

Reprint **Island Tides**

Visit www.islandtides.com for more interesting articles on other BC, national & international topics

Reprint from Volume 26 Number 5

Mar 20, 2014



Photo: Jim Hebert

Over 1,000 ferry-community citizens gathered on the Legislature lawn to protest ferry service cuts, many travelling long distances on ferries to get there. 'Ferries are highways,' they say. Apart from the seriousness of the situation to

Defending marine highways - Priscilla Ewbank

On March 11, the Defend our Marine Highways rally stood in front of the BC Legislature buildings while, inside—as we listened to rally speakers—Minister of Transportation Todd Stone was addressing the Legislature speaking about the coastal ferry sailing cuts and fare increases.

Outside, you could be touched by the passion and respectfulness displayed by coastal people in the face of the current government's disrespect for our lives and livelihoods. You could chuckle with the wit, wisdom, and playfulness out on the lawn in the sunshine—'We need a Ferry Godmother!', 'Experience---Indifference', 'BC Ferries-Pirates of the Salish Sea!', 'Grimm Ferry Tales'.

You could also laugh and cry at the idiocy and absurdity of the BC Government's 'business' ferry policy, not based on any

impact studies on the communities affected.

I looked with love and pride at the 26 Saturna Islanders of every political stripe and age—from 90 to newborn—who informed themselves, got onto the *Mayne Queen* in the morning dark, made and carried signs and banners, wondering all along if participating would make a difference.

It was comforting and inspiring to see people from Quadra, Gabriola, Read, Pender, Mayne, Denman, Hornby, lower Sunshine Coast, Texada and Powell River standing together in support of our Island lives—ecological, cultural and economic.

We found powerful support and energy amongst us. Almost all Islands Trustees were there as well as many members of the Ferry Advisory Committee. During the rally, Stephen Hume, *Vancouver Sun* columnist, who has recently written fact-filled

© Island Tides Publishing Ltd. This article may be reproduced with the following attribution, in its entirety, and notification to Island Tides Publishing Ltd.

'This article was published (March 20, 2014) in 'Island Tides', an independent, regional newspaper distributing on the Canadian Gulf Islands, on Vancouver Island and, via the internet, worldwide.'

Island Tides Publishing Ltd, Box 55, Pender Island, BC V0N 2M0 • 1-250-216-2267 • islandtides@islandtides.com • www.islandtides.com

columns with insightful and thought-provoking conclusions, was being interviewed, there and then, by Mark Forsyth, CBC noon-show host.

The organizers of Defend our Marine Highways did a splendid job in gathering speakers to inform, encourage and entertain the assembled. The Raging Grannies, Valdy and other musicians kept the event lighthearted. That ball of fire, North Island MLA Clare Trevena, who is Opposition critic for transportation, led off the speakers. Saanich North & The Islands' MLA Gary Holman, Saanich-Gulf Islands' MP Elizabeth May, Chair of the Islands Trust Sheila Malcomson, Victoria Mayor Dean Fortin, BC Federation of Labour's Jim Sinclair, and President of the BC Ferry and Marine Workers Union Chris Abbott all did a brilliant job of giving us facts and figures and BC Ferry/BC government history that emphasizes how much we coastal residents actually pay for our under-subsidized ferry infrastructure, what actual costs are and what percentages they have increased and what the BC government has said it is doing and what it actually has done.

The 'Takeaway' Is...

1. We ferry riders hugely cover our transportation costs like no other in the world and there is no comparison to the tiny amount paid by users of land transit versus its government subsidies.

2. We need infrastructure funding—not subsidies—we are not beggars in this province we want *fair* rates and access. We are providing a huge amount of the BC taxbase and actively participating in sustaining and building tourism.

3. Right now our basic livelihoods are at stake, whether in active day-to-day business like stores, lumberyards, B&B's, cafés, tour guiding companies; or through the equity that we have built up over many years while investing in our communities through building our homes and our businesses. The value of our businesses and the property value of our homes has dropped like a stone while those in Victoria and Vancouver

have risen or remained high. The ability to reasonably access our homes and businesses in the same way that we did when we started or bought these financial pieces of our lives, is being removed for ideological reasons by the BC Government.

No one wants to buy in to our communities with this lowered level of transportation and this lack of security from rising fares and service cuts.

4. In 2003, the *Coastal Ferry Act* was mooted to remove government (political) interference in BC Ferries. In contravention of even this *Act*, the provincial government is calling the shots and directing BC Ferries Inc.

5. Feed the economy, fund ferries: these cuts and increases are affecting all of BC. Those tourists who can no longer ride from Port Hardy to Bella Coola spending money in a wide circle that ends up in Victoria or Vancouver. This is a collective BC loss.

Christy Clark Told Like It Is

You could have heard a pin drop while an excerpt from a 2008 interview was played; erstwhile CKNW radioshow host (now premier) Christy Clark interviewing Ferry Advisory Chair Tony Law and Strathcona Regional Director Jim Abram about increases to ferry fares and scheduling cuts. In her chirpy, radio voice she was ridiculing the BCLiberal government for thinking that cutting sailings and increasing fares would make BCFerries more profitable.

Right there we heard all of our observations and arguments, coming from her own mouth—just a few short years ago!

Listen to the revealing clip at: www.bcmarinehighway.org/2014/03/13/christy-clark-how-2008-cknw-audio/. Thanks to all who came and to all who have put in long hours of work in support of putting our ferries back into provincially funded infrastructure. ☞

© Island Tides Publishing Ltd. This article may be reproduced with the following attribution, in its entirety, and notification to Island Tides Publishing Ltd.

'This article was published (March 20, 2014) in 'Island Tides', an independent, regional newspaper distributing on the Canadian Gulf Islands, on Vancouver Island and, via the internet, worldwide.'

Island Tides Publishing Ltd, Box 55, Pender Island, BC V0N 2M0 • 1-250-216-2267 • islandtides@islandtides.com • www.islandtides.com
