

BC Ferry Services Inc.

Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details

Date January 17, 2013
Time 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM
Location BC Ferries Head Office – Suite 500-1321 Blanshard Street

Attendance

Public Interest Representatives

Pat Danforth, Co-Chair
Susan Gallagher, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
Hugh Mitchell, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
Scott Heron, Disability Resource Centre
Barbara Schuster, Canadian National Institute for the Blind
Valerie Thoem, BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
Jane Sheaff, Seniors Serving Seniors
Ernie Stignant, Multiple Sclerosis Society

BC Ferries Representatives

Karen Tindall, Co-Chair, Director of Customer Care, Customer Care Department
Jeff Davidson, Director, Retail Services, Food and Retail Operations
Bruce Paterson, Fleet Technical Director, Engineering
Sheila O'Neill, Catering Representative, Central Coast
Garnet Renning, Customer Service & Sales Representative
Stephen Nussbaum, Regional Manager, Swartz Bay
Captain Chris Frappell, Marine Superintendent, South and Central Coast
Steve Shardlow, Training Manager, Terminals

Guests

Elke Kite, Customer Relations Manager, Customer Care Department

Regrets

Peter Simpson, Director Operational Strategy, Fleet Operations
Jeff Joyce, Director, Operational Training, Fleet Operations and Training
David Carroll, Director, Terminal Construction, Engineering
Paul Curtis, Manager, Web Services and Customer Information Network

Introductions

Co-Chairs Pat Danforth and Karen Tindall welcomed the members of the committee.

Review of minutes – February 9, 2012

Matters Arising

It was pointed out that under Loading Practices and under "ACTION" items in last meetings minutes, it should have been noted that loading procedures at Swartz Bay, Tsawwassen and Departure Bay terminals would be reviewed and reported on at the next meeting.

Matters Arising from Action Items

Staxi

Stephen Nussbaum advised the committee that the Staxi Dane Mover has been at Horseshoe Bay terminal for 6 months now and has received positive reviews from terminal staff. The Dane Mover was tested at Departure Bay and a new Dane Mover will be arriving there within a week. The unit will be sent to Duke Point and Swartz Bay for testing as well. S. Nussbaum told the committee that the units were expensive and that testing is necessary to confirm that the benefit outweighs the cost.

Karen Tindall advised the committee that wheelchair reservations, made through the Call Centre, were receiving positive feedback from customers. K. Tindall asked Jane Sheaff if seniors were aware of this service and if there was a better way to get the "word" out.

Standing Items

Loading Practices

Valerie Thoen commented that the accessibility loading practices at Departure Bay terminal has improved since last meeting, specifically with the use of wand lighting.

Jane Sheaff put forth the question, how do individuals with accessibility needs identify themselves at the terminal?

Stephen Nussbaum replied that customers should tell the ticket agent they require special loading near an elevator. Customers then may be asked to put their car flashers on, and may also be handed a card to display on their dash to help loading officers identify these customers during the loading process.

Stephen Nussbaum asked the committee members for further feedback on any disability issues at the terminals. S. Nussbaum then suggested that he could be contacted via email to address any questions or concerns.

Induction Loop Technology

Karen Tindall advised the committee that the Vessel Refit Group, under John Dorman, is looking at meeting with companies who are currently using the induction loop technology. The plan going forward would be to look at implementing an Induction Loop Pilot project during the refit of the Spirit of British Columbia in 2015. K. Tindall also advised the committee that terminal implementation of the technology, specifically at ticket booths was still being looked at. A potential pilot project is currently being considered. Discussion ensued.

ACTION: K. Tindall or Paul Curtis will continue to update the committee on the progress of this project.

Vessel Developments

Bruce Paterson called via conference call to update the committee about two vessel replacement projects that are coming up, the Queen of Burnaby and the Queen of Nanaimo in 2016 and 2017. He also provided an update about the Cable Ferry project targeted for the Buckley Bay-Denman Island route.

Retirement of the Queen of Burnaby and Queen of Nanaimo 2016/17

BC Ferries was hoping for an agreement from the provincial government to build two identical large ships to replace these retiring vessels. B. Paterson advised that this does not seem to be the agreement that will take place, and that three smaller identical ships will most likely be built instead. Bruce advised that each of the three ships will most likely have one overhead passenger lounge and an open vehicle deck similar to that of the MV Skeena Queen. Each ship will be equipped with two elevators, an LSA slide for emergency evacuation and a light galley for food service and retail space.

Bruce then asked the committee for any further suggestions about the accessibility of the vessels prior to their construction.

Pat Danforth suggested that all comments and issues previously brought forth by the committee on tours of vessels should be incorporated into these new ships. Pat specifically referred to way-finding signage, wheelchair accessibility and Induction Loop Technology. Pat also mentioned that having 3 vessels all being built almost identical to one another is helpful to individuals traveling with a disability and mobility issues.

Cable Ferry Update

B. Paterson advised that the cable ferry will be a simple build, similar to a barge. It will have 2 unisex bathrooms, no stairs, and one lounge for passenger seating. Two new berths at each terminal will be constructed in order to accommodate the new ferry. This will involve an expansion of the passenger pick up and drop off area for buses at Buckley Bay terminal. Trial runs are expected to take place in the summer of 2014, with the full service anticipated to commence in October of 2014.

Spirit Class – Mid-Life Upgrade

Jeff Davidson provided updates about these mid-life upgrades. These vessels are now 22 years old. A mid-life upgrade usually takes place halfway through the expected 40 year life span of a vessel. The mid-life Spirit Class vessel upgrades will be their largest upgrade. The goal during the refit process is to keep these vessels as safe as possible, and as comfortable as possible, but not at a "cruise ship" standard.

J. Davidson advised that the passenger areas will change in design standard, with a focus on refreshing – not replacing the design. J. Davidson brought in several carpet samples to the meeting for the committee to provide input on color and pattern styles. Several members provided feedback about how color contrasts and floor patterns were helpful when leaving and entering different areas on the ship. Susan Gallagher said that the carpets are good on the Spirit Class vessels for this, however it is harder to differentiate carpet and floor colors on the Coastal Class vessels. J. Davidson confirmed that color contrasts for transition areas are being considered with accessibility concerns in mind.

The vessels upgrades will mirror each other. The upgrades will include modernization to life saving equipment through the wider use of visual aids and audio. There will also be the consideration of an integrated communication system including wireless internet and televisions. Further discussion ensued.

ACTION: Bruce Paterson/Jeff Davidson to continue to provide updates to the members of the committee regarding the status of this project.

Terminal Developments

Westview Powell River/ Little River Comox Terminal Upgrades

Karen Tindall provided an update on behalf of David Carroll. K. Tindall advised that upgrades to both Westview and Little River Terminals will take place from January 14th – March 10th, 2014. The shut-down will be for approximately 8 weeks. Little River terminal will remain closed until February 8th. The service options planned during this shut-down will be:

- Scheduled sailings between Departure Bay and Saltery Bay and Saltery Bay and Little River
- Water taxi service for foot passengers between Texada Island and Powell River
- Scheduled vehicle/passenger sailings will be offered between Texada Island and Saltery Bay
- Shuttle service will be provided to terminals for foot passengers traveling between Departure Bay Nanaimo and Little River Comox, as well as from Saltery Bay, Powell River to Westview Powell River.

Public consultation open houses regarding the terminal upgrades will be held in February 2013. BC Ferries will provide customers with extensive notification as to when the change to service will take place.

Alert Bay

K. Tindall advised work at Alert Bay will commence April 28, 2013 with the ramp replacement project and will include a separated walkway.

Other Business

Review of Shipley Letter

K. Tindall sent a copy of the letter for committee members to review prior to the meeting. Members, Ernie Stignant and Valerie Thoem provided feedback about the letter. The committee agreed that better employee training for dealing with customers who have accessibility issues could be implemented into employee training. Customer service seemed to lack in the situation that occurred and the customer complaint could have possibly been prevented if staff had provided better communication at the time. No changes to BC Ferries' wheelchair accessibility policy or online communication was recommended.

Review of Customer Complaint

Karen Tindall presented notes from a current customer complaint about the BC Ferries Disabled Status Card. Elke Kite further explained her interactions with this customer. The customer has taken this complaint to a settlement conference that will take place in the spring of 2013. The customer recommends that employee training about the BC Ferries' Disabled Status Identification Card should change. The customer maintains that employees should be required to ask every customer who arrives at the ticket booth with a wheelchair placard visible in their car or who asks for elevator access, if they are aware of the card and the discount it provides.

K. Tindall also advised the committee that the BC Ferries' Disabled Status card is not integrated with other government programs. BC Ferries is looking into the possibility integrating with the provincial government's new BC Services Card, to provide both the BC Senior discount and the Disabled Status discount by simply swiping it at the POS system at the terminal.

Review of Accessibility Wording on Website

Karen Tindall asked the committee to provide feedback on the wording for the accessibility information on the BC Ferries' website. As a result of a customer complaint K. Tindall and her team are looking at changing the wording to be more specific and clear for customers.

The committee decided that including information on the website for individuals who are traveling with temporary mobility restrictions due to an accident or illness would be beneficial. This information could include accessibility loading procedures at terminals and facts about the Disabled Status Card.

Review of Customer Complaint

Karen Tindall and Elke Kite advised the committee about another customer complaint regarding an expectation of preferential loading (first on / first off) to attend weekly medical appointments.

Training

Steve Shardlow advised the committee of the SEA standardized employee training program currently being implemented across the fleet. This training consists of a combination of electronic, self study and on site training (vessel and terminal specific). This standardized training across the fleet provides employees with hands on experience and the benefit of shared information. S. Shardlow advised that deck training has been implemented and terminal training programs are set to be implemented by 2014. Engineering and Catering are expected by 2016.

In addition to SEA training, the previously raised concept of pairing employees with individuals with a disability to tour terminals and vessels to experience the journey from the perspective of a customer, will be reviewed by the training department. The purpose of this training exercise is to provide better customer service training for interacting with customers who have accessibility needs at terminals.

Next Meeting

July 17, 2013