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BCF developing first ROF ~ April Primus



BC Ferries, following its policy of leading the world in innovation, is quietly equipping *Coastal Inspiration* to be the first Remotely Operated Ferry (ROF) in service anywhere. The work is being carried out at the Esquimalt Graving Dock, under heavy security. The facility is often used for work on Royal Canadian Navy ships, and British Columbian Ferry Service officials feel that it is an ideal site for this ground-breaking technical project.

The need for an ROF arose after extensive study of the sinking of the *Queen of the North*; it was eventually concluded that the cause of the grounding was 'the personnel on the bridge'. A search of records for all previous ferry incidents, going back fifty years, showed that in each case, there had been personnel on the bridge at the time, confirming management's conclusion.

A Radical Idea

Thus the radical idea was born that ultimate safety on the ferries could be achieved by running the vessels with no crew whatsoever. It was reasoned that if the absence of humans on the bridge could improve navigational safety, then eliminating the deck crew could eliminate accidents when loading and unloading the vessel, completely automating the cafeteria would cut out any problems with food services, and eliminating the engineering staff would halt any problems with the engines and other systems.

BC Ferries' financial staff could also see significant potential cost savings, thus avoiding serious financial problems. They felt that the ship conversion would be preferable to an alternative ROF, a Remotely Operated

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Finance department.

The Latest Technology

The technology for an ROF has only been developed in the last few years. Drawing on the GPS and internet innovations that have made possible BC Ferries' vessel tracking webpage, combined with control systems developed for the operation of pilotless drones in the Afghan war, and interfacing them with heavily digitized automatic pilot, proximity warning systems, stealth technology, and radar equipment drawn from aircraft applications, the sophisticated systems on the *Coastal Inspiration* will make it all possible. Announcements on board will be made by a computerized voice messaging system, as used by telephone companies throughout the world.

The vessel will be controlled from a small, windowless room on the top floor of BC Ferries' headquarters. Since the *Coastal Inspiration* is a double-ended ferry, two operating consoles will be required, with two operators, one to come and one to go. They will be cross-trained so that either operator can operate the ferry in reverse if required, a further safety precaution.

Top Secret

At the Esquimalt graving dock, the design and installation teams have priority access to the military technology involved, while being assured of absolute protection from industrial or maritime espionage. A covering rumour involving engine trouble is being circulated. Visiting experts from other countries can be landed by submarine without attracting attention.

The work will be completed on schedule and on budget, neither of which has been published. It is possible that the conversion to remote operation may be completed by April 1st of this year, or if not, by April 1st, 2011.

The New BC Ferries

A new slogan for BC Ferries is being considered to succeed 'Bringing you home for 50 years'. It is 'BC Ferries—completely crewless'.

As of April 1, out of respect for BC Ferries' security concerns, Island Tides have made no effort to confirm any of the above; it is pure speculation. The union has also not been consulted. ☞

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