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Spirits swap refits

The refit and maintenance period of the *Spirit of Vancouver Island* has been moved ahead as a result of the fire in the stand-by generator just before Thanksgiving Weekend. Its sister vessel the *Spirit of British Columbia* was originally scheduled to go for its annual maintenance and recertification period from October 13 through the end of November. The *Spirit of Vancouver Island* was to undergo its annual maintenance period after the *Spirit of British Columbia* returned to service.

Now, due to the fire on the *Spirit of Vancouver Island*, BC Ferries is swapping the refits. Concurrent with the *Spirit of Vancouver Island's* refit and recertification, repairs to the

damaged stand-by generator, wiring, cabling, and electrical components will be conducted. The cause of the fire has not been determined at this point and BC Ferries is conducting an internal investigation.

During this time, the regular schedule will remain in effect on the Tsawwassen–Swartz Bay route. ☞

Editorial: A Complete Service Has Both Peaks And Quiet Times

BC Ferries CEO David Hahn was certainly seen to be earning his million dollar salary over the Thanksgiving Weekend during the crisis resulting from the unfortunate fire aboard the *Spirit of Vancouver Island*. Hahn and his staff were front and centre handling the chaos of getting British Columbians to their families and turkey, and back, on Canada's big weekend. There is no spare capacity with a ship missing when demand is at its highest.

But when traffic is relatively low, BCFerries feels that it can cut service without consultation, as it will this winter with one of the Nanaimo–Horseshoe Bay weekday evening roundtrips. The point has frequently been made that cutting out a ferry run is like closing a road—there must be an alternative route. In this case BC Ferries says that the Duke Point/Tsawwassen run is an alternative, and for some travellers, it may be.

This is an example of what happens when you measure the performance of infrastructure (the ferry service) by the traffic on parts of it—you start cutting out the 'unprofitable' parts, hacking away at the complete, predictable service.

However, the essential characteristic of infrastructure is its availability over the long term—this is why it is called

infrastructure and should be measured by the overall quality of service, not its corporate 'profitability.'

Affordability is also an important part of availability. As BC Ferries has been discovering this past summer, traffic can be extraordinarily sensitive to fare levels. Lower fares can lead to increased traffic—the demand was there all the time.

Traffic levels don't equate to demand unless fares are fair.

People depend on infrastructure. They make long-term and life-altering decisions, involving major investments, with justifiable expectations that infrastructure is essentially permanent. They expect their needs will be considered first when changes are contemplated.

A complete infrastructure service includes both the peaks and the quiet times.

BCFS should not be thinking that it can cut low-utilization trips simply because they don't carry much traffic. This is particularly cogent when it comes to Minor Routes, where there is no alternative. ☞

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