

Meeting Details

Date: February 26, 2025
Time: 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm
Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Public Interest Representatives

Marnie Essery, Access Westshore Society – Co-Chair
Scott Heron, Peer Support Specialist, Spinal Cord Injury BC
Wendy Cox, Executive Director, Victoria Disability Resource Centre

BC Ferries Representatives

Karen Tindall, Director of Customer Care – Co-Chair
Bruce Paterson, Director, Naval Architecture, Fleet Technical
Leslie Meyer, Regulatory and Policy Manager
Morningstar Pinto, Executive Director, External Engagement
Amy Bronee, Director, Community Relations
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

Pat Danforth, Victoria Disability Resource Centre
Captain David Willows, Chair of Saanich Peninsula Accessible Advisory Committee
Dr. Jie Zhang, Seniors Serving Seniors
Rhonda Daye, Manager, Customer Relations
Susan Simmons, Advisor for Special Olympics, Victoria

Introduction

Attendees introduced themselves to the meeting. No changes to the minutes of the last meeting (June 5, 2024).

Minutes approved.

Updates from Public Interest Representatives

Scott Heron, Peer Support Specialist, Spinal Cord Injury BC

- Scott was helping organize the BC Ferries Sunset Dinner Cruise, set for March 22. He said a lot of new people were coming this year.
- Otherwise, he was busy planning for events for the next fiscal year, hopefully including another Sunset Dinner Cruise in 2026.
- Scott explained that peer members board as foot passengers at Swartz Bay and complete a round trip where they enjoy dinner. In past they were joined by another group of peers who boarded at Tsawwassen, but that wasn't possible this year. About 30 participants were expected to attend. He said it's a fantastic event and always well-received.
- Karen Tindall added that the event used to be held in the buffet, and that BC Ferries would look at how to accommodate the peer group with the recent announcement of the Seascapes Lounge.

Wendy Cox, Executive Director, Victoria Disability Resource Centre

- No updates

Marnie Essery, Access Westshore Society – Co-Chair

- Marnie began with an acknowledgement of Black History Month. She wanted to celebrate influential figures and persons with disabilities and shared a quote from Maya Angelou.
- Regarding BC Ferries, she said Spring Break was coming up, it's a busy time, and that accessible porta potties are important, especially when it's busy. Secondly, she asked that as a common sense and compassion measure, during busy times, if people don't need to use the elevator, please don't, and to save it for those in need so they are not left waiting. She added that for staff, especially seasonal staff, some customers may not know where the elevators are, the accessible washrooms and the accessible seating – it's great for staff to know where these are so they can assist. It may be worth reminding them.
- There have been some ongoing issues with the Bowen Island ferry that have meant water taxis are necessary. It has been challenging as the water taxis are not accessible, and where you access it is not the same as the ferry. It's an ongoing issue and Marnie said she feels bad for people with specialist appointments who may have been waiting a long time and then miss them. She said the good part is that she was getting comments from people in rural parts of BC, where they are looking at TAP to include rural communities and she acknowledged BC Ferries and their part in that.
- Marnie mentioned two upcoming days - National Access Day and Red Shirt Day, which are accessibility initiatives, and encouraged BC Ferries to get involved. She had recently participated in the Coldest Night of the Year walk, to raise money for the Pacific Center Family Services Association and Our Place and asked that Scott Heron provide details about the Charity Challenge set for July 2025. Scott said the Victoria event was to raise money for Spinal Cord Injury BC and all were invited.
- Marnie's last comment was that during last year's National Access Awareness Week there was a very successful wheelchair basket event at Spencer Middle School with

dignitaries and wheelchair sports people, as well as students. Participants learned about wheelchair basketball and played a game, and the same was planned for the end of May 2025. Marnie invited BC Ferries to participate. Karen Tindall was supportive of the idea.

- Karen responded to Marnie's concerns about Bowen Island and said the Company would look at how it handled to service disruptions in February to see what improvements could be made. She explained that there is only one accessible water taxi on the west coast of BC and it was in Shearwater at the time. The accessible water taxi can only transport someone who can manually transfer from their chair, and that a foldable chair is required. BC Ferries will work with customers, but staff need to understand what their needs are. She said she'd take the information away to see whether BC Ferries can improve the communication to customers during an outage.
- Marnie said there is a retreat for people who are blind and partially sighted on Bowen Island each summer. Karen said the Company works with the organizers to facilitate their travel and familiarization.

Updates from BC Ferries

Morningstar Pinto, Executive Director, External Engagement – Let's Connect Shaping Future Engagement

- Morningstar provided a brief overview of the Ferry Advisory Committees. There have been 13 FACs, each run a little differently depending on the group.
- She noticed in her limited time with the Company that there is great opportunity to engage with more people.
- When they went into communities, they were booking a place and telling people to come to it to engage, but engagement has changed and they want to reshape what it looks like.
- BC Ferries wants to provide different ways for people to engage and hear from people of all backgrounds including more youth, more seniors, more people with accessibility needs we may not have heard before, people new to the country where there may be language barriers.

Amy Bronee, Director, Community Relations

- Amy explained that the engagement project is a three-part process and said she had five questions to pose to the group.
The purpose with this project is to develop a collaborative and inclusive engagement framework that strengthens trust, incorporates diverse perspectives and enhances relationships with the coastal communities that BC Ferries serves. Three parts:
 - February 4 to March 18, discussions with community members, First Nations, local governments, under-represented groups, plus pop up events at terminals and onboard vessels to talk to people who are traveling that day and doing online engagement as well.
 - Best practice research and connecting with other large organizations that do local community engagement.
 - All this information will be used to inform the new engagement framework.

- Actions:
 1. Gathering input from outgoing FAC members, FNs, MLAs etc.
 2. Online engagement
 3. Pop-Up events
 4. Scientifically valid community panel survey
 5. Outreach to under-represented groups

Amy Asked the committee for input on five questions:

1. What would a fair and inclusive engagement process look like for you?

Marnie Essery: Inclusive engagement, which means it's done in a number of ways. For example, some people are intimidated by technology, so we need a number of ways to let people provide feedback. In person, on the phone, through community groups, on board the ships. Meet people where they are. Informal presentations to accessibility groups. Also include BC Ferries staff – they probably have good insight.

Scott Heron: Are these one-offs or for ongoing engagement? I guess it could be both, if someone reaches out to some smaller groups. I could help facilitate with some groups for one-offs. Ongoing, perhaps we could reach out the Spin Magazine and SCI BC's social media Communications team.

Wendy Cox: Reaching out to representatives at specific groups to invite their clientele and let them know we want to hear from them. Also, multiple choice is helpful, with a space for "other"

2. Are there any challenges that make it hard for you or others to participate in engagement activities?

Marnie Essery: Financial challenges are barriers for people. Even accessing in-person events – that means caregiver time, parking, transportation, or the cost of taking the ferry. Can they afford this? There would also need to be a lot of notice. It's 14 days to book a HandyDART, and caregivers have schedule changes, so having as much notice and accommodation as possible, and the flexibility for the organization to say 'We value you, and we want to hear from you, we can accommodate you.' Are the buildings accessible? Is there a washroom? These can make the difference.

Wendy Cox: Providing all materials ahead of time, Power Point presentations, etc.

Karen Tindall: Also if you're going to be providing materials, multiple languages are important.

Amy Bronee: Yes, we have added a translation plug-in for our engagement website.

3. What types of activities or tools – like online surveys, workshops or commit meetings – work best for sharing your ideas and feedback?

Scott Heron: As mentioned in question 1.

Marnie Essery: Having clear communication ahead of time regarding the venues/accommodations is key so people don't feel awkward, and they know what to expect, and whether it is ok to bring an attendant. Letting people know ahead of time, on event posters, how accessible the space is (ie. there is a ramp, 2 accessible washrooms etc.) Also, a phone number, with a person to assist you without having to press numbers.

4. Are there specific approaches – such as translated materials, accessible formats, or easier locations – that would help you participate in BC Ferries' engagement process?

Marnie Essery: Providing a deadline or timeline, and information about the follow-up that people will receive if they have taken the time to participate.

Amy Bronee: Responsiveness is one of the biggest things we hear from people, they want more.

Wendy Cox: Letting people know that even if they don't take the ferry very often, their feedback is valid.

Karen Tindall: Online, it must be screen-readable for those who are blind or partially sighted.

Marnie Essery: We want to see something tangible from the feedback.

Amy Bronee: Yes, we plan to only request feedback on areas where we can put the feedback into action.

5. How can BC Ferries make it easier to stay informed and participate in engagement efforts:

Scott Heron: That's hard, we have a hard time because we tell people things and they still don't always know. You can remind them, send notifications, and over-flood them with information.

Wendy Cox: Making strong connections to community groups and offering food.

Marnie Essery: Use the networks to get the information out. I know there are some people who will be fatigued by this. But also use Instagram, social media etc. to reach people. And food: it's a way to thank people who have taken the time to engage. Or a prize, like a BC Ferries ticket, something like that, a draw for those who gave feedback by the deadline. It encourages them to participate. It doesn't have to be a lot but something like that goes a long way.

Amy Bronee: That's interesting because for a time it was seen maybe as buying people's feedback, but that is shifting to recognition that it's a thanks for people's time.

Action: Amy sent the link to the BC Ferries engagement page, Karen Tindall will resend it to Marnie Essery so she can send it out to her group to invite people to engage and participate.

Amy left the meeting at 2:51.

Steve Shardlow, Training Manager, Terminals

- Steve provided an update on training. One of the non-regulatory courses is Terminal Passenger Safety Management. This teaches terminal staff to safely assist customers and what else to do in an emergency. Unlike for onboard training, it's not regulated by Transport Canada.

There has been a lot of feedback about the course and the course is being redesigned. He said part of the redesign would likely involve reaching out to the Accessibility Advisory Committee for feedback about how to best assist people with different accessibility considerations.

Steve said the timeline would require feedback be submitted in the next two weeks. Wendy Cox said she would think about it and reach out. Marnie Essery said terminal staff are ambassadors, and most familiar with the terminal areas and can help guide customers to accessible washrooms and parking at the terminal and onboard, as well as accessible amenities onboard.

Steve Shardlow had to leave for another meeting at 3:02 pm, but asked for any training suggestions to be emailed to him.

Action: Committee members to email feedback and suggestions to Steve.

10 MINUTE BREAK until 3:15

After the break, the order of Other Business and Bruce Paterson's presentation were switched.

Other Business

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

- Soleille Cyr provided an update on the Pacific Buffet. The space is being reimagined as a paid entry lounge called Seascapes Lounge. The soft opening was scheduled for early June and the official opening June 11, 2025. There will be a \$6 entry fee which includes coffee, tea and fountain pop, and then a small a la carte menu will be available for an additional fee, as well as specialty and alcoholic drinks. Opening on the two Spirit Class vessels to begin; the seating arrangement will remain the same as it was in the Pacific Buffet.
- Karen Tindall said that while the area is generally not bookable, BC Ferries will work with Scott Heron's group to accommodate their event.

Karen Tindall, Director, Customer Care

- Karen Tindall provided an update on the braille signage. In terminals, 80% of the washrooms have had braille installed, and 25 vessels have been completed. The

plan is to have the terminals and vessels completed by June 2025, with an update to be provided at the next meeting.

- There was also work ongoing to create terminal maps to include information such as the locations of accessible washrooms. Two terminal maps have been completed, and the rest should be done before summer. Karen thanked Marnie Essery for the suggestion, as previously there were maps for the vessels but not the terminals.
- The New Major Vessels will have more accessible washrooms than those before. There are six planned for each one, plus at least one Changing Places adult change table per ship.

Bruce Paterson, Director, Naval Architecture

- Bruce Paterson provided an update on the Fleet Renewal Program. BC Ferries is in the full swing of Phase 3 of the Island Class ferries. Four vessels are under construction by Damen in Romania. The planned deployment is on the routes serving Gabriola Island-Nanaimo Harbour (Route 19) and Quadra Island-Campbell River (Route 23). There are currently two Island Class vessels working on Route 19 and the plan is to redeploy the older vessels to different routes when the new ones arrive. The plan is to fully electrify these new vessels.
- Terminal work is required to make them fully electric and the first two should arrive in the fall of 2025. There has been significant re-engineering in the internal working of the ships to accommodate electrification. From a customer perspective, there is likely to be very little change.
- In order to ensure the vessels are accessible, much research was done to find a suitable solution to transfer customers up and down the stairs. While the plan is still to have a platform-style chair lift, it will not be the pneumatic or hydraulic push system, which was difficult to maintain, but a geared system that has a good track record in the yacht industry. BC Ferries will be changing suppliers to install this system.
- The final point, which will impact the New Major Vessels, is that the Canadian Transportation Agency guidelines have been retired and much more regulated guidelines introduced, so BC Ferries has modified the specifications for the New Major Vessels to reference the new documents. The Company also recently learned that there is an additional Canadian Standards Association documents that will have to be incorporated.
- Regarding the New Major Vessels, the RFP was issued late last summer and responses were received. BC Ferries is assessing those to produce a short list and are on track to get a contract in place.
- The other variable is that the BC Ferry Commissioner has yet to rule on the request to build five Major New Vessels.
- The design of the New Major Vessels is moving along at high level, and Bruce said the team is interested in what might be available for technologies to increase accessibility. He confirmed induction loop has been specified in the design, but that there are other technologies that may be integrated. Karen Tindall suggested plug-

ins for electric wheelchair and scooter charging, though there are Transport Canada regulations around charging lithium-ion batteries onboard.

- Leslie Meyer said the Company would be rolling out a policy on electric vehicles, and that there is an exception for mobility aids, which won't be prevented from accessing areas of the vessel or from charging onboard. This has not yet been run by Transport Canada.

Karen Tindall, Director, Customer Care

- Karen Tindall and Marnie Essery discussed the need to replace exiting Accessibility Advisory Committee members and secure backups for those who can't attend, as there were more representatives from BC Ferries at the meeting than community representatives.
- Hugh Mitchell from the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association has stepped down and needs to be relaced, while Matthew Ellies from Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada, BC and Neil Belanger from BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS) may need alternates. BC Ferries would like to add two people. Scott Heron had a suggestion for someone from the Indigenous community and said he would talk to potential representatives for the deaf and blind communities.

Action: Scott, Karen and Marnie will investigate replacements and alternates. Elisabeth Broadley to draft a letter of invitation.

Meeting Adjourned: 3:53 pm

Next Meeting Date: October 8, 2025