

December 31, 2013

Administration

4448A Marine Avenue
Powell River, BC
V8A 2K2
Tel: 604-485-0978
Fax: 604-485-1231
1-866-585-0978

**Powell River
Branch**

4721 Joyce Avenue
Powell River, BC
V8A 3B5
Tel: 604-485-6206
Fax: 604-485-7112
1-800-393-6733

**Texada Island
Branch**

2601 Gillies Bay Rd
PO Box 268
Van Anda, BC
V0N 3K0
Tel: 604-486-7851
Fax: 604-486-7671
1-800-361-9933

**Bowen Island
Partnership Branch**

101-475 Bowen
Island Trunk Rd
PO Box 190
Bowen Island, BC
V0N 1G0
Tel: 604-947-2022
Fax: 604-947-2082
1-866-947-2022

www.firstcu.ca

Telephone Banking:
604-485-6617



BC Coastal Ferry Engagement Committee
P.O. Box 3532 Vancouver Main
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 3Y6

First Credit Union and Insurance is based in Powell River, BC. With four credit union and five insurance branches, our organization's 140 employees serve over 38,000 members and clients across six coastal communities including Powell River, Bowen Island, Texada Island, Cumberland, Courtenay and Comox. We are deeply concerned that the financial burden of the rising ferry costs and the elimination of ferry runs will negatively impact our member-clients and the communities we serve. This letter is written on their behalf.

The ferry system is the highway that connects our coastal communities. Changes to this vital transportation system must be considered carefully – not just the economic ramifications, but the social implications as well. School children and community youth use the ferries to participate in sports and recreational activities; senior citizens use the ferries to stay connected to families and friends; residents rely on the ferries to access medical appointments; businesses depend on the ferries to ship and receive their goods. The traffic of people and goods to and from our coastal towns keeps our communities healthy and sustains our economies.

The cuts to coastal sailings announced in the November 2013 Discussion Guide will wreak havoc on our communities. Eliminating ferry runs Saturday evening and Sunday morning between Powell River and Vancouver Island will devastate community and school sports activities. Cuts to early morning sailings to and from Bowen Island on both Saturday and Sunday means that people who work weekends and shifts won't be able to get to their jobs. Reducing Texada Island's service by 22.9% will have significant social and cultural impacts to Texada residents ranging from students not being able to attend extracurricular activities to adults not being able to go out to dinner or a concert or movie in Powell River.

Cancelling seniors' free ferry passes will negatively impact our senior citizens, most of whom live on a fixed income. Many seniors travel by ferry to visit family and grandchildren and stay in touch socially. According to the 2011 Census, 23% of citizens in Powell River and Texada Island are aged 65 or over, compared with the national percentage of 15%. Increasing their ferry costs will put barriers between our seniors and their loved ones.

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While these service cuts threaten the health and well-being of our most vulnerable demographic – our children and senior citizens – they will do nothing to address the issues of affordability.

Despite the proposed cuts, fares are still expected to rise another 8%. Local businesses in small communities already struggle to compete and increasing ferry costs will make it even more difficult for them to succeed in our local market. If the issue of rising fares is not addressed, people and businesses will start leaving our communities to find opportunity elsewhere. Organizations like ours have already been forced to cut back on travel, reducing ferry ridership. In 2012/2013, our organization spent over \$50,000 in ferry costs. We are now looking for ways to eliminate the majority of those ferry trips.

First Credit Union and Insurance understands the need for budget reductions and efficiencies, but we believe that the changes you are proposing will negatively impact our member-clients and weaken our communities. We propose that BC Ferries work with our community leaders to reduce runs that are more acceptable to community tolerance levels, and that long term solutions for BC ferries are sourced to lessen future impacts.

Sincerely,



Gerry Wray
Board Chair
First Credit Union
Email: Gerry.wray@firstcu.ca

cc:

Honourable Todd Stone, Minister of BC Transportation and Infrastructure
Honourable Nicholas Simons, MLA, Powell River/Sunshine Coast
Jack Barr, President, Powell River Chamber of Commerce
Kim Miller, Manager, Powell River Chamber of Commerce
Scott Randolph, Manager, Powell River Economic Development
Diane Hawkins, President & CEO, Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce
Laura Thorold, Operations Manager, Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce
Tim Rhodes, President, Bowen Island Chamber of Commerce
Mary McGregor, Manager, Bowen Island Chamber of Commerce