

Ferry fares to rise again April 1

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Route	TARIFF	Passengers		Vehicles	
		30-Mar-10	01-Apr-10	30-Mar-10	01-Apr-10
1	TSAWASSEN - SWARTE BAY (One Way)	\$13.00	\$14.00	\$40.00	\$40.75
2	DEPARTURE BAY - HORSESHOE BAY (One Way)	\$13.50	\$14.50	\$40.00	\$40.75
30	TSAWASSEN - DUKE POINT (One Way)	\$13.50	\$14.50	\$40.00	\$40.75
3	HORSESHOE BAY - LANGDALE (Return)	\$11.00	\$12.00	\$30.00	\$30.50
4	SWARTE BAY - FURFORD HARBOUR (Return)	\$9.00	\$10.00	\$20.00	\$20.50
5	SWARTE BAY - GULF ISLANDS (Return)	\$9.00	\$10.00	\$20.00	\$20.50
5A	INTER-GULF ISLANDS	\$4.00	\$5.00	\$10.75	\$11.25
6	CROFTON - VEDUNG BAY (Return)	\$5.00	\$5.50	\$10.00	\$10.50
7	EARL'S COVE - SAUTER BAY (Return)	\$11.00	\$12.00	\$30.00	\$30.50
8	HORSESHOE BAY - SNUG COVE (Return)	\$9.00	\$9.50	\$20.00	\$20.50
9	GULF ISLANDS - TSAWASSEN (One Way) Regular Season	\$7.00	\$8.00	\$20.75	\$21.25
9	GULF ISLANDS - TSAWASSEN (One Way) Off Peak Season	\$7.00	\$8.00	\$20.25	\$20.75
9.1	TSAWASSEN - GULF ISLANDS (One Way) Regular Season	\$14.00	\$15.00	\$30.25	\$30.75
9.1	TSAWASSEN - GULF ISLANDS (One Way) Off Peak Season	\$14.00	\$15.00	\$29.75	\$30.25
12	MILL BAY - BRENTWOOD BAY (One Way)	\$5.00	\$5.50	\$10.00	\$10.50
13	LANGDALE - KEATS ISLAND - GAMBOUR ISLAND (One Way)	\$5.75	\$6.00		
17	HOWELL RIVER - LITTLE RIVER (One Way)	\$11.00	\$12.00	\$37.50	\$38.50
18	HOWELL RIVER - TEMAN ISLAND (Return)	\$8.00	\$8.50	\$20.00	\$20.50
19	NANAIMO HARBOUR - GARDOLA ISLAND (Return)	\$5.00	\$5.50	\$10.50	\$11.00
20	CHERAMUK - THETIS ISLAND - KUPER ISLAND (Return)	\$8.00	\$8.50	\$20.50	\$21.00
21	BUCKLEY BAY - DENMAN ISLAND (Return)	\$7.00	\$7.50	\$18.50	\$19.00
22	DENMAN ISLAND - HOWAN ISLAND (Return)	\$7.00	\$7.50	\$18.50	\$19.00
23	CAMPBELL RIVER - QUADRA ISLAND (Return)	\$7.00	\$7.50	\$18.50	\$19.00
24	QUADRA ISLAND - CORTIS ISLAND (Return)	\$9.00	\$9.50	\$21.50	\$22.00
25	PORT MANSIELL - ALBERT BAY - SCENTOLA (Return)	\$9.00	\$9.50	\$21.50	\$22.00
26	SCENTOLA - ALLIRED BAY (Return)	\$7.00	\$7.50	\$18.50	\$19.00

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The province's New Democrat ferry critic accuses the provincial government of jeopardizing coastal communities due to its failure to manage rising ferry fares.

“What we’ve seen are skyrocketing fares and [the BC Liberals] not working within the promise it made to support ferry-dependent communities,” said Gary Coons, an NDP MLA representing the North Coast riding. “This is devastating tourism, small business and having a huge impact.”

Coons' remarks follow the BC Ferries Commission decision to raise the price cap for fares on routes serving Salt Spring, the southern Gulf Islands and other "minor routes" by nearly six per cent.

The price cap increase reflects the maximum amount BC Ferries can increase fares between April 1, 2010 and March 31, 2011.

The cap does not necessarily reflect how much fares will increase in the coming operating period, although BC Ferries commissioner Martin Crilly said customers can expect increases "to be pretty darned close." That turned out to be the case when BC Ferries announced the resulting increases for April 1 on Tuesday.

Travellers not using Experience Card discounts will see the foot passenger costs rise from \$9.45 to \$10 (return) on the Fulford-Swartz Bay and Vesuvius-Crofton runs, and from \$9.80 to \$10.40 between the southern Gulf Islands and Swartz Bay, for example. Vehicle fares rise by \$1.60 (to \$29.60) on the Salt Spring routes, and by \$1.95 to \$32.95 for the other Gulf Islands.

Price caps were set at 2.68 per cent for BC Ferries' three major routes and 5.68 per cent for all other routes.

The Ferry Commission establishes the price cap by plugging the current Consumer Price Index into a pre-determined formula, Crilly said. Although this year's CPI is negative, he added, the price cap increased because of the ferry company's projected capital expenses and the provincial government's failure to increase its annual transportation subsidy.

"That leaves passengers paying their share of the increase and making up the government's share," Crilly said.

Coons is calling on the province to follow up on recommendations presented in last year's audit by the province's Comptroller General.

Among those recommendations is that the province increase its transportation subsidy to BC Ferries as a way to "sustain the ferry system on a sound financial footing."

"The report indicated that the Coastal Ferry Act, along with the Commission, has been structured to have no mandate to protect the public interest nor the people of B.C. who depend on the ferry system," he said. "It said that there is insufficient transparency in accounting and a reliance by the Ferry Commission on 'unverified figures' supplied to it by BC Ferries."

Coons called the anticipated fare hikes a "final nail in the coffin" for many businesses and tourism dependent entities who must also contend with a 5.11 cent/litre gas tax and soon-to-be seven per cent HST.

“The days of a day-trip to the islands are not possible for very many people anymore,” he said.

In related ferry news, the Islands Trust has written a letter to the province that calls for greater consultation with Gulf Islands residents and groups during the province’s upcoming BC Ferries governance review process.

The BC Liberals announced it will take a “fresh look” at BC Ferries during its 2010 throne speech in early February.

The Trust’s Feb. 9 letter from Trust Council chair Sheila Malcolmson specifically asks that the company strive to incorporate more input from Ferry Advisory Committee chairs.

The letter notes that some communities within the Trust’s jurisdiction have encountered fare hikes of up to 120 per cent over the past five years.