

Bella Coola Valley Tourism

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BC Ferries Commission

Bella Coola Valley Tourism (BCVT) is writing to you in regards to ferry scheduling, service and fares for the Discovery Coast Passage Route 40 after your request for comments relevant to the Coastal Ferry Act or other issues. Thank you for coming to Bella Coola and hearing our community's thoughts during your public consultation meetings.

Tourism has become a huge part of the provincial economic wheel. And it is a huge part in the Bella Coola Valley as well. BCVT membership comprises almost all businesses in the Valley, as well as some from the West Chilcotin and outer coast. With the passing of the great forestry and commercial fishing days, tourism now provides critical seasonal employment for a major part of the Valley.

BC Ferries Route 40, The Discovery Coast Passage, has become an important part of that equation. Businesses have been built on continued ferry service between Port Hardy and Bella Coola.

Historically, the Queen of Chilliwack has made three runs a week between Bella Coola and Port Hardy for about 12 weeks of the summer. Only one run in either direction is a direct run however, completed in about 12 hours. All the other runs stop in the small communities of the central coast and can take up to 24 hours. Though some recliners are provided, most of the passengers on the overnight runs must bring camping gear and bed down in any available space.

During the winter these outer coast communities have been serviced by MV Nimpkish as a short hub & spoke type route linking them to Bella Coola and the MV Northern Expedition running between Port Hardy and Prince Rupert. With major investment in the docking facilities in Klemtu to accommodate the MV Northern Expedition, there is now room for rethinking the entire Route 40 structure of this important ferry route.

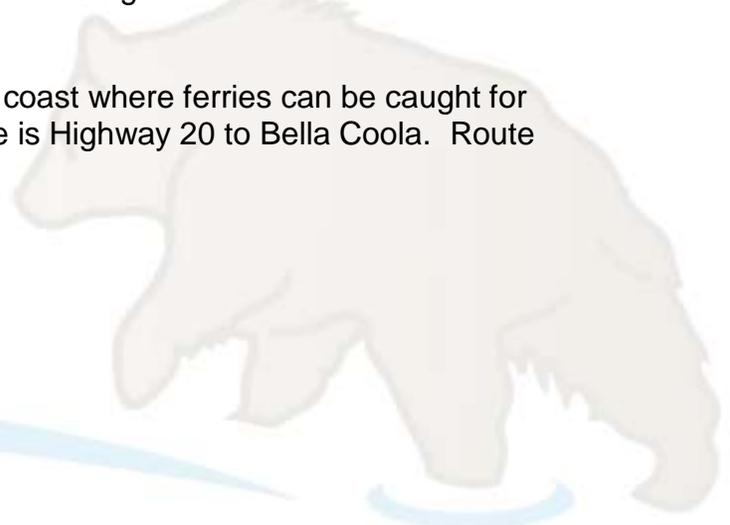
There are only three roads to the mainland coast where ferries can be caught for further adventures and travel. One of those is Highway 20 to Bella Coola. Route

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40 is an important extension of that highway and is part of the Coast Cariboo Circle Tour, one of the nine circle tours created by the Ministry of Transportation. The Circle Tour is an integral part of the economic development of the Valley and Chilcotin Plateau communities and is heavily promoted by West Chilcotin Tourism Association and Bella Coola Valley Tourism. The method of scheduling that BC Ferries has chosen makes it impossible for the route to become viable to the corporation, and severely limits the success of tourism development for the entire central part of the province.

Statistics show that the direct runs carry twice as many passengers on one-third the number of runs as do the indirect runs! And the cost of fuel and staffing to run 24 hours a day is huge. Increased efficiency, a smaller carbon footprint, and decreased costs demand that a reassessment of the sailing schedule is in order. We respectfully submit that all sailings for Route 40 should be direct runs. The Nimpkish should continue to service the outer communities and connect them to the MV Northern Expedition sailing to Prince Rupert or Port Hardy. The people in these communities have expressed a preference for these destinations. This would also allow increased number of runs to the smaller outer coast communities while still decreasing costs to BC Ferries.

The present contract agreement and new service schedule is ready for renewal by September 2011. It is our hope that the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and the Ministry of Tourism, Jobs and Innovation along with BC Ferries Corporation will maintain service to the Central Coast while improving efficiency, decreasing costs, and increasing the number of travelers. Keeping costs and fares low will make it possible for more riders to travel this fabulous route.

Bella Coola Valley Tourism will continue to improve and grow while marketing our part of this beautiful province to the world. Please check out our website at www.bellacoola.ca. There, you will find a link to BC Ferries as well as a host of valuable information.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Doug Baker
President Bella Coola Valley Tourism



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