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New Prepaid Ferry Cards ~ Patrick Brown

Explaining the experience

At the end of March, BC Ferries introduced a new wallet-size Experience™ Card which entitles the user to the discounted prepaid fare on any minor routes where it is offered (and even maintains 'Travel History' records that regular commuters can access to claim Income Tax deductions for transportation costs).

The card is essentially a type of debit card which travellers can preload with funds and use to pay fares on any BC Ferries route. It will replace the use of prepaid paper tickets for frequent ferry riders. Every time the card is used, the BC Ferries 'Purchase' ticket issued will show the remaining balance.

Cards may be obtained at any BC Ferries ticket booth (in fact are being handed out), or BC Ferries will mail you one if you telephone them at 250-386-3431.

The Experience™ Card can be presented at any BC Ferries ticket booth and used to pay the fare, provided that there are sufficient funds remaining on the card to cover the entire fare. It can be replenished at any participating ticket booth, by telephoning BC Ferries, or, most conveniently, through Internet access at BC Ferries' website. An AutoLoad feature allows the customer to set a dollar level at which the card must be replenished, and specify a replenishment amount and a credit card (Visa, MasterCard, American Express) number to which the replenishment may be charged. Balances are transferable between cards but are non-refundable.

Each replenishment must be a minimum of \$75 if the card is to be used for vehicle fares, and \$40 if it is to be used for passenger fares only. The total balance on cards must not exceed \$12,500.

The new card will also enable the user to purchase Assured Loading Tickets (ALTs) as with the existing Coast™ card. (With ALTs, travellers pay a premium but are guaranteed loading on the next main route ferry provided they arrive 20mins before scheduled departure time. (You may use any ticket booth and jump the boarding lines.)

Registering Your Card for Additional Benefits—Ain't Computers Grand?

The new Experience™ Card may be registered through the BC Ferries website, or at participating ticket offices or by telephone. The advantages of registering are protection in case of loss, access to Travel History reports, transferability of amounts between cards, availability of assured loading, and the AutoLoad replenishment facility, to ensure that the Experience™ Card never runs out of funds. Several cards may be grouped for replenishment. Without registration, the card is essentially a gift card, which can be used by anyone (for example, by grandparents to encourage their grandchildren to visit them on the Gulf Islands).

Replacing Prepaid Fare Tickets

The new cards have been useable from March 19 on Southern Gulf Islands routes, and from March 26 on Sunshine Coast, mid- and north Vancouver Island, and Queen Charlotte Island routes. The familiar books of five or ten prepaid fare tickets will no longer be sold. This will come as a relief to frequent travellers, who regularly had to face an investment of several hundred dollars to purchase a book of prepaid tickets; now this form of sticker shock will not be as severe (but more frequent).

Converting Paper Ticket Incentive

If you have leftover tickets, they may be used for passage (with any ferry fare increases added on at the booth) or turned in for translation to your Experience™ Card. There was a fare increase on April 1 but from April 1–15, converted tickets will be valued at the *new* prepaid fare levels. After April 15, they will be valued at the March 31 prepaid fare levels. This is clearly an incentive to turn-in paper tickets during the first two weeks of April. (See also advertisement, page 7.)

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Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada. Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.
Email: islandtides@islandtides.com. Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>