

Mr. Doug Routley
MLA for Nanaimo-North Cowichan
Room 201, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC, V8V 1X4

Dear Mr. Routley,

First, may I thank you personally for taking the time and trouble to be at the recent BC Ferry Consultation meeting on Thetis, and for your thoughtful participation. I know it was much appreciated.

It occurred to me that you might find it useful to have the enclosed little "Tale of Two Travellers" ; you may remember that I expressed thoughts along these lines at the meeting. The two people in it are real, but I have given them pseudonyms.

The more I think about this subject, the more I realize that there is a serious lack of proportion in many of the ongoing discussions about ferry costs. Yes, of course efficiency and economy should be sought everywhere in government. But focusing "ad nauseam" on revenue "shortfalls" on some routes, while scarcely raising an eyebrow about much larger amounts in other areas of government spending, tends to be a fruitless waste of effort. This overweening attention shows a regrettable failure to understand the larger picture.

Wherever the BC Ferries provide lifelines for communities, it surely makes sense for them to be dealt with consistently as an integral part of the whole transportation infrastructure of the Province. That structure - and others, the provision of electric power being a further example - bring the people of BC together as a meaningful and unfragmented social, economic and political entity.

While minor "tweakings" here and there may bring some cost savings, broadly speaking I believe the BC Ferry system is very well run. The excellent service it provides in coping with the geography of our rugged coasts should be a source of pride to British Columbians.

I touched above on the electric power infrastructure here in BC. It is relevant: my understanding is that residential consumers, wherever they may be in the Province, pay the same rate for their power. However far away the source of generation, however rugged the terrain over which it is transmitted, the rates for electricity are the same for all. Carrying the power over mountains, over or under water ... all the costs are pooled to determine the rates charged.

I will be happy for you to share these thoughts with your colleagues in government. I am sending a copy of this letter to The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure (underlining mine), and invite her to do likewise.

Yours sincerely,

Denham Kelsey

Copy to The Honourable Mary Polak
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure
PO Box 9055, STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC, V8W 9E2

A TALE OF TWO TRAVELLERS

Mr. Smith and Mrs. Jones are both worthy and respected British Columbians.

Mr. Smith lives in West Vancouver, retired after a successful career as a partner in a large accounting firm.

Mrs. Jones, now a widow, came to Thetis Island with her husband thirty years ago, having been attracted by affordable property prices, the supportive “small town” community spirit, and the absence of the congestion and stresses of a big city. She continues to operate a small business which she and her husband built up together. It gives part-time employment to five other residents of the island.

Thetis Island lacks many of the services which city dwellers take for granted, e.g.: grocery and other shopping, medical, dental and hospital care, secondary and post-secondary schooling, a theatre, prompt police protection ... even a gas station ... and many others. Lack of these things fosters a spirit of self-reliance, and the development of cooperative volunteer efforts, but still the people, and others like them in many coastal locations in the Province, are very dependent on the “lifelines” of BC Ferry service to more populated places.

Mrs. Jones uses the BC Ferry “lifeline” to Chemainus once or twice a week. Even with a BCFerry Experience Card, this costs her over \$20.80 a trip, or \$2.60 a mile for the round trip of eight (nautical) miles.

As for Mr. Smith, he lacks none of the basic services, close at hand. But he is an enthusiastic skier, with the good fortune of owning a condominium in Whistler,

roughly seventy miles from his home, via the Sea to Sky Highway. At \$2.80 a mile, that round trip would cost him about \$350 ... but he doesn't have to worry, because the cost is borne by the taxpayers at large. He goes to Whistler frequently, and never has to pay a user charge or toll.

(Granted, he does pay a tax on the gas used by his car for the trip, but that amount is insignificant.)

Incidentally, I understand that the Sea to Sky Highway cost over \$800 million to build and that in addition the BC Government is committed to spend a further \$63 million annually for the next twenty-five years, to cover its maintenance and further improvements. This all adds up to \$2.3 billion ... taxpayer money spent, or to be spent mainly for access to recreation.

Surely there is a lack of fairness and equity here!

Denham Kelsey, November, 2012