

Meeting Details:

Committee:	Accessibility Advisory Committee
Date:	November 14, 2007
Location:	Hotel Grand Pacific, 463 Belleville St., Victoria, BC
Time:	1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Attendees:

Public Interest Representatives:	BC Ferries Representatives:
Pat Danforth, Disability Resource Centre, Victoria, Co-chair Susan Gallagher, Treasurer, Victoria Chapter Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians Vivian Garcia, BC Paraplegic Association Mary Kay Kennedy, Specialist – Orientation & Mobility, CNIB Hugh Mitchell, Hard of Hearing Association Albert Ruel, National Director, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians Jane Sheaff, Executive Director, Seniors Helping Seniors Ernie Stigant, MS Society Valerie Thoem, Director, BC Coalition of People with Disabilities	Pat Morris, Manager, Operational Planning – Fleet Operations, Co-chair Barbara Britton-Wilson, Director, Catering Services Bill McCormick, Customer Sales and Service Representative Karen Chrabasz, Manager Customer Relations Mike Menzies, Director Terminal Operations, Tsawwassen (for Judy Cryer) Kristina Bird, Manager Customer Service Centre (for Roberta Chartier)
Regrets: Dawn Day, CNIB	Jeff Davidson, Director, Retail Services Bruce Paterson, Fleet Technical Director Cheri Maisonneuve, Manager, Sales and Community Relations

1. Introductions

The substitute attendees and guests were welcomed.

2. Review of Minutes

A technological problem had surfaced with the distribution of the minutes of April 17, 2007. Consequently they were put over for consideration at the next meeting.

Action: Pat Morris to re-issue.

3. Assistance services

- ***Comment and Complaint Processing***

Karen Chrabasz described the role of her unit in dealing with special requests (special needs, scattering of ashes, dignitary travel, etc.), service notices, escalation of issues (complaints) and described the process from point of contact through to completion. BC Ferries is currently planning for the re-launch of the website in December/January to improve its navigational characteristics but also to address the needs of low-vision users. A major initiative is to make it more user-centric in the Expedia model. Karen noted that many organizations make it easy (or easier) to find access-related information.

The customer feedback system includes the "customer relations card" which may be handed to customers to help them access the Customer Relations unit. However, BC Ferries has tried to encourage the resolution of customer issues at the site, without needing to escalate to Headquarters (this being better and easier for the customer and less expensive for the company). In addition, there is a web-based feedback system to accommodate comments, questions, complaints and compliments. This mechanism also provides a repository for all customer contacts, however received (telephone, mail, etc.). A further component of the system for web users is the opportunity to rate the company's performance on a variety of measures (in other words, a continuously updating survey).

Questions arose

TTY systems: BC Ferries has used the relay service provided by Telus but does not use TTY terminals.

Time to respond: BC Ferries has significantly improved its response time over the past year, with the assistance of these system changes and a greater focus on prompt response (usually by telephone or email, rather than mail).

How many call-backs: It is standard practice to make two phone calls and leave messages each time. If there has been no response and a third call is made, no message is left and the file is closed at that point.

- ***Special requests***

Karen Chrabasz explained the system that has been implemented to more effectively address the need to provide additional services for persons who require them. This can extend to any situation that calls for additional assistance, and is not directed solely to persons with disabilities. In addition to supporting persons with disabilities, it has been brought into play for single parents traveling with multiple children, and to facilitate dignitary travel. The system incorporates communication to the terminals involved and the ship. Identification and self-identification of needs works well when implemented well. It depends, however, on the advance call in order to allow for the allocation of resources. There is a need to make the information about this service more available to the affected community. This includes improving the web links to accessibility-relevant information and ensuring that the telephone number is known. Web-based information will be improved with the redevelopment of the BC Ferries website and the addition of links to other sites.

4. Vessel Developments

- ***Coastal class vessels***

The seating standard of 5% accessible has been implemented, with the cafeteria having at least one seat in each of 14 tables accessible. In the buffet of Coastal Celebration all 100 seats are movable chairs. Coastal Renaissance and Coastal Inspiration are fitted with a "Sitka Coffee Bar" rather than a buffet – Coastal Celebration will have a buffet for its assignment to the Swartz Bay – Tsawwassen service.

The Coastal class vessels are fitted with three elevators, including two that extend to the outer sundeck level (Deck 7). The ships are designed with two full passenger decks; Deck 5 is the secondary level and can be closed off during low traffic volumes while Deck 6 will always be open.

- ***Northern Adventure***

Northern Adventure arrived mid December 2006 and immediately underwent a major refit to ready it for service on the north coast. Notwithstanding its recent construction (2004) the ship was not built with current North American accessibility standards in mind, necessitating a variety of modifications over time.

The ship has one food service area (cafeteria) and all tables are fitted with chairs (no fixed fast-food-style seating). The condiment areas have been modified for improved reach and access.

There is one elevator only, which has not been serviceable, due to regulatory restrictions and the need for certification for use in Canada and British Columbia. BC Ferries plans to install a completely new elevator during the vessel's next refit in spring 2008. The current elevator can accommodate one wheelchair plus attendant. [Question – what is the planned interior size of the new elevator?]

The ship is equipped with one wheelchair-accessible washroom, located on deck 6 near the purser's square, and has two accessible cabins.

- ***Northern Expedition***

Northern Expedition is being built to BC Ferries specifications and therefore will present significant improvements over Northern Adventure. However, the vessel is being built to be compliant with the international SOLAS (Safety Of Life At Sea) Convention which has introduced the need for some curb installations (on the car deck) and minor floor obstructions on the passenger decks (to ensure the watertight door seals). These were acknowledged by the committee to be much more relevant as tripping hazards generally and for travelers with low vision rather than a significant barrier for wheelchair users. [Question – what curbs or steps will be installed on exterior access doors from the passenger decks?]

The vessel is being constructed with two food service outlets and is being fitted to readily accommodate a future flexible lounge (if warranted). There is also a multi-use room adjacent to the cafeteria, appropriate for presentations or lectures.

There will be two elevators, both of which will access all public levels including the outer Deck 7 sundeck.

- ***Intermediate (125-car) vessel***

The intermediate 125-car design is new in BC Ferries with a wide open car deck and access to the passenger lounges through two side casings. The vessel is equipped with one elevator and all passenger services are located on the passenger deck. A question was raised as to whether the elevator goes to Deck 7 and the sun deck. The first-aid room is located on Deck

7.

There is a convenience store catering facility, originally designed for the 20-minute Horseshoe Bay – Bowen Island service. The ship is, however, to be deployed on Jervis Inlet (between Saltery Bay and Earls Cove, connecting the Powell River area to the lower Sunshine Coast). The store concept is in the 7-11 model and includes both convenience items and take-out food, and is spaciouly laid out. There are 54 seats at tables, of which four are accessible.

5. Video-Tel Project

BC Ferries is continuing to explore how best to access this product and make effective use of it.

6. Next meeting

The next meeting was tentatively set for April 2008, subject to exact arrangements. Pat Morris indicated the April meeting should include attendance from the four sponsoring vice-presidents so the meeting schedule would be coordinated to facilitate that.

[The meeting is now scheduled for 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. on May 8, 2008.]

7. Meeting adjourned

3:35 p.m.

January 22, 2008