

Thursday » September
4 » 2008

Grits all at sea over ferry fees

The Province

Monday, September 01, 2008

When Gibsons Mayor Barry Janyk recently asked B.C. Ferries' president David Hahn whether or not the company would join a study on the effect of rising fares on ferry-dependent communities, he got a one-word answer: "No!" As terse and blunt as this response was to those attending B.C. Ferries' annual meeting in Delta last week, it spoke volumes about what is wrong with the province's coastal ferry system.

Hahn is technically correct in saying that any study into what ferry-dependent communities believe is the increasingly negative economic impact of higher ferry fares is "a policy thing" -- and therefore falls under the B.C. government's jurisdiction.

However, Victoria has shown no interest whatsoever in a report from the B.C. Ferries Advisory Committee, which warned that rising fares are not only hurting coastal communities, but are threatening the viability of the ferries system.

The committee, which represents ferry-dependent communities serviced by B.C. Ferries, wrote the report specifically for Transportation Minister Kevin Falcon.

"Falcon cool toward report on impact of ferry fares," was the way one editorial-page headline described the minister's response to the report.

Since the Campbell government dumped its responsibility for B.C. Ferries as a Crown corporation in 2003 and set it up effectively as a stand-alone authority, it has adopted a "hands off" position.

That's why it has not only ignored the advisory committee report, it has shown no inclination to address the economic impacts on smaller communities that the study outlined.

So what we have here is B.C. Ferries and the B.C. government each saying "not my problem" to the impacts of fast-rising ferry fares.

When the travelling public demands accountability for this mess, both the B.C. Ferries bureaucrats and the Liberal politicians in Victoria quickly run for cover.

And our premier wonders why his Liberals are now running behind the NDP in public-opinion polls?

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