



Islands Trust

## Key Messages for Trustees to give in BC Government 2013 Coastal Ferries Community “Engagement”

DRAFT November 28, 2013 (we encourage islanders’ ideas on what else we should say, and invite you to copy what’s below)

Note: BC Government’s Meeting Format Dec 10 on Gabriola: 5-6pm is a public open house, 6-8pm will be a question and answer session (which in other communities we hear has been all submissions from the public at a microphone).

### Draft Key Messages for trustees to deliver to the BC government:

All of our constituents are ferry users. No other British Columbia local government has as many ferry dependent communities. The Province promised to consult with local governments about cuts and this has not happened. If the Province were sincere about consulting us on service cuts they would analyze their socio-economic impact and consider fare rollbacks. That would be an entirely different conversation, which islanders might more willingly engage in.

Since 1961, when BC Ferries bought out local operators and began to provide a publicly funded ferry service, our communities have received repeated promises from the provincial government that our ferries are our highways and will remain affordable. Communities have been built throughout the islands on the basis of this promise. Businesses and families invested on the islands based on repeated and consistent promises from the provincial government that it would sustain affordable, reliable ferry services. Development patterns of coastal communities have been shaped by the ferry system: people and businesses have located to the islands based on reasonable and reliable ferry service.

The fundamental principle that built this coastal province is that marine transportation is an essential part of BC’s prosperity.

Ferries are lifelines for coastal communities and businesses; just like highways are in the rest of the Province.

Skyrocketing fares, promises of more fare increases to come, and now service cuts. This is the perfect storm with the potential to devastate the economic and social health of island communities, families and businesses.

These cuts don’t appear to have anything to do with the affordability of the ferries, which is a huge concern.

There is still a four-per cent fare increase scheduled for the spring and a 3.9-per cent fare increase a year after that. We are deeply concerned that there are service cuts on top of the increases.

Let’s talk about the people affected and what this really means. It means a person who needs to work an early or late shift may have to lose their job or move to keep it, with just a few months’ notice. It means the boy or girl who wants to play sports or in the band off island may not be able to make practices. It means businesses relying on tourism may flounder and sink. It means grandparents may not be able to afford to see their grandchildren.

We need the Province to support the sustainability of island economies and the coastal ferry service. It is appalling that the BC government did no socioeconomic impact assessment on the effects of their service cuts.

The reality is that provincial transportation infrastructure to remote, rural communities is expensive, whether it is on the coast, in the north, or in steep, mountainous terrain subject to snow removal, mudslides and avalanches. The Province invests billions of dollars in highways and public transit. It continues to budget \$22 million a year to support fourteen inland ferries, at no cost to users.

The current approach to the marine transportation system is failing us and the future is predictable. As fares go up, ridership goes down, and as ridership goes down, fares go up yet again. As services get cut, coastal economies weaken further. This cycle of decline has to stop and the root of the problem lies with decades of chronic provincial government underinvestment over decades.

It’s time for the Province to acknowledge the coastal ferry service as an essential and integral part of BC’s transportation infrastructure and to fund it accordingly. Ferry users are already paying 92% of operating costs. Ferry users put \$5 billion into the system over the past 10 years, compared to the Province’s \$1 billion. We have not found a form of transit or another ferry system that gets less state support proportionately.

About 10 years ago someone said: *“We all want the service to succeed; we all need it. It is fundamental to local economies.”* That’s still true today. And the person who said it was Judith Reid, the Minister of Transportation, on 2nd reading of the *Coastal Ferry Act*.

*There are many Islands Trust submissions on ferry service over the years at <http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/trust-council/advocacy/bc-ferries-advocacy.aspx>*