

Honourable Rob Fleming
Minister of Transportation & Infrastructure
PO Box 9055 Prov Stn Govt Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Re: Increase in contract ferry service level for Route 3

Minister Fleming,

The past two weeks have been very tumultuous on the Sunshine Coast. As I am sure you are aware, BC Ferries brought forward a proposal to increase the level of reservations on Route 3 to 95% on a trial basis. This proposal brought outcry from many in the community, and over 8,500 Sunshine Coast ferry users signed a petition against proposed changes. BC Ferries has since cancelled the trial due to the high level of division in the community.

It is our stance that this BC Ferries proposal was the best option to better utilize existing capacity on our route and increase satisfaction with the performance of our route. This proposal would shift demand away from the busiest times, but it comes at the cost of accessibility to the ferry – our marine highway. Our community depends on convenient and reliable access to Metro Vancouver, and the community spoke loud and clear that this proposal does not meet that objective.

Residents of Sechelt are tired of overloaded ferries and an inability to access reservations. Route 3 is no longer meeting the needs of our community. This is evidenced by a BC Ferries study which shows in 2019 the customer satisfaction of Route 3 sailing frequency is 2.86 out of 5 while the ability to get on desired sailing is 3.49 out of 5. Of the 8 routes studied, the sailing frequency satisfaction is the lowest and the ability to get on desired sailing is second lowest – behind Gabriola Island which will be getting a significant service upgrade in the next year. To put it in further context, out of the 8 routes surveyed and 48 metrics measured – only three metrics have lower satisfaction than the sailing frequency of Route 3. [1]

As local elected officials we hear stories about the impacts of our current ferry service levels. We hear about people coming out of surgery and forced to wait for three hours in the Horseshoe Bay terminal for the next available sailing with space. We hear about Lower Mainland youth sports teams not wanting to visit the Sunshine Coast. We hear about businesses struggling to get the supplies they need in a timely fashion. As travellers we know about the struggle of planning travel to avoid busy sailings times. We know the current level of ferry service is hurting our community in a multitude of ways.

Furthermore, BC Ferries singled out Route 3 for this trial due to the low level of general customer satisfaction. They saw frustration around travel times, long waits, and congested terminals. BC Ferries recognizes that service levels on Route 3 is a problem, our community recognizes it, and now we look to the province.

We are writing today to once again request that the province increase the contracted level of service on Route 3.

Our vision is 16 sailings a day in each direction, leaving approximately every hour. After the proposed and cancelled BC Ferries trial, we are focused on moving together with consensus in the community. We make this request knowing that it has incredibly strong support in the community. We need more ferry service.

However, we recognize that 16 sailings a day is not feasible with current BC Ferries infrastructure. We provide this as a long-term goal so that BC Ferries, the BC Ferries Commission, and the Province of BC can work put together a business plan for increased service on our route.

In the interim, we would request your office direct BC Ferries to study options for increasing service on Route 3. There are currently several proposals in the community that could possibly be implemented but would require direction from the province and your office.

- Increase the service level to 12 sailings a day every day in peak season on Route 3.
- Supplement service with a secondary smaller ship.
- Provide a passenger ferry service to complement regular service.
- Share ferries between different routes to prioritize peak service on Route 3.

We wish to move past the division created by the BC Ferries proposed pilot project. We believe the above solutions can be implemented by BC Ferries with the support of the Province and we know that these ideas will receive broad community support.

Sincerely,

cc. Mark Collins, Nicholas Simons