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## **B.C. Ferries to pay \$1.6 million in bonuses**

### Despite dip in traffic, last year's 'successful' performance is rewarded

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B.C. Ferries will pay out \$1.6 million in Thanksgiving bonuses to front-line employees this week even as the corporation loses customers and trims sailings on major routes.

The company confirmed yesterday that about 3,400 full-time employees will receive cheques of up to \$500 each.

"I would expect employees were seeing them in their mailbox either yesterday or today," B.C. Ferries spokeswoman Deborah Marshall said late yesterday afternoon.

Marshall stressed that the bonuses are based on the company's "successful" performance in the last fiscal year. They were approved prior to the end of March and before the current drop-off in customer travel, she said.

"This is for their significant contribution in assisting B.C. Ferries in meeting our financial and customer service targets," she said. "Looking forward, obviously no decision has been made as to whether we would pay bonuses out for the current fiscal year that we're in. That decision would be made in the spring of 2009."

B.C. Ferries president David Hahn announced last week that a 12 per cent drop in passenger traffic had forced the corporation to trim sailings on major routes beginning Oct. 14. Hahn blamed high gasoline prices for the decline in business.

Marshall said the corporation has awarded bonuses for the past three or four years. "We like to time it the week before Thanksgiving," she said.

The bonuses go to full-time employees in good standing, and the size of the cheque varies depending upon hours worked.

Marshall said the bonuses are contingent upon the company meeting financial and service targets. "If they're not met, then bonuses are either reduced or they're not given."

Gulf Islands residents, who have been protesting high ferry fares for months, reacted with outrage to news of the bonus program.

"Oh my God," Michelle Easterly said when told of the bonuses. Easterly, a co-founder of the Rock the Boat Coalition, said high fares are killing business on Hornby Island, where her bed and breakfast has sat empty for more than two weeks. Other businesses have closed early for the first time ever, she said.

"I mean, we're becoming a ghost town, and nobody seems to care from government. So I guess the best thing we've got going is to vote."

William Thomas, another coalition member, questioned whether the bonuses will succeed in boosting the morale of front-line ferry workers who face the public's wrath daily.

"The morale among the employees, at least the ferry workers I talk to, is rock bottom," he said. "I don't know if they can buy morale for \$500. I also know that they're really getting tired of being screamed at, is the only phrase, by irate residents and visitors in the ferry lineups. Of course, it's not their fault, but they're taking the brunt of people's ire, and it is major."

Marshall declined to say whether B.C. Ferries' executives also received bonuses this year. "The executives are on a different plan," she said. "We're just not prepared to discuss that right now."

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