

## Proposed ferry fare hike 'outrageous': critics

B.C. Ferries says it is looking at boosting fees by as much as 20% on major routes

**Danielle Bell**

Daily News; with a Postmedia News file

*Monday, February 07, 2011*

Critics say hefty fare hikes proposed by B.C. Ferries are "outrageous" and will devastate many coastal communities.

Beginning next year, fares could climb as high as 20% on major routes, 50% on minor routes and 100% on northern routes over the next four years.

Tess Cassidy, 28, said the fares are already so much that she does not take her car on sailings anymore.

Cassidy regularly travels on the ferry since she moved to Nanaimo from Vancouver, both for work and to visit friends.

"It's already so expensive that I won't take a car," said Cassidy as she waited to board at Departure Bay on Saturday. "I think that sucks."



CREDIT: Danielle Bell/Daily News

Tess Cassidy, waiting to board as a foot passenger at Departure Bay on Saturday, said ferry fares are already so expensive she does not take her car on B.C. Ferries.

The B.C. Ferries commissioner is reviewing price caps for performance term three, spanning April 2012 to March 2016, and preliminary price caps will be set by the end of September, according to Deborah Marshall, B.C. Ferries spokeswoman.

B.C. Ferries CEO David Hahn discussed BC Ferries' request to raise fare caps by four or 5% on major routes over the next four years to Voice of B.C. on Shaw TV on Thursday.

Hahn said the province must increase subsidies or services will be cut if fares do not go up.

Until approved by the provincial government, any fare hike would not take effect.

"If these outrageous fare increases (are implemented) it's going to be devastating to a lot of coastal communities," said NDP ferries critic Gary Coons on Saturday. "Fares are skyrocketing, ridership is going down. It's just not working."

Coons said the "million-dollar man," referring to Hahn's annual pay, would make more money as communities get hit.

Part of the issue of rising fares is to offset costs of new ships and terminal upgrades, said Marshall, such as the \$50-million overhaul at the Departure Bay terminal, .

People living on Gabriola Island would be among the hardest hit in rising ferry fare costs.

Many people use the ferry to commute or have children who attend school in Nanaimo, said Andre Lemieux of the Gabriola Island Ferry Advisory Committee.

Some people already struggle to pay ferry fares, said Lemieux, and a hefty hike would be brutal for families and other commuters.

"The small families and lower-income group is not going to be able to afford to travel on the ferry continuously," said Lemieux on Saturday. "It's going to create a place for the rich to live."

Critics say ferry advisory committees and the province need to develop a long-term vision for the viability of the B.C. Ferries.

DBell@nanaimodailynews.com

© The Daily News (Nanaimo) 2011