different markets that were acceptable to the Government of Canada and would ensure the company’s financial survival. It worked because we designed our fare applications to be open and most importantly, fair to all of our customers in Western Canada. Success was partly secured by my going to almost every community we served and explaining exactly what we had to do by way of fare changes. There were never any political repercussions. Please reject any staff representations that this cannot be done successfully because I know it can and should be done by BC Ferries.

The point of writing this letter is to say on behalf of all ferry dependent communities that BC Ferries and the BC Government have not earned the right to impose service cuts upon the system until you have rectified poor operating practices and tried some of the recommendations made by ferry users over the past 10 years.

Sincerely

Gabriola Island Ratepayers

Erik Andersen
Randy Young
Andre Lemieux

cc. Gabriola Flying Shingle
BC Ferries
CBC Early Edition
Rafe Mair