

## GABRIOLA FERRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

May 11, 2015

### Informal Notes of Meeting (not an official record)

In attendance:

*Gabriola representatives:*

John Hodgkins

Heather Nicholas

Jim Ramsay

Steven Earle

Jim Wilson-Storey (part of meeting)

*BC Ferries Representatives:*

Darin Guenette (Public Affairs Manager)

Corrine Storey (VP, Customer Services)

David Hendry (Director, Strategic Planning)

Jeff West (Terminal Operations Supt, North Region)

John Macdonald (Regional Manager, Terminal Ops)

Captain Lewis Mackay (Marine Superintendent)

Captain Mark Waugh (Senior Master, Quinsam)

Apologies for absence:

Jane McCall Woods, Howard Houle, Chris Hock and David Prevost

### Welcome and Introductions

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### Election of Chair and Vice Chair

John Hodgkins was nominated and seconded to continue as Chair (thanks everyone!) – in view of the number of members missing it was agreed that the election of a Vice Chair would take place at a local meeting. JH emphasised the desirability of having a vice chair in place as he would be standing down by the end of this 4-year term. *FAC to consider the appointment of a Vice Chair*

### Terms of Reference

BCF described the refresh to the FAC Terms of Reference. Main change is suggested two-term limit on appointments (John H will reach that limit at end of this term). BCF was asked to formally acknowledge the representation from local government nominees Heather and Howard in the ToR. . BC Ferries was also asked to clarify their right of refusal for FAC members as stated in the ToR.

### Local Joint Task Group

John H described the value of continuing the joint task group, initially established with 2 FAC + 1 community representative. FAC to agree locally whether the new committee was sufficiently large to effectively absorb the community rep role with a third FAC member. BCF representation (Lewis and Mark) would be expanded to include John Macdonald. *FAC to nominate up to 3 members to attend future meetings of the local task group*

### Feedback on schedule change

John H outlined the background within which the review of schedules had been conducted and presented a summary of the community feedback received via the FAC website. As expected, there were complaints about the early morning changes, mixed reactions to the mid-evening schedule and general support for the improvement to the daytime service. *Potential changes to school bell schedules would be confirmed via David Prevost.*

Heather confirmed she had received further anecdotal complaints about the impacts of the early morning and evening schedule. Mid-afternoon gap on Saturdays was already resulting in overloads in Nanaimo and would need monitoring through the summer. Heather recognized the good work of the previous FAC and acknowledged the constraints that BCF operates under in regards to the Province, but reminded BCF that the schedule changes continue to have real, critical, detrimental effects on our community.

FAC monitoring demonstrated the dramatic improvement in on-time performance since April 1 (only 1 departure out of 298 monitored delayed by >10 minutes, and just 7% running 5 mins or more late. Compared to last summer, when 25% of departures were delayed by more than 10 mins and almost half ran at least 5 minutes late. Monitoring had also revealed the average crossing time had slipped slightly to 22 minutes, with 40% of crossings (mainly daytime sailings) now completed at speeds below 10 knots where previously 11-12 knots was commonplace. BCF confirmed that fuel savings had resulted and these were being quantified.

John H expressed concern at the number of occasions that the 6:15am ex Gabriola was taking up to 29 minutes to complete the crossing, with potential consequences for anyone starting work at 7am. BCF was asked to try and ensure a more predictable arrival time. Monitoring by the FAC and BCF both suggested the potential for a much more robust schedule to be maintained this summer. Public input confirmed the improved reliability and reiterated the concern about Saturday afternoons. Suggestions of selective pricing for small vehicles were discussed.

BCF was asked whether they were in a position to release details of the savings obtained in the April 2014 service cuts; David H confirmed that the BCF Board had requested route-by-route savings and these would be reported in the summer (BCF Annual Report). Heather also asked whether BCF had indeed decided not to implement the \$4.9 million service cuts on the major routes, which David confirmed, saying they had agreed with government that the savings would be made without affecting service levels, to avoid the inevitable revenue loss. John H highlighted the disparity of approach between the majors and minors, suggesting the FAC write to government to ask why these alternatives were not considered when the cuts to the minor routes were being imposed. Route 30 was specifically discussed.

### **BCF Operational update**

Lewis confirmed that operational performance was improving as described. Next infrastructure projects were a planned refit to Quinsam in 2017 and dock upgrade on Gabriola in 2018/19. With Bowen Queen likely to be replaced in due course, John H questioned whether a replacement vessel with deeper draft would be able to operate reliably into Descanso Bay. BCF was considering extending the dock further into the bay to provide extra depth of water.

Changes to unloading sequences were discussed, with BCF trialling unloading of first 4 vehicles in each lane before remainder of vessel. Cut-off times for vehicles and passengers remained at 5 minutes on both sides, though some local flexibility is applied on Gabriola.

### **Pilot Fare Reduction Scheme**

John H referred to the impacts of high fare levels on traffic volumes and the widespread call for fares to be rolled back. The FAC had considered what implications this could have for Gabriola, given the lack of spare capacity on daytime ferries. FAC promoted a pilot project to BCF with the objective of showing that reduced fares would attract more traffic in the evenings and winter weekends when spare capacity

was available. FAC suggested this should become a demonstration project in partnership with BCF and the Province. BCF believed there was the potential to attract new business but were concerned that the impact could be simply to divert traffic away from earlier sailings resulting in less revenue rather than more. BCF not clear on whether the Province would wish or need to be involved since BCF had discretion on individual fares within parameters set by the Ferry Commissioner. BCF asked that this proposal be the subject of a further meeting to develop further. FAC to nominate 2 or 3 members to pursue this demonstration project with BCF

#### **Provision of Gabriola Information kiosk at Nanaimo Harbour terminal**

As Jim Wilson-Storey had left the meeting feeling unwell, this item was only discussed briefly. BCF needed to investigate liabilities and insurance issues. FAC representatives (Jim W-S and John H) to set up meeting with John Macdonald and Jeff West

#### **Nanaimo Harbour Terminal – wifi hotspot**

John H described the community's frustration at the lack of a wifi hotspot at Nanaimo terminal, asking whether BCF could work with Shaw to provide one. BCF reported they had previously met with Telus, Shaw and Bell and were concerned about cost/marketing implications. JCH pointed out that community members had previously had positive feedback from an approach to Seaspans and he believed that BCF should do more to accelerate this with Shaw.

#### **Gabriola Ferry Terminal upgrade**

As previously noted, BCF was proposing a substantial renewal of the loading ramp at Descanso Bay during 2018/19, which could include other infrastructure upgrades and an extension out into deeper water to provide for vessel substitution. Process involved substantial community consultation with FAC playing a major role. At least one year's notice provided to ensure adequate arrangements are in place.

#### **Gabriola Ferry terminal – Traffic and Parking arrangements**

Steve E described traffic problems at Descanso Bay, both within the car park and at the adjacent road junction. FAC believed a study of traffic and safety should be independently conducted and suggested a meeting to include MoTI, RDN, SD68, BCF and FAC to ensure all interests are covered. School bus driver reported concerns at any proposal that would leave students walking between GERTIE bus and school bus if barriers are moved. BCF would need to consult with crew if crew space locations were affected. Steve E and Jim R to arrange meeting via John Macdonald. John H will attend if possible.

#### **Gabriola Emergency Wharf**

FAC asked for clarification of BCF's position should there be a proposal to expand the use of the emergency wharf for water taxis. FAC not involved with request to RDN in 2014 but had been faced with a dilemma when the proposal to drop the 5:30am ferry had come forward. There was nowhere for a water taxi to dock if the need for a replacement passenger service had been identified. Captain Waugh described the hazards of operating in close quarters to the shore and any small craft and was strongly opposed to introducing small craft to this location during BCF operating hours. Outside of operating hours, the marine issues were not there, but BCF were unclear whether the highway approach to the emergency dock would be treated in winter for late night/early morning use. BCF also expressed concern about the open waters in the area for a smaller vessel, but it was acknowledged that this would be the concern and liability of any potential operator. John H to draft letter to BCF/RDN/IT for clarification of ownership and responsibility for the highway section with a view to establishing a definitive answer from BCF. [Footnote : It is now understood that the roadway to the emergency dock is maintained by the Ministry of Transportation]

### **Improving engagement with the community**

John H asked FAC members to consider whether the FAC should engage more strongly with the community – for example by holding local meetings. BCF was encouraged by the level of community engagement via the website, which was often referenced by other FACs. Social media tended to focus on polarised views and was not necessarily representative of wider community feeling. FAC members to discuss this further and develop a community engagement plan