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## Saturna Notes: BC Ferries Proposed Schedule Will Destroy the Community - Priscilla Ewbank

In the midst of islanders' summer-camp for visiting grandchildren, the joy of our children coming from afar for family gatherings, pears, blackberries, and plums ripening, seals pupping, long summer evenings and swimming in gorgeous sea water—BC Ferries has presented its proposed 2017 scheduling for Galiano, Mayne, Pender, Salt Spring and Saturna Islands. Now deep in summer, we must drop everything and pay close attention to the consultation meetings underway. As reported in last edition's *Island Tides*, we have to be alert to our marine highway's fate.

Look at this proposed regime and compare it with the schedule you use now. Precipitated by the new Intermediate Class ferries coming into service, you may have some nasty surprises. Saturna Island sure has. All Southern Islands' routes are affected. As I sometimes tell my grandchildren—Gramma is getting cross!

Due to 'similar population size', Saturna is to be paired with Galiano as its 'hub' partner and Mayne with Pender. Saturna will have to tack on the extra time to travel through Galiano to Victoria. We will also lose our well-developed business and social links with Pender and Mayne Islands. No matter that all our Southern Gulf Islands' ferry reps have been telling BC Ferry Services Inc that this pairing concept 'makes no sense' and that it is 'destructive' and its 'basic reasoning is flawed'.

Saturna Island and Southern Gulf Island reps have identified Saturna's new scheduling as nothing short of destructive, due to too-short in-town business days Monday to Friday, very questionable capacity to carry visitors and weekenders on the weekend from Tsawwassen, too short time to attract and hold visitors and weekenders on the weekend, no feasible short town-dash midday, and few reasonable connections with any other island. Many of the ferry reps have serious concerns about their own island's scheduling and many agree that Saturna is being hung out to dry.

Remember, in April, that digital survey in which BC Ferries asked us to participate so that we could be part of the team to create improved ferry service in conjunction with the two new vessels that are to replace the *Queen of Nanaimo*? All passengers in BC were asked to participate. The introduction

said 'The population of the Gulf Islands varies from almost 350 to 10,500'.

The first question was 'How should the frequency of service be determined during the course of the day?' BC Ferries offered as response choices: 'island population', 'traffic volume', or, 'neither, all islands should have the same service'. Such a survey is referred to as a 'Forced Response Survey'—you must choose from their options.

Wondering at the flawed options presented to determine scheduling, noting there was no place for alternate input and deciding the survey was rigged, I never responded. Brian Hollingshead, Chair of the Southern Gulf Islands Ferry Committees, gave the best answer I have heard to the question: 'Appropriate capacity, available at needed times.' *Viola*—so simple. This is how you provide transportation service to an island community supporting its social and economic base, whether it is Salt Spring at 10,500 islanders or Saturna at 350 islanders.

No matter what ferries say and how they explain it to us and solicit our input, we cannot adapt as an island community to a for-profit business model; our population numbers don't support it. We are committed and deeply adapted to a rural infrastructure model subsidized to an extent and paid for by our taxes.

BC Ferries proposal has galvanized our ferry reps and islanders. Those who have developed island businesses for many years are not content to see years of developed business relations with other island businesses get torpedoed due to a questionable survey and BC Ferries' read of what customers identify as right for the Southern Gulf Island's ferry schedules.

Hopefully islanders are already examining these 'storyboards' at the island-by-island meetings. You will notice that out of 18 'scheduling considerations' none mention the responsibility to provide dependable service to island communities to allow for economic and social survival.

Another storyboard is titled 'customer needs'. You will notice there is no mention of the scheduling needs for island contractors, stores, and other businesses to get to town and back on Monday to Friday for a full day of stops and chores.

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There is also no mention of the need for tourist accommodation providers and cafés to attract weekend customers by being able to offer a realistic time frame and ferry capacity to justify the ferry cost to get to the islands.

Does the scheduling work for your island? Do you get what we all want as coastal communities: a reasonable business day in town and good weekend scheduling for tourists and others? Can you, within reason, make your businesses and your social inter-connections work?

Kindly support us all by getting very informed and thinking about your island's healthy economy and social structure. Support our shared right to connection on our marine

highway—hold BC Ferries accountable as service providers.

Dash thoughts that any island is acting as though it deserves better service at the cost to its neighbors. Healthy access allows us all to participate meaningfully in our inter-island shared school system, emergency services, park visitations, newspapers and other literate links, tourist providers, recycling efforts, cultural experiences, businesses, governance—our shared identity as Gulf Islanders and our right to build lives in our island communities, with our personal capital, our mutual efforts, and our creative ingenuity. ✍