

Meeting Details

Date: October 8, 2025
Time: 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm
Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Public Interest Representatives

Marnie Essery, Access West Shore Society – Co-Chair
Scott Heron, Peer Support Specialist, Spinal Cord Injury BC
Wendy Cox, Executive Director, Victoria Disability Resource Centre
Michelle Bobyn, Seniors Serving Seniors alternate
Gwen Gaddes, Seniors Serving Seniors
Susan Simmons, Advisor for Special Olympics, Victoria
William (Bill) Conway, CNIB BC Advocacy Committee alternate

BC Ferries Representatives

Karen Tindall, Director of Customer Care, Customer Care Department – Co-Chair
Soleille Cyr, Executive Director, Catering, Food and Retail Operations
John MacDonald, Director, Terminal Operations
Steve Shardlow, Training Manager, Terminals

Guest

Elisabeth Broadley, Assistant Manager, Customer Relations

Regrets

Rosa Marinelli, Director, Corporate Marketing & Customer Experience
Bruce Paterson, Director, Naval Architecture, Fleet Technical
Leslie Meyer, Regulatory and Policy Manager
Captain David Willows, Chair of Saanich Peninsula Accessible Advisory Committee
Tommy Leung, CNIB
Pat Danforth, Victoria Disability Resource Centre
Neil Belanger, Chief Executive Officer, BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS)

Introduction

Scott Heron requested an adjustment to the minutes of the previous meeting (June 5, 2024). Scott emailed the requested change to Karen Tindall during the meeting.

Minutes approved, pending the change. (*changes completed*)

Attendees, including two new members and one alternate, introduced themselves to the meeting and provided community updates at the same time.

Bill Conway and Marnie Essery experienced issues with their audio and were only able to listen during the meeting. Bill provided his comments in writing after the meeting.

Updates from Public Interest Representatives

Gwen Gaddes, Chair of the Board, Seniors Serving Seniors

- Gwen is the new Chair of the Board of Seniors Serving Seniors, a role she took over from Dr. Jie Zhang after serving 9 years on the board.

Susan Simmons, Advisor for Special Olympics, Victoria

- Susan is the lead coach of the Spirit Orcas, a swim team made up of people who have physical and intellectual disabilities. The Spirit Orcas travel frequently on the ferry, especially to and from Pender Island, where they have received great service. The team recently completed a swim around South Pender Island, with another large swim planned to take place near Bella Bella in summer of 2026.

Wendy Cox, Executive Director, Victoria Disability Resource Centre

- Wendy explained that the Victoria Disability Resource Centre assists those with visible and invisible disabilities and works to reduce and eliminate barriers. They receive approximately 600 enquiries per month. She said one of the biggest barriers they are seeing is difficulty filling out the disability tax credit, and they are working on a plan to help clients with this.
- The Resource Centre recently lost a valuable employee who ran two programs. Wendy reported that there were some challenges with filling the role and keeping the programs rolling.

Scott Heron, Peer Support Specialist, Spinal Cord Injury BC

- Scott said the the BC Ferries Sunset Dinner Cruise on March 22, 2025, was fantastic, and he was working on planning another one for March 2026.
- The cruise on March 22, 2025, took place in Seascapes Lounge and saw some unexpected reunions between people who had known each other in childhood back east, but who didn't know the others had moved out to BC, so they happily reconnected.
- There are two flagship events for the organization in Victoria; the Sunset Dinner Cruise and Hockey Night in Victoria at Save On Foods Memorial Centre.

- Scott explained that during Covid, all of Spinal Cord Injury BC's resources went online, including meetings. When they were commissioned back to in-person, Scott kept the meetings available online and with that, attendance has doubled.
- Scott was recently invited to speak at a spinal cord injury event held by Praxis Spinal Cord Institute, previously the Rick Hansen Institute. He said that, like other organizations, funding is limited and it can be a challenge to meet the needs of the community.

Updates from BC Ferries

Soleille Cyr, Executive Director, Catering, Food and Retail Operations

- Soleille provided information on a new initiative that was initially raised by a Chief Steward on a Salish Class vessel serving Salt Spring Island. The employee heard from a number of customers who are Deaf or hard of hearing that they cannot hear the pre-arrival announcement, and so were not aware that the vessel was approaching their stop, or where to go to disembark. The Chief Steward reached out to see if the announcement could be featured on the Scala screens, and he has since met with Soleille to work on the details; there are some vessels that have complexities that need to be addressed. The specific system on the Salish class vessels is used on about 43% of BC Ferries vessels, so the Company is working with the vendor to implement these Scala announcements on these ships. Expected date of introduction is December 2025.
- Karen Tindall said this had also been requested by members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee in past, and she was glad to see it moving forward.
- Regarding more options for vegan and vegetarian customers, which was raised by Susan Simmons earlier in the meeting, Soleille said that there are options for those customers, whether it be the salads that have cashew cheese, or hot items that can be modified on request to leave off the meat or dairy items. She acknowledged that while options exist, the communication to the public may be lacking. She said staff are working on ways to provide this information to travellers, and in the meantime, she could provide this information to Susan, who accepted and suggested some ideas to help those with intellectual disabilities understand their options when traditional signage may not be accessible for them.
- Bill Conway experienced audio issues and submitted the following comments via email:
 - I regularly use the Langdale route and have given tips to the cafeteria staff. To me, the cafeteria staff needs training [in assisting] a blind person from steam table to seating areas. I always extend my appreciation for their help.
 - Arrival Announcements – Onboard Digital: This is a good move for those with hearing difficulties. Seniors who may use hearing devices could turn them off or down, while on board, due to surrounding noise.
 - I am aware that this topic was regarding DIGITEL information, I do think that your audio version should also have some upgrades. It took me a year to ensure that it says all 'CERTIFIED GUIDE & SERVICE DOGS' are permitted on

passenger decks. This is on the Langdale route, I have been on other routes and the message is not the same.

Action: Soleille to look into signage options for vegan and vegetarian items and to provide information to Susan on current items.

Steve Shardlow, Training Manager, Terminals

- Steve provided an update on training. Based on the feedback he received following the previous meeting, BC Ferries is meeting the requirements of the Accessibility Advisory Committee when it comes to training. At the same time, there are changes happening to how BC Ferries trains new staff.

Training branches into two main areas: operational training and SEA training. There are various levels of training depending on an employee's role, responsibilities and location. An example of operational training would be that involving Dangerous Goods.

Much of the training takes place February through early June, for seasonal employees. Crew-related cancellations have been reduced significantly due to recruitment and hiring practices, as well as having appropriate training so new staff are ready for peak season. The company is also focusing on internal development, retention, and promotion of employees.

One area that is changing is training for ticket agents. While they previously received one day for training on point of sale, now they receive four full days, as part of a 10-12 day training program. The position is entry-level but requires a high level of knowledge of several areas, and the additional training is expected to improve the high initial failure rate the company was seeing for these employees, which was up to 47% in the last year.

Changes to the internal training website are also underway to improve ease of access for employees.

The other major change is that BC Ferries is working to consolidate all training under one department. Currently many areas run their own training programs, and the idea is that the training department will handle all things related to training. Work is underway to determine what this will look like.

Susan Simmons asked if BC Ferries has any data on the number of employees who have disabilities, and also whether training was modified to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

Karen Tindall said that in Customer Care, she knows exactly how many employees have disabilities and that training is modified to meet specific needs. Employees are not required to disclose their disabilities and often these become known during the training process, at which time necessary accommodations can be made, both for training and for day-to-day work.

Karen encouraged suggestions on how to assist individuals maintain their current positions at BC Ferries when their sight is deteriorating, specifically in a Call Centre

role that uses computer/screens to make bookings and provide guidance to customers.

Scott Heron suggested the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind and then asked Steve if terminal employees have a way to receive feedback or a debrief if an interaction with a customer doesn't go well. Steve confirmed that there are processes and training in place for these situations, as well as a one-day course on prevention of violence in the workplace.

Marnie Essey asked, via the chat function, if seasonal and regular employees receive different training and Steve said no, they receive the same training.

Karen Tindall, Director, Customer Care

- Karen provided information on the Accessible Fare Identification (AFI) card, which provides the holder and escort with discounted fares on BC Ferries southern routes. AFI card holders must be BC residents with a permanent disability, and the provincial government requires that a valid card be presented in order for the customer to receive the discount. In order to obtain the card, customers must prove permanent disability either by showing their enrollment in government programs or through the signature of their doctor or nurse practitioner. During Covid-19 pandemic, BC Ferries accepted expired AFI cards in recognition of the difficulty many customers experienced in visiting the doctor during that time.

After the Covid-19 restrictions ended, the government required that AFI cards be renewed and expiry dates enforced.

Karen said that the discount is only available for customers with a permanent disability, and therefore she is working with the government with the aim of having the expiry date removed entirely. She said BC Ferries was waiting for the government to come to a decision, which she hoped was the removal of the expiry date. In the meantime, customers were frustrated with the expiry date.

Scott Heron expressed concern that some customers may have to pay a fee to have their doctors sign their application and said that in his designation as a social worker, he has signed for some individuals who have a permanent disability.

Karen said her hope was that, in future, a doctor's signature would not be required, and she was also looking to change the online PDF application that requires printing and mailing, to an online fillable form, eliminating the barrier for those who don't have access to a printer or find sending mail difficult.

Note from Bill Conway: I fully agree that there should be no expiration date on this card. If a citizen is 'deemed' to have a permanent disability, it will not expire in 2 or 5 years or like mine for 62 years.

Action: Karen to follow up with the government to advocate for the removal of the expiry date on the AFI cards.

10 MINUTE BREAK until 3:05

Karen Tindall, Director, Customer Care

- Bruce Patreson was unable to attend or provide his update, so Karen provided an update on the changes coming to Horseshoe Bay terminal.
- Work is underway on the multi-year upgrade project. Plenty of public communication has been provided. To support the changes, BC Ferries is switching to a fully reservable model where bookings and prepayment are required for all sailings departing Horseshoe Bay for Departure Bay, effective October 15, 2025. The reason for this is construction will cause a 25% reduction in terminal vehicle capacity. The project will take an estimated 5-7 years and will involve the deconstruction and moving of the tower, the removal of the transfer deck and berth electrification. Storage of construction material will also occupy some of the terminal parking, so customers will be directed to the underground parking.

Signage, handouts and information on the website are all being provided to ensure customers are aware of the coming changes. A radio station is also planned for the terminal, to provide real-time schedule information, as well as other operational details.

The biggest change, she said, was that vehicles must reserve their travel in advance and would be turned out of the terminal if they arrive without a booking.

BC Ferries is also introducing an Alert function, to inform customers when space opens up on their desired sailing. The system will first be tested on the Comox-Powell River route before it is expanded to other routes, including Horseshoe Bay-Departure Bay.

John MacDonald added that all berths will be replaced with floating berths, which will allow improvements in foot passenger walkways and access. Walking paths during construction will be different than they have been in past but will be clearly marked and information will be kept updated on the Projects page for BC Ferries.

Michelle Bobyn asked about the process of booking travel for customers who arrive in a vehicle without a booking. Karen said they will need to book within the booking window, but they will be provided information on how to exit the terminal, make their booking, and return. She added that there will be space held for Medical Assured Loading and other priority loading customers. Assured Loading Tickets (ALT) will no longer be accepted for travel from Horseshoe Bay to Departure Bay. ALT holders were being offered refunds or extensions if the product no longer worked for them.

Note from Bill Conway: The CNIB BC Advocacy Committee would like to be involved, when it comes to the design of the terminal area. We are aware that several low vision and blind citizens travel through this terminal, especially during the summer months to Bowen Island.

Other Business

Karen Tindall, Director, Customer Care

- There were some changes to the membership of the Accessibility Advisory Committee:
 - Tommy Leung and Bill Conway (alternate) replaced Matthew Ellies from CNIB;
 - Gwen Gaddes and Michelle Bobyn (alternate) replaced Dr. Jie Zhang, representing Seniors Serving Seniors;
 - Robin Whyte, Vancouver Island Community Advisor, [Technology for Living](#) is replacing Hugh Mitchell;
 - Richard Peter, Indigenous Peoples' Liaison, [Praxis Spinal Cord Institute](#)

Meeting Adjourned: 3:32 pm

Next Meeting Date: April 15, 2026