

Meeting Details

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

Attendance

Public Interest Representatives

Scott Heron, Co-Chair, Spinal Cord Injury BC
Hugh Mitchell, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
Marnie Essery, Intermunicipal Advisory Committee on Disability Issues
Barbara Schuster, CNIB
Valerie Thoen, Independent
Hanna Leavitt, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
Pat Danforth, Board Member, BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
Jane Sheaff, Seniors Serving Seniors

BC Ferries Representatives

Karen Tindall, Director of Customer Care, Customer Care Department
Garnet Renning, Customer Service & Sales Representative, Customer Care
Stephen Nussbaum, Regional Manager, Swartz Bay
David Carroll, Director, Terminal Construction, Engineering
Bruce Paterson, Fleet Technical Director, Engineering
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
Leah Robinson, Customer Service & Sales Representative, Customer Care
Deborah Fraess, Independent

Regrets

Darin Guenette, Manager, Public Affairs
Sheila O'Neill, Catering Superintendent, Central Coast
Kay Gimbel, Mate, Intermediate
Captain Robert Nelson, Captain, Coastal Inspiration
Darren Brown, Project Manager, Unified Disability Signage
Brad Judson, Manager SMS, Safety
Jeff Davidson, Director, Retail Services, Food and Retail Operations
Les Chan, Disability Resource Centre
Mary Ellen Meunier, Seniors Serving Seniors
Mary Kay Kennedy, CNIB

Introductions

Co-Chair Karen Tindall welcomed the members of the committee
Review of Minutes – February 17, 2015

Matters arising from the minutes

Valerie Thoem noted the information presented on the Washington State Ferries on Page 2, Paragraph 5 was incorrect. She provided a written copy with the following corrections:

Prior to reaching the toll booth, passengers are given a card to complete which asks the following questions:

- 1. Senior passengers are requested to indicate their age and type of assistance they will require by the ship's crew in case of an emergency.*
- 2. Handicapped passengers are asked to indicate the nature of their disability, and what assistance they will require in case of an emergency.*

The cards are presented at the toll booth, and passengers in both categories are entitled to a 10% discount on their fare. Passengers are encouraged to contact the purser when they board the vessel, and indicate where they will be seated during the voyage. The Washington State Ferries provide two areas in the bow of the vessel and two aft, designated for the use of handicapped passengers. These locations assist the crew to quickly locate passengers requiring assistance should and emergency arise.

Karen Tindall (KT) said that Darren Brown is looking into including the contents of announcements on the BCF website. KT will follow-up with Darren Brown and let Scott Heron know via email. KT said that the new content for the announcements have not been finalized yet. KT said it is valuable to have the information on the website and will follow-up when the content is ready to post.

ACTION:

- Karen Tindall will follow-up on posting the announcements on the website once they have been updated.

Standing Items

Hugh Mitchell (HM) brought up an issue regarding digital signage by reading an email he wrote. HM said that a few months ago while he was waiting to board the ferry at Tsawwassen Terminal to go to Swartz Bay, he heard an announcement. He had to ask his wife what was being said and she explained it was for the Nanaimo ferry. Then a few minutes later another announcement came on, HM had to ask his wife again and she said it was for Swartz Bay. HM said he looked at the sign and it was flashing with "Nanaimo Boarding Now". There was no such notice for the sailing going to Victoria. HM said the ferry system has the capability of putting a message on the screen and he would like to see written captioning on the screen when the announcements are being made. He wondered why it was not done for Victoria.

Stephen Nussbaum (SN) said that he was unsure why the message failed for the sailing to Victoria. He said the message is automatic; all the terminals with the capability already have the messages in place. SN said the tower enters when the vessel has arrived and a message will appear on the screen.

SN said this issue is separate from the digital signage program. HM said this seems low-tech, but good for the interim. SN said it may be a matter of following up with the terminals to ensure the message is presented at the right time.

KT asked HM where he was waiting for the ferry. HM said he was inside the food area and didn't see the announcement. Pat Danforth said it sounds like it may be a training issue and it would be beneficial to know when it happened in order to follow-up with the staff member that was working at the time. She said that it is a convenience to passengers and also helps those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Hanna Leavitt asked if there is a checklist that it can be added to the training. Steve Shardlow said yes, but he could double-check with the trainers to see the level of details in the training and checklists.

Melanie Lucia (ML) asked what happens in the system when there are multiple vessels loading at the same time. She wondered if there is more than one controller working, and one of them flips the switch, does it override the other person. HM wondered if a similar thing can happen on the ferry. KT and ML said it was something to look into. KT said the unified digital signage program will work on signage at the terminals first and then the vessels.

Melanie Lucia asked Hugh Mitchell what he expects to see on the screen while onboard the ferry. HM replied the safety messages and a message for passengers to return to their vehicle. He added all the verbal announcements should be written on a screen. David Carroll said that passengers are a captive audience and there may be cues from other customers (i.e. getting up to go down to the vehicle).

KT said BCF is implementing Induction Loop Technology and the Queen of Oak Bay will be the first ship to have it. She said it would help people with cochlear implants and hearing aids.

Loading Practices

Elevators:

Stephen Nussbaum (SN) had a look at the feedback for loading practices and noticed that the largest issue was the lack of elevator service on board the vessels. A lot of the elevators have been out of service. Therefore, the number of elevators available for customers to be parked close to is reduced. At one point, the Queen of Cowichan (QCOW) had no elevators in service so other arrangements had to be made to accommodate customers. Currently, there is one elevator in service on the QCOW.

SN said there are complaints from customers who don't have elevator access when needed as there are limited spots near elevators. However, there are nearly as many compliments about wheelchair services as there are complaints.

SN said communication about the elevator access is provided to customer when they make a reservation and they are also notified at the terminal.

Captain Chris Frappell said on the ship employees would speak to customers who look like they may need an elevator. Employees told customers the elevators are out of service and confirmed whether they still wanted to travel. There were also portable toilets on the QCOW vehicle deck to accommodate customers who needed to travel on a specific sailing.

Terminal Issues:

SN mentioned one new item came up during his review: at the Swartz Bay terminal, washrooms on the lower level were being closed at 7:00pm instead of staying open until 9:00pm. This was done as a way to expedite the cleaning and closing procedures. SN said closing washrooms early is unacceptable. He said this was happening during the shoulder season and was brought to our attention by a customer.

At the last meeting, SN addressed the courtesy seat pilot project happening at the Horseshoe Bay terminal. He said there are now four courtesy seats in the waiting room and the pilot has been a success. It will be rolled out to other terminals as it is in the budget.

Priority Boarding:

SN said priority boarding should be called safe, coordinated boarding – as it may not guarantee first on/off. For example, staff has found loading wheelchairs is best done before large groups, while offloading is best done after a large group. SN said this will be looked at after the summer period.

SN said 400 University of Victoria engineering students have been issued a challenge to create a design to help move wheelchairs more efficiently through accessible terminals. The students have been given a lot of information about the scope of the project and will come up with the proposals starting in September 2015. Karen Tindall, Melanie Lucia and Stephen Nussbaum are overseeing the project. KT said they hope to announce the winners' suggestions at the next meeting.

Deborah Fraess (DF) said lately she noticed the onboard staff seem much better trained. She spoke to a customer who had a scooter and she said they had nowhere to go onboard without being in the way. DF mentioned this customer travels the Horseshoe Bay route. The customer brings their own bag lunch because there isn't enough space to eat in the cafeteria. Also, they find that the quiet room is closed most of the time.

Marnie Essery (MN) said she is concerned about the loading at Swartz Bay on the way to Vancouver. MN said she arrived over an hour before the sailing, with her Disabled Status Identification card and sign showing she needed to be parked near an elevator. On May 27, 2015, she was parked in lane #4 (and in lane #5 on June 23, 2015) at Swartz Bay terminal and there was no one in lane #1. When she was loaded, she didn't go first and she noticed the traffic attendants weren't looking for her pass. MN said she wasn't parked close to an elevator. She had to navigate her way around vehicles to get to the elevator. MN said she wouldn't have been able to make it to the elevator if her dad wasn't there to help. By the time the employees noticed MN was trying to get to the elevator, it was too late to really help.

MN said in the past she has had priority boarding with her wheelchair pass and has been parked in lane #1. MN wonders if there has been a policy change. This problem has now happened to her multiple times - twice at Swartz Bay and once at Horseshoe Bay. MN said the terminal staff doesn't seem to be putting wheelchairs in the right area. MN explained this creates two problems: 1. visual – staff is not looking for the pass; and 2. since there are so many cars on the ferry, customers can be stuck in their car permanently for the duration of the crossing.

Stephen Nussbaum (SN) said there hasn't been a policy change and he can look into it. KT asked what time MN travelled. MN said she had the tickets and could provide them. MN said there were two cars parked by the elevator that did not have a handicap placard on them. HM suggested to MN that she could notify the ticket agent that she usually goes in lane #1. MN said she asked the ticket agent both times. SN said he didn't know why this was happening and that he would look into it.

Bruce Paterson (BP) said last Friday (July 31, 2015) he was travelling on the 7:00 am sailing from Swartz Bay to Tsawwassen. He was in the reserved lane because he had an ALT card. BP said the person right in front of him had a handicap placard and their hazard lights flashing. BP said he could see the lights flashing in front of him and he had to flag down the traffic attendant and get them to put the customer in the correct lane. SN said with specifics he can look into those instances. HM asked if the loading crew positions have high turnover. Capitan Chris Frappell said yes, also this time of year there is seasonal staff and they may have the training but not the experience.

KT said the summer constitutes the 100 busiest days of the year. It is good to have feedback to remind the new staff of what they learned. KT said feedback is valuable especially from seasoned travellers (members of the committee). She said the quicker the employee knows how they negatively affected the customer the more beneficial it is for them. Scott Heron said yes; please communicate the information when things happen.

Onboard Customer Service

KT asked if there any questions for Melanie Lucia (ML) in regards to onboard services. ML said she made a note about the scooter issue as they are different from wheelchairs and will have a look into it to find out the right specs.

Vessel Developments

Bruce Paterson (BP) provided an update on the upcoming vessel replacements and mid-life upgrades.

New Builds

BP explained the cable ferry, under construction by SeaSpan in Vancouver, is scheduled for delivery in mid-August 2015. There will be a month of testing, trials and training that will take place before the official roll-out in mid-September 2015.

The Intermediate Class ferries have been called the Salish Class with the following vessel names: Salish Eagle, Salish Orca and Salish Raven. BP said these vessels will replace the Queen of Burnaby on Route 17 (Comox-Powell River) and the Queen of Nanaimo on Route 9 (Tsawwassen-Southern Gulf Islands). The vessels will operate on liquefied natural gas (LNG). BP explained the vessels have hydraulic elevators that are wide enough for wheelchairs and a pallet for storing. The decks are sloped by 6° from the middle of the deck to the end. He said the elevators are located in the mid-section where the deck is flat. The construction is being done in Poland at the Remontowa Shipyards.

BP said there is potential for replacement of the North Island Princess on Route 18 (Powell River-Texada) and K-class ferries. Using LNG at this time for the new small ferries is not feasible because of where they operate. BP said they are considering putting a passenger lounge on one side of the vehicle deck as opposed to having an elevator up to the passenger deck.

Mid-Life Upgrades

BP said the Queen of Oak Bay went through the first half of the ¾ life upgrade. This was a classic refit of mechanics with steel repairs and piping renewal. This fall will be the next phase with an upgrade to customer-facing areas. BP said they would be looking at the elevators, gift shop and lighting. The Queen of Surrey will go through a similar upgrade to be fit for the next 15 years of service.

In regards to the C-Class vessel upgrades, the Queen of Coquitlam, Queen of Alberni, and Queen of Cowichan all need some updating with the program starting this September 2015. BP said all three vessels are due for retirement in 2020. The elevators on the Queen of Cowichan need to be totally rebuilt starting in the fall.

BP said the mid-life upgrade (MLU) on the S-Class vessels has been delayed by one year to 2017. Three shipyards have been shortlisted to complete the project, including one local shipyard. The project is ongoing and the engineering/contracting phase has been extended.

BP said the MLU on the Queen of Capilano turned out well. On the lounge deck new life-saving equipment has been installed. In the event of an emergency, people would be assembled in the lounge and evacuate from there. BP explained the vessel now has gallery decks to expand the vehicle capacity. This vessel travels on a commuter route between Horseshoe Bay and Bowen Island. The galleries expand the vehicle capacity by 15-20 cars. BP said there is no elevator access from the outboard side of the vessel on the gallery decks. Also, there is not a lot of room for passengers to get out of their car when parked on these decks. However, BP mentioned the crossing time is only 15 minutes so most people will stay in their car for the trip.

The Queen of Cumberland, sister ship to the Capilano, will also be undergoing upgrades to be completed in May 2016. BP said the scope of the project is similar to the Capilano with a few differences. The Queen of Cumberland will not have gallery decks because there are hoistable platforms. BP mentioned the Cumberland will be getting life-saving equipment for the lounge. The MLU is scheduled to start in November 2015.

BP discussed the MLU for the Skeena Queen that travels between Swartz Bay and Fulford is scheduled for completion in May 2017. There will be upgrades to the four lounges on the vehicle deck. BP said they are looking at adding a pet area with table seating. The washrooms will be reconfigured to include a more conventional handicap-friendly unit. Pat Danforth (PD) said she has used the washroom on the Skeena Queen in the past and would never do it again. She said it is not usable for people who cannot use stairs or get over curbs. BP said he is looking to get rid of the curb outside of the washroom.

PD asked how it works for walk-ons with reduced vision and mobility on the Queen of Cumberland and the Queen of Capilano. BP said there are limitations on the improvements that can be made on these vessels. He said on the Capilano walk-ons are boarded into the lounge at Horseshoe Bay and then they would access the elevator from the vehicle deck by following the painted lines that lead to it. Stephen Nussbaum suggested letting BCF know ahead of time when travelling from Horseshoe Bay to Bowen Island so an employee can help those who need assistance with boarding. He also suggested bringing an escort on that route.

Break – 2:15-2:30pm

Terminal Developments

David Carroll (DC) provided an update on terminal accessibility and parking accessibility (included a handout).

DC first mentioned the Sointula ramp has just been installed on Route 25 that services between Port McNeil, Sointula and Alert Bay. DC said the goal is to have a standardized ramp between all three terminals. There is a separate area for foot passengers on either side of the ramp and the ramp is now longer with a gentler grade. DC said they are trying to upgrade one ramp per year. The next project will be to replace the Chemainus ramp. DC said the Sointula terminal now has an accessible waiting room that includes a button to open the door.

DC said another project underway is completing the signage at Horseshoe Bay to improve information about getting around at the terminal. Also at the Alliford Bay and Skidegate terminals there is a unique set of graded concrete ramps. DC said the ferry has ramps on either end that line up with the ramp at the terminal. Since there are large tides in the North, the ramp tends to get slippery. Now the non-skid walkways have been improved and have a well-marked path that is easier to follow. DC said the draining and paving project at the Prince Rupert terminal is nearing completion. This project included: adding sidewalks, updating the parking area, and making safer walking areas with new signage. DC said he would bring some photos for the next meeting.

Upcoming projects:

DC said they are looking to improve accessibility at the Langdale terminal and will soon be requesting proposal designs. Currently, the foot passengers have to walk across the vehicle ramp and are being rushed to load and unload quickly before the cars. DC said the improvements will include a separate foot passenger waiting room and gangway to load the vessel – like the major routes. DC said the parking at the Langdale terminal also needs improvements. Currently the lanes to exit the parking lot merge with the lanes exiting the ferry.

DC mentioned there is an elevator/escalator project coming up in the next 2-3 years. BCF will be replacing most of the escalators at the terminals and upgrading the elevators. Other projects are also underway to increase accessibility.

DC presented the handout he provided to the committee titled Terminal Accessibility Parking Review.

DC said there are accessibility guidelines for the terminals to follow for parking stalls. The minimum amount of space for a standard accessible space is 3900mm (3.9m). In shared spaces there is a 2400mm (2.4m) stall, a 1500mm (1.5m) access aisle, and then another 2.4m parking stall. DC explained the minimum amount of space for an accessible van parking stall is 4600mm (4.6m). With the van parking they are looking at making an access aisle right beside the parking stall so the customer can use the aisle to make their way to the sidewalk. These stall dimensions were determined by the BC Ferries 'Accessible Terminal Facility Design Criteria'.

DC said that he also looked at the number of accessible parking stalls at the terminals. Based on the ADA standards, the minimum number of accessible parking stalls was determined for each terminal and DC was able to categorize which terminals were deficient. The top priority terminals include: Swartz Bay, Tsawwassen and Departure Bay. DC said moving forward they will look at the terminals and see how to revamp them to improve accessible parking. Stephen Nussbaum (SN) asked if this was the pay parking area or the pick-up/drop-off area. DC said principally long-term and short-term parking, not the drop-off zones.

Scott Heron (SH) said he recently held a Sunset Dinner Cruise event on the ferries. He said that there were 15 cars and everyone was in a wheelchair. They noticed that in both the short and long-term parking there were not enough accessible spaces. However, SH was able to coordinate the parking with Robbins Parking and they were able to accommodate all the people attending. DC said the guidelines for the number of accessible parking stalls needs to be evaluated.

SH said the priority needs to be the accessible van stalls and then add in the regular wheelchair stalls. Pat Danforth (PD) said there is an accessibility handbook that is available online that has guidelines. Hugh Mitchell (HM) asked what does the number of accessible stalls look like, what percentage are van accessible and what percentage are regular wheelchair stalls. SH thinks there should be some sensitivity training provided within his organization. For example, he does not need a lift so he would use a general wheelchair stall not a van lift stall.

SH said he does not have the numbers for the amount of people who would need a wheelchair spot versus a van spot. SH mentioned that increased accessibility will encourage people to travel - those who would not normally use the ferry will be more willing to if they are accessible.

PD wondered about the timeline for this parking project. DC said the timeline is about six months to one year; there is no specific time frame at this point. However, he will have more information at the next meeting.

Training

Steve Shardlow (SS) provided an update on training adding that most of the training is done now. There are 329 new hires, and 64 new hires in Nanaimo alone – this is a 33% increase from last year. He said after the training is complete, new employees are expected to continue learning and have a checklist to keep track of the skills they have learned. It is the employees' responsibility to follow-up with their supervisors and review procedures they need help with.

SS said they are looking at doing more online training for dangerous goods and occupational health and safety. There will be upgrades and new programs created to keep up with Transport Canada. As regulations change, there will need to be an update on training procedures. SS mentioned there will need to be a new training plan in place for the new Salish Class vessels that use LNG. He said there will be onboard education and trainers will go to Poland to become experts on the vessels.

SS discussed the Simulation Training Centre that has now been accredited. Since the center is recognized, employees from other companies (not just BCF employees) can be trained there. There are three training facilities: Departure Bay, Swartz Bay and Tsawwassen. SS said currently courses are only being run internally but they are looking to other companies to use the center.

SS said the rollout for the Standardized Education Program was on April 1 for three areas: deck/engineering, catering and terminal management. The programs for deck training and terminal management are completely rolled out and the catering is coming.

Hanna Leavitt asked if there is some accountability for the catering staff to complete the checklist and show they are asking for refresher training. SS explained the trainer sits down with the employee on clearance day and gives the employee the checklist. The employee is then expected to complete the list. SS said there is no accountability to review the list. Melanie Lucia (ML) said seasonal employees have a mid-year performance review and the checklist is part of the conversation, as it shows the employees level of engagement. This information is used to determine whether the employee will stay on, become a casual or come back next year. ML said catering has implemented a peer support program where employees are assigned to a mentoring Chief Steward. SS added the trainer does emphasize the checklist must be done.

Other Business

Sunset Dinner Cruise

Scott Heron (SH) opened up his Facebook page to show the committee some photos of the Spinal Cord Injury BC Sunset Dinner Cruise event. SH is a peer support specialist who does counseling with newly injured individuals. He also helps organize peer support events to help people adjust, adapt and thrive in their community after an injury. With the sunset dinner cruise, groups from both Swartz Bay and Tsawwassen boarded the ferry and had

dinner in the buffet. SH said there were 40 people that needed to be accommodated and the crew was very helpful. The event was a success and there has been phenomenal feedback from those who attended.

Hanna Leavitt (HL) said that she represented people with vision loss. She said communication is a problem on the ferry, especially with signage. For example, HL was unaware that the water in the bathroom was not for drinking. She said other people would know because there is a sign, but for people who cannot read the sign, there should be another way to get the information to them. HL suggested having mini information pages on the website where people can go to see specific information related to individual disabilities. She also recommended posting an audio clip about ferry services for people who are visually impaired. Karen Tindall (KT) said there is an area on the website for accessibility information but it is not broken down into mini information pages specific to each accessibility requirement. HL suggested having different information that distinguishes between different disabilities.

KT said she would embrace the concept. KT said the website is getting updated so making those changes shouldn't be a problem. However, KT said she would need committee members to provide information that is relevant to each of their organizations. HL said she would check with the different groups and get the information.

Next Meeting(s)

March 8, 2016

November 16, 2016

Going forward, there will not be any meetings in mid-summer