

GABRIOLA FERRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

November 18, 2016

Informal Notes of Meeting (not an official record)

In attendance:

Gabriola representatives:

Steven Earle
Howard Houle
Heather O'Sullivan
Peggy Richardson
Jim Ramsay
Jane McCall Woods

BC Ferries Representatives:

Darin Guenette (Public Affairs Manager)
Mark Collins (VP, Strategic Planning & Community Engagement)
David Hendry (Director, Strategic Planning)
John Macdonald (Regional Manager, Terminal Ops)
Captain Lance Lomax (Marine Superintendent)

Apologies for absence:

John Hodgkins, David Prevost

Welcome/Agenda

The meeting was called to order at 9 AM. In the absence of FAC Chair John Hodgkins, Vice-Chair Steven Earle chaired the meeting. The agenda was approved and introductions made.

Steve thanked BC Ferries for installing a plaque at the Nanaimo terminal commemorating Malcolm Lowry's historic visit to Gabriola; and also for posting GERTIE bus schedules in Quinsam lounges.

Experience Card top-up

Heather O. reported that the Gabriola FAC is very concerned about the high top-up rates of \$115 for car and \$65 for foot passengers, as those in the community most in need find those levels a significant barrier. She mentioned that Trustees from other islands share these concerns. It is recognized that BC Ferries wants to keep the purchase cost fairly high to discourage visitors from buying them as they are intended for locals only. Heather suggested that the simplest solution would be to keep the purchase levels high, but lower the top-up levels. A question was asked as to how many Convenience Cards are in use on Route 19. Mark stated that BC Ferries will review this top-up reduction suggestion and provide an answer before the end of January 2017.

Proposed changes to ferry lineup

Steve E. explained that the FAC is very concerned about safety issues along the existing ferry traffic line-up route along Taylor Bay Road due to the narrow, twisted roadway and problems with inadequate turnarounds and poor sight lines. He presented a proposal, which has been submitted to MoTI, to consider alternative routings extending up North Road instead of using Taylor Bay Road.

Two members of the public added comments: Liz Ciocea expressed concern that during summer when ferry loads are very heavy, the line-up situation along Taylor Bay puts her life at risk, and also for families with children. She suggested extending the third lane up North Road to the Telus trailer and purchase a lot in that area for an overload holding area. Jeremy Baker noted because of gradual slope failure the ferry lane along Taylor Bay Rd. slopes 1" for every 1', is very dangerous for vehicles and for passengers walking alongside and does not meet MoTI standards. He suggested a geotechnical study is needed.

BC Ferries asked that Steve's presentation be submitted to Dave Hendry. Mark noted that this issue has overlapping responsibility. BC Ferries will arrange a meeting with MoTI to discuss and will include local representatives at that meeting.

Medical assured loading

Peggy Richardson reviewed problems that exist when properly authorized medical assured loading drivers try to park at the head of the line. She has talked with representatives of other Ferry companies to compare procedures. In conjunction with Steven Earle, Peggy made a presentation outlining the problem and proposing solutions, many of which would be easy to implement. A designated priority boarding location at the front of the line could be achieved by moving the loading start back by 2 to 3 car spaces. Lance indicated the solutions seem feasible, while Mark indicated a system-wide solution is needed at BC Ferries. Terminal Operations will review the matter and then pass the file up to the Vice-President, Customer Service. A copy of the presentation will be submitted to John Macdonald.

Health care worker priority loading

Howard Houle reviewed problems care service clinicians are experiencing, as detailed in letter of November 2nd from Island Health's Director, Oceanside/Nanaimo Community Services. A temporary priority boarding solution is proposed. Terminal operations will review and make a recommendation to the Vice-President, Customer Service. The FAC will also ask Island Health if it would be feasible to change the timing of the health care workers arrival and departure. Currently, they arrive on the 8:10 ferry and leave on the 3:05, but if they changed to 9:25/in and 4:20/out they would be much less likely to encounter overloads.

Assessment of addition of mid-afternoon, weekend, peak sailings

Darin G. indicated that the statistics on those extra summer sailings have just been received. A preliminary assessment indicates the sailings were well used and other sailings were not diminished. A report will be issued in due course. Heather indicated that the absence of those sailings is still a problem the rest of the year.

BCF reply to FAC proposal for evening discount

Steve E. reminded BCF about our request to have a trial evening discount (suggested 25% off on sailings after 9 PM) and Mark C. apologized for not responding to this sooner. He promised to get back to us early in 2017.

Marine Superintendent's Operations Report

Lance L. indicated plans are continuing for a number of routine refits. The Quinsam will undergo a minor refit in late 2017 (Oct. 25 to Dec. 15), and will be replaced for that time by the Bowen Queen. A minor problem exists in that the contractor who provided snow plowing on Gabriola has retired and a replacement has not been found. Steve indicated the community will be canvassed and candidates referred to John.

Vehicle discount promotion summary

Darin G. described the latest 50%-off vehicle promotion, which started on November 14th and runs until December 18th. A number of Gabriola sailings are discounted, including those after 9 PM, but, as he did mention, its 50% of the regular fare, not 50% off of the Experience Card fare, so it's only really a 22% saving for most regulars on this route.

Minor 44 Class summary

Mark C. announced a call for proposals for the new Minor 44 Class ferry, which will have a capacity of 44 vehicles and will eventually be used on most low-traffic routes (not Gabriola). The new ships will be high-sided with enclosed ends, and will have deck-level lounges for easy access but also a sun deck. They are thinking about using an efficient hybrid diesel/electric propulsion system.

AEQ restatement summary

BCF has decided to redefine the AEQ (automobile equivalent) from the current 5.3 m (17.4 ft) to 6.1 m (20.0 ft). This means that the Quinsam will now be rated at 63 AEQ, even though it typically carries between 65 and 80 vehicles (depending on their size).

FFDEI/reservations project update

The flex-fare and digital experience initiative, which will only apply to the major routes, is scheduled to take effect in the spring of 2018. Ferry users will be able to book their passage in advance, and that will include the option to travel on a less-used sailing at a discount.

In a discussion as to why debit cards cannot be accepted, it was noted that debit cards require a real time connection to bank servers which at present not all terminals have; also debit cards slow down transaction time. However BCF will have to have real time connection to bank servers for credit cards eventually. Also more BCF will eventually be doing more business online.

Next meeting: Spring 2017 -- BCF will start looking at dates "next week", and may schedule it after the BC election. Steve pointed out that it would be good to have meeting when John is here.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 AM.

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