

BC Ferry Services Inc.

Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details

Date December 4, 2008
Time 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM
Location Board Room, BC Ferries, 1112 Fort Street, Victoria, BC

Attendance

Public Interest Representatives

Pat Danforth, Disability Resource Centre, Victoria, Co-chair
Susan Gallagher, Treasurer Victoria chapter, Alliance for equality of Blind Canadians
Mary-Kay Kennedy, Specialist Orientation and Mobility, CNIB
Hugh Mitchell, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
Jane Sheaff, Seniors Serving Seniors
Ernie Stigant, Multiple Sclerosis Society

BC Ferries Representatives

Pat Morris, Manager Operational Planning (Fleet Operations), Co-chair
Roberta Chartier, Manager Customer Service, Customer Care Department
Erinn Grant, Manager Communications, Corporate Relations
Bill McCormick, Customer sales and Service representative, Customer Care Department
Bruce Paterson, Fleet technical Director (Engineering)
Monique Turgeon, Terminal Manager Swartz Bay (for Paul McDaniel, Director Terminal Operations Swartz Bay)
Stuart Leslie-Young, Catering Superintendent Nanaimo (for Barb Britton-Wilson, Director Catering Services, Food and Retail Operations)

Regrets

Dawn Day, CNIB
Scott Heron, BC Paraplegic Association
Albert Ruel, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
Valerie Thoem, BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
Jeff Davidson, Director Retail Services, Food and Retail Operations

Introductions

Chair Pat Danforth welcomed the members and also recognized Monique Turgeon, attending on behalf of Terminal Operations, and Stuart Leslie-Young, attending on behalf of Food and Retail Operations.

Review of minutes – May 8, 2008

ON motion by Hugh Mitchell, seconded by Mary Kay Kennedy, the minutes of the meeting of May 8, 2008 were approved.

Certain changes in the attendance list were requested, to more accurately identify the organizations represented.

Matters arising from the minutes

No items had been previously identified. The issues raised in Item 5 (Discussion with sponsors) were put over to the end of the meeting, in the event the agenda did not fully canvass all of the issues raised.

Steering Committee role and priorities

Pat Morris reported that the sponsors had met on July 9, with the following results.

Role

The sponsors validated the current form of the committee and recognized the need to add representation from BC Ferries related to the communications function, hence the presence of Erinn Grant, Manager Communications. In addition, the sponsors are to be augmented with the vice-president of Corporate Relations Dan Wong (who encompasses the communications function) and the executive director of Customer Care Brian Anderson.

Priorities

The sponsors also identified the need to re-focus their support in a "steering committee" format to provide organizational commitment to the work of the Advisory Committee. The sponsors also identified three organizational priorities:

The Transport Canada recommendation, arising from the loss of Queen of the North, relating to the provision of assistance in an evacuation to those who need additional assistance;

Accessibility training related to terminal operations and loading operations;

Loading standards for vehicles related to accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Discussion

In regard to the Transport Canada recommendation, Bruce Paterson reported it had been discussed at the national Canadian Marine Advisory Council (CMAC) meetings. The Transportation Safety Board had indicated that the Transport Canada response was not sufficient.

In regard to the loading process it was recognized that there is a continuing need to educate staff.

Vessel Developments

Coastal Celebration

Bruce Paterson made a presentation regarding improvements that were piloted on the Coastal Celebration and will be replicated on the other two Coastal-class vessels. Due to a Transport Canada interpretation, the Coastal-class upper car decks were designed with a significant (8 inch high) curb between the level of the car deck and the level of the passenger access (stairwell and elevator landings). On Coastal Celebration, this has been addressed with a sloping pad that completely eliminates any step curb. (On Coastal Renaissance and Coastal Inspiration the problem had

been addressed with ramps along the line of the casing, leaving a step between the adjacent lane and the raised landing.) While the sloped area extends into the vehicle lanes, no usage problems have arisen. The sloped area is fully marked with hatchwork to provide a visual cue that the deck slopes up to the accesses.

Northern Expedition

The vessel continues under construction for arrival in early February. Following the training and run-in phase it will enter service on the Inside Passage in mid-May. There are plans to make it available for open-house events in southern BC, either before it enters service or in September 2009 when it is removed from service for the winter season.

Northern Adventure

During this winter refit season the elevator has been fully stripped out and reconstructed. While it will be fitted into the same trunk and will therefore be the same size, it will be significantly more reliable. BC Ferries considered fitting an additional elevator but the implications for the car deck arrangement made this impossible.

Island Sky

Pat Morris presented a series of slides of the vessel and explained its construction and deployment. This intermediate-size vessel is completing construction in North Vancouver and will provide service on the Earls Cove – Saltery Bay (Jervis Inlet) route. The vessel has many of the interior-design and signage characteristics of the larger ships although it carries approximately 125 car-spaces and 600 passengers. The presentation focused on the accessibility attributes.

Regarding *Evacuation*, the evacuation level is Deck 4 which is the main passenger deck. A modular slide system (MSS) is also fitted to facilitate evacuation from the main car deck level direct to liferafts.

In *Discussion*, the following items were highlighted:

The elevator access is 31 inches, significantly less than the building code standard of 34 inches. In addition the elevator, while not being a drive-through design, does not provide a clear five-foot diameter turning area. The committee noted that a higher expectation attaches to new construction as compared to existing assets. To address this problem BCF plans to position more company wheelchairs with the ship to assist with those people whose chairs cannot be accommodated. It is recognized that this is not functional for some users for whom moving from one chair to another is onerous.

The elevator control panel deck numbers are not strongly contrasted with the background, as the panel is steel-gray with black figures. In addition there are no Braille markings.

The accessible washroom lock mechanism does not provide a clear indication that the door is “locked” or “unlocked”. This is true of most accessible washrooms throughout the system. BC Ferries was encouraged to fit some clear visual cue to indicate the locked and unlocked positions.

Mary Kay Kennedy advised of a situation in which several CNIB clients were being transported and were left unattended on the car deck. Further information was requested regarding where and when this event occurred. However, it appears that much better communication between service organizations and BC Ferries is required to ensure appropriate service for all travelers. [Monique Turgeon, Mary Kay Kennedy]

Website Status

Pre-Travel Information

BC Ferries has initiated a small project to increase the level of pre-travel information available to assist those with particular accessibility needs and any traveler who may be unfamiliar with the services or amenities of their intended route of travel. This will entail:

Engaging with all of the communities of interest to ensure that needs are addressed;

Designing a template for the effective delivery of the information in a web-based model, and populating the template with accurate terminal, ship and route information;

Producing articles and information for the advocacy organizations in order to publicize the availability of this pre-travel information.

BC Ferries Website Changes

Changes to the website presentation are ongoing. Accessibility information appears only under the FAQ (frequently-asked-questions) section where (a) it is not intuitively obvious and (b) it fails to address much of the information needs of the community.

In *Discussion* it was emphasised that individuals seek information in different ways. While some are highly oriented to web access to information, others are primarily interested in a telephone number that will help them solve (or address) their needs. In regard to content, it was suggested that the food-service menu offerings be made available on the web. Roberta Chartier noted that a pilot project is underway to position screens in the Spirit-class cafeteria line-ups, so that people waiting can take the opportunity to consider the choices available before reaching the servery.

Other Business

Identification and DSI "Disabled Status Identification" cards

BC Ferries continues to operate the DSI program pending a more appropriate replacement. The current system is unsatisfactory because the controls against fraudulent acquisition of a DSI card and fraudulent use (of any DSI card) are inadequate. BC Ferries would prefer to recognise a reasonable array of identification types issued for parallel purposes (whether by government, other transportation agencies or advocacy organizations) and in the process abandon the current DSI program. However, because different entities issue identification against various criteria and for different purposes, no replacement has been adopted. Currently the discounts allowed by BC Ferries under this program are fully compensated by the provincial government and it is not yet engaged in resolving the problem.

Lighting levels and upgrades to old vessels

With the retirement of the Queen of Esquimalt, Queen of Saanich and Queen of Tsawwassen, and the imminent retirement of Queen of Vancouver, the only previous-generation major vessel remaining is Queen of New Westminster. That ship is currently undergoing a mid-life upgrade. The determination of whether lighting levels can be improved or other adjustments made for those with vision limitations is to be determined. [Sue Gallagher, Bruce Paterson]

Call Centre capabilities

It was reported that Telus has a system that would effectively facilitate the conversion of voice-to-text, and text-to-voice, so as to enable those with severe hearing loss to communicate effectively with a call centre operator. Further investigation is required. [Pat Danforth, Roberta Chartier]

Pavement markings for steps - Tsawwassen

The committee was advised that there are areas in Tsawwassen Terminal adjacent to the children's play area where the steps should be highlighted (painted) as tripping hazards. [Sue Gallagher, Monique Turgeon]

Next Meeting

To be determined

Adjournment

Adjournment was called at 12:30 PM