

Meeting Details

Date March 8, 2016
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
Barbara Schuster, CNIB
Hanna Leavitt, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
Les Chan, Disability Resource Centre

BC Ferries Representatives

Karen Tindall, Director of Customer Care, Customer Care Department
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
Melanie Lucia, Director, Catering Operations
Darin Guenette, Manager, Public Affairs

Guests

Leah Robinson, Customer Service & Sales Representative, Customer Care

Regrets

Jeff Davidson, Director, Retail Services, Food and Retail Operations
Steve Shardlow, Training Manager, Terminals
Garnet Renning, Customer Service & Sales Representative, Customer Care
Mary Ellen Meunier, Seniors Serving Seniors
Mary Kay Kennedy, CNIB
Marnie Essery, Intermunicipal Advisory Committee on Disability Issues
Valerie Thoem, Independent
Pat Danforth, Board Member, BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
Jane Sheaff, Seniors Serving Seniors
Deborah Fraess, Independent

Introductions

Co-Chair Karen Tindall (KT) welcomed the members of the committee and reviewed the emergency response plan.

Bruce Paterson requested to revise the agenda and present after the break – accepted by KT.

Review of Minutes – August 4, 2015 meeting.

Matters arising from the minutes

Melanie Lucia (ML) asked that Sheila O’Neil, Catering Superintendent Central Coast, be removed from the regrets list as she is no longer on the committee and was replaced by ML.

Hanna Leavitt (HL) said she had some questions about GPS beacons at the Tsawwassen Terminal that she would like to discuss during the meeting.

Standing Items

Loading Practices

Stephen Nussbaum (SN) reviewed the report from last meeting and determined that not much has changed in regards to loading practices and issues. In the last quarter, there were not as many elevator issues in comparison to the previous quarter. SN said vehicles are being loaded well – as close to the elevator as possible for those who need it. There have been compliments from passengers about employees being helpful during loading/unloading and he believes this shows an increased awareness from staff.

SN said the number of wheelchair reservations for this quarter has been average. He said the reservation service seems to be working. Twelve more wheelchairs have been added to the inventory across the fleet. Ideally, there should be 3 wheelchairs on the vessel and 5 per terminal. Occasionally customers had to wait for assistance. This issue is more prevalent during off-peak times when there are fewer staff members available to assist.

Scott Heron (SH) asked if there is a report that shows the number of instances when crew members provided assistance for a passenger who did not have a reservation. SN said the only report is through the reservation system to see how many passengers made wheelchair reservations. SN said the Captain requires a total number of passengers requiring assistance (self-declaring at the ticket booth) prior to departing, but the count does not break it down into specific types of assistance requests or disabilities.

KT mentioned that BC Ferries is producing self-declaration cards to be handed out by the ticket agents when customers purchase a disabled fare to help spread awareness.

SH said he was impressed with the crew’s awareness when he has been onboard the ferry. He noticed crew showed an openness to provide assistance for those who need it and staff were sensitive to the passengers’ needs.

SH said committee members should help their organizations understand what to expect when loading the ferry to aid in the loading process.

SH asked BC Ferries if there had been any passengers who have had objections to self-declaring. KT said that to our knowledge there have not been any passengers who have objected.

Captain Chris Frappell (CF) said Transport Canada has certified all BCF evacuation systems to handle all passengers. The reason passengers need to self-declare is because the systems may not be able to evacuate passengers as quickly if staff are unaware of passengers' needs. CF said the vessel needs to be evacuated in 30 minutes. CF said the fleet standard for life-saving systems (LSA-Life Saving Australia) is slides that go into rafts. CF said evacuation needs to happen as safely and as efficiently as possible.

Hanna Leavitt (HL) asked if the cards will be available in large print or braille. KT said BCF has not decided on a design yet but she will look into it.

ACTION:

- Karen Tindall will look into card designs with braille.

HL asked if guide dogs are still not part of the emergency rescue plan. Captain Chris Frappell (CF) said unfortunately no, as animals cannot be accommodated on the rafts. CF said the ship Master has the complete discretion on how to proceed during an emergency; they would make the final decision at the time.

University of Victoria (UVic) Accessibility Project:

Stephen Nussbaum (SN) said last semester (Sept-Dec) 400 UVic engineering students participated in a challenge to come up with an innovative solution to move wheelchairs more efficiently through accessible terminals. Solutions included: wheelchair tracking devices, BCF website and reservation enhancements, smart phone applications to help with the booking process, wheelchair movers (e.g. vehicles, moving sidewalks), and booking incentive programs (booking during off-peak times). SN said the students' presentations of their designs took place before Christmas. A team of engineers and BCF staff watched the presentations and voted for the winners. SN explained the criteria to determine the winners were based on classroom criteria:

- 25% - Communication of Idea on Poster
- 25% - Presentation of Idea
- 50% - Technical Merits of Idea

BCF kept all the submissions and will evaluate them all again from a more technical standpoint. SN said the BCF judges are meeting next week and will report back to the Accessibility Committee with the findings. SN said it is exciting to have fresh ideas. Melanie Lucia (ML) explained since there was so many presentations not everyone may have seen the same solutions. Re-evaluating all the submissions again provides an opportunity to make sure good ideas do not get missed.

Hugh Mitchell (HM) mentioned the students would have come into the project without prior preconceptions about feasibility or limitations of ideas. KT said CanAssist UVic also helped with judging the presentations. She said they brought a relevant perspective to the panel because they had a background in accessibility which the other evaluators didn't necessarily have.

Induction Loop System

Melanie Lucia (ML) reviewed the installation of the Induction Loop System on the Queen of Oak Bay. She said this project was championed by Hugh Mitchell. ML explained the Induction Loop System magnetically transmits sounds to passengers with T-coils (telephone-coils) in their hearing aids.

ML said the Induction Loop System has been installed at three different locations on the Queen of Oak Bay. First, at the two cashier stations in the cafeteria - there is a speaker above the monitor that the cashier speaks into and it transmits sounds. Second, ML said there are two designated tables in the cafeteria that also have an Induction Loop box for passengers to hear the announcements. Lastly, ML said there is a copper wire that has been installed in the forward lounge so passengers with T-coils can hear the announcements anywhere on the carpeted area in the lounge.

Hugh Mitchell (HM) explained the process further. He said people who are hard of hearing can't separate sounds as the sound waves pass through the air. HM said the little box or wire on the floor tied into a microphone creates an electromagnetic force. Hearing aids and cochlear implants have a coil in them that can pick up the electromagnetic force and then transmits it into sound. HM explained especially in the cafeteria where there is so much background noise, the Induction Loop System makes a difference. As long as passengers with hearing aids and cochlear implants turn on their T-switch, they will be able to hear the cashier and announcements. HM said the hard of hearing community needs to be educated on how the T-switch works.

SN asked if the microphone at the cashier desk is always turned on. ML said that it will always be on. HM said once passengers see the sign on the side of the cash register and turn on the T-switch they will be able to hear. Barbara Schuster (BS) asked if all hearing aids have the T-switch. HM said that most hearing aids and cochlear implants have them but not all of them. HM mentioned that some doctors tell patients they will not need the T-switch and he believes medical professionals also need to be educated on the benefits of the T-switch. Les Chan (LC) asked how many stations have the Induction Loop System on the Queen of Oak Bay. ML said two tables in the cafeteria (each can sit 4 people), the two cashier stations in the cafeteria, and the large one in the forward lounge.

ML explained since the system is not installed at every table in the cafeteria, new training will come into effect to educate staff. For example, staff can suggest alternative seating for passengers who do not need the induction loop. ML said so far there have not been any issues with customers not being to access the table if they need to. ML suggested that the layperson might not necessarily know what the sign means. HM suggested adding a small note that explains what the symbol means on the box. Captain Chris Frappell (CF) suggested that most people would understand the sign.

ML asked HM if he has been onboard the Queen of Oak Bay to experience the system. HM said he has not been able to get onboard yet. ML said BCF would arrange a travel pass for HM to experience the system. HM asked if the website has the induction loop information on the website, KT said it will be added to the accessibility page.

HM said he was concerned that the new Induction Loop System was just a pilot project that would not be added to the rest of the fleet until feedback is collected from customers. Scott Heron (SH) asked how to get to the word out to the community that the Induction Loop System is installed and feedback is needed. HM said he put the word out to community representatives he is in-touch with. Darin Guenette (DG) asked if there were criteria for evaluating the success of the Induction Loop System.

KT clarified to the whole committee: the Induction Loop System is not a pilot project. As stated in the news release, the system is the new standard for all vessels moving forward. KT said feedback on ways to make improvements to the system would be helpful if passengers have any suggestions. The Queen of Oak Bay was the first vessel to have the system because it was undergoing a major refit. The system is expected to be added to the other vessels as they go in for a major refits. The first Spirit-Class vessel will be upgraded April 2018.

SH said the Induction Loop system would be an excellent topic to include in members' newsletters. KT suggested that DG's team can help write the article. BS asked if emails could be sent with the article attached. KT said articles would be written upon request so specific themes can be targeted for each specific group and article.

David Carroll (DC) asked if the system could be added to the toll booths by finding a way to plug the box in. HM explained a handheld unit can be brought anywhere and placed on a counter (e.g. at a hotel – a guest services agent can speak into a microphone attached to the induction loop box). HM suggested getting in touch with Advanced Listening Systems who installed the system on the ferry to see if it would work at the toll booth and be able to transmit signals through the glass.

HM thanked Bruce Paterson for his perseverance in overcoming challenges and making the Induction Loop System happen. HM said he is very happy with the improvements.

Terminal Developments

David Carroll (DC) highlighted different projects going on at the terminals.

DC said an active lift gangway that is hydraulically operated was installed at Departure Bay. DC explained that the hydraulics take the full load - including the weight of the gangway and people. Therefore, it can be raised and lowered with people on it. DC said this is beneficial because now people do not have to get off for the gangway to be adjusted to the vessel list.

DC said the Sointula berth rebuild is complete with walkways on the sides of the loading ramp and smooth transitions between the shore and the ramp. This ramp can also be raised and lowered without having to vacate it. DC explained the goal is to standardize all terminal ramps so the passenger experience can be the same at every terminal.

Upcoming Projects

DC said at Tsawwassen berth 1 is being rebuilt so different vessels can access it including the new Salish Class vessels. DC said the Tsawwassen berth upgrade should be completed before the busy summer season so it can be utilized during summer.

Swartz Bay and Tsawwassen way-finding projects are progressing through the terminals. DC said BCF is working towards standardized signage that includes braille.

DC said designs for Denman West, Denman East, Heriot Bay (Quadra Island), and Whaletown (Cortes Island) washroom buildings are being replaced and modernized. DC said Terminal Operations are the owners of the projects and they work with direction from the Terminal and Vessel Operations departments. This project is coming in the next 6 months to one year.

Langdale Master Plan Project:

DC said there is a series of projects to upgrade the Langdale terminal that are currently in the early design stages. BCF is working through a business case with a 2018 timeline for construction. DC explained there will be a new foot passenger ticketing building and elevator/escalator improvements. DC said right now the Langdale terminal foot passenger walkway is exposed to the environment so it slows down the loading process. As part of the upgrades the gangway will be enclosed. Another part of the project is reorganizing the exiting lanes at Langdale for a safer unloading process. DC said there will be significant pieces of work done in the next few years to improve the Langdale Terminal. DC said in the future the terminal will be more efficient, safer, and friendlier for passengers.

Prince Rupert Trestle Replacement:

DC said the timber trestle at the Prince Rupert terminal will be replaced. DC said right now there is a long walk from the building to the vessel. The new walkway will be enclosed steel with a rest point halfway down the walkway. DC said this replacement project will be happening in the next year or two.

Elevators/Escalators:

DC said there is an Elevator/escalator project that is going to business case. DC explained the project will involve modernizing and replacing elevators, and replacing escalators at most major terminals (Swartz Bay, Tsawwassen, and Horseshoe Bay). DC said BCF will incorporate accessibility guidelines during the replacement. DC said this project will be taking place over the next couple years. SN said elevators are very important because they are really the best option for changing elevation at a terminal. DC said there will be escalator standardization at the terminal. DC explained that standardizing equipment increases efficiency and routine for the user.

SPACE:

DC said Terminal Construction is undergoing changes to the organization of the department and the terminal development plans. DC said the new group is called Strategic Planning & Community Engagement (SPACE) with Mark Collins as the Vice President. The group focusses on producing strategic plans and engaging with coastal communities.

Standardization:

DC said that BCF is moving towards standardization in multiple areas. DC said that standardization of vessels means that they can be moved from one route to another and still be able to fit in the terminal berths. Standardization involves defining plans and requirements for areas at the terminal and onboard the vessels.

Captain Chris Frappell (CF) said BCF is moving towards a standard fleet. CF explained that BCF is trying to achieve a fleet comprised of only six different types of vessels. DC said standardization provides a better experience for people on the vessel and at the terminal. DC said the SPACE team is working on the master plans to get everything correct.

Break – 2:45-3:00pm

Vessel Developments

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

New Builds

BP said the Baynes Sound Connector is up and running on route between Buckley Bay and Denman Island.

Salish Class Vessels:

BP said the new Intermediate Class vessels have been named: Salish Orca, Salish Eagle and Salish Raven. The new vessels are currently under construction at Remontowa Shipbuilding in Poland. Training is underway for natural gas for both shore staff and crew. BP said the training is a substantial effort and the US Maritime Academy is helping supply BCF with training simulators. BP said the Salish Class vessels will feature First Nations artwork by three different artists – one for each vessel. Darin Guenette said the naming contest that took place for these three vessels included suggestions for the class name (e.g. Salish) and descriptor name (e.g. Eagle).

BP said on the new vessels, 145 cars will be split between the upper and lower decks. Since the traffic is variable, the lower deck opens up to accommodate more vehicles down below. BP explained the overheight vehicles will be accommodated on the upper deck due to the structure of the vessel. BP mentioned there is a deck slope issue, but it is less aggressive than other vessels in the fleet. BP said there are accessible washrooms on all decks.

BP said the passenger deck is divided into two areas: the lounge and full cafeteria. Induction Loop technology will be included on the new vessels. BP said the Salish Orca has been launched and named in a ceremony that took place at the dockyard in Poland. The Salish Orca will be in dry-dock in April/May for a full paint job. HM asked how long the vessel can sail without filling up with fuel. BP said the vessel will fill-up about twice a week.

NC2 – Near Coastal 2 Voyages:

BP said BCF is looking at getting replacements for the small North Island and K-Class ferries. BP said there are three vessels that will be replaced: North Island Princess, Howe Sound Queen, and Nimpkish. BP said that the Statement of Operational Requirements and Technical Statement of Operational Requirements are currently in development. BP said the vessels being replaced are smaller vessels that can accommodate 40-50 cars and around 200 passengers. BP said they are likely to be diesel fuel as they are servicing remote routes and it would not be feasible to use natural gas. The main passenger lounge and life-saving equipment will be on the vehicle deck and access to the sun deck may not be accessible for all passengers. BP said these vessels will have an Induction Loop System installed.

Mid-Life Upgrades

BP said the Queen of Oak Bay and Queen of Surrey are in different stages of their ¾ life upgrades. The projects are executed in two phases: Phase 1 – renewal and fire suppression system and Phase 2 – passenger accommodation, bridge and steering gear, expanded gift shop, and general re-fresh. BP said the vessels are also being fitted with the Induction Loop System. The Queen of Oak Bay Phase 2 was recently completed February 2016. The Queen of Surrey Phase 1 will be completed April 2016 and Phase 2 will be in 2019.

Queen of Oak Bay Induction Loop:

BP reiterated the Induction Loop technology was fitted in three areas of the ship: the forward lounge, cafeteria cashier and two cafeteria tables. BP said all areas are identified by signage onboard the vessel.

Queen of Cumberland MLU:

BP said the Queen of Cumberland is currently undergoing a mid-life upgrade at Esquimalt Graving Dock with completion in April 2016. This vessel services between Swartz Bay and the Southern Gulf Islands. BP said the scope of the refit is similar to the Queen of Capilano including: Life-saving Australia fitted in the lounge, retaining hoistable platforms (no gallery decks), electrical upgrades, standardized bridge and system upgrades.

Other Business

Tsawwassen GPS:

Hanna Leavitt (HL) shared a recent experience she had while at the Tsawwassen Terminal. HL explained she has a GPS system on her iPhone for people with vision problems. She said while she was passing the berths at the terminal her phone announced the berth numbers. HL said that her phone must have picked up a GPS signal at the terminal and it provided very helpful information. HL asked if there were other ways this could be incorporated at the terminal. Stephen Nussbaum (SN) said the person who created the app must have put the information in because BCF has not made berth GPS. KT requested HL forward the name of the app. HL also suggested having iBeacons at the terminal. SN said BCF would be open to looking into iBeacons.

ACTION:

- Hanna Leavitt will forward the name of her GPS app to Karen Tindall.

Sunset Dinner Cruise:

Scott Heron (SH) shared the details of the Spinal Cord Injury BC Sunset Dinner Cruise event at the last meeting and a summary at this meeting. SH said 26 individuals from Swartz Bay and 26 individuals from Tsawwassen took part in the event. SH said they had a film crew recording the event while they were onboard. The footage was used to create a promotional video for Spinal Cord Injury BC. SH said the video was just released in the last couple months and he would like to share the video with the committee. SH explained the event takes place once a year and this upcoming dinner will be the fourth one. SH said in the future, they would like to hold the event twice a year.

Hugh Mitchell (HM) said the event is a good training opportunity for BCF staff. Melanie Lucia (ML) said the event is a positive experience for the crew. SH said it is beneficial for the spinal cord injury community too to show them what barriers they might face when travelling onboard the ferry. Les Chan (LC) asked how the buffet is arranged to accommodate everyone. SH said the group makes arrangements beforehand to be sure they are on the correct vessel and they take up about half of the buffet area. SH explained the group from Swartz Bay boards the 3pm sailing and they meet up with the rest of the group boarding from Tsawwassen on the 5pm sailing. Then everyone is able to do one trip together in the buffet. HL asked if the event is funded. SH said Spinal Cord Injury BC is funded for peer programs, but they do have to fundraise to cover all the costs.

Next Meeting(s)

September 13, 2016 (Deferred to November 16, 2016)

March 8, 2017