

BC Ferry Services Inc.

Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details

Date July 7, 2010
Time 1:00 PM - 3:30 PM
Location Board Room, BC Ferries, 1112 Fort Street, Victoria, BC

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, CNIB

BC Ferries Representatives

Peter Simpson, Director Operational Strategy, Fleet Operations, Co-Chair
Karen Chrabasz, Manager Customer Relations, 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
Stuart Leslie-Young, Catering Superintendent, Food and Retail Operations

Regrets

Scott Heron, Disability Resource Centre
Valerie Thoem, BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
Mary-Kay Kennedy, CNIB

Introductions

Co-Chairs Pat Danforth and Peter Simpson welcomed the members of the committee

Review of minutes – January 26, 2010

The minutes of the meeting of January, 26, 2010 were approved. Matters arising from the minutes include scooters hanging up sills to outer decks; the washrooms in the Nanaimo retail area being too small and washrooms on Spirit vessels not indicating clearly whether the doors are locked while being occupied.

Action items for matters arising from the minutes:

- Passengers in motorized scooters arriving by the overhead foot passenger walkway are impeded by the door sills (Coastal class in particular) in moving into the interior of the vessel - need for a small moveable ramps (Bruce to

liaise with Terminal Maintenance; Marine Superintendents to then supply ship with ramp)

- Review the need for better signage at the Departure Bay retail area (Jeff and David to review)
- Initiate a work order to install in the handicap restrooms an 'in use' light/device - as soon as the work is completed, photos of the work to be sent to Co-Chair, Pat Danforth. Work completed

Standing Items

Transport Canada Recommendations

A further update was provided to the committee on the 'gazetted' regulation to be issued from Transport Canada with respect to passengers needing special assistance in the event of an emergency. Since the prior meeting the requirement remains gazetted for review by marine operators on changes in the Canada Shipping Act, Measures Respecting Vessels that Carry Passengers;

Passenger Count and Details

The master of a vessel that carries passengers shall, before the vessel embarks on a voyage, ensure that the following information is both communicated to him or her and recorded:

- (a) the number of persons on board; and*
- (b) details respecting all persons who have declared a need for special care or assistance during an emergency*

In anticipation of the regulations coming into force BC Ferries instituted procedural changes including input received from the committee during the January 26 meeting. The procedures incorporated the requirements to account for passengers declaring special care or assistance during an emergency through the pre-travel contact and at the pre-boarding stage; the nature of assistance that may arise (e.g. mobility, sight, hearing or other) and a record of the information provided to the Captain on the numbers of such passengers on board prior to sailing.

Further issues were raised by the committee on the benefits of instituting community outreach programs to present to different disability groups on what this could mean for them when travelling aboard BC Ferries and the means by which the people with disabilities know that they can self-declare.

Training

Jeff Joyce advised that training material had been updated with input from the committee from the previous meeting and would circulate examples of these updates through to the committee members.

A potential training issue related to the valid use of CNIB cards for the discount fares was noted relating to a report that there was an incidence of a ticketing employee not recognizing the CNIB card.

Action: Jeff will follow through with notice to the Trainers of the ticketing staff to ensure knowledge of all valid identification for discount purposes is included during training. Paul will circulate this information to current staff through his department's informational channels.

Ernie Stigant suggested consideration of the 'secret shopper' approach to quality testing of services, both related to assistance provided for special needs or BC Ferries services in general. For further discussion and review

Loading Practices

Paul McDaniel spoke to the committee that major modification work is being done at Berth 4 in Tsawwassen and that temporary procedures are in place at Berth 3 (primarily for Duke Point) and Berth 5 (the primary arrival and embarkation between Vancouver and Victoria). The construction work means changes to dock usage, and therefore vehicle loading and the use of the passenger overhead walkways.

The same procedures will be implemented when future dock upgrades are scheduled for Berth 3 and 5.

Vessel Developments

Chilliwack

The committee was advised that recent developments in funding has provided for the upgrading of the Chilliwack. From a passenger perspective this will include the change of evacuation equipment from davit-launched lifeboats to MES (slides) which are an improvement for persons with mobility challenges. There will be passenger accommodation upgrades done over a two stages of work between 2011 and 2012. Improved safety features for the vessel includes the installation of dividing doors on the car deck. The 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 between Comox and Powell River.

Quadra Queen 2

Bruce provided the committee with further information related to the work on the QQ2 which is out for a lengthy and major upgrade. Evacuation systems changed to slides and the layout being changed so there is an enclosed lounge at the aft of the ship with a washroom. On older vessels (QQ2 is 1969) the lounges are usually on an upper deck and may limit accessibility.

Klitsa

The Klitsa is set to replace the MV Mill Bay on Rte 12, Brentwood Bay to 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.

Spirit-class vessels

The two Spirit class vessels are scheduled for mid-life upgrades in the next 5-6 years and in keeping with Transport Canada recommendations to move towards standard life-saving and evacuation systems, these ships will be outfitted with MES (slides) as replacements for the present chute systems. The planning for passenger areas will be occurring and the Accessibility Committee will need to play a role in identifying opportunities for improved features for passengers with disabilities.

Terminal Developments

Paul McDaniel gave a fuller briefing following on from the discussion on Loading Practices.

With respect to the Tsawwassen terminal re-construction of Berth 4 the terminal side operations has and will experience significant impact to the embarkation and arrival of foot passengers and the need to maintain high priority for the safety of customers, especially persons with disabilities, during loading and unloading. Completion for construction of the overhead walkway (serving Berth 3, 4, 5) is scheduled for late August, 2010. The unavailability of Berth 4 does mean that ships which normally use Berth 5 may dock in Berth 3 during high winds. There will be periods during construction where there will be no use or partial use of the overhead walkway to Berth 5 and plans and protocols will be in place for foot passengers to load/unload via the vehicle deck if necessary. During this time the terminal has developed specific pathways for use in marshalling passengers onto and off of the vessels and that additional staff will be deployed to assist and escort passengers. Otherwise, use of Berth 3 will be maximized and normal access via the walkway will be available. Should Berth 3 not be operational or problems with elevators arise, the terminal staff will be made available to assist any passengers with access issues to ensure their safe transit to/from the ship.

At Swartz Bay the introduction of sewage pump ashore (replacing sewage trucks on board) initially created some passenger passage issues, but these have been resolved. Improvements for handling customers and vehicles using through-fare passage between the Gulf Islands and Tsawwassen continues with solutions being sought around the need for passengers to re-ticket at Swartz Bay.

BC Ferries Design Criteria

David Carroll advised the committee that a comprehensive draft of design criteria had been developed using the services of 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. The work for this is being led by Brad McCannell and Bruce Gilmore.

Sue Gallagher raised the concern that people with sight impairment are faced with challenges with lighting levels and markings at the foot passenger counters and booths for the pathways and lanes.

Action: Paul to bring forward for Terminal Operations review

Pat reminded the group of the 2007 site audit and recommendations for the mobility and sight impaired with respect to these issues.

Action: Pat and Bruce are to provide a copy of the audit to ensure that the findings are considered for the final draft of the barrier free design guidelines.

Pre-Travel Information and Website Status

Karen updated the group on the work being in Customer Care. The company is moving to introducing vessel announcements on video monitors with close captioned messaging during Safety announcements – the trial of this is planned for the Spirit vessels which have numerous video monitors and are on a high volume route. The current challenges being faced with a more rapid implementation are related to hardware/software issues where we have two systems with the older hardware will

need software upgrades that will align with the newer software already in place for our food and retail systems (menu boards).

The BC Ferries website is scheduled for a full replacement and the company is in Phase 2 of revising the website. Discussion on the changes to colouring in the design with 'auto-reading' capacity and Karen will seek feedback from Pat, Susan and Barb after they've had the opportunity for review. The accessibility information pages are designed with full content and the development of the website will provide both vessel specific and terminal specific information relating to accessibility.

Action: Karen to provide screen shots of the new web layout and accessibility information. Complete

Ernie stated there needed to be assurance that the hyperlink to information for persons with disabilities be given a high priority and concluded. It was recommended that this be done through a more prominent placement of a 'Persons with Disabilities' link on the front page of the website. The first information to be provided would be for passengers who may need special assistance in the event of an emergency and then include the other information related to services related to disabled passengers which is on the website but not currently linked to the front page of the website.

Action: Placement of a hyperlink for Persons with Disabilities on the front page of the BC Ferries website. Complete

Other Business

Horseshoe Bay advocacy group raised issue on persons with hearing impairments during the ticketing process. Hugh Mitchell provided the group with a simple and intuitive solution and process for this issue in advance of a better technology solution. As hearing impairment is an invisible disability, many organizations have developed a universally recognized design for persons to self-identify that they are hearing impaired which also provides guidance to service providers on how best to communicate to customer (e.g. speak directly, don't cover mouth, move to line of sight and if practical use short written notes).

Action: Hugh will circulate and promote to the various associations for the hard of hearing the information to use the universal card for identification during travel on BC Ferries; Jeff to include a copy of the card as part of the training package for ticketing staff and Karen to ensure that the new Point of Sale system includes large, easy to read information regarding travel transactions.

ASIC were seeking assistance and a protocol to aid independent travel by persons with sight impairment to travel independently by bus and ferry. The need was to ensure that there was adequate communication between BC Ferries staff and the drivers employed by PCL and Greyhound in being available to guide travellers when the bus arrives or departs from the car deck.

Action: Paul and Stuart to provide process and seek commitment from bus companies to support the process to assist low-vision customers between the buses and the passenger lounges. Once complete, ASIC would use their communication network to inform the appropriate organizations of this assistance option during travel on BC Ferries. Complete

Parking and the distance from long-term parking was identified as a concern for persons with disabilities.

Action: The plan is to seek better coordination with both Robbins staff and BC Ferries in assisting those with needs to get to the booth and to follow up at future meetings of the committee.

Next Meeting

To be determined