

The Flying Shingle - May 2008

Falcon's Response to Ferry Survey:

Gulf Islanders already getting more than their fair share

Dear Veronica Hartman,
Re: BC Ferries

Thank you for your letter of March 4, 2008, and attached survey expressing your concerns about the rising cost of ferry travel.

Our island and coastal communities are an irreplaceable part of British Columbia, and I know the health of Gabriola Island depends on an affordable ferry service. However, BC Ferries, like ferry companies around the world, is facing dramatically increased costs across its operation. These higher costs make it necessary for BC Ferries to apply for increases in fares, a matter of concern for many ferry users. The independent BC Ferry Commissioner makes sure that any ferry fare increases reflect real changes in the cost of providing this vital service.

Currently, taxpayers contribute more

than \$130 million a year to guarantee service levels for minor, northern and Sunshine Coast ferry routes, and \$55 million of this is used to support ferries for the Islands Trust area, which has a population of about 25,000. No other small communities in B.C. benefit from this degree of sustained transportation funding, whether for highways or buses or ferries, and I'm proud that we're helping to protect the unique communities and lifestyles on our islands and coasts. In contrast, we pay only \$15 million a year to operate the inland ferry system.

Our government continues to support the ferries in other ways as well. We provide about \$20 million of additional funding annually to keep fares affordable for seniors, students, disabled residents and those travelling for medical reasons.

We also provide a total of \$7 million to help defray increased fuel costs, and we will be providing millions more in the future to help cover the cost of northern routes with new ferries. These contributions will keep down ferry fares on all non-major routes.

I recognise that ferry fares represent a major expense for many residents. There's no way around the fact that coastal ferry services are expensive to provide, especially for low volume routes. Taxpayers across BC contribute significantly, but the people who live on and love our islands and coasts must share these costs too.

Thank you again for taking the time to write.

Sincerely,
Kevin Falcon.

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