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Should the BC government permanently lower ferry fares?

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Maurine Karagianis
NDP transportation critic

matic increase in fares – that government's hands were tied and that any measures to help coastal communities were "political interference."

But last month, the premier proved the government can help when it chooses to, announcing out of the blue that he would roll back fares for two months in December and January.

Campbell claimed that this two-month reduction in fares was a response to the economic crisis, but his actions beg the question: if these reductions are a good idea for two months in the pre-election period, why aren't they a good idea year-round?

The New Democrats believe that fares should be frozen until a full plan is in place that would take into consideration the impact of fares on communities.

Skyrocketing fares have had a deep and profound

impact on all coastal communities. Residents struggle to get kids to school, get food and medicine from grocers and pharmacies and to attend medical appointments.

Island businesses struggle to get their goods to their market.

And that's without even counting the fuel surcharge that was thrown on top of the regular fare.

As the fare increases skyrocketed, communities up and down the coast protested and asked the Campbell government for assistance.

Coastal communities need permanent solutions to the devastating effects of ferry fares, not a thinly veiled one-time purchase of votes for the B.C. Liberals from coastal residents.

The Campbell government has run out of excuses.

I want to set the record straight regarding government support for BC Ferries.

In 1997, under the previous government, provincial contributions to BC Ferries were just \$5 million per year. Today, government support for BC Ferries is \$150 million per year, 25 times larger than what it was a decade ago.

This ongoing contract guarantees service levels for minor, northern and Sunshine Coast ferry routes. It also helps to keep costs affordable for seniors, students, disabled residents and those travelling for medical reasons. Over 10 years, that's more than \$1.5 billion of taxpayer dollars going towards the ferry system.

And as you know, Premier Gordon Campbell announced a Ten Point Plan on October 22nd,

to protect B.C.'s economy amidst the current global financial crisis. The plan includes a 33-per-cent reduction in ferry fares on all routes for December and January, as well as the restoration of full service on major routes and the Sunshine Coast route.

We are taking this action to help B.C.'s families, coastal communities, and our retail and tourism sectors. The holiday season is coming up, a time of year when all of us want to spend time with our loved ones, and these fare reductions will help people connect over the holidays.

We need to be prudent and responsible with taxpayer dollars, especially at a time when the world is in the middle of the worst financial crisis seen in over 75 years.

It's important to remember that our provincial government had been left with an effectively bankrupt ferry corporation, an aged fleet



BC Transportation Minister
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(averaging 32 years), virtually no investment, and a fractious labour-relations climate, with many strikes that created big headaches for the travelling public.

BC Ferries is now an independent company, operating on sound business principles, free of political interference. This government already helps through our \$150-million contract payments every year, and now with the 33-per-cent reduction in ferry fares for the upcoming holiday season.

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