

## Meeting Details

Date February 17, 2015  
Time 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm  
Location: BC Ferries Head Office - Suite 500-1621 Blanshard Street

## Attendance

### **Public Interest Representatives**

Susan Gallagher, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians  
Hugh Mitchell, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association  
Mary Ellen Meunier, Seniors Serving Seniors  
Mary Kay Kennedy, CNIB (Late)  
Marnie Essery, Intermunicipal Advisory Committee on Disability Issues  
Barbara Schuster, CNIB  
Valerie Thoem, Independent  
Hanna Leavitt, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians

### **BC Ferries Representatives**

Karen Tindall, Director of Customer Care, Customer Care Department  
Garnet Renning, Customer Service & Sales Representative  
Stephen Nussbaum, Regional Manager, Swartz Bay  
David Carroll, Director, Terminal Construction, Engineering  
Darin Guenette, Manager, Public Affairs  
Bruce Paterson, Fleet Technical Director, Engineering  
Sheila O'Neill, Catering Superintendent, Central Coast  
Captain Chris Frappell, Marine Superintendent, South and Central Coast  
Steve Shardlow, Training Manager, Terminals  
Melanie Lucia, Director, Catering Operations

### **Guests**

Elisabeth Broadley, Customer Relations Advisor, Customer Care  
Deborah Fraess, Independent  
Kay Gimbel, Mate, Intermediate  
Captain Robert Nelson, Captain, Coastal Inspiration  
Darren Brown, Project Manager, Unified Disability Signage  
Brad Judson, Manager SMS, Safety

### **Regrets**

Jeff Davidson, Director, Retail Services, Food and Retail Operations  
Jane Sheaff, Seniors Serving Seniors  
Pat Danforth, Board Member, BC Coalition of People with Disabilities  
Scott Heron, Co-Chair, Spinal Cord Injury BC  
Les Chan, Disability Resource Centre

## Introductions

Co-Chair Karen Tindall welcomed the members of the committee  
Review of Minutes - July 23, 2014

Karen Tindall (KT) reported on Action Items from last meeting:

- KT will follow up with the Marketing Department regarding a members suggestion to place decals on the windscreens near the elevators on the Coastal Class vehicle deck
- KT followed up with Customer Service Centre staff to ensure employees are providing the correct messaging regarding wheelchair booking
- Marnie Essery confirmed she has been provided with the information needed for the Help in Helping Yourself pamphlet
- KT confirmed braille signage locations outside the accessible washrooms on the Sprit Class vessels, and on the outside of accessible washrooms and at the elevators of the Coastal Class vessels. David Carroll said that BCF is looking at new signage standards for vessels and trying to build this into the capital plan.
- KT said that Jeff Davidson is aware of, and looking into, Susan Gallagher's concern about the lack of wheelchair space in the lounge areas and the lack of universal graphics on the "Do not drink water" signs in the washrooms.

## Standing Items

### *Loading Practices*

Stephen Nussbaum (SN) went through six months' worth of customer comments looking for trends in comments regarding accessibility needs. He found 24 comments; passengers with disabilities who were unable to exit their vehicles made up less than half of that total, which indicates that improvements are being made.

SN said there are no real changes to the types of complaints being made, and that one of the major complaints is unfulfilled requests for elevator access on the vehicle decks. Customers are telling BCF there is inconsistency in how to communicate which side extra room and/or elevator access is needed. SN said the information has been reviewed and changed so customer are advised to use their four-way flashers when loading, loaders will engage with the customer to determine their needs on the vehicle deck to resolve this complaint. Captain Chris Frappell noted taking the time to have a conversation to ensure a customer is parked appropriately is better than trying to address a situation after the fact.

SN said that the number of wheelchair requests is growing and that we now need additional resources on long weekends to meet the demand. He said this continues to be a trend, and that additional resources have been built into the upcoming budget.

SN advised the designated seat trial, which uses signage to identify seating for customers with mobility challenges, is underway in Horseshoe Bay waiting rooms. Currently there are two seats and he said two more are needed, as well as signage directing people to the specific seats. Hugh Mitchell asked if the seats are designed to help staff by having people who need assistance close to the walkway. SN said no, the signs are

meant simply to provide people with a place to sit. He said BCF will monitor the trial's success. He added that the signs, which cost \$2.00, need replacement every three months.

KT asked SN if he had any thoughts on priority loading. He said yes, but he wants to see if the trial works and then possibly go another step at that point.

KT asked committee guest, Deborah Fraess, to elaborate on her loading concerns. Deborah Fraess said that while travelling in a vehicle, she arrived at the ticket booth, showed her Disability Status Identification card and said that she had a wheelchair. She was placed in regular traffic and when staff realized, they tried to help but ultimately she was parked two cars away from the elevator. She was travelling Duke Point - Tsawwassen and there was a fire drill. After it concluded, the elevators were not operational and she waited for 45 minutes on the vehicle deck. Eventually the middle elevator began working. She said that staff were very good but they didn't understand her needs. It made her wonder whether anyone would help her during an emergency situation, and it caused her to feel worried about being trapped on the vehicle deck. It was discussed that her concerns would be addressed during Captain Robert Nelson's presentation.

SN said that BCF is working towards having terminal announcements consistent and at the correct volume, and therefore more understandable. He said that the announcements for Swartz Bay terminal have been recorded and that the machine used to play them should be operational soon. At Tsawwassen terminal, the announcements have been written but he was not sure if they had been recorded.

David Carroll said they are working on clarity and improvements to the PA system itself. KT said that all of the announcements for the major routes are being re-written and re-recorded, including onboard accessibility announcements asking customers to self-declare. She said the announcements will be significantly shorter, but that BCF is required to mention certain onboard amenities but safety announcements are always the priority. KT mentioned the possibility of using scrolling marquées on the video displays is being explored, so people can read the announcements, and she would provide an update as soon as one was available.

Valerie Thoen said that Washington State Ferries provides passengers with a card to fill out for customers who have specific loading or assistance requirements. She said they also provide a large orange card that reads "Exit," which customers place on the side of car where they need extra room. KT said BCF was reviewing the opportunity to provide business-size cards to customers who purchase a fare for persons with disabilities or who request elevator access, which asks customers to self-identify. She wondered if this would be considered discriminatory and asked the committee for their input. Susan Gallagher said she really likes the idea of having the information available on the webpage, because as a legally blind person she will not be filling out forms.

Mary Ellen Meunier said that when travelling with crutches, she became aware of numerous small ramps on the vehicle deck, but added she is not sure what could be done about it. SN asked whether she made a request at the ticket booth for access to and elevator, and she replied that she did, but that she was placed in a regular lane, even with her four-way flashers activated. KT asked her to please provide the details so that internal follow up can be completed.

**ACTION:**

- None

## Vessel Developments

Bruce Paterson (BP) provided an update on the new builds and mid-life upgrades.

### ***New Builds***

BP explained that the cable ferry, under construction by SeaSpan, was scheduled for delivery in the spring of 2015. He said the three intermediate class ferries were set to be delivered beginning autumn 2016 through spring 2017. The first of the three will operate on Route 17, between Comox and Powell River, and the other two will operate on Route 9 between Tsawwassen and the Southern Gulf Islands, one on a full-time basis and the other part-time.

He discussed the layout of the cable ferry that will be operating between Buckley Bay and Denman Island. He explained that the evacuation equipment will be made up of two systems, each capable on its own of accommodating the entire passenger complement.

In regards to the intermediate class ferries, KT said the feedback provided by the Accessibility Advisory Committee about the Coastal Class ferries was included in the Request for Proposals. BP added that Transport Canada standards for accessibility were also included, which feature requirements for accessible washrooms on all decks including vehicle decks.

BP also said there is potential for replacement of the North Island Princess and the K-Class ferries. He said the new vessels may include passenger lounges on the vehicle decks. He said designs may be based on Norwegian projects. In the short-term, the decision whether to replace or refurbish has not been made.

### ***Mid-Life Upgrades***

The Queen of Oak Bay will be undergoing a  $\frac{3}{4}$  life upgrade. Phase 1 involves engine work and Phase 2 involves customer-facing areas. BP said that the installation of induction loop technology is still a possibility but hasn't yet been done. Hugh Mitchell asked a question about induction loop and BP provided an explanation and said that it was included in the scope of the upgrades for the Spirit Class vessels.

BP said the Queen of Surrey is also scheduled for a  $\frac{3}{4}$  life upgrade. He did not have slides on the Spirit vessel upgrades but said he would provide an update. He said that BC Ferries would be contracting with a shipyard and that the projects would run on a very tight schedule. Each of the Spirit vessels will be taken out of service for nine months. He said the major pieces of the refit include the conversion to LNG capability and upgrading lifesaving equipment, while upgrades to passenger areas will be relatively modest. Equipment will also be replaced, and he added that structurally, the vessels are in great shape.

BP said there are 10 potential bidders looking at the project, and that the intention is to give shipyards roughly 12 months of preparation time.

The Queen of Capilano is undergoing her midlife upgrade now, with an expected completion date in May 2015. The major change is the addition of gallery decks. Susan Gallagher said that it is important for the new customer seating to be high-contrast.

BP said that following the refit, customers will be able to board directly into the lounge areas but said that the gallery decks will provide accessibility challenges, as customers parked in this area must walk along the ramp if they wish to leave their vehicles. He said the decision was made to make this compromise in order to increase capacity. He added that the crossing, between Horseshoe Bay and Bowen Island, is about 15 minutes long, and that many people remain in their vehicles. He said BC Ferries will have to work to make sure that persons with disabilities are not parked on the gallery decks. On the Bowen Island side, foot passengers will still embark and disembark on the vehicle deck.

Susan Gallagher said she was not impressed with the system in place for foot passengers disembarking the Coastal Renaissance, as customers who wish to get off quickly must wait outside on the outer deck as the ship docks. She requested that future builds take into account the foot passenger waiting environment.

### Evacuation/Self-Declaration Presentation

Captain Robert Nelson of the Coastal Inspiration provided a presentation on evacuation procedures on major route vessels and the role that self-declaration plays in assisting with emergency procedures. KT advised the committee members that not a lot of people, upon arrival at the ticket booth, are letting staff know that they will need assistance in the event of an emergency.

Captain Robert Nelson discussed the fire and vessel regulations in place, including the Canada Shipping Act of 2001. He discussed the importance of self-declaration so that staff know what customers need and can provide appropriate help in the event of an emergency. He said there are numerous options to communicate these needs - through C-MIST, at the ticket booth and on the ship to the chief steward.

During an evacuation, staff are concerned with organizing and moving customers, which is the key to evacuation. He said that evacuation equipment is on deck 5, while the majority of customers gather on deck 6. During a fire alarm, the elevators are locked. They can be unlocked, but the Captain needs to know how many people need to be helped, which goes back to the importance of self-declaration.

Hanna Leavitt asked if both foot passengers and vehicle passengers should self-declare, and Captain Nelson replied in the affirmative. Hanna Leavitt asked how one should self-identify, and KT said that if customers let the ticket agent know, two things will happen: the customer will be asked to speak with the chief steward onboard regarding their specific needs, and the agent will send the information to the tower operator, who will communicate with the vessel.

Hanna Leavitt asked if guide dogs would be evacuated in an emergency. Captain Robert Nelson replied that technically, guide dogs would not be evacuated but that crews may be able to provide assistance. He said there is some concern about dogs' claws on inflatable ramps and rafts.

KT raised Deborah Fraess's concern and asked how the crew would know if a customer was on the vehicle deck during an emergency. Captain Robert Nelson explained that crews will sweep the area to find and evacuate any passengers, turning on the elevator if necessary. He added that this is why people are asked to self-identify.

KT explained that in an emergency, deck crew will identify if a customer is stuck in their vehicle and they'll do whatever is needed to get that customer out. She said it is important for customers to park their vehicles in a way that allows them to exit their vehicles. Captain Robert Nelson stressed the importance of people parking so that they can get out of their vehicles, and Captain Chris Frappell said that across the fleet, the emphasis is on providing positive experiences for customers, rather than getting as many vehicles on as possible.

KT said that on the Queen of New Westminster, there are narrow yellow metal casings on the side of the vehicle deck that make it too narrow for wheelchairs to pass. In one case, a man had to carry his brother, and his wheelchair, to the elevator. She said that this particular vessel is not ideal for people who use wheelchairs and she encourages customers to call BC Ferries when planning their travels to ensure they are on a suitable vessel.

Captain Robert Nelson said that safety is the top priority and that crews conduct drills once per shift. He then showed a video of an evacuation slide deployment. He explained that passengers with disabilities would likely be evacuated in the middle of the passenger group, because that way passengers who are already on the raft will be able to assist.

Susan Gallagher asked if there was just one evacuation slide, to which Captain Robert Nelson replied that on his vessel, there are four slides. Captain Chris Frappell said that some passengers needing extra help may be asked to wait to evacuate, as the last raft will have more crew members in it, who will be in a better position to provide the needed help.

Hugh Mitchell asked if there is raft capacity for all passengers and crew. BP said yes, and said that on Captain Robert Nelson's vessel, for example, there is capacity for 60 per cent of the maximum load on each side of the vessel, for a total of 120 per cent of the maximum capacity. He said on some of the smaller vessels, there is 100 per cent capacity on each side of the vessel.

Captain Robert Nelson added that evacuation is the last case scenario, and that crews will take every action to prevent the need for evacuation, if possible.

Valerie Thoem asked if BC Ferries has had a disabled person go down the evacuation slide. Captain Chris Frappell explained that BC Ferries has not, but the manufacturers have tested them thoroughly with numerous scenarios.

## Break

### Terminal Developments

David Carroll (DC) provided an update. He said that changes are coming to the fuel used in some vessels, which will be capable of running on Liquefied Natural Gas, and that BC Ferries will continue to provide updates.

He said that some of the markings for some of the overhead walkways have been wearing off, and those markings will be fixed.

A note from Co-Chair Scott Heron was presented on behalf of a concerned traveller that accessible terminal parking spaces are not suitable for side-loading vans. DC said he will investigate the concerns further. KT asked DC if he would be looking at accessible parking at Langdale terminal, as it fits into the terminal master plan, and he agreed.

## Unified Digital Signage Update

Darren Brown provided an update on digital signage. He said that the hardware is in place for a pilot project at Duke Point Terminal. Signs will contain information on arrivals and departures, and prompt passengers to return to their vehicles for boarding, as well as other information. He said that the pilot project will allow BC Ferries to work on sign content, and the next phase will involve providing content for a unified system. There will also be provisions for emergency messaging.

Hugh Mitchell asked how many signs will be in the holding lot. Darren Brown said that one sign, 45 feet tall, will be placed at the front of the lot. Mary Kay Kennedy asked about signs for foot passengers, and Darren Brown said there may be signs inside the terminal as well for foot passengers. He said there may also be signs synced with the announcements, in order to provide the same information to passengers who cannot hear the announcements, but that the signs would not replace the announcements. Darren said that beginning in the fall of 2015, the new screens at Duke Point may be operational. Hugh Mitchell asked that visibility be kept in mind, and suggested a black or brown background with light letters. Darren said he believes the background is dark blue and the letters are white, to provide high contrast.

Mary Kay Kennedy asked if the content of the announcements can be made available on the website so that people can look ahead of time. Darren Brown said the possibility could be explored. Mary Kay Kennedy explained that with students, she goes over the information ahead of travel, so it would be of use to enhance their understanding of what to expect.

## **ACTION:**

- Darren Brown will look at the possibility of including the content of the announcements on the website.

## Training

Steve Shardlow said that the time when seasonal employees will be joining BC Ferries is approaching. He said there will be a lot of new people around the fleet, and a lot of people taking on new roles. He said training materials and the SEA (Standardized Education and Assessment) program have been updated. He said that training for employees who provide wheelchair assistance needs to be improved, including information on backing people up into vessels in order to reduce the risk of accident. He said he is in the process of improving training and testing materials.

He said Marine Atlantic visited BC Ferries for one week, as they are developing their own SEA program. The two companies met to discuss this. He said there is a lot of discussion about the training that will take place as various vessels undergo their mid-life upgrades.

## Other Business

Valerie Thoen requested that the notification for the next meeting go out early in order to give people time to plan. KT said she would send the notification out right away.

Committee members bid farewell and thanked Susan Gallagher for her contributions to the committee. Hanna Leavitt, will be attending future meetings on behalf of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians.

## Next Meeting(s)

August 4, 2015

March 8, 2016

September 13, 2016