

Reducing the top-up amount for the Experience Card

Ferry-dependent communities appreciate the Experience Card program. We appreciate the fact that BCF makes it possible for regular ferry users to receive a discount on track. But we are concerned that some of the people most in need of this program have barriers to accessing it.

Minimum wage in this province is \$10.45 an hour. It costs \$115 to load your card to the vehicle savings level. To realize savings as a foot passenger is \$65. That means that someone working a minimum-wage job has to spend *more* than a full day's pay to load their ferry card if they want to take a vehicle on the ferry and get the resident's rate, and it's very close to a day's pay to get the discounted rate for walking on. Of course that's a barrier. And it impacts the most financially marginalized members of our communities.

We may have given you too much information last time. We talked about a number of different ways that you could make this situation better and you promised you would go away and look at it. At the time, your response seemed somewhat encouraging.

<http://www.southernnews.com/news/ferries-to-consider-solutions-for-low-income-experience-card-users.html>

Unfortunately we didn't hear anything back from you, so we decided to reduce the proposal to its bare bones.

The simplest method of fixing this issue is to reduce the minimum top-up load on the Experience Card. There is no realistic need for the minimum load level to be \$115. We understand that you may wish to keep the initial load higher to discourage non-resident use, and that makes sense. But reducing the minimum amount for reloading the card would allow our more financially challenged residents to actually use it. We recommend a minimum of \$30 for foot-passenger cards and \$60 for vehicle cards.

And it could also increase ridership. At today's FAC meeting a pensioner spoke up and pointed out that on her fixed income she cannot afford to top up her Experience Card to discount levels, and she restricts her travel as a result. She is almost certainly not alone. Increased utilization would be a direct result of removing barriers to accessing the Experience program.

We ask you again to look at this. We know that you are making an effort to foster positive community relations. Reducing the financial strain of punitively high minimum top-up loads would be a real step in that direction, and implementing it is low-hanging fruit – it would work within your current system, unlike some of your future FFDEI plans which require infrastructure development. This is a way you can make a difference in the communities you serve right now, and we believe those communities would be grateful for your efforts.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

If you have any further questions, please contact Heather O'Sullivan at hosullivan@islandstrust.bc.ca or Steve Earle at Steven.Earle@viu.ca.