

Major fare hikes could be on the way

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An interview on Shaw TV last week with B.C. Ferries head David Hahn has set off a bit of a political firestorm over the possibilities of major fare hikes for minor routes.

The fare increases have been submitted to the B.C. Ferry commissioner for review with the commission making its initial recommendation on fare caps by March 31. The provincial government will then have until June 30 to decide in which direction to go, with the final fare rates to be set by September.

Hahn indicated during his interview that if the company's submissions are accepted, minor routes of which Route 3 (Horseshoe Bay-Langdale) is considered, could see a 14 to 16 per cent increase from 2012 to 2016.

In an email to stakeholders and governments here on the Coast Feb. 4, Jakob Knaus, chair of the Sunshine Coast Ferry Advisory Committee said the advisory committees have been grappling with the threat of these huge ferry fare increases for quite a while now.

"The chairs have made two very powerful and well researched submissions to the Ministry of Transport and to the ferry commissioners, outlining the likely impact such increases will have on our communities," said Knaus. "As far as our Route 3 is concerned, we are somewhat in limbo with the possibility of being upgraded to the major routes. Estimates based on likely traffic/revenue development, it looks like Route 3 will not suffer the top fare increases mentioned by David Hahn, but in any case it will be painful if government does not step up to the plate and increase the ferry service fees, which have been stagnant for the "other than northern routes" since 2003."

When news broke of Hahn's interview last week, the six Liberal party leadership candidates all began to weigh in on the issue, pledging to review the commissioner's findings if they were elected.

A Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure news release was also issued last weekend trying to outline further facts and how the process will unfold.

"As the ferry commissioner has not yet completed his review of the reasonableness of the information provided by B.C. Ferries it is too early to assume any additional amount of money," stated the news release. "Government will have ample time to carefully review the ferry commissioner's price cap ruling and it will be 2012 before any changes in fares or services go into effect."