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Reprints from November 1997, December 1997 and January 1998

The travelling public can make a difference!

The following is a series of Island Tides' articles recording a public outcry in 1997. Unexpected fare increases surprised stakeholder groups and incensed the public. Demonstrations at the Legislature and at Fulford followed. The debate focussed public attention on fundamental problem with funding the Crown Corporation.

November 20, 1997

'Modest' fare increases, & new deal for ferries— says provincial government

The provincial cabinet has brought an abrupt end to the escalating debate over BC Ferries' fare increases with an announcement last Friday of system-wide increases, along with a promise of a new financial deal for the BC Ferry Corporation. Most fare increases will take effect this week, although some will not be in effect until the end of the month. They range from 8% on the main routes through 14% on Gulf Island routes to 20–23% on some minor routes; Route 9 (Tsawwassen - Gulf Islands) and Route 17 (Comox-Powell River) have increases of less than 5%. (Calculations made on a car & driver basis.)

The increases were described as 'modest' by Dan Miller, Minister Responsible for BC Ferries; they are generally, in some cases substantially, less than the Ferry Corporation's proposals presented to stakeholder groups over the past two months. But on the smaller routes, they are larger than any increases in recent memory; combined with increases this spring, the cost to Islanders for ferry travel has increased significantly. Miller indicated that the purpose of larger percentage increases on the smaller routes was to make some progress in reducing operating losses.

The fare increase announcement surprised members of stakeholder groups, who had been led, by BC Ferries, to believe that a decision on fare increases would not be made until spring.

Fare Increases In 50¢ To \$2 Range.

The fare increases were set on a broad basis, with little differentiation between routes. For passengers, the one-way fare between the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island (Route 1, Tsawwassen - Swartz Bay; Route 2, Horseshoe Bay - Departure Bay; and Route 30, Tsawwassen - Duke Point) goes

up by 50¢ during the low season and \$1 in the shoulder and peak seasons. On all other routes (including Route 9, Tsawwassen - Gulf Islands; and Route 17, Powell River - Comox), the one-way passenger fare goes up by 50¢, year-round (\$1 for a return fare).

One-way vehicle fares between the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island will increase \$1 in the low season and \$2 in the shoulder and peak seasons. On all other routes, one-way vehicle fares will increase by \$1, year-round (\$2 for a return fare).

Commuter tickets (car and driver) have gone up by an identical amount. Ten round-trip car and driver tickets will now cost an additional \$30.

Island Tides estimates that the increases will yield in the neighbourhood of \$22 million in additional annual revenues. BC Ferries booked a loss of \$76.5 million in the 1996/7 fiscal year, and CEO Tom Ward says that revenue this year is currently about \$10 million ahead of last year.

The new tariff announced last Friday does not include any increases for commercial and bus customers as their fares were set last March for a three-year period. The tariff also does not include a number of mid and North Coast runs, where new, two-year rates were announced in December of 1996.

The BC Ferries announcement supports suggestions adopted at the combined stakeholders' committee meeting in Richmond on October 20th and 21st. (See related article on page 7 and letters last issue.) The tariff structure announced by the government backs away from route-by-route fare increases, is system-wide, and continues cross-subsidies. It is expected that stakeholder discussions of changes for increased efficiency and long-term fare structures will continue.

continued, PTO

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A New Financial Deal

BC coast stakeholders had also supported the reinstatement of the provincial subsidy for BC Ferries. This recommendation appears also to have been heard. In his announcement Miller was quoted as saying, 'The provincial government is taking steps to improve BC Ferries' financial performance with a new fare structure and provision of annual financial support for the service.' Questioned on the government's plans, Miller would not go into detail, but did note that the government has received proposals for 'unconventional financing' of needed new ships, which would have the effect of removing debt from BC Ferries' balance sheet.

'We recognise that BC Ferries operates a good service which is a necessary part of our transportation infrastructure and cannot be totally self-supporting. It's a service which must remain affordable, especially for our year-round customers,' said Miller. 'Therefore, the fare increases are modest and, together with government support and the Corporation's own efficiencies, should help pave the way toward putting BC Ferries on a sound financial footing.'

BC Ferries President and CEO Tom Ward welcomed the

government decisions. 'As a result, BC Ferries will continue to maintain lower, off-season fares which have proven to be a benefit for our local customers,' said Ward. 'At the same time, we are committed to completing the public consultation that is currently underway with our Advisory Committees on a five-year plan to cover ongoing operating costs.'

Miller Will Meet Stakeholders

While confirming that the government 'will continue to provide annual financial support' to BC Ferries, Miller said that a long-term policy will be set during the government's upcoming budget process. He said he appreciated the input provided by members of the regional advisory committees.

He also said, 'I do want to meet with representatives of the stakeholder groups,' and indicated that he hoped that this could be arranged in the near future. Salt Spring's Neville Atkinson has organized a group which would represent the entire coast. For some stakeholder representatives, however, travel costs are a problem; BC Ferries Board secretary Pat Morris has so far indicated that the corporation is unwilling to assist with travel for such a meeting. ☞

December 4, 1997

Islanders demand fare rollback

Citizen and stakeholder groups throughout the BC coast are calling for a complete rollback of the November 14th increase in ferry fares. Bowen Islanders blocked a ferry departure from Horseshoe Bay. Gabriola Islanders marched to MLA Dale Lovick's office last week to deliver a letter protesting the fare increases. And a large, noisy meeting on Quadra Island booed BC Ferries Chief Financial Officer Glen Brown and resolved to boycott their Island ferry. At last report, vehicle traffic on the Quadra Island ferry is down noticeably, with commuters finding other ways to get to work in Campbell River.

The increases, which were described by the government as 'modest', ranged up to 40% in some cases. Cortes and Hornby Islanders, who must cross another Island to reach essential services, face a double increase. Daily commuters from Quadra Island to Campbell River, Gabriola to Nanaimo, Denman Island to Comox, and Bowen Island to Horseshoe Bay find that the flat-rate increase will result in up to an extra \$120 per month in ferry fares.

The Regional District of Comox-Strathcona has passed a resolution calling the fare increases 'exorbitant' and called for reinstatement of the 'traditional highways subsidies' to the system. The Regional District also demanded that Premier Glen Clark, Minister Miller, and Finance Minister Andrew Petter meet with representatives of the affected communities

'to discuss the future direction of the Government and the Corporation.'

The demand for a rollback was supported by Gordon Wilson, Powell River/ Sunshine Coast MLA and leader of the Progressive Democratic Alliance. 'It is clear,' he wrote, 'that the recent move toward fare increases has placed an unacceptable burden upon many who live within ferry dependent communities, and government must take action to bring the financial structure of this crown corporation into line.' Wilson is a strong supporter of a subsidy for BC Ferries, and says that the ferry routes are an extension of the provincial highway system and the vessels themselves are 'part of our public transportation network'.

The fare increase has sparked numerous letters to Minister Responsible for BC Ferries Dan Miller, many of them enquiring how the fare increase was arrived at after stakeholder groups from one end of the coast to the other had rejected BC Ferries proposals to increase minor route fares drastically in order to cover costs in five years.

The fare increase is high on the agenda as stakeholder representatives from the entire coast meet with Miller on Wednesday, December 3rd. The eight stakeholder groups, plus potential representation from a new-formed Quadra/Cortes group are preparing their presentation for the meeting.

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The stakeholder representatives have more on their mind than fares. They are concerned about the future of the ferry system, and the future of their coastal and Island communities. This means that the communities must have long-term assurance of service, and that the price of ferry transportation, both for residents and visitors, must remain affordable.

Stakeholder representatives are quick to point out that all

British Columbians, not just Islanders, regard the ferries an integral part of the highway system. Salt Spring's Drew Thorburn describes this as a 'social contract' between the government and those dependent on the ferries (710,000 people, or 21.5% of BC's population), as well as the millions of visitors to the region each year. ✍

December 18, 1997

Fare issue comes to boil

Up to 400 Islanders from Cortes to Saturna massed on the legislature lawn in Victoria on Tuesday, December 9th to bring the fare rollback issue to a boil. Many wore lifejackets and floater coats, an essential precaution for a sinking ferry corporation. Demonstrations held the same day at Gabriola Island, Nanaimo, Thetis Island, on the Texada Island ferry at Powell River, and at Horseshoe Bay turned up the heat on the provincial government to roll back the November 14th fare increases and make essential changes in the management of BC Ferries.

The demonstrators' pot was stirred by Quadra's Jim Abram, Powell River MLA Gordon Wilson, and others, and was attended by a number of opposition MLAs. The NDP caucus, meeting inside the legislative building, could undoubtedly hear the shouting, interspersed with musical interludes, including a song about recall (see the Christmas carol sheet in this issue).

Minister Responsible for BC Ferries Dan Miller sent his secretary out to the steps of the Legislature to recruit 'two or three' representatives to meet with the minister. The crowd's first reaction was to demand that Miller come out and meet with them, but eventually eleven demonstrators went in to meet with Miller.

Miller says 'no' to fare rollback

Petulant Dan Miller, Minister Responsible for BC Ferries, had no appetite for any of the recommendations served up by the eleven representatives of the Combined Stakeholders Committees who met with him on December 3rd. In fact, he expressed his refusal to be persuaded to TV newsmen before entering the meeting. In particular, he said, there will be no rollback of the November 14th fare increase. Miller was true to his promise. He said no to everything.

Miller refused to accept the concept that BC Ferries was an extension of the highway system. He 'accepted responsibility' for the sense of betrayal felt by stakeholder groups and said 'we have to work through' it. He said that the provincial level of support for BC Ferries would be determined during the

At this meeting, also attended by Jan Pullinger (Minister of Tourism and Small Business), two up-Island NDP MLAs and various staff members, Islanders roasted Miller for his treatment of the stakeholder delegation the previous week, and reiterated their demands for a rollback of the fare increase. Miller said that would be up to the cabinet, and offered no other solutions to the impasse. One participant said that Miller 'bobbed and weaved' as he tried to avoid charges of arrogance and mismanagement from the protesters.

Meanwhile, CHEK-TV's Judy Tyabji Show featured Jim Abram, Vancouver Sun columnist Vaughn Palmer, and stakeholder representative Drew Thorburn in a thorough discussion of BC Ferries' financial troubles. And all the Vancouver and Victoria TV stations featured the ferry fare issue on their evening newscasts.

The following day, newspaper coverage included an editorial in the Vancouver Province which supported a rollback of the fare increase and the restoration of a \$51 million annual subsidy for BC Ferries. A Knowledge Network program that evening featured a debate on ferry subsidies and fares, including Islanders Patrick Brown (Pender), Richard Goth (Bowen), Ferries VP Glen Brown, and businessman Graham Clark. ✍

budget process, and that Premier Clark and Finance Minister Pettey would determine what it would be. 'I can't throw a number on the table,' he said, 'We must talk about it.'

Miller denied that BC Ferries had no business plan. 'We may not have been good at sharing that plan,' he admitted. He said that he would 'take the hit' for the fare increase. 'We made an attempt to look at the impact,' he said, 'including commuter tickets.' Asked for a rollback, he said, 'My answer is no.' He did, however, confirm that there would not be a further fare increase in the spring of 1998.

The only morsel in which he showed any interest was the notion of stakeholders on the Board of Directors. 'An interesting idea,' he said, and asked whether the stakeholders

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were qualified. Yes, said the delegation; Miller agreed to discuss the idea further.

After the meeting, Miller boasted to the assembled TV newsmen that he had made no commitments. Stakeholder representatives emerging from the meeting were shocked and disappointed at the minister's attitude and behaviour. One

said, 'He seemed to take a perverse delight in finding ways to put us down.' They vowed to take the results of the meeting back to their communities, and predicted the communities would not be pleased.

Stakeholders won't proceed with planning

The Southern Gulf Islands ferry stakeholder group 'cannot proceed' with further long term planning until the issues raised by coast stakeholders have been addressed by the government.

That stand was affirmed unanimously by representatives of all the Southern Gulf Islands at a December 12th meeting in Sidney, when they voted on the following resolution:

'Whereas the Government, through their actions, has destroyed the credibility of the Stakeholders process, it was moved and seconded: That the Southern Gulf Islands Stakeholders Committee cannot proceed with this process until such time as the Government makes a significant move on the issues presented to the Minister on December 3, 1997.'

This means that further decisions on future route patterns, terminals, vessels, fares, and schedules will be delayed until major issues, including a fare rollback and refinancing of the corporation, have been settled.

The resolution climaxed a meeting that agreed on a definition of the major issues facing the government and BC Ferries and a presentation on the Phase 2 analysis of route options by BC Ferries planning staff. A draft recommendation from BC Ferries, which favoured the status quo, was received during the meeting but not acted upon. Stakeholders still have many unanswered questions concerning the assumptions and figures used in the Phase 2 analysis.

Subsidy to continue, stakeholders say no

Ferries Minister Dan Miller announced Wednesday, December 10th that the existing \$4.7 million annual subsidy to BC Ferries would be continued for a further year.

The offer was immediately rejected by stakeholder representatives, who pointed out that the continuation of the present subsidy level would lead to a further massive loss in the present fiscal year, and represented no solution to the

corporation's long or short term problems.

The Minister's latest recipe was taken off the menu when government sources suggested that Miller's announcement should be ignored and alternative proposals would soon be forthcoming. At press time, there were no further developments but plenty of rumours.

Cooking up the fare increase

Has your carefully planned Christmas 'fare' ever ended up in the garbage? Have your guests ever picketed your kitchen? How to do it? Simple; just ignore the recipe, macerate a random selection of figures in an accountant's cuisinart, season with panic, throw the whole mess in the oven, and serve, half-baked. Having too many cooks helps, too . . .

Last spring, with the The BC Ferry Corporation hemorrhaging money, and the government apparently obdurate about any subsidies, BC Ferries' Board of Directors came to the conclusion that each of the minor routes should reach the objective of covering their own costs within five years. Sous-chef Glen Brown was sent out in the late summer of 1997 to advise the 'steakholder' groups that fares would double, triple, and in some cases quadruple to accomplish this. Not surprisingly, the 'steakholders' rejected this outright. Meeting in Richmond October 21st, they agreed on a fare-setting formula which depended on system-wide average costs

per passenger-mile and per vehicle-mile. But they also demanded that the provincial government's annual financial contribution to BCFC be restored.

The fare increase: how it was supposed to happen

Following the meeting, Glen Brown was to prepare a set of fare increases that followed the stakeholders' recommendations, and return them for comment to stakeholder representatives by November 12th. There was a short time for further comment before the proposals were to be presented to the Board, on November 23rd. The next Board meeting, scheduled for December 12th, would make a recommendation on 1998 fares to the Minister Responsible for BC Ferries, Dan Miller, who would take it to the provincial cabinet for approval. Following this pattern, past fare increases have historically taken place early in the new year.

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What may have happened:

An examination of the entrails, ashes, and shards of bone china found in the dumpster behind the legislative building, together with evidence from people who were within earshot of the kitchen, yields the following hypothetical sequence of culinary events.

First, the ingredients. The turkey probably came from the Cabinet's private freezer. A more than ample supply of panic came from the publication of BC Ferries' 1996/97 Annual Report, which revealed that the corporation had lost \$77 million (counting depreciation, finance charges, training of aluminum welders, and the settlement of the odd lawsuit). BCFC was now officially and publicly insolvent, and its losses were becoming indigestible. A shortage of understanding was made up by an extra helping of haste. And Glen Brown never did manage to show the detailed recipe to the stakeholders.

The Board met on October 29th to discuss not only tariffs

but also the the recent stakeholder meeting, during which the Board had been roasted for not standing up to the government for the corporation. The results of this meeting are not known, but they seem to have resulted in a clash between the Board and the Minister Responsible during the following week. Judging by the noises from the kitchen, this meeting did not result in agreement. After that, the Board had no further culinary role.

The minister responsible then took over as chief cook and bottler. With kitchen helpers from Treasury Board, and with ingredients from BC Ferries, he then mixed up a simple fare increase to put before the Cabinet for their approval.

Cabinet, with the heat turned up high, and with an generous dash of panic, then completed the incineration of the fare -increase turkey. The following day, November 14th, it was served cold with a light sauce of vague promises, and has since proved thoroughly unpalatable.

December 5th: Trustees grill BC Ferries reps

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimbel in the wabe . . .'

And gyre and gimbel they did. Four BC Ferries representatives answered pointed and telling questions from Islands Trust Council in a two hour session on December 5th.

The grillees were Vice President, Operations and Customer Service Mike Carter (CEO Tom Ward missed the helijet from Vancouver); Vice President, Finance Glen Brown; Assistant Vice President, Southern Operations Jeannette McKay; and Board Member and Comox MLA Evelyn Gillespie. The pointed questions covered subsidies, the stakeholder process, cost reduction, an independent audit, recent fare increases, the relationship between BC Ferries and the provincial government, and the adequacy of the protocol agreement between the Trust and BC Ferries. Some new information emerged . . .

Director Evelyn Gillespie said that her function on the Board of Directors was to 'represent her constituents' but also 'to give the government's overview'. But she said that the 1989 order-in-council mandate that BCFC should be self-supporting 'alarms' her. Glen Brown, commenting on 'cost recovery', said, 'It may not be possible to achieve all this in five years.' Gillespie suggested that BCFC offered a 'Cadillac service' and suggested an additional gasoline tax on the Islands to help pay for it. Broad questions of public policy, she said, needed to be

addressed.

Carter affirmed that 'the stakeholder process is at the core of everything we do right now.' Trustee Kim Benson (Gambier/Keats) pointed out that BCFC's overhead and administrative costs, at \$46 million, were more than twice the operating loss on minor routes. Carter said that last year BCFC cut \$10 million in overheads; he welcomed stakeholder scrutiny.

The tariff setting process was explored, but the only explanation offered by Glen Brown for the recent increase was that this year it had gone 'much faster' because the loss reported for the last fiscal year was receiving so much publicity. Gillespie added that she thought that cabinet 'felt something had to be done quickly'.

Wrapping up, Trust Chair David Essig said that he would 'refrain from saying anything about the province abdicating its social responsibility to coastal communities.' The Trust later passed a resolution which affirmed its commitment to the stakeholder process, called for an appropriate financial contribution from the government, and insisted on complete study of social and environmental impacts for all major decisions including fare increases. The existing protocol agreement between the Trust and BC Ferries is also to be strengthened to include these points. ☞

January 15, 1998

BC Ferries bifurcates

BC Ferries has split its organization into two 'business units', one covering the main routes and the other serving the smaller routes. President and CEO Tom Ward has announced the appointment of two Executive Vice Presidents. They are Captain Mike Carter, who becomes Executive Vice President, Mainland Services, and Glen Brown, as Executive Vice President, Inter Island Services. The reshuffle became effective January 8th.

In announcing the new organization, BC Ferries President Tom Ward cited 'conflicting priorities between our commercial objectives and our public policy mandates'.

'BC Ferries,' continued Ward, 'essentially runs two kinds of service. On our major routes, we operate large vessels transporting a high volume and mix of traffic for economic and social purposes. On our minor routes, we operate smaller ships carrying traffic focused on island communities with people commuting to work, travelling for personal reasons on a year-round basis, but with a significant summer visitor content.'

Ward went on to express his continued support for the stakeholder process, and also pledged to 'commit significant personal efforts' to improving labour relations.

Mainland Services

Reporting to **Captain Carter**, formerly Executive Vice President, Operations and Customer Service, in his new role will be:

Jeanette McKay, with operating responsibility for Route #1 (Tsawwassen - Swartz Bay), Route #2 (Horseshoe Bay - Departure Bay), Route #3 (Horseshoe Bay - Langdale), and Route #30 (Tsawwassen - Duke Point). McKay, who was previously Assistant Vice President, Southern Operations, will

also be responsible for the Tsawwassen, Swartz Bay, Horseshoe Bay, Departure Bay, and Duke Point terminals.

Peter Hughes, formerly in the Northern Gulf Islands, has moved further north—to Prince Rupert. He will be responsible for routes in the Prince Rupert and Queen Charlotte area, as well as the Discovery Coast Route #40.

Bill Lumley will be responsible for fleet engineering, Deas Dock, and ship technical operations.

Inter-Island Services

Reporting to **Glen Brown**, formerly Vice President, Finance and Corporate Services, will be:

Norm Craddock, with operating responsibility for all minor routes from Horseshoe Bay north on the mainland side of the Strait of Georgia, and from Denman north on the Vancouver Island side, and for all minor route terminals in this area.

Ross Harris, with operating responsibility for all other minor routes, including the southern Gulf Islands, Mill Bay, Thetis, and Gabriola. Harris will make his headquarters in the Fulford Marina building on Salt Spring Island.

Bob Lowe will be responsible for fleet engineering on all these routes.

Other Changes

Gordon Cross will succeed Glen Brown as Vice-President, Finance and Corporate services and Chief Financial Officer. Ellis Meads becomes Vice President, Ship and Terminal Construction. Julia Bardos continues as Vice President, Human Resources, and Harry Martin continues as Vice President, Corporate Safety and Standards.

Ward also expects to appoint an Assistant Vice President, Marketing and Commercial Business Development in the near future. ✍

Commuter rollback token—ferry committee holds firm

The Southern Gulf Islands Long Term Planning Advisory Committee to BC Ferries will not be meeting to discuss strategic planning for the time being.

The Committee, which has been working on a strategic plan for the complex Southern Gulf Islands ferry service for three years, voted on December 12th to suspend its work until the Minister Responsible for BC Ferries, Dan Miller, had made a 'significant move' on the issues presented to him at a meeting with stakeholders last December 3rd.

'Dan Miller's rollback of commuter fares gave back only \$2

million of a \$22 million fare increase, and did not address any other issues,' said Salt Spring's Neville Atkinson, spokesperson for the Committee. 'It wasn't good enough. We need assurance that vital changes in BC Ferries' structure will be made before we can continue our work.'

A rollback of the November 14th fare increase was only one of the issues raised with Miller at the December 3rd meeting. Others included stable long-term financing, an independent 'value for money' audit of the corporation, independence from political decision making, and reform of the Board of Directors

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(see 'Recipe' next column). The meeting included representatives of all the stakeholder committees on the BC coast.

At the meeting, Miller promised that the subsidy would be reviewed. However, he dodged any commitment to a figure, saying that would be up to the Premier and the Minister of Finance. He also undertook not to bring in any further fare increases in 1998, but made no other commitments.

Saturna's John Fryer mediates

In mid-December, following ferry-user demonstrations at various terminals and in Victoria, Miller appointed John Fryer, a well known labour mediator and Saturna Island resident, to 'mediate'. Fryer's terms of reference were limited to making recommendations about commuter fares, and to recommending what would be necessary in order to get the stakeholder consultation process back 'on track'. Fryer met with about twenty stakeholder representatives in Nanaimo on December 20th, and recommended to Miller on December 23rd that commuter fares be rolled back to their pre-November 14th levels. Miller's announcement of this also included a 'system-wide rate freeze for 1998' and confirmation that 'additional financial support' would be provided for BC Ferries, and that 'alternative financing options' were being explored for the construction of new ferries.

Fryer is now working on the second part of his terms of reference: how to restart the stakeholder process, which was derailed by discussions on fares towards the end of last year, and then lost credibility when stakeholders' recommendations on fares were apparently ignored by the provincial cabinet. He expects to report back to Miller towards the end of January. Several stakeholder groups, including the Southern Gulf Islands Committee, will meet with Fryer this month. ☞

Internet connects coastal dwellers

One result of the frenzied ferry fare protest activity before Christmas was the development of an interactive E-mail forum on ferry matters. BCIslanders was set up three weeks ago by a Cortes Island resident, and has since proved a useful electronic bulletin board for the exchange of information and opinion. While initial messages were completely concerned with ferries, subject matter is now broadening to include logging and other matters of interest to Islanders.

Messages sent to bcislanders@connected.bc.ca are immediately distributed to every subscriber. A web site at <http://www.connected.bc.ca/bcislanders> contains a subscription form. There is no cost to join.

A web site called 'Unfare', originating from the Quadra Island Ferry Users Group, provides updated news and coming

Recipe for a New BC Ferries

At their December 12th meeting, Southern Gulf Islands stakeholder representatives agreed on ten actions which must be taken to begin the creation of a new, more effective, more responsive BC Ferries:

1. The November 14th fare increase should be rolled-back, and fares should be frozen pending renewed discussion with stakeholders.
2. Government should confirm a strong mandate for BC Ferries, including, at a minimum, affirmation of the government's responsibility to provide fair and continuing access to the communities BC Ferries serves.
3. Government should commit to adequate funding of a contract for these services with BC Ferries for at least a five year period.
4. BC Ferries should be managed by its own executives, under the active guidance of its board of directors.
5. The board of directors should be predominantly drawn from qualified stakeholders.
6. The coast-wide stakeholder process should continue as an effective influence on the operations and planning of the corporation.
7. BC Ferries should be managed using a five-year business plan, and a ten-year capital plan, which shall include a mechanism for the financing of capital expenditures. The mechanism shall be backed by the provincial government.
8. Fares should be set by the BC Ferries' Board of Directors as a result of the planning process.
9. The provincial auditor should conduct an independent audit to determine whether the corporation is getting and giving value for money.
10. The board should immediately convene a high-level advisory group, involving the stakeholders, the management, the union, and the government. The group would be involved in setting the terms of reference for the audit and in reviewing the results. It would also provide a forum within which the future structure, strategy, and direction of BC Ferries can be discussed. ☞

events as well as background facts and letters from ferry users and community representatives. Its location is <http://www.orion.online.bc.ca/~unfare>

A new E-mail forum, commforest, has been added to the Majordomo mailing management system. The forum is concerned with community forestry. To subscribe, send a message to Majordomo@kinch.ark.com including the

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command 'subscribe commforest'. The Majordomo program will confirm your registration and send you instructions on how to access the system.

Howard Breen's 'Marine Wire' 'zine gives in-depth news of fisheries. He collates news articles from many different worldwide publications. That's how *Island Tides* got the first

Our readers writ(h)e

Island Tides' recent extensive coverage of ferry fares and affairs has fanned the flames of readers' wrath, and brought forth letters in greater bulk than we have room for. So here's a sampling:

Michael Stibbs of Mayne Island wrote:

'I read Craig McInnes's piece about the ferry hike in today's *Globe and Mail*...

'...McInnes failed to include in his list of 'social costs' freebies to employees of the ferry corporation. It is my understanding that employees and their dependents are entitled to free passage on the corporation's vessels wherever they sail, this privilege to include their vehicles. I do not believe that such privileges are restricted to weekdays either, as is the case of senior's free travel, but may be used any time...

'... I believe it is more than likely that the loss of income to the ferry corporation attributable to the employee benefits exceeds what can be laid at the door of the seniors. It would certainly be interesting to examine the figures.

'No doubt the presence of free employee travel is the result of hard bargaining by the ferry workers union, a very strong union that perhaps has customarily had the good fortune to negotiate with weak management. However, I imagine that even mentioning this subject in the Gulf Islands where many employees live would be, if not exactly a risky business, certainly most unpopular and not likely to win one many friends.'


Mr. Stibbs was also kind enough to send us a copy of a letter which he sent to Dan Miller, Minister Responsible for BC Ferries. In it he made some more points:

'...In his discussions with Ottawa the late Premier WAC Bennett forcefully argued that the BC Ferry system is as much an extension of the Canadian Highway system as the ferries to Prince Edward Island (which receive a federal subsidy). In that Ottawa subsidises BC Ferries to the tune of \$22 million it would appear that WAC Bennett's argument was accepted, and that indeed the BC ferry system is an extension of our highways.

'It then has to be asked why the ferries serving the Gulf Islands and the other areas are singled out in this way, while all those other elements in the transportation system, such as BC Transit, West Coast Express and the Highways generally are so generously subsidised and clearly do not pay their way?

'One conclusion that can be drawn is that the 25,000 voters so

information on the Standing Committee on Fisheries & Oceans' meetings, see article on page 7. You can contact him at hbreen@mail.island.net.

It is estimated that the number of homes on the Islands with Internet access is approaching 10%. 

adversely affected by this increase count for less than others; surely an action that is discriminatory and one that is difficult to reconcile with the middle word in your party's title.'

Joan Harper of Pender Island made several controversial recommendations:

'What I and most other Gulf Islanders would like to see is a long term solution. Rolling back the present increase would be a start but only a 'band-aid' solution. Instead I believe the following steps should be implemented:

- Roll back the number of administrators from 227 to 162. If the corporation operated with 162 in 1992 surely it can today.

- **Fire the 2 top corporate executives on the grounds of incompetence. There is ample evidence.**


- Hire a high powered executive from the private sector with a proven track record of cost control and downsizing to streamline the organization.

- Freeze employee wages for 5 years. An increase of 40% over 10 years is far above the national average for the period and took place during a time of extremely low inflation. Perhaps in light of this and the fact that the corporation is in trouble employees would agree willingly to the freeze. There have been numerous examples in the private sector (notably Canadian Airlines) of employees making even deeper sacrifices when their corporation was in trouble.

- Reduce service on the Southern Gulf Island route to Tsawwassen (the route with which I am most familiar) to 5 days per week. Eliminate service on Tuesdays and Wednesdays which are slack days. At these times patrons could use the alternate, though less convenient route through Swartz Bay to reach the mainland. Cuts to other routes should be investigated.

- Recognize the BC Ferries as part of the provincial transit system and subsidise it accordingly.

'If you agree with any points in this rather lengthy letter, please write Premier Glen Clark and Dan Miller, minister responsible for the ferries. Send copies to your MLA and opposition party leaders to use as ammunition in the legislature. Above all don't let the protest fizzle out.'

This *Island Tides* issue contains further chapters of the ferry stakeholder story. Stay tuned, and keep writ(h)ing. For an entirely novel view of the situation, see 'Tea Party' letter on page four. 

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