
Meeting Details

Date: November 22, 2023
Time: 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm
Location: Teams

Attendance

Public Interest Representatives

Marnie Essery, Intermunicipal Advisory Committee on Disability Issues – Co-Chair
Pat Danforth, Victoria Disability Resource Centre, Chair, CRD Accessibility Advisory Committee
Michelle Bobyn, Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada, BC
Captain David Willows, Chair of Saanich Peninsula Accessible Advisory Committee
Scott Heron, Peer Support Specialist, Spinal Cord Injury BC – Accompanied by Cooper
Susan Simmons, Advisor for Special Olympics, Victoria, President of MS centre of Vancouver Island, coach of the Spirit Orcas
Dr. Jie Zhang, Seniors Serving Seniors

BC Ferries Representatives

Karen Tindall, Director of Customer Care, Customer Care Department – Co-Chair
Bruce Paterson, Director, Naval Architecture, Fleet Technical
Steve Shardlow, Training Manager, Terminals
Rebecca Jamieson, Manager, Marketing and Customer Experience
Rhonda Daye, Manager, Customer Relations
Camrin Hillis, Regional Manager Terminal Operations
Captain Chris Frappell, Marine Superintendent, Shipbuilding
Jeff Davidson, Director, Retail Services, Food and Retail Operations
Leslie Meyer, Regulatory and Policy Manager

Guest

Elisabeth Broadley, Assistant Manager, Customer Relations, Customer Care

Regrets

Melanie Lucia, Vice President, Customer Experience
Rosa Marinelli, Director, Corporate Marketing & Customer Experience
Hugh Mitchell, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
Song Hu, Seniors Serving Seniors (Alternate)
Matthew Ellies, Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada, BC
Neil Belanger, Chief Executive Officer, BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS)

Introduction

Co-Chairs Karen Tindall and Marnie Essery welcomed and introduced the members of the committee. No changes to the minutes of the last meeting (May 10, 2023).

Minutes approved

Updates from Public Interest Representatives

Seniors Serving Seniors – Dr. Jie Zhang

- Will keep an ear out for what the community wants as far as accessibility requirements. Seniors Serving Seniors is now working on wheelchair access on buses. She will follow up and share more information at the next meeting for ferry-specific feedback or concerns.

Advisor for Special Olympics, Victoria, President of MS centre of Vancouver Island, coach of the Spirit Orcas – Susan Simmons

- Susan explained that the Special Olympics are for people with intellectual disabilities.
- Noted that for people with anxiety disorders, access to a quiet space makes a huge difference and can mean the difference between having an anxiety attack or not. Customers can sometimes find a space like that on the ferry, sometimes they can't. It would be helpful if BC Ferries could identify a quiet area for customers who need it.
- People with walkers – may or may not have a placard on their car, but they need enough space around their vehicles to access elevators.
- Karen Tindall explained that for customers who use walkers, BC Ferries has a process for loading and that customers don't need a placard. They are to ask to tell the ticket agent specifically what they need, (to be parked on the upper deck and with space on the right, near an elevator, for example) and the ticket agent will put them in the correct lane and communicate the requirement to the vessel.

Action: Karen Tindall will check the website to ensure there is information regarding the accessible loading process for customers; as well as how to request assistance to find a quiet area on board for customers who need it.

Chair of Saanich Peninsula Accessible Advisory Committee – Captain Dave Willows

- Captain Willows is also on the committee for Saanich School Accessibility.
- He and his family had a great experience on the Coastal Celebration over the summer of 2023 – staff were going to park them in the 'yellow space', Captain Willows suggested something different, they accommodated on the spot and it was great.
- On the way back they took the Coho ferry. There were no elevators so his wife and son boarded via overhead walkway, and disembarked in Victoria the same way, and were then brought down in an elevator at the terminal. Staff did a great job finding a workaround with no elevator. They will also drive you onboard if needed.

Victoria Disability Resource Centre, Chair, CRD Accessibility Advisory Committee – Pat Danforth

- Pat suggested the company offer Disability Inclusion and Awareness training, to facilitate employer and employees working together to accommodate persons with disabilities.
- She heard from one person who travelled on one of the Spirit vessels – they complained there was only one accessible washroom, that it's on Deck 5 and very busy, and near the men's washroom, so she was uncomfortable accessing it. She also raised concern that there is no adult change table. Pat told her about the other accessible washroom on Deck 6.
- Another person complained about low tides, which impact the angle of the ramp. Pat said they could ask for assistance and that BC Ferries has no control over the tides.

Spinal Cord Injury BC – Scott Heron

- No update to share, but Scott was busy planning the sunset dinner cruise with BC Ferries. Scott said that in addition to the individual counselling, etc. that he does, Spinal Cord Injury BC organizes peer events to get people together and out of the house. Most popular is the sunset dinner cruise with BC Ferries – a group would travel as foot passengers on the ferry out of Swartz Bay and go to the Pacific Buffet. On the Tsawwassen side, the Vancouver peers would join in and then they all sail back together. Then the Vancouver passengers would return home. With the loss of the Pacific Buffet that stopped, but last year it was a huge success as they were seated in the old buffet area and their food that they had ordered was delivered to their seats. He said they'd love to do it again.

Action: Scott will provide information about the sunset dinner cruise with the goal of planning an event similar to last year's.

Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada, BC – Michelle Bobyn

- No updates from Matthew Ellies, also of Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada, BC, on whose behalf she was attending.

Intermunicipal Advisory Committee on Disability Issues – Marnie Essery

- Marnie travelled on the ferry recently and said how much she admires the staff as they deal with people who are very busy and terminals that are very busy. She said staff are doing a great job.
- She noted that at Tsawwassen terminal, the garbage can was overflowing and people were throwing trash on the ground instead.
- At terminals, it's hard to find a dedicated unisex washroom. There are disabled washrooms for men or women, but those aren't helpful when you have a helper of the opposite gender.
- Wet floor signs in washrooms are very large and they take up lots of space needed for maneuverability. She noted one in the washroom, but the floor was bone dry.
- She said the Spirit class accessible toilet resembled a camping toilet, not a standard wheelchair accessible toilet. This was on the Spirit of Vancouver Island on November 15, 2023, the 5:00 pm sailing from Tsawwassen to Swartz Bay. She said the toilet is low and looks like a porta potty. The wet floor sign was blocking access.
- Also on November 15, the ferry was very busy and it was hard to hear the announcements wherever you were in the terminal – they sounded very muffled. People were rushing back to their vehicles in order to load.
- Marnie said that people have commenting on the Earls Cove-Salter Bay (Powell River) schedule, saying they are losing out on a lot of work time because the ferry schedule is not conducive.
- Karen asked Marnie regarding the Powell River business customers – did they have a suggestion about what would improve their experience? Business customers heading to Vancouver are required to travel on two routes, (Earls Cove-Salter Bay and then Langdale-Horseshoe Bay).
- Marnie said the feedback they had was that they wanted more options for travel times, that the commute and travel time was excessive.
- Camrin Hillis let the group know that the PA system was upgraded 6 or 7 years ago and that engineers were involved in the design at the time. There had been a known issue with some of the announcements in the Southern Gulf Islands holding lanes. Some speakers at the Lands End Café were removed during the renovation project, and have since been returned. He added that there is a new project coming up in 2024 to replace the public address player equipment at the terminal. Camrin will ask the project team to confirm adequate speakers and volume levels around the terminal.

Action: Karen will share Marnie's feedback about the washrooms with the Spirit Class Senior Chief Steward. Camrin to confirm adequate speakers and volume at Swartz Bay terminal.

Updates from BC Ferries

Bruce Patterson – Director, Naval Architecture, Engineering

- Island Class update: 4 vessels coming as part of Phase 3 – these will be fully electric as opposed to hybrid. This means we need to introduce shore charging infrastructure at both terminals. The ships will partially charge at each docking. The planned deployment is 2 vessels on the Nanaimo Harbour-Gabriola Island route, and 2 on the Campbell River-Quadra Island route.
- This has been approved under Section 55 of the *Coastal Ferry Act*. Last spring, BC Ferries received responses from 5 qualified shipyards, including 1 in Quebec, and then received 3 responses including Damen, the previous builder of the Island class vessels. There were no BC applicants. Contract negotiations will begin December 2023, the contract will be awarded early 2024, and the first vessel will be delivered mid-2026.
- Last meeting, there was a discussion about accessing the upper (sun) deck. Bruce said the committee had a good discussion about a platform to access it, and the group thought it was perhaps over and above to go to this level. Bruce consulted the legal department and they advised that a lack of access could be a Human Rights complaint, so we are including the stairclimber in the bid.
- Today's front page of the Times Colonist features a story about BC Ferries and our plans to build 6+ vessels in the 2029-2031 window. Bruce said he reported last meeting on energy sources. Now the Company is working with a Norwegian design firm to make a design package, which will allow companies to see that there is not as much contract risk as they may think. There is also a focus on environmentally-friendly, double ended, interoperable ferries including for Route 3 (Horseshoe Bay-Langdale). The new major vessels are expected to have similar capacity to the Spirit class ships.
- Bruce said the new ships will begin operations with a diesel hybrid engine with large battery capacity, then transition to all-electric in first 5-10 years of service.
- He asked the group for feedback on what accessibility items for the new builds would be of help? He asked if there are any trade shows etc. to look into services?
- Susan said she would be happy to keep her eyes open for technical solutions, as she works in technology. She asked that as the new ships are designed, will there be an opportunity for people on the Accessibility Advisory Committee or in the community to provide input throughout the design phase?
- Bruce explained that BC Ferries is looking at having the pet areas in the passenger area, Retail mid-ship deck 5, and that the main food areas will be on Deck 6.
- Jeff Davidson provided a brief highlight of some of the planned passenger areas and amenities. He said that while plans are subject to change, the new vessels are being designed with 6 accessible washrooms each and 12 gender inclusive, single occupancy washrooms. Two of the accessible washrooms will have adult change facilities in them and the induction loop will be more prevalent in the passenger areas. The paid entry lounge will likely be on Deck 7. The paid lounge would include small amount of snack-type food - coffee, tea, maybe sparkling water, pretzels, gummy bears, goldfish – snacks, not meals.
- The Company is considering an area that is licenced, with a hot entrée choice and salad, that customers pay more for (food would be premade in main galley, transported up to quiet lounge). Maybe a charcuterie board, cheeseboard etc. Trying to find the balance between the small snack included in the entry fee, and perhaps give customers the option to pay more for a full meal, but offer very limited choices.

- Bruce said that the Baynes Sound Connector would be moving to a new cable system which is lighter and less expensive. The Company ran 2-ship summer service in 2023 as opposed to expanding the Baynes Sound Connector. It was successful, and will allow BC Ferries to postpone the expansion of the Baynes Sound Connector. For accessibility, the vessel is very simple, as it's one level and the sailing is 7-10 minutes long.

Rebecca Jamieson – Manager, Marketing & Customer Experience

- Rebecca provided an update on the projects she has been working on.
- She said customers have been using their cars for changing adults, which is not acceptable.
- She looked into the number of “accessible fares with an assistant” sold on our routes, which are issued to customers accompanying AFI cardholders. The greatest numbers are on Routes 1, 2, 3 and 30. She then looked at vessels on these routes, to see if adult change tables can be easily added. The Spirit class vessels have the space but not the structure for a wall mounted change table, so she is looking at a freestanding version. The terminals can't accommodate these tables, so she is looking now at what is possible with the new vessels.
- Another possibility is the installation of hydraulic lifts, where customers would provide their own slings. The standards are called “changing places” and Rebecca is researching structural requirements to comply with these standards.
- She said the Deck 5 accessible washrooms are likely the best place for adult change tables. A number of factors need to be considered, including space, installation of grab bars, and proper weight-bearing structures.
- Regarding braille, she said not all wayfinding washroom signage onboard has braille, and some that do don't meet the standards for being in the correct place. Rebecca is looking at the vessels to install a sign that can be mounted in the proper place, that has a raised pictogram, a raised letter, and braille.
- BC Ferries has rebranded employee single occupancy washrooms to be All Gender; next the accessible (single occupancy) customer washrooms will be rebranded All Gender.

Jeff Davidson – Director, Retail Services:

- Looking to introduce slightly higher end experience in a quiet lounge, a little more exclusive, some slightly higher end food (something away from the main cafeteria). Not the same as the cafeteria – no burgers and fries. First round of research was quite supportive of the concept. At the end of November the Company will be out again looking for feedback on menu items, and pricing models. Jeff said in the first round we went out with all-inclusive pricing but he believes customers didn't completely understand what all-inclusive meant – they thought it meant all you can eat, but it's more like, you get a drink, a snack, and a meal for one set price.
- Karen asked that the committee members be included in the next round of surveys. Jeff agreed.

Action: Committee members to be included in future surveys regarding onboard services.

Break: 3:10pm-3:24pm

Steve Shardlow - Training Manager, Terminals

- Steve shared a presentation "BC Ferries Academy" with the committee. BC Ferries Academy provides Operations and SEA training.
- The current goal is to update and enhance training material and quick reference guides; the long-term goal is to explore options for a dedicated course or courses focusing on enhanced accessibility training.
- Steve said BC Ferries is taking a couple of steps back and looking at the big picture, not only at the hiring process overall to improve the experience for employees, but also trying to avoid overloading new and existing employees with training. There is a lot they already do to be job-ready. He and the team are asking how we simplify this to make the experience positive for new employees especially, so they stay with the company. One goal is to avoid overload with e-learning and self-guided courses. Also, Steve said the Company has to be aware of resources – laptops, for example, to complete the learning.

Other Business: Karen Tindall – Director, Customer Care

- Karen provided a Major Terminal Efficiency Project Update. BC Ferries is looking to make upgrades at the major terminals to improve the customer and employee experience in various areas.
- Areas that are being explored include:
 - Vehicle traffic and throughput – express lanes for bookings, which would allow customers to go through the booth easily with fully prepaid fares.
 - Measurement capabilities at booth – length, height, weight.
 - Looking at replacing kiosks for the foot passenger check-in.
 - Looking at a data hub to help terminal operations decide about loading plan, identify how many foot and vehicle ticket agents are required, etc. This would also improve Current Conditions because we would have the exact vehicle details. There are 4 things that need to be considered: vehicles outside terminal – reserved and non-reserved; No shows; vehicles booked at 20 feet per standard vehicle doesn't always reflect reality; we hold back some footage on each sailing for emergency and priority loading (hearses, Ambulance/Police, BC Mail, etc.); and length between vehicles once parked onboard – all of these have a large impact on our estimates and once loaded, can change the numbers drastically. We are looking at what we can do differently to inform the customers so they can then decide when to travel.
- Before we proceed, we will also need approval from the BC Ferry Commissioner.
- Karen asked those at the meeting to participate in the Charting the Course survey, as well as any future follow up surveys, including one regarding the space once occupied by the Pacific Buffet.
- Karen and Marnie had discussed an in-office meeting in future, and Karen said the Ferry Advisory Committees have asked if the Accessibility Advisory Committee could look into some of the issues they are seeing.

Action: Karen will share any applicable agenda items from the FACs to the committee as a mechanism to communicate regarding accessibility. There are none at this time.

Meeting Adjourned: 3:54 pm

Next Meeting Date: June 5, 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm via Teams