

BC Ferry Services Inc.

Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details

Date January 26, 2011
Time 1:30 PM - 4:00 PM
Location 7th Floor Board Room, Atrium
1321 Blanshard Street, Victoria

Attendance

Public Interest Representatives

Pat Danforth, 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
Barbara Schuster, Canadian National Institute for the Blind
Valerie Thoem, BC Coalition of People with Disabilities

BC Ferries Representatives

David Hahn, President and CEO
Karen Tindall, Director Customer Care, 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
Bill McCormick, Customer Service Agent, Customer Care
Marika Karpes, Customer Service Agent, Customer Care
Sheila O'Neill, Catering Superintendent, Central Coast

Regrets

Scott Heron, Disability Resource Centre
Mary-Kay Kennedy, Canadian National Institute for the Blind
Stuart Leslie-Young, Catering Superintendent, Food and Retail Operations
Peter Simpson, Director Operational Strategy, Fleet Operations, Co-Chair

Introductions

Co-Chairs Pat Danforth and Karen Tindall welcomed the members of the committee.

Review of minutes – July 7, 2010

The minutes of the meeting of July 7, 2010 were approved. Matters arising from the minutes include

- Hyper link – now available on BC Ferries Website.
- Spirit Class Washrooms locking mechanism – now intuitive and functional

New items members wished to add:

- Handrails on vessels
- Captioning issues onboard vessels for safety announcements
- Designated Parking at Nanaimo Terminals

Standing Items

Transport Canada Recommendations

Bruce Patterson advised the committee the 'gazetted' regulation to be issued from Transport Canada with respect to passengers needing special assistance in the event of an emergency still remains gazetted for review. Bruce added that Northern Routes maintain a detailed passenger manifest, but the smaller routes with shorter sails have not had such a development.

Pat Danforth inquired with Transport Canada if BC Ferries had to comply if ship sailings were less than 12 hours. Their response was the passengers had to self-identify - BC Ferries needs a way to tell people this.

Valerie Thoem explained Washington States process of handing out cards for people to fill out if they needed special assistance.

Karen Tindall advised the committee that information has been "rolled out" to the ticket agents and there is wording on our external website advising customer to self identify when purchasing tickets. Once onboard, the persons with disability is to go to the Chief Stewards office where they will be given information where to muster in the event of an emergency.

Action: Karen also explained that she was in the process of creating brochures, vessel specific for accessibility needs (evacuation etc). Customers would receive this brochure from the ticket agent (upon self-declaration) but could also obtain the brochure fleet wide on our vessels, in our terminals, and online as a PDF (that are readable by screen readers).

Training

Jeff Joyce updated everyone on his standardized education and assessment program being developed - the program that anyone new to the company or moving around within the company will have to go through. Within this program he is creating a training module that is specific to persons with disabilities. With feedback from Karen (BC Coalition for People with Disabilities) and looking over source material from Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services he would like the module to cover 3 areas:

1. Appropriate terminology
2. Approaching customers
3. Practical procedures

Jane Sheaff brought up that not everyone has a visible disability, like the elderly for example. Is there a service that is offered to help an elderly person carry a tray to their seat?

Sheila O'Neill confirmed that the crew are trained to do exactly that. Passengers traveling should feel comfortable asking any crew member for assistance.

Pat confirmed with Jeff that his new material will be covered in this April's training.

DAVID HAHN joined the meeting

Loading Practices

Paul McDaniel spoke to the committee about the ongoing construction and loading practices at the terminals.

Swartz Bay Berth 3

When not in service, the wheelchair or scooters were wheeled across terminal to the main car deck of the vessel. The overhead walkway is now in service and back to normal. There is now new lighting and barrier free design was mostly used. Some customers with mobility issues may find the degree of slope, under certain tidal conditions, difficult to load or unload.

Tsawwassen Berth 4 Construction

Paul advised there will be extra staff in the construction area to help people travelling to their intended berth.

Request for Wheelchair and/or Attendant

Karen Tindall, Jason Bowman and Stuart Leslie-Young are reviewing procedures with Customer Care, the terminals, and ships to make the wheelchair and assistance requests seamless for our customers. Karen spoke to the committee about the new reservation process for wheelchairs and/or attendant assistance. When asked by David Hahn what are limit of reservations per sailing would be she responded; "possibly 6 (at major terminals), but we'd have 10 wheelchairs available to help our customers".

Barbara Schuster and Ernie Stigant brought forward their concerns about being able to take public transit to be at the terminal by the desired check-in time.

Pat Danforth raised a concern about limiting number of customers per sailing.

Karen advised the committee that these limits would only be for people that actual require assistance and that we've been tracking self declared travellers. On average there's been approx 6 per day, 0-2 per sailing.

Action: Karen to send out information in regards to the new reservation process to Pat once details are finalized.

Vessel Developments

Susan Gallagher asked about the indicator or tactile bumps at the bottom of the stairwells onboard BC Ferries vessels. They give her extra reassurance and wonders where these dots originate?

Bruce Paterson was not 100% sure where this originated but expressed that BC Ferries intended to continue to use them on the landings. David Carroll advised that under the accessibility design guidelines it states, "tactile markings in handrails must indicate exit levels only"

Island Sky

Bruce Paterson advised the committee the elevator onboard the MV Island Sky was deemed non-compliant with Canada Transport. It is scheduled to receive a new elevator car and doors compliant with Canada Transport in spring of 2012. The delay is due to vessel dispositions and the need for a replacement vessel while it goes into refit. The MV Island Sky currently operates on Route 7, the Sunshine Coast (Powell River / Earls Cove).

Quadra Queen II

Bruce spoke to the committee about information relating to the work on the QQII which is out for a lengthy upgrade at Point Hope Shipyard. Evacuation systems have changed to slide base, as they were previously steel ladders - this system is more favourable to persons with mobility issues. The layout is also being changed so that there is an enclosed accessible lounge at the aft of the ship with an accessible washroom. On older vessels (QQII era 1969) the lounge was on the upper deck with no elevator access. The QQII currently operates on Route 25 (Port McNeill / Sointula and Alert Bay).

Action: Karen Tindall to contact members about possibility of viewing vessel before it heads back North.

Capilano Class – Cumberland & Capilano

Bruce spoke to the committee about the passenger accommodation upgrades which included cafeteria remodelling and new seating arrangements. These upgrades helped improve accessibility in both passenger areas and the cafeteria. The Queen of Cumberland currently operates on Route 5 (Swartz Bay / Southern Gulf Islands) and The Queen of Capilano operates on Route 8 (Horseshoe Bay / Bowen Island)

Chilliwack

Bruce advised of receiving money from Provincial Government for capital upgrades to provide service to Bella Coola. Upgrades will come in 2 phases:

Phase 1 – updating the safety systems and crew areas. The phase 1 update will include doors that seal the main car deck in sections. This will prohibit anyone staying on the car deck during vessel movement. Evacuation system is to also be updated to a "slide" system similar to that on the MV Island Sky. This is an

improvement over our current system of davit-launched lifeboats for people with mobility challenges.

Phase 2 – updating the passenger areas to our current standards of accessibility and design. This is to take place in spring of 2012.

The Queen of Chilliwack will be operating on three routes in the upcoming years, including Route 40 (mid-coast between Port Hardy and Bella Bella and Bella Coola), Route 7 the Sunshine Coast (Powell River/Earls Cove) and Route 17 (Comox / Powell River).

Coastal Class

Passengers travelling in motorized wheelchairs and scooters are catching on the sills of the walkway ramp while moving into the interior of the Coastal vessels. Bruce said he has met and talked with 2 of the 3 Senior Chief Engineers and the Engineering Superintendent. The sill must remain to keep water from entering inside. They're looking at building removable ramps but have to look at the procedures of putting this in place - they should be lifted out, training is needed. Ernie has had troubles with sill on vessel previously and there have been iSail notifications of people tripping over them.

Action: Bruce to follow-up

Spirit Class

Bruce advised of changes to boarding on Spirit Class Vessels when docking at Tsawwassen's berth 4. He advised the railings are in place and they are intuitive.

Jeff Davidson advised the committee that we are in preliminary stages of planning for the Spirit Class mid life upgrades (expected to happen 2013/14 or 2015/16). We're starting on the planning now and we'd like to have an accessibility audit done on the ships by the committee. Jeff suggested having one of our meetings on one of the vessels to collect feedback.

Action: Karen Tindall to plan next accessibility advisory committee meeting onboard Spirit Class vessel to collect feedback.

Klitsa

The Klitsa is set to replace the MV Mill Bay on Route 12 (Brentwood Bay / Mill Bay) in May/June of 2011. The Klitsa has a single deck for vehicles, passengers and washrooms. The Klitsa is larger than the Mill Bay, however when fully loaded there will be the same limitations on movement around the car deck, which will need to be addressed by crew members during the voyage for passengers with mobility issues.

Terminal Developments

Berth Standardization

David Carroll spoke to the committee of the importance and reasoning behind berth standardization - specifically behind minor and intermediate size vessels / terminals. The new standardized berths will allow BC Ferries to have more flexibility with regards to which vessels can go into which berths. All standardized berths will have 1.5 meter wide walkways to allow safer passage for people loading and unloading our vessels. These walkways will have smooth transfers for people travelling with mobility aids.

Swartz Bay Berth 4 / 5

David Carroll advised the committee that BC Ferries currently has a request for proposal to construct berth 4 and 5 at Swartz Bay. The berths will be standardized and will have the 1.5 meter walkways. Paul McDaniel advised the committee we will safely move passengers around terminal, from ticketing to vessel using additional staff. This customer movement was successful in Tsawwassen during construction and the same strategy will be used at Swartz Bay.

Tsawwassen Berth 5

David Carroll spoke to the committee about Tsawwassen's berth 5 mid-life upgrade. David explained that due to winter weather concerns and possible sailing cancellations the decision was made to start the project in April of 2011. The project is expected to take 6-7 months and will affect the terminal during the busy summer months. The flip side to this is walk-on passengers won't have to walk as far to get to their boarding area. Paul McDaniel also advised the committee that in addition to the berth 3 / 4 pre-board lounge the berth 5 lounge would be made available for customers to use while waiting for their sailing.

BC Ferries Design Criteria

David Carroll advised the committee that a comprehensive draft of design criteria had been developed using the services of Brad McCannell at Canadian Barrier Free Design Inc. The document, titled 'A Strategy to Increase Meaningful Access for People with Disabilities, Older Adults and Seniors to BC Ferries Land Facilities' has been prepared in draft format and is currently being reviewed within the company. David also advised that Brad McCannell will be doing disability awareness training, in groups of approximately 18, with some of the staff members at BC Ferries.

Action: David to distribute draft to committee members for feedback and hopes to see the finalization of terminal design criteria by the end of March. David also to liaise with Brad about coming in and presenting to the committee about Canadian Barrier Free Design Inc. and their initiatives at BC Ferries.

Pre-Travel Information and Website Status

Karen Tindall spoke to the committee on the current status of closed caption onboard the TV's on our major routes. She advised that there is an open captioning system (video plays emergency procedures while announcements play) in place onboard the Coastal Class vessels and that we have not been able to implement closed or open captioning on the Spirit Class or Queen of New Westminster. Karen advised the committee that her closed captioning trial project, which was slated for the Spirit Class vessels, was folded in to a new digital signage project that is underway. The projects mandate is to have all digital signage at terminals and on vessels to be run from one location. This would show pre-travel information and closed-captioning.

Hugh Mitchell asked for our definition of closed captioning and stated "it has to be white writing on a black background". The committee also asked for a time frame of the digital signage projects completion.

Karen Tindall spoke about the re-launch of our website on February 21st. Karen advised the group that there is testing and focus groups going on right now. Some changes need to be done. This will come in 2 phases:

- Phase One - upgrading reservation systems and vacations.
- Phase Two - upgrade color definition and allow screen reader capabilities.

There will still be a link on the homepage for accessibility information.

Action: Karen to follow up on estimated completion date and update for digital signage project.

Other Business

Designated Parking at Nanaimo

Pat Danforth received 3rd hand information via an email that applies to the Departure Bay and Swartz Bay terminals accessible parking spots. They used to be immediately outside the departures / arrivals area and have now been moved quite a distance away. Karen Tindall and Paul McDaniel confirmed this – at Nanaimo the spaces had to be moved due to a new bus contract. At Swartz Bay the pick-up / drop-off accessible spots were also moved to accommodate buses but the new area is actually closer to the terminal. There was a new ruling by Transport Canada that disallowed tour buses to come inside our terminal to drop their passengers off (previous practise). Now tour buses have to drop passengers off outside the fare paid zone.

Pat expressed that as an end user she felt the pick-up / drop off procedure at Swartz Bay was more confusing. Paul explained that the current signage at Swartz Bay is incomplete and once completed it will be more intuitive.

Action: Paul McDaniel to bring Departure Bay parking concerns forward to Jason Bowman for follow-up.

Next Meeting

Tentatively set for July 6, 2011 from 1:00-4:00 - likely to be on board Spirit Vessel. Meeting revised - July 13, 2011 from 10:30-3:00 onboard Spirit of Vancouver Island.

Action: Karen to send out meeting notification.