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Southern Gulf Islands ferry update - Brian Hollingshead

The Southern Gulf Islands Ferry Advisory Committee (SGIFAC) met with BC Ferries on November 15 for their regular fall meeting. A number of items of interest to residents, businesses and visitors were on the table...

Through-fare Service: Last fall, BCFerries undertook a project to improve through-fare service, to and from Tsawwassen via Swartz Bay, and inter-island via Swartz Bay. They brought back their report this past spring, identifying the things they could do quickly, some that would take a little more time, some that would take much longer, and some that may never be possible.

The quick win—introduction of the Throughfare mirror-hanger and priority loading at Tsawwassen, long recommended by the Ferry Advisory Chairs (FAC), was brilliant and has received well-deserved rave reviews from customers. This has now migrated from a pilot study to regular practice.

Also at our spring meeting, we were advised that soon we'd have a throughfare process to connect our islands via Swartz Bay at something like the interisland fare, rather than having to pay the full round trip fare from Swartz Bay. We were disappointed to now hear that this initiative has been set aside, likely until sometime in 2018 at the earliest due to Finance department priorities.

The FAC asked if a low-tech solution similar to what happens in Tsawwassen could be considered for Swartz Bay, providing incoming customers from the islands priority access to the next ferry to Tsawwassen. BCFerries staff will consider it. Cautious optimism.

The FAC also asked that the through-fare option be given greater visibility in printed and on-line material as well as with Reservations over the phone. Also requested that reservation fees on the trip from Tsawwassen to Swartz Bay be able to be refunded for all through-fare connections, not just the ones asterisked in the schedule.

Salish Raven and Eagle: These new ferries, replacing *Queen of Nanaimo*, are anticipated to be in service by May 1, next year. They will provide much improved two-vessel service for the spring 'shoulder season'. In the event one of them arrives late, *Queen of Nanaimo* will remain in service as the second ferry. In the unlikely event neither are ready for service then, the shoulder season schedule will revert to the 2016 one. BCFerries has committed to a definite statement on what will be where, when, no later than the end of January. While these ferries will be wired for wi-fi, it won't be provided initially, and possibly ever, due to existing problems with signal strength and service reliability.

More information about this at: www.bcferrries.com/about/intermediatevessel.html

Commercial Fare Freeze: The FAC is once again requesting a commercial farefreeze on Route 5 (SGI–Swartz Bay), providing it can be done by adding a nickel onto passenger fares as is now done. This freeze at \$3.20/ft has been in place since 2009, providing substantial savings for island businesses, which translates into lower on-island shopping costs for islanders. These savings have come at negligible adjustments to our other fares. The freeze also applies to over-length fares for non-commercial

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over-length combinations (car and trailer).

Passenger Reservations Route9: Passenger reservations from—and now to—Tsawwassen have worked out well, and will likely become regular elements of the service. BCFerries is working to smooth out the check-in service at Tsawwassen when it gets busy with passenger traffic for the major routes and non-reserved traffic to the SGI.

Parking at Sturdies Bay: With the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure barricading parking along the road leading to the ferry trestle (that's what they call it), parking around the terminal has become an even greater headache on Galiano. With BCFerries not in the business of providing on-shore parking for foot passengers, and the ministry not in the business of providing parking for BCFerries customers, there is no simple solution.

While this is a problem at almost all island terminals, it's particularly acute at Sturdies Bay. BCFerries has committed to working with the responsible agencies, but is limited in what it can contribute.

Bargain Fares: BCFerries is running a 50% vehicle fare discount promotion on selected sailings on all routes until December 18. The 50% discount is off the cash fare, which then amounts to about 25% off the Experience card fare. Not 50%, but heaps better than no discount. Check the website, bcferries.com, to find out which sailings qualify.

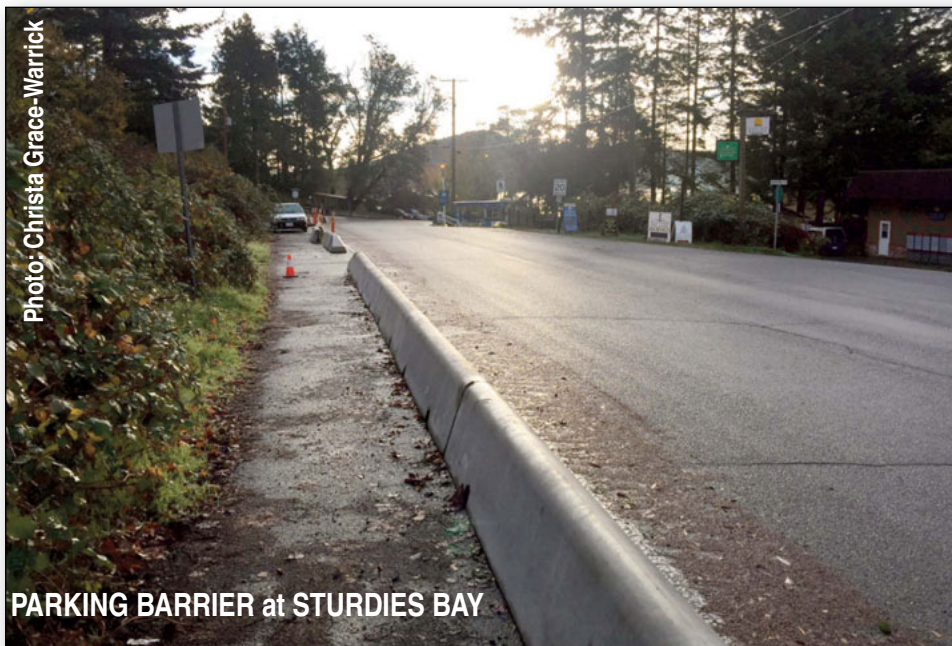
Service Note: *MV Skeena Queen* will be removed from service to undergo right-angle drive (RAD) replacement on Monday, December 12. Lower capacity *MV Bowen Queen* and *MV Queen of Cumberland* will provide service on Fulford

Harbour–Swartz Bay and Swartz Bay–Southern Gulf Islands routes.

Bowen Queen will also replace *Queen of Cumberland* the evening of December 13 and all day on the 14.

It will also replace *Queen of Cumberland* on some offpeak sailings between Jan 3 and Feb 8, while the *Cumberland* helps out on the Fulford Harbour route during *Skeena Queen's* refit. ✍

Photo: Christa Grace-Warrick



PARKING BARRIER at STURDIES BAY

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