

# Ferry users hope for increased subsidy

BY JANE SEYD, NORTH SHORE NEWS FEBRUARY 13, 2011 [BE THE FIRST TO POST A COMMENT](#)

A committee representing coastal ferry users -- including those who regularly commute through Horseshoe Bay -- says it shares concerns voiced by B.C. Ferries boss David Hahn that massive fare hikes may result if the province doesn't start paying more in its annual subsidy.

Representatives for coastal ferry advisory committees said fare increases of up to 50 per cent on smaller routes recently discussed by Hahn are a "realistic assessment" of what could happen.

Hahn made his comments last week, noting B.C. Ferries is projecting a \$25-million annual deficit starting next year. A higher government subsidy is needed to fill the gap, he said, or fare increases and/or service reductions will be necessary.

That would have a significant impact on communities like Bowen Island and the Sunshine Coast, where many people regularly commute by ferry through Horseshoe Bay to work, said Alison Morse, Bowen Island ferry-users representative.

"It's the people who have to go to work every day and have no discretion that it will hit the most," said Morse. According to a recent study on Bowen, "about 45 per cent of the people who work commute into Vancouver," she added.

The projected increases are on top of a series of fare hikes that have already hit ferry travellers hard. Since 2003, round trip fares for an adult and vehicle leaving Horseshoe Bay have jumped to almost \$55 from \$37 for a trip to Langdale, and to almost \$37 from \$25 on the Bowen Island route.

Morse said she's hopeful that the province will opt to put more money into its annual ferry subsidy, which has remained frozen at \$92 million since 2003. The province also pays \$34 million to support northern routes, plus the costs of travel for school children, seniors and those travelling for medical reasons.

Morse said that subsidy is still modest compared to those for other kinds of public transportation -- like bridges and highway construction.

"People choose to live out in the Valley and they can still drive across bridges so they can get to work," she said. "The ferry system is a marine highway."

Hahn's estimate that a 50 per cent increase on minor route fares and a 20 per cent increase on major routes will be needed if nothing changes is contained in a report submitted by B.C. Ferries to the independent ferry commissioner.

Every four years, the commissioner sets a cap on ferry fare increases. He is expected to release a preliminary ruling on the increases covering the period 2012 to 2016 by March 31. The province then has three months to respond.

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