

NEWS RELEASE – from the Ferry Advisory Committee Chairs (FACC)

Ferry commissioner report: Realistic roadmap for all ferry stakeholders

27 January 2012 - The Ferry Advisory Committee Chairs (FACC) welcome the BC Ferry Commissioner's report on the *Coastal Ferry Act* as a realistic but rocky path toward sustainability for essential coastal transportation.

The Commissioner found that fares have reached the "tipping point of affordability" and that "all of the principle stakeholders will need to be part of the solution."

"The Commissioner has drawn a realistic picture of the problems in the ferry system," says Tony Law of the Denman-Hornby FAC, "and the responsibilities all the stakeholders have for fixing those problems."

The FACC are pleased to see several of their long-standing requests among the Commissioner's recommendations:

- make the Ferry Commissioner's main responsibility protecting interests of ferry users and taxpayers;
- remove the requirement that the ferry system move toward user pay;
- remove the ban on cross-subsidization among route groups;
- limit future price cap increases to the rate of inflation.

"These are essential elements for reining in the galloping fare increases, which since 2003 have eroded ridership, hurt coastal economies, and threatened the sustainability of BC Ferries itself," says Brian Hollingshead of the Southern Gulf Islands FAC.

But they're not enough.

"Coastal ferry users have to be realistic and accept some service changes," says Harold Swierenga of Salt Spring FAC. "But we want to be absolutely clear: service cuts are only acceptable if the provincial government does its part too, and increases its financial contribution to adequately support the coastal ferry system. Anything else just won't work."

The FACC considers government contribution to be adequate if it brings fares back from the tipping point. That requires an initial fare roll-back, to create a sustainable baseline for inflation-indexed increases.

"Only this method will restore traffic to levels that will support the system," says Bill Cripps of Northern Sunshine Coast FAC.

"We realize the provincial treasury has many demands on it," says Cripps, "but we believe adequate support for ferries is critical economic investment. Given that economic growth depends on solid transportation infrastructure, adequate ferry support underpins the Premier's jobs plan."

The FACC comprises the chairs, or their designates, of the route-specific Ferry Advisory Committees, appointed by BC Ferries to represent the interests of ferry users and ferry-dependent communities.

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