

NEWS RELEASE – from the FACC (Ferry Advisory Committee Chairs)

## Report urges government to clarify its own goals for ferries

09 NOVEMBER 2009 – Representatives for users of the non-major coastal ferry routes welcome recommendations from the Comptroller General that address concerns about the system's public service mandate.

The recommendations are contained in a report released Friday of the Comptroller General's review of BC Ferries and TransLink governance.

The Ferry Advisory Committee Chairs (FACC) say the review was a large task within a tight timeframe. Yet the Comptroller General made some substantive, excellent recommendations.

The most significant ones affirm the public service role of coastal ferry service. The report notes that this is one of the province's objectives, yet it is not reflected in the governance framework the province created in 2003:

“The focus on the sustainability of the ferry operator(s), as articulated in the *Act* as a principle to guide the Commission, needs to be balanced with the interests of users of the ferry system, local communities and taxpayers.”

Tony Law, chair of the FACC, and of the Hornby-Denman FAC says, "the FACC has pointed out these deficiencies. We are pleased that the Comptroller General has recognized them and made constructive recommendations."

A key recommendation is update legislation to clarify government goals. Another is to expand the role of the Ferry Commission beyond its current mandate, which is to ensure sustainability of the ferry operator. The expanded mandate would require the Commission to consider the interests of ratepayers and customers as well.

The report also calls for open, consultative re-evaluation of service levels. Such assessment is complex. The recommended measures increase the likelihood of balancing different needs and reaching sound decisions – for customers, taxpayers and BC Ferries.

The FACC is encouraged that the Comptroller General finds BC Ferries "well managed and reasonably effective." However, the report says it is not clear how BC Ferries will fund coming expenses that include replacing "seriously aging" vessels and upgrading terminals for non-major routes. The FACC has concerns about the unknown impact of this on fares and service.

The recommendations in the list attached can strengthen both the ferry system and support public access to the BC coast. The FACC urges the government to adopt and adequately resource these recommendations, to ensure that all of government's goals are implemented.

The FACC looks forward to discussing with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure how the report recommendations and a long-term strategy for the non-major routes can help resolve these key issues identified by the Comptroller General.

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## **BACKGROUND**

### **Comptroller General's "Report on Review of Transportation Governance Models"**

[http://www.fin.gov.bc.ca/OCG/ias/pdf\\_Docs/transportation\\_governance.pdf](http://www.fin.gov.bc.ca/OCG/ias/pdf_Docs/transportation_governance.pdf)

#### **Significant Recommendations**

- The province review, clarify and update the legislation to reflect fully its current intentions and objectives for the coastal ferry system governance model.
- The province consider amending the legislation to change to the Commissioner's required responsibilities to include:
  - a seventh guiding principle, protecting the interests of ratepayers and customers;
  - assessing and commenting publicly on:
    - BCFS' 10 to 15 year strategic and capital plans and their implications for future services, fares and provincial/federal service fees;
    - BCFS' service levels and standards with consideration of the need for balance among capacity, cost and service levels.
- BCFS periodically re-evaluate, with public consultation, route service levels with a view to optimizing use of available resources while maintaining acceptable service levels in order to balance taxpayers' and fare-payers' interests with the need for long-term sustainability of BCFS operations and the ferry system.
- The Ferry Commission periodically conduct independent evaluations and comment on the service plans. As part of these evaluations, the Commission should invite public input. The results of these evaluations would be provided to the Authority, the ministry, and BCFS.