

NEWS RELEASE – from the Ferry Advisory Committee Chairs (FACC)  
**Coastal ferry service consultation - questioning the point**

30 October 2012 – The ferry service consultation just launched by the provincial government is confusing, rushed, and missing key parts of the picture, say representatives of coastal ferry users.

In the light of what's missing, the Ferry Advisory Committee Chairs (FACC) question the consultation goals.

"Yes, it's worth discussing the Province's two stated goals - how to save money, and a long-term vision for coastal transportation." says Harold Swierenga of Salt Spring Island FAC. "But there are many holes and questionable assumptions in the picture of the situation as it's presented.

For example, the consultation doesn't mention that fares are past the tipping point - and are part of what's driving down traffic. Yet the Ferry Commission report recommended that fare increases should not exceed inflation. To achieve this the Province would have to fill up some of the hole it created over the eight years it froze the funding it gives ferry service.

"And there's no explanation of why the Province treats coastal ferries differently from other basic transportation infrastructure," says John Hodgkins of Gabriola FAC. "This raises the question of what should be the Province's role in coastal ferries. That's not asked in the consultation, but it's an important question."

The FACC also question the description of the \$26-million target for cuts as a shortfall. "It appears to be a figure the Province put into its contract with BC Ferries as a way to cap its contribution to ferries, says Alison Morse of Bowen Island FAC. "And the cap comes on top of its earlier funding freeze."

Further, the FACC say previous government announcements led coastal ferry users to expect consultation on specific cuts and cost-saving measures.

"Instead, we have the process just announced. There is no commitment to come back and consult on specifics when they're finally decided. Without that step, the Province is flying blind. It won't know what the cuts will do to ferry users and communities," says Brian Hollingshead of the Southern Gulf Islands FAC. "Is this effective consultation?"

The FACC also wonder why the whole province is being consulted, given that most British Columbians are not familiar with the needs and challenges of the complex coastal ferry service.

With respect to timing, the FACC were invited to a meeting less than two weeks ago to hear plans for community interaction. They had many concerns, but only a few of their recommendations were accepted.

The consultation team was persuaded to add more communities to its meeting list, but there are still gaps. Some potentially affected communities won't get a visit, and will have to rely on the internet, which is often inadequate in many coastal communities.

"But most importantly, says Tony Law of Hornby-Denman FAC, "there is little time to let people absorb very complex information, and to look for other information they may need to give thoughtful, useful responses and ask questions that need to be asked."

The FACC has long advocated for direct engagement between communities served by ferries, and the government responsible for providing that service. The communities are ready for a more clear and constructive interaction than is being offered.

<http://www.facchairs.wordpress.com>  
<http://www.coastalferriesengagement.ca/>

## CONTACTS

Tony Law | Hornby-Denman | 250-405-5151/250-335-1155 | tlaw1@telus.net  
Brian Hollingshead | S. Gulf Islands | 604-421-5804 | hollingshead@telus.net  
Harold Swierenga | Salt Spring Island | 250-653-4950 | haroldswierenga@gmail.com  
Ian Cameron | Brentwood-Mill Bay | 250-652-1260 | ianc@uvic.ca  
Keith Rush | Thetis-Penelakut | 250-416-0013 | keithrush17@gmail.com  
John Hodgkins | Gabriola | 250-325-5646 | john@islandtransportsolutions.com  
Alison Morse | Bowen Island | 604-947-9875 | amm5@shaw.ca  
Joyce Clegg | Gambier-Keats | 604-886-2763 | jaclegg@primesignal.com  
Barry Cavens | S. Sunshine Coast | 604-866-8696 | bcavens@dccnet.com  
Bill Cripps | N. Sunshine Coast | 604-485-6563 | wccripps@telus.net  
Paul Ryan | Quadra-Cortes | 250-285-3896 | pryan@island.net  
Marnie Crowe | Tri-Islands | 250-902-3557 | marniejc2000@yahoo.com  
Evan Putterill | North and Central Coast | 250-637-2466 / 5711 | sqcrd.area.e.director@live.com

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