

Treat ferries like roads, transit? Or make users pay more?

By [Don Cayo](#) 4 Feb 2011 [Cayo](#)
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Big fare increases, scaled-back service and/or tens of millions of dollars in increased annual subsidies from the province — these are the options over the next few years facing BC Ferries and its passengers.

They are [spelled out here](#) in more detail by my colleague Vaughn Palmer, reporting on his conversation with ferries CEO David Hahn.

The ultimate decision will be political, of course, and there'll be a long period of discussion and debate before any decision is reached.

But this seems a good time to raise a basic question about how ferry service ought to be regarded in a coastal province like ours. Is a ferry route, as some argue, essentially an extension of the road system that should cost no more to use than traveling a comparable distance on the highway or on public transit? Or are British Columbians who don't use the ferries much being unfairly taxed to subsidize people who choose to live in pleasant (and often lower-cost) places at the end of the line? Or is there an intelligent way to define a fair middle ground — a combination of substantial fares and substantial subsidies, along the lines of what we have now, but perhaps in different proportions? Follow me on Twitter @DonCayo