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September 19, 2014

File No.: 0420-20

via e-mail: Minister.Transportation@gov.bc.ca

The Honourable Todd Stone, MLA
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure
PO Box 9850, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Stone:

Re: Studying the feasibility of a bridge to Gabriola Island

I am writing on behalf of the Islands Trust Council in response to yesterday's announcement of a feasibility study for a bridge to Gabriola and Mudge Islands.

The Islands Trust carries out the provincial mandate of the *Islands Trust Act* on behalf of islanders and of all British Columbians: to preserve and protect the provincially-significant island archipelago that lies between Vancouver Island and the Vancouver mainland. Our most recent survey ([Ipsos Reid, 2011](#)) indicates that 86% of British Columbians and 97% of islanders agree that the Gulf Islands are a special part of BC; 85% of British Columbians agree they should be protected from over-development and 83% agree the provincial government should take action to support the preservation and protection of these islands. Within the Islands Trust Area, these latter percentages rise to 90%.

Consistent with the *Islands Trust Act*, the Province has approved the *Islands Trust Policy Statement* and numerous Official Community Plans from individual islands, all developed through extensive consultation with islanders, non-resident property owners and visitors. None of these documents support fixed connections of these islands to Vancouver Island, the mainland or another island. Fundamentally, islanders and non-islanders alike recognize that such connections destroy the very essence of islands; something that, once lost, can never be restored.

From our previous experience working with provincial ministries, we are surprised and alarmed that you have now announced an initiative that seems so contrary to our previous discussions, community consultation and the wisdom that led to creation of the *Islands Trust Act* forty years ago. While it is true that we are concerned about community sustainability and the impacts that rising ferry fares and service cuts have had, we believe the solution lies in broad consultation with our communities, rather than surprise announcements about single projects.

I am disappointed your ministry has announced major infrastructure studies without any apparent consultation with the locally-elected representatives or taxpayers. There are at least four government bodies with zoning or other authorities and services affected by this proposal: the Snuneymuxw First Nation, the City of Nanaimo, the Regional District of Nanaimo and the Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee. We are not aware of outreach to any of those bodies before making this significant announcement. I also do not understand why your Parliamentary Secretary MLA Jordan Sturdy failed to mention the pending study when we met Wednesday to discuss Vancouver Island transportation infrastructure planning, even when I raised the issue directly.

I am also disappointed your ministry failed to study the economic impacts of your government's BC Ferries decisions, [as requested](#) by Islands Trust Council and many coastal governments. Last week's [Union of BC Municipalities study](#) found traffic losses from your ferry policies cost the BC economy \$2.3 billion over ten years. It found BC Ferries stimulates \$1.8 billion in expenditures each year, which in turn produces \$1.5 billion in total value-added GDP for BC. These strong findings suggest your ministry should have conducted such research itself, before raising rates and cutting service, and funding this study should not have fallen on local government.

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If you are determined to spend public dollars on a bridge study instead, we strongly recommend that the scope be broader than location and economics. The terms of reference for such a significant development proposal should also assess navigational, archaeological, ecological, community impacts and community support. Today's Times Colonist quotes you as wanting to put the "facts on the table" and we encourage you to get all the facts.

I will close by reminding you of the [protocol agreement](#) between our two agencies in place since 1992 and revised in 1996. Your staff have respected this agreement by offering "effective cooperation between the Ministry of Transportation and the Islands Trust (leading to) certainty in road system planning and development, coordinated responses from the parties and the harmonization of relevant legislation, bylaws, policies and programs." We call on your ministry to uphold the cooperative spirit of this agreement.

Thank you for responding to these concerns.

Sincerely,



Sheila Malcolmson
Chair, Islands Trust Council
smalcolmson@islandstrust.bc.ca

Attachment: Excerpts from Islands Trust Documents

cc: The Honourable Christy Clark, Premier of British Columbia
Trust Area MLAs: Gary Holman, Saanich North and the Islands
Don McRae, Comox Valley
Doug Routley, Nanaimo – North Cowichan
Nicholas Simons, Powell River – Sunshine Coast
Michelle Stilwell, Parksville – Qualicum
Jordan Sturdy, West Vancouver – Sea to Sky, and Parliamentary Secretary to the
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure for Transportation

Snuneymuxw First Nation
City of Nanaimo
Regional District of Nanaimo
Bowen Island Municipality
Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities members
Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee
Islands Trust Council
Islands Trust website

**Excerpts from Islands Trust Documents approved by the
BC Minister responsible for the Islands Trust
(currently the Minister of Community, Sport and Cultural Development)**

Gabriola Island Official Community Plan - Adopted in 1997, Consolidated: November, 2011

Land Transportation Objectives

Policy 7.1.1

- *To oppose any fixed link or bridge to Vancouver Island or ferry connection to the BC Lower Mainland.*

Land Transportation Policies

Policy 7.1.n

- *The development of a bridge or other form of fixed transportation link of any kind connecting Gabriola to Vancouver Island or any other island or the B.C. Lower Mainland is not supported and is contrary to the provisions of this Plan.*

Mudge Island Official Community Plan - Adopted in 1997, Consolidated: September 2014

Community Goal #4

- *To keep the islands as a refuge from the pressures of urban life, as partially facilitated by the absence of ferry service and bridges between these and other islands.*

Transportation Policy 4

- *No island in the Plan Area shall be connected to any other island by a bridge.*

Appendix A – Community Profile and Values Report (2008)

What are your views on bridges connecting Mudge Island to Vancouver Island and to Gabriola Island?

- *An overwhelming majority of respondents stated “No” to the question of a bridge, although some qualified their response with suggestions for a foot bridge, a toll bridge or a “residents only” bridge. The anti-bridge sentiment was probably best described by the statements “to arrive by boat is one of the special things about Mudge”, “A bridge would be the demise and destruction of rural island living”, and “What we value about Mudge would be lost”.*

Islands Trust Policy Statement, Approved by Minister on June 9, 1994 - Consolidated April 2003

Policy Statement 5.3.1:

Trust Council holds that local trust committees and island municipalities should be consulted and involved in the decision-making process regarding provision of utilities, transportation services or facilities that might affect land use in their local planning areas.

Policy Statement 5.3.2:

It is Trust Council’s policy that no island in the Trust Area should be connected to Vancouver Island, the mainland or another island by a bridge or tunnel, notwithstanding the existing bridge between North and South Pender Islands.