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Ferry schedules change with new ferries, and old

Brian Hollingshead

Two intermediate-class ferries will be arriving in early 2017 to replace the venerable *Queen of Nanaimo*, providing service between Tsawwassen and the Southern Islands and Salt Spring (see article, page 1).

As two medium-sized ferries have different capabilities and limitations from one larger ferry, or one large and one small ferry, new schedules need to be drawn-up prior to their arrival.

Helping With New Schedules

To this end, BC Ferries has met with an extended working group from the community, including nine members from the Southern Gulf Islands and three from Salt Spring. This group is tasked with providing early comment, intended to reflect the views of islanders, on various schedules proposed by BC Ferries. Not necessarily to 'approve' them but to help get them to a stage where they can be presented to the community for discussion and refinement.

Community meetings will take place in August on each of the islands, in Richmond and in Sidney (schedule, box above). BC Ferries is committed to considering all community comments and adjusting the schedules as may be appropriate. We are advised the proposed schedules will be posted online prior to the meetings.

The working group was anticipating considering various options for the two new ferries and their connecting linkage to Routes 5 and 5A (Swartz Bay–Southern Gulf Islands).

Swartz Bay–Southern Islands

Ferry committees were surprised to find that BC Ferries has undertaken a complete re-write of the Route 5 schedule in an effort to resolve a few long-standing concerns and to create some 'operating efficiencies'. Not surprisingly, there are trade-offs.

The schedules initially presented included several service improvements along with a number of service degradation 'problems', some minor, some major. BC Ferries listened to the group and fixed several of the 'problems'. While there seems to be agreement that many connections are better than the current ones, there remain some major (in the committee's view) problems in both the Swartz Bay and Tsawwassen 'proposed' schedules. There are also a host of proposed sailings now requiring back-tracking, increasing travel times.

There are two major changes that seem to be embedded in the proposed schedules. The first is combining the four islands

into two pairs, and providing most of the day-to-day service accordingly, with one of the Swartz Bay ferries serving Galiano and Saturna and the other serving Mayne and Pender. This appears to be non-negotiable. With that arrangement comes

the second major change, the substantial reduction in what remains of inter-island connectivity.

The committee suggested that in order to partially mitigate the required re-routing through Swartz Bay, BC Ferries should apply SGI inter-island fares on through-fares via Swartz Bay. These would apply to SGI to SGI trips and to SGI to and from Salt Spring (Fulford Harbour). The lengthy trips would remain but they'd cost less. BC Ferries is considering the recommendation.

The changes are substantial and will affect everyone, positively and possibly negatively. You need to be aware of them and be prepared to comment. BC Ferries needs (and wants) to hear from you, while the schedules are still open to adjustment. ☞

New Ferry Schedule Meeting Dates

- **Saturna:** Mon, Aug 17, 7-9pm, Saturna Community Hall
- **Mayne:** Tues, Aug 18, 7-9pm, Mayne Community Centre
- **Pender:** Wed, Aug 19, 7-9pm, Pender Anglican Hall
- **Salt Spring:** Mon, Aug 24, 7-9pm, Harbour House Hotel
- **Sidney:** Wed, Aug 26, 7-9pm, Mary Winspear Centre
- **Galiano:** Thurs, Aug 27, 7-9pm, Galiano Hall, South Island
- **Richmond:** Wed, Sep 9, 7-9pm, River Rock Casino/Hotel