

Meeting Details

Date: November 23, 2022
Time: 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm
Location: Webex

Attendance

Public Interest Representatives

Marnie Essery, Intermunicipal Advisory Committee on Disability Issues – Co-Chair
Hugh Mitchell, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
Neil Belanger, Chief Executive Officer, BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS)
Matthew Ellies – Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada, BC

BC Ferries Representatives

Karen Tindall, Director of Customer Care, Customer Care Department – Co-Chair
Captain Chris Frappell, Marine Superintendent, Vessel Replacement Program
Jeff Davidson, Director, Retail Services, Food and Retail Operations
Chris Morris, Terminal Operations Superintendent
Chanwoo Bae, Engineering Manager, Naval Architecture
Steve Shardlow, Training Manager, Terminals
Rhonda Daye, Manager, Customer Relations
Leslie Meyer, Regulatory and Policy Manager

Guest

Cheryl Forsyth, Customer Relations Advisor, Customer Care

Regrets

Pat Danforth, Disability Alliance BC
Vicki Pilot, Executive Director of Seniors Serving Seniors
Scott Heron, Peer Support Specialist, Spinal Cord Injury BC
Melanie Lucia, Executive Director, Terminal Operations
Bruce Paterson, Director, Naval Architecture, Fleet Technical

Introduction

Co-Chairs Karen Tindall and Marnie Essery welcomed and introduced the members of the committee.

Updates from Public Interest Representatives

Hugh Mitchell – Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

- No concerns or issues to report.

Matthew Ellies – Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada, BC

- Matthew advised he has recently spoken to a few specialist clients and two main concerns that were brought forward to him; navigating Tsawwassen terminal drop-off area and safety concerns relating to this:
 - It is difficult to ensure that taxis are dropping off at the same consistent drop-off spot, and
 - navigating the crosswalk area, there are no lights or audio to orient travellers and this can be challenging with potential safety concerns.

Some of the suggestions are: ensuring a consistent drop-off spot at Tsawwassen terminal; canvassing other terminals for consistent drop-off practices at curbside that don't involve walking across traffic in a crosswalk area if possible when dropping clients off. Matthew would like to work collaboratively by walking clients through to familiarize and identify potential areas for improvement in the various areas, restrooms, foot passenger waiting areas, visitor pass procedure, etc.

Action: Matthew will work with Marnie and Karen on planning and organizing walk-through exercises with clients.

- Matthew also discussed accessibility concerns on the vessel and as well suggested a walk-through exercise with clients. Some of the areas identified:
 - Finding restrooms once onboard
 - Locating other passenger amenities (cafeteria, gift shop and passenger lounge areas).

Matthew has been in touch Bruce Paterson about implementing technology and built-in features (higher contrast areas around restrooms and passenger spaces).

Marnie suggested considering additional infrastructure such as "BlindSquare" (the world's most widely used accessible GPS-self-voicing app developed for the blind, deafblind and partially sighted). This would work with GPS or blue tooth modules that can be installed in different areas on the vessels. Another version is

“RightHear” (provides talking signage, so everyone can interpret and understand their surroundings in real time). This app uses the same concept using blue tooth beacons. Another option is using WiFi mapping which utilizes individuals using their own personal phones.

Action: Marnie will connect with Karen and Bruce about this and provide additional information if needed.

Marnie Essery - Intermunicipal Advisory Committee on Disability Issues

- Marnie shared a positive situation she witnessed with a person impacted by blindness at the Horseshoe Bay terminal trying to navigate the arrivals area. She shared a commendation for BC Ferries’ staff that assisted the customer. Marnie shared that new seasonal staff could benefit from this example as a learning/awareness opportunity so that BC Ferries’ staff approach and communication pattern is consistent at all of our terminals and vessels.
- Marnie also raised:
 - An interest in the new and upcoming BC Ferries app. Customers have shared feedback about wanting to have the convenience of having an app for travel
 - feedback about wanting to see the buffet back in operation
 - concerns the number of cancelled sailings and the affect on customers making their long-awaited specialist appointments and travelling for important treatment
 - the question about having accessible portable restrooms at the terminals during busier terminal times.
- Marnie shared that November is “*Indigenous Disability Awareness Month (IDAM)*” with the goal of bringing an increased awareness of the many different disabilities and barriers that individuals face every day while celebrating significant contributions. Indigenous Disability Canada (BCANDS) will be hosting it’s third Indigenous Disability and Wellness Gathering.
- Marnie also shared that December 3rd is “*International Day of Persons with Disabilities*”. This is a day to bring together an equal opportunity and a day of taking action while recognizing the important message behind this theme to promote inclusion, equality and accessibility for the disability community. Businesses and corporations are included to look at how they can improve in all aspects of their business. Marnie shared with the committee that she is proud to be part Mi’kmaq First Nations.

Action: Karen advised that members of the committee would be invited to participate in BC Ferries’ Mobile App Beta testing prior to launch in the Spring of 2023.

Karen Tindall – Director, Customer Care

- Karen provided an update to the committee that the BC Ferries mobile app will improve timely communication regarding current conditions to passengers and allow customers to travel plan and make bookings from their phones. The app is currently in the production and testing phase. The release date for the app is

targeted for March, 2023. Important Beta testing and revisions need to be completed before it is released. Once beta testing has been completed we will have a better idea when it will be available to the public.

BC Ferries has a large communication plan in the works, which includes a '*frequently asked questions*' section. Beta testing will begin mid-January. The testing phase is one of the most important phases to ensure a successful release to the public. Karen advised that there will be email notifications sent out shortly to beta testers on the new app and we are looking for any feedback or suggestions for improvement. We are looking for testers and anyone on the committee is welcome to participate.

- Karen advised that when we implemented our new booking system on our website we added an option for passengers to note any accessible requirements in the booking process whether it is online or by calling into the Customer Service Centre. Our terminals have committed resources to assist with passenger's needs, this has been in place for 5-7 years. We also have a complimentary wheelchair assistance service that customers can pre-book ahead. This is available to any passenger requiring assistance. We are open to any suggestions for improvements to any of these services offered.
- Karen updated the committee on our summer 2022 traffic volumes and challenges we faced. We continue to have challenges relating to sailing cancellations, as well as staff availability both at the terminals and on the vessels. We are looking at filling approximately 900 positions throughout the fleet. We are seeking many highly skilled, marine licensed and various critical engineering positions. There is a world-wide shortage of mariners that is affecting our crewing levels. We are actively planning and holding hiring/career fairs. We have hired additional resources, in our recruiting area, to assist with getting prepared for the summer.
- Karen shared with the committee a new program that was introduced last summer related to compensation/service recovery for customers affected by crewing and mechanical sailing disruptions. The program is called '*Making it right when your travel is disrupted*', '*Making it Right*' is offered to customers whose booking is cancelled due to situations within our control (such as mechanical, crew availability, etc.). If customers are eligible they will be sent a travel voucher valid for 1 vehicle and driver with a 1 year expiry date.
- Additionally, we are currently working on implementing a complimentary TAP booking flow option to customers booking on the website, mobile app or through the Customer Service Centre. This will provide a complimentary booking/reservation for customers when travelling with a completed TAP form.
- Karen shared with the committee that accessible restrooms have been put in place on the highways outside of the major terminals only on long weekends at this point. Chris Morris advised that the terminals have identified peak times of bringing in portable accessible restrooms, some minor terminals are also included, depending on the traffic volumes. Our terminal management teams will continue to monitor and adjust the schedule if necessary. There are some challenges with placement of the portable restrooms, depending on the location and configuration of the terminal.

Action: Terminal operations to review portable accessible restrooms plans for summer 2023

- Karen updated the committee about our new process of notifying service notice subscribers of 'sailings at risk' of being cancelled, to provide customers with an advanced opportunity to change/manage their travel plans.

Action Items from last meeting – Karen provided update:

1. Non-smoking signage raised with Marketing – currently doing a signage audit to see if we have enough on the vessels and at the terminals.
2. Beta Testing/BC Ferries App – an information email is planned for Dec. 5 and external committee members will be receiving instructions if they would like to participate in the testing phase, which is planned for January, 2023.
3. Straws – Jeff and Karen have discussed. Karen advised that it is her understanding that our Catering teams will keep a single-use plastic straw in place and available for customers who require and request them. We are looking at a paper straw option that can bend, we are currently checking with our Environment department. We have checked with the provincial government and we have been unsuccessful in receiving confirmation as to whether or not there is an exemption for plastic single-use straws.
4. TV monitors captioning – mostly all vessels have closed captioning available to passengers. We have had some short-term technical outages but can confirm that all monitors are currently operational. We also have pre-recorded announcements that are currently working well and well received.

Updates from BC Ferries

Chanwoo Bae - Vessel Development Update/Naval Architecture Update

- On behalf of Bruce Paterson, presented a PowerPoint slide show to the committee on "*Underwater Radiated Noise, Greenhouse Gas and & Underwater Radiant Noise*".

Steve Shardlow - Training Update

- Steve presented an overview on training relating to accessibility requirements. Steve shared various slides on the BC Ferries Academy and the role relating to training staff. The main objective is to train employees on the vessels and at the terminals. We provide operational training, Transport Canada regulations we operate under and WorkSafe requirements. BC Ferries has its own set of rules within our company and we regularly extend over minimum requirements.
- SEA training includes "*on the job*" training and involvement with other departments. Other departments within BC Ferries have their own specialized specific department/area training, eg. Customer Care, Safety, Terminal Operations, Catering Operations, Vessel Operations, etc. The Academy is responsible for 80+ courses, 80+ regulations and non-regulated. 40+ Sea training programs for deck, terminal, catering and engineering keeping a blended learning approach in mind. A typical new employee spends between 4-25 days in training, depending on the complexity of the position and range of requirements necessary. We continue to

have a lot of good engagement with part-time trainers working in the positions and mentoring new staff, this ensures all job requirements are up-to-date. Additionally, we have over 60 part-time trainers and 13 full-time trainers.

Action: Steve will update the committee on:

- 1) how the training programs incorporate and address accessibility awareness
 - 2) information on timing/availability of refresher training for current/regular staff
 - 3) does the training include guide trainers who are well versed with visual impairments
- Accessibility awareness training is given to many staff members and prioritization is given to staff members that are assisting with accessibility requests. There are many touchpoints that staff are trained on. Some of the touchpoints include:
 - customer service interaction (in a vehicle or on foot);
 - elevator request;
 - upper car deck request and vehicle placement on vessel;
 - braille and way-finding to amenities and services on vessel

Our trainers work through a new hire check-list with staff to ensure that all possible touchpoints are reviewed and covered before independently working in their new positions. Training is given to Supervisors as well.

Jeff Davidson - Food and Retail Operations Update

- Jeff discussed the buffet area on the two Spirit vessels (*Spirit of Vancouver Island* and *Spirit of British Columbia*) and the *Coastal Celebration*. After extensive analysis the buffet is not profitable, and crew availability has been challenging to enable us to re-open. We have been looking at the different options to utilize the space to be the most efficient while remaining fiscally responsible. The space has been closed since the beginning of the pandemic. Jeff advised that he would predict that the buffet will not open in the current format. The company is still exploring options for this desirable space while utilizing less staff and being more efficient.

Action: Jeff to provide an update at the next meeting.

Other Business:

- Scott Heron, representing Spinal Cord Injury BC will remain as a member of the committee.
- Karen and Marnie to send a thank you letter to Les Chan for his involvement and contributions to the committee over the last few years. At our next meeting we will have confirmation for his replacement with the committee.
- A vote commenced on applications for consideration of new community members to be added to the committee:
 - 1) Captain Dave Willows – Chair of Saanich Peninsula Accessible Advisory Committee, who is a retired, former BC Ferries employee Captain and Chief Officer.
 - Nominated by Karen – 1st

- Capt. Frappell – 2nd
 - Karen and Marnie will co-sign a welcome letter to Captain Willows.
- 2) Susan Simmons – Board member and Head Swim Coach/Advisor for Special Olympics Victoria.
- Nominated by Karen - 1st
 - Hugh – 2nd
 - Karen and Marnie will co-sign a welcome letter to Susan Simmons.
- 3) Seniors Serving Seniors – Two new representatives were presented to join the committee:
- Dr. Jie Zhang, Marnie suggests the appointment of Dr. Zhang and alternate nominee
 - Nominated by Karen – 1st
 - Captain Chris Frappell – 2nd
 - Heng Su, Treasurer, nominated by Karen
 - Marnie suggested that the committee consider Dr. Zhang as a member and Heng Su as an alternate member
 - Karen – supports this suggestion – 1st
 - Captain Chris Frappell also supports this suggestion – 2nd
- Committee members were asked to email any agenda items to either co-chair in preparation for the next meeting.
 - Marnie closed the meeting and thanked everyone for taking the time to attend. All members are welcome to reach out to either co-chair, prior to next meeting, should there be any issues or concerns to discuss.

Meeting Adjourned: 3:20 pm

Next Meeting Date:

Wednesday, May 10, 2023 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm via Webex