



**ADDRESSED TO:**

Mark Collins, CEO, BC Ferries  
Jill Sharland, Vice President and CFO, BC Ferries  
Hon. John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia  
Hon. Claire Trevena, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, Government of BC  
Hon. Michelle Mungall, Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Competitiveness  
Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer, Government of BC (COVID-19 concerns)  
Cc: Nicholas Simons, Member of the Legislative Assembly, Govt. of BC  
Cc: Rachel Blaney, Member of Parliament, House of Commons, Canada  
Cc: Graeme Johnston, President, BC Ferry & Marine Workers' Union  
Cc: Darin Guenette, Strategy & Community Engagement, BC Ferries  
Cc: Kim Barton-Bridges, Chair, Northern Sunshine Coast Ferry Advisory Committee  
Cc: Chuck Childress, Texada Action Now (Submitted statistical run data analysis to the FAC)

**July 14, 2020**

**Dear Mr. Collins, Ms. Sharland, Hon. John Horgan, Hon. Claire Trevena,  
Hon. Michelle Mungall, Dr. Bonnie Henry,**

On behalf of the Texada Island Chamber of Commerce and the residents of Texada Island, please reinstate the Texada-Comox Pilot Route, colloquially-known as "The Triangle Run," which was suspended due to COVID-19. Texada was excited about the Pilot's approval.

**ROUTE DESCRIPTION**

The Salish Orca/Class leaves Powell River, picks up Texada Island residents, and drops us off in Comox on the least-utilized Powell River-Comox runs on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

**ROUTES RESTORED – TOURISM ENCOURAGED**

We're now in July, post the height of COVID-19. Regular sailings on most routes have been restored and additional sailings have even been added. The Province is encouraging provincial tourism. Texada feels that this is an appropriate time for BCF to restore our Pilot.

**SALISH ORCA: HALF-EMPTY VESSEL – TEXADA INCREASES TICKET REVENUES**

Statistics\* demonstrate that the Salish Orca has rarely been more than 50% full on the selected Wed/Sat sailings from Comox. The highest average number of available vehicle spaces on Wed in any month was 94 in Oct, and for Sat was 88 in both May and June. The lowest average deck space available on Wed was 66 vehicles in Aug (69 vehicles is 50% empty). The lowest average deck space on Sat was 78 vehicles, also in August. It's been busier in the mornings to Comox but even on the busiest long weekend has never had an overload. Restoring this Pilot would help BCF make this route more profitable, especially if restrictive limitations, described, aren't placed on the Pilot. (\*Presented to FAC. 2018 data.)

**WAGES BEING PAID – WITHOUT SERVICE DELIVERY for our PILOT**

While not confirmed, we've heard that crew on the Powell River-Comox route have continued receiving wages to deliver our Pilot throughout COVID-19, even though it was suspended, and that they'll continue receiving these wages until the end of the year, whether the Pilot is reinstated or not. This is because BCF can only change wages once in the calendar year, and the change was applied in January 2020 for the Pilot. Is there a pattern? Many of our Island Discovery Texada crew are being paid to stay at home, while requiring a reduced crew of five to complete a heavier workload on a larger vessel.

**PLEASE IMPLEMENT THE FULL SIGNIFICANT SERVICE REQUEST RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Request (FAC Chair):**

*\*One request per submission only*

Trial/pilot of direct link between Blubber Bay and Little River; Wednesday and Saturday first sailing from PR picks up Little River traffic in Blubber Bay; Wednesday and Saturday last sailing from Little River drops Texada traffic in Blubber Bay. Ticketing by 100% reservation, using a reservation procedure similar to system currently in use for sailings between Tsawwassen and Southern Gulf Islands.

**Supporting rationale, data and information (FAC Chair):**

*\*Attach additional documentation as required*

1. Reduces round trip travel time between Texada and Comox by up to five hours (benefits both Texada residents travelling for medical appointments and Texada-based businesses hauling products to Vancouver Island and returning same day.
  2. Increases traffic on underutilized sailings, with projected increase in revenue. Easier access = more traffic, benefitting both BCF and Texada. Increased exposure to tourism traffic at a decreased cost will allow the island to further offerings, thereby increasing flow further.
  3. Provides for collection of real time data for planning purposes.
- Relevant information reflecting changes to area population 2011 to 2016 (Texada Action Now, May 25/17):
- |  |                |          |                 |
|--|----------------|----------|-----------------|
| Increase in population aged 65 + older | - Texada 49%   | PR 14.1% | Courtenay 26.3% |
| Percent of population aged 55 + older  | - Texada 60.9% | PR 44.9% | Courtenay 44.1% |
| Percent of population 65 + older       | - Texada 36.7% | PR 27.1% | Courtenay 26.1% |

Note: a) Proposed change affects only 4 out of 54 sailings per week (Island Sky did 14 dockings per week in winter during Westview terminal construction).  
 b) Weather is seldom an issue when docking in Blubber Bay, but summer weather should help on time performance.

**Medical:** Resumption of the Pilot will allow residents to get to medical specialists on Vancouver Island in a timely manner (1 hour, rather than up to 5 hours each way).

Many appointments are now being rescheduled, post COVID-19. Also, minimizing the number of travel hours from 5 to 1 means that people have less contact points and hours in terminals, vessels, and washrooms, thereby minimizing COVID-19 spread risk. Reservations are critical to making the Pilot dependable for medical trips.

**Denial of SSR Recommendations Caused Great Frustration for Texada Residents**

- **Reservations:** Allow Texada residents to call the BCF reservation line to purchase our Pilot tickets over the phone with a credit card. Or, let us use the system currently in use for booking sailings between Tsawwassen and the Southern Gulf Islands, by adding our Pilot route onto that system. We find it incomprehensible that “it’s impossible for Texada residents to make reservations.” BCF has proven capable of this task elsewhere.
- **Commercial:** Allow Texada’s commercial vehicles to be loaded onto the ferry, given that most Powell River customers are non-commercial and they could be loaded into the empty lower car deck. That would allow our commercial vehicles to be loaded onto the upper deck, in addition to regular non-commercial vehicles. Many entrepreneurs and heavier industry were deeply disappointed that you would not allow commercial vehicles to participate in the Pilot. We need to help business, especially now when all parts of our economies are affected by COVID. Imagine if Powell River residents were not allowed to board in commercial vehicles at Powell River...that trade route wouldn’t exist for them. We’re arguing we need this commercial link to Comox active too.

- **Tourists:** Allow motorcycles to be loaded, as not all tourists and residents use larger vehicles. We were not informed why motorcycles weren't allowed to board during the initial Pilot launch. Allow RV trailers to be loaded on as well, to help 2-way tourism.
- **More than 10 Cars per Trip:** Texada residents were upset that the Pilot launched with a max-10 vehicle limit. BC Ferries developed a 10 car-limit based on traffic when the Island Sky ferry was stopping here. As mentioned in the SSR, though, the Island Sky was doing 7 round trips with 10 cars per week. 70 cars having access to this route is not 20 cars per week (that's your limitation of 2 round trips per week with 10 cars per week). Texada would like greater access to Vancouver Island per week than 20 vehicles and the ferry has the space for this to happen. We were pleased to see that BCF relaxed this limitation 'a bit.' Please expand it. The vessel has the room. The crew can handle it.

#### **Why Some Pilot Runs Were Not Fully-Subscribed or Participation Petered Out**

- People were mad. Some residents believe that there's an outright plan to make this Pilot so hard and annoying as to instigate failure. Limitations outlined are illustrative.
- Because there was no way to reserve, and a max-10 spot rule, some people parked overnight and had someone else drive them home. Then, they had to drive back the following morning. Some people have to drive up to 45 minutes to get to the ferry terminal, and had to plan to be there 2 hours or more early to get one of the 10 spots.
- If they got there after the 10 cars, then their travel plans were completely ruined. They had to either drive all the way back home or sit there at the ferry terminal waiting for the next Texada to Powell River ferry. When they got to Powell River, they had to wait a couple hours, then get the next ferry to Comox but by then most of the day was over. Many just decided that they could make more dependable plans by forgoing the Pilot and getting on the 'sure thing' run from Texada, wait in Powell River, then get to Comox.

#### **PAYMENT COLLECTIONS & CONTACTLESS PURCHASE OPTIONS**

- Comox to Texada (the return run portion of the Pilot route) could be immediately implemented without any change to current BCF ticket procedures. All Salish Class passengers purchase tickets in person at the Comox ticket booth. Passengers for Texada could buy tickets as per usual, and park in 'Texada lanes' for first-exit boarding at Texada.
- As stated in the SSR, a reservation system was envisioned. We heard that the technical reservation system development problems were 'so severe' that there would be no reservation and telephone/online ticket purchasing system for the entire duration of the 2-year Pilot. Nobody can believe this statement. COVID-19 could be an excellent time to encourage BCF to place us onto a currently operable contactless purchasing system.
- Please consider adding us as a 'run' on your currently active Tsawassen-Southern Gulf Islands reservation system. Or, allow Texada to Comox passengers to use your current phone-in credit card payment reservation system on most other routes to allow us to pay for the Texada-Comox direction sailing. What is the barrier to using your current successful systems, exactly?

Allowing us to remote-purchase tickets would give Powell River crew advance notice of exactly how many people will be in the lineup at Blubber Bay and limit our in-person interactions with BCF staff during the pandemic.

**DON'T FORCE PEOPLE TO TRAVEL FROM COMOX TO POWELL RIVER then back to TEXADA**

Prior to the suspension, crew sometimes forbade Texada vehicles from getting off the ferry at Texada because they were the '11<sup>th</sup>' car. They were too strict on the '10 cars off only.' After having arrived at Texada some residents were forced to travel all the way back to Powell River, and wait more than an hour for the next ferry back to Texada when they had already been at their destination more than 2 hours prior. Plus, they had to pay the fare from Powell River to Texada again, in order to board. For the love of common sense, please don't force crew to do that to BCF customers.

You may better understand this through art. Here's a 'Monty Python'-style skit written by a Texada resident, which explains the absurdity of this situation.

***(Imagine John Cleese's voice for the Traveler)***

**Traveler:** Yes, sir, my destination is Texada.

**BC Ferries:** I know sir, but you can't get off the boat Here.

**Traveler:** But we're Here! And I want to be Here!

**BC Ferries:** Ah yes, but you have to go There, and Wait an hour and Pay more to get Here.

**Traveler:** (Incredulous) So, you're saying the ship is Here, and I'm Here, and I want to get off Here, but I have to go There to get back Here??!!!

**BC Ferries:** Yes sir.

**Traveler:** But, but, but WHY?

**BC Ferries:** Well because sir, you're #11. If you'd just been #10 we would let you off the boat Here and you wouldn't need to go There. But being #11, you now have to go There to get Here.

**Traveler:** Actually, you know I'm not really #11. I'm actually, the second #1. There are two sets of #1 to 10. And I'm really #1 the 2nd.

**BC Ferries:** Oh well then! You can get off Here!

***(Credit: Carolyn Wood, included with permission)***

**RECOVERING FROM COVID-19 ECONOMIC IMPACTS**

We're providing an idea to limit COVID-19 spread. We believe BC Ferries' can issue reservations and ticket sales over the phone, which would be especially helpful to make medical travel, via the Pilot, dependable. We want to participate in the economy and, for some of us, that's trying to make or retain important commercial ties to Vancouver Island. Many of us have been hit just as hard as others, economically, and we need to do what we can to promote business opportunities. Texada wants to participate in tourism, as the Province is encouraging all of us to do. We believe that it's advantageous for BC Ferries to address its COVID-19 deficits by maximizing revenues by not blocking fares with a 10-car restriction, and allowing commercial vehicles, RVs, and motorcycles onto the Pilot runs.

**RESUMPTION DATE**

Please let us know when you can resume our Texada-Comox Pilot. Thank you.

Cindy Babyn, President, Texada Island Chamber of Commerce | [Cbabyn@gmail.com](mailto:Cbabyn@gmail.com) | 604-344-0428