

BC Ferry Services Inc.

Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details

Date January 26, 2010
Time 12:00 AM - 3:00 PM
Location Board Room, BC Ferries, 1112 Fort Street, Victoria, BC

Attendance

Public Interest Representatives

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

BC Ferries Representatives

Peter Simpson, Director Operational Strategy, Fleet Operations, Co-Chair
Karen Chrabasz, Manager Customer Relations, Customer Care Department
Bruce Paterson, Fleet Technical Director, Engineering
Paul McDaniel, Regional Director South, Terminal Operations
David Carroll, Director, Terminal Construction, Engineering
Jeff Davidson, Director Retail Services, Food and Retail Operations
Jeff Joyce, Director, Operational Training, Fleet Operations and Training
Michael Foucher, Project Manager, IT

Regrets

Mary-Kay Kennedy, CNIB
Barb Britton-Wilson, Director Catering Services
Bill McCormick, Customer Service Agent, Customer Care

Introductions

Co-Chairs Pat Danforth and Peter Simpson welcomed the members of the committee plus guest Michael Foucher.

Review of minutes – June 25, 2009

The minutes of the meeting of June 25, 2009 were approved. Matters arising from the minutes included tactile signage and pre-boarding announcements.

Standing Items

Transport Canada Recommendations

Peter Simpson and Bruce Paterson informed the committee on an emerging (gazetted) requirement from Transport Canada with respect to passengers needing special assistance in the event of an emergency. The requirement currently gazetted for review by marine operators provides for the following changes in the Canada Shipping Act, Measures Respecting Vessels that Carry Passengers;

Passenger Count and Details

The master of a vessel that carries passengers shall, before the vessel embarks on a voyage, ensure that the following information is both communicated to him or her and recorded:

- (a) the number of persons on board; and*
- (b) details respecting all persons who have declared a need for special care or assistance during an emergency*

As part of the preparations BC Ferries is making to ensure compliance with this future regulation, should it come into force, BCF sought input from the committee on potential issues and suggestions for implementation. These included:

- training and informing current employees
- some groups (i.e. seniors) not self-identifying
- other groups overly identifying
- describing the type of assistance required
- how the special assistance is recorded
- will there be a requirement for individuals to provide their names
- provision of hand-outs for persons who self identify
- where people will locate in the event of an emergency – muster points
- the use of 'deputized' passengers to assist

The information was gathered and to be used in the development of the BCF preparations for compliance if the regulations were to come into force. It was noted that this type preparation for special needs is already in place on our northern vessels which have a 2 hour pre-board sign in process. This matter was previously discussed at the prior meeting (see minutes from June 25, 2008) and is the natural progression of work being done by BCF and the interest Transport Canada has in seeing marine operators enhance management passengers during an emergency. Peter will report back to the committee at the next meeting on the progress of BCF actions.

Training

Jeff Joyce provided an update on the SEA training program that BCF is rolling out to the operational staff on ships and shore. The program is an improved method of delivering job familiarization such that there is consistency of training material, job relevant information and job/site specific knowledge being provided to our staff by dedicated trainers with the skills to ensure all employees receive the same – high level – preparation for their position in operations. While previous methods, including combinations of specific training courses and job shadowing were able to meet the needs for preparing crew – the goal was to improve the quality and ensure standard delivery of training to contribute more to the safe operations and safety of

the worker. The program includes using pre-testing, web learning, on-board training, job specific training materials and final testing and clearance to work as a member of the crew.

Loading Practices

Paul McDaniel spoke to the committee on the work being done to implement a standardized approach to loading and unloading. The terminal and ship crews have been examining the communication processes in place during the time the vessel is in port (ship-shore interface) and including this with the new training of Equipment Operators (shore based loading staff). The practices that will be introduced include such changes as not allowing vehicles to stop on the aprons (the dock ramp that articulates onto the ship's deck – the point of contact between the ship and shore). Many project 'working' teams made up of front line employees are developing clear processes, signage and identification on 'no-stopping' zones. The protocols developed so far include a 'huddle' where prior to each occasion of loading/unloading there a face to face discussion of the entire team involved in vehicle transfers and how they will load the ship. This will also include the identification of loading and parking for vehicles of people with disabilities and whether there needs additional attention to proximity to elevators or room to get in and out of their vehicles.

During the meeting, an earlier issue raised by Sue Gallagher was revisited – the issue of particular concern to persons with low vision capacity and crossing on the telescoping foot passenger ramps which dip at each section of the ramp as this can cause problems as the height change is not marked on the ramp. A site visit was again discussed, but the issue may be resolved through improved markings on the foot passenger ramps. Any follow-up actions to this would be included in the next meeting.

Vessel Developments

Island Sky

The committee was advised the elevator dispute had been settled in BCF's favour; however there is not yet a clear solution to rectify the problem of the small opening and access. Further information will be provided if a solution can be found. The ship was designed with extra wide lanes alongside the casings to allow for greater ease in getting in and out of vehicles, but old parking habits persist and this has allowed for only some improvements

Northern Vessels

Bruce provided the committee with further information related to elevator usage on the northern ships – specifically related to use during heavy weather. The resolution to preventing the potential of being trapped in an elevator will include asking passengers to avoid use (there are already restrictions to entering the car deck on parts of the voyage) and also, in more extreme conditions – the shutting down of elevators

Quinsam

The Quinsam is currently in middle of a major betterment and life-extension project which includes passenger upgrades to improve access within the lounges and addition of a slide evacuation system. All new built or major upgrades to ships will include installing the slide evacuation systems to replace the older lifeboat systems.

Bowen-class vessels

The introduction of slide evacuation systems is also included for these ships and part of the issues facing the company is that on many routes a large number of passengers remain in their cars or on the car deck while there are also many passengers who use the lounges which can be on two different decks. Placing the muster point for evacuation is the main concern because of the need to move people up or down stairs as the ships do not have elevators.

Terminal Developments

David Carroll provided the group with an update on the construction activities and plans at Berth 4 in Tsawwassen terminal. A new berth is being constructed which will almost completely replace the existing berth. The work includes shoring up the rock facing at the water line and evening out the sea bed. David also gave an update on the work completion at Nanaimo, where the old waiting room and cafeteria has been replaced with a new retail, waiting room and outdoor canopy area.

Paul McDaniel expanded on the Tsawwassen terminal developments, identifying that there will be significant construction activity and that this will challenge our on time performance during the busy season. The work will take until the end of 2010 and means this berth will not be available during the summer and will require some temporary changes in and around the walkway leading to Berth 5 which is the main berth for use by foot passengers between Tsawwassen and Swartz Bay. Some loading will be done by loading foot passengers onto the main car deck, which includes passengers crossing the terminal compound and means ensuring that this is done safely. Paul also spoke to new security projects at the terminals which includes the construction of perimeter fencing, introducing access control and new foot passenger ticketing counters.

Auto-ticketing

Michael Foucher presented to the group on his project involving the expansion of auto-ticketing – which is essentially self-serve ticketing for foot passengers. Kiosks have been introduced for a limited range of fares – adults and children. They are not designed to sell special fares provided for seniors, disabled passes or travel cards. The objective is to improve service in peak periods when there are many travellers arriving within a short period – the kiosks will allow the Ticket Agents more time to deal with other passengers. The kiosks are currently at Swartz Bay, Tsawwassen and Nanaimo with a spring launch at Horseshoe Bay. The project team will be looking for a kiosk design that is more wheelchair-friendly and will look for input from the Accessibility group to ensure the success of any changes.

Pre-Travel Information and Website Status

Karen updated the group on the work being in Customer Care. BC Ferries doesn't have its own TTY technology but will continue to use the Telus relay service. The website is updated to reflect the use of this relay service. The website is now moving to Phase 2 in the plans to introduce a new look and design. The design features will include improved colour and fonts as well as revised locations for accessibility issues. The website group is still working through the inclusion of vessel

specific information on accessibility and services in the form a fleet profile or guide. This is currently on hold as the gazetted Transport Canada regulations will likely include some need to incorporate vessel specific information (e.g. muster stations) related to passengers who self-identify a need for special assistance during an emergency.

Other Business

David Hahn joined the meeting to express his view on the importance of the group's role and involvement with BC Ferries, especially as we built and purchased new ships. This will continue as the company starts to look at replacing our minor vessels. He provided the group with an update on the extra sailings being provided during the Olympics. There was some discussion on BC Transit services for the last sailing arriving at Vancouver; David encouraged the representatives to continue to pursue this issue with Manuel Achadinha at BC Transit.

Paul McDaniel also reported that he had met with PCL on what they can jointly do to assist passengers as they exit their buses on the ferry. Discussions were continuing as to whether there would be assistance provided by the driver and what availability there would for BC Ferries crews to assist during the loading period.

Ernie Stigant identified an issue with scooters getting hung up on sills between the outer decks and inside lounges – to be reviewed for the next meeting.

The washroom in the Retail area at Nanaimo does not accommodate large motorized wheelchairs. Suggestion was to use signage to direct people with this accessibility issue to the unisex washroom in the new waiting room.

On the Spirit vessels, accessibility washrooms are locked with a push button but there is no indication to the user (e.g. light) that the door is actually locked. Request to investigate to see if this can be resolved.

Scott Heron will be representing the Disability Resource Centre instead of the BC Paraplegic Association as of February 1, 2010.

Next Meeting

To be determined