

**FERRY FARES FOR BC STUDENTS AND YOUTH WHO TRAVEL ON BC
FERRIES TO ATTEND OR PARTICIPATE IN SCHOOL OR JUNIOR
ASSOCIATION EDUCATIONAL AND SPORTING EVENTS**

**A Submission to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
November 17, 2010**

Submitted by:

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Joint SSCFAC/NSCFAC Submission to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

November 17, 2010

Subject

This submission concerns fares for BC students and youth who travel on BC Ferries to attend or participate in school or junior association educational and sporting events. The Ministry is asked to consider free travel on specific additional routes for the above travel categories.

Reference

Schedule B of the Coastal Ferry Services Contract, CFSC, including 2004, 2005, 2007 and 2008 Amending Agreements, specifically **Social Program Reimbursement**, item 5(a) and Appendix 2, BC Student (under 19 years of age) discount.

Situation

Since 2003, Schedule B of the CFSC identifies discounts available to students and youth traveling on specific BCF routes to attend or participate in school or junior association education and sporting events. Escalating ferry fares on the minor routes are making it increasingly difficult for families residing in some small coastal communities to afford the total travel cost associated with these types of events. The minor route fares charged on these routes are inconsistent, varying from 50% fare to free for students and 100% fare to free for junior associations. Note that a youth fare is charged up to age 12 and an adult fare is charged age 12 and above. These inequities are not explained in the CFSC and have likely been carried over from the pre 2003 fare schedules.

This situation is a particular problem for families on the Sunshine Coast, as they must, in many cases, travel in order to provide competitive and educational opportunities for their children. For the SSC the travel is to the lower mainland on route 3 and on the NSC the travel is typically to Vancouver Island on route 17 and occasionally on route 7/route3 to the lower mainland and interior of BC. There is also a reverse problem in some cases, where families in the lower mainland and on Vancouver Island are reluctant to travel to the coastal communities for these same sporting and educational events due to transportation costs. In fact some teams from the SSC have to play their 'home games' on the lower mainland.

This situation is not new; it is simply becoming more relevant as fares continue to rise significantly each year with the potential for double digit increases in PT3. Traffic continues to decline on BCF minor routes as discretionary travel disappears due to cost. The concern is that student and junior association travel is also discretionary, and opportunities for kids in coastal communities will start to disappear as well.

Problem Definition

There are two problems with this existing situation. The first is that escalating ferry fares and the current cost for kids to travel will force families to limit or eliminate opportunities that involve ferry travel. The second problem is that the Social Program Reimbursement program is inconsistent in how it is applied across the minor route group for no apparent reason. For school events the fare cost problem has been identified for years without any change to date. This year the BC School Trustees Association voted unanimously at their AGM to recommend that all students should travel free, not some free and some 50%. The SSCFAC with community support has agreed to a revenue neutral fare change on route 3 that increases all fares by 0.5% so that students can travel for 25% fare. That decision reflects how seriously the SSC views this problem.

The following two examples from the NSC serve to clarify the above two problems, the cost and the inconsistency.

The first example relates the experience of a junior association soccer team, not school, from Powell River that travels via route 17 to Vancouver Island for sporting events. On one of their trips this year the team traveled to the Island en route to an event on Saltspring Island. They paid full fare on route 17, but were surprised to learn they could travel free on route 6 if the team coach filled out a BCF form identifying the number of kids, the event and provided his/her name and signature. They filled out the form and traveled free. Since the two communities have a significant youth population, both with local elementary, middle and high schools (although the Powell River area does have twice the population) the President of the youth soccer association followed up this discovery. The inequity was identified to the NSCFAC, questioning why Powell River youth are treated differently. In terms of cost, using the current fare schedule and assuming 15 kids over age 12 on the team the total youth cost for the return trip on route 17 is \$304.50 using a BCF 'experience card' rate. If the kids were under 12 the cost would have been half. This is a significant cost and inconsistency in fare application between route 6 and route 17.

The second example is for the Powell River Pee Wee A Mets minor baseball team, not a school team, that won the Provincial Championship in Surrey in August this year. This is an all-star team with 12 kids who play in a league in Powell River that has 3 teams and 35 players total. The all-star team had to compete in a tournament with Vancouver Island teams in Campbell River to qualify for the Provincials. In order to get experience the team traveled to the Island for two exhibition games prior to the tournament. Only one Island team traveled to Powell River for a return engagement. Once qualified, they traveled route 7/route 3 to the lower mainland for the Provincial Championship tournament. Total ferry cost for these four trips, assuming half youth fare and half adult (ages varied from 10 to 12) was approximately \$722, assuming a BCF 'experience card'

rate. These costs are on top of ferry fares for coaches, parents and vehicles, which in total are becoming increasingly difficult for families to manage.

School sponsored travel has a similar cost structure, but does benefit from the 50% discount. Student and youth travel for school and youth association events such as the two described above provide an invaluable life experience for kids. It's important these opportunities are not lost because families can no longer afford ferry fares.

This situation is a much larger problem that might be imagined based on the two examples above. Many families in coastal communities have their children or would like to have their children in many other activities as well. For the SSC and NSC, these other school and junior association activities also include, but are not limited to, hockey, volleyball, basketball, track and field, gymnastics, martial arts, figure skating, aquatic sports and golf. All of these involve travel by ferry for participation in leagues, tournaments etc. The kids and the programs will lose out when discretionary travel is reduced by the cost of ferry travel.

See appendix 1 for a personal perspective on school travel from a retired teacher, principal, coach and current SD 47 Board member.

Recommendation

The SSCFAC and the NSCFAC recommend that the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure consider modifying the CFSC, Schedule B, item 5(a) and Appendix 2, for PT3 by including free travel on routes 3, 7 and 17 for student and youth travel to school and junior association educational and sporting events. This would also include student and youth teams traveling to the Sunshine Coast for educational and sporting events.

Caveats

The SSCFAC and the NSCFAC recognize that by opening this discussion with the Ministry there is a risk that many routes could lose the favorable student and youth fare structure they currently enjoy, including route 6 noted earlier in this submission. Regardless of the outcome of the above recommendation, the SSCFAC and the NSCFAC also recommend that the fare structure remain unchanged in PT3 for routes that already have free student and youth travel to school and junior association educational and sporting events.

It is also recognized that other coastal communities may recommend inclusion for their routes, which if justified, should also be considered on a route-by-route basis.

For clarity, what is being recommended involves increased Provincial Government social program funding and is not intended to influence the service fee in any way.

Rationale for the Recommendation

In today's world it is important to keep youth active, both physically and intellectually. For small coastal communities, it is important that youth have the opportunity to experience competitive and educational events in the broader community of British Columbia. For the most part, that means travel by ferry. It is critical to avoid losing this discretionary travel because of escalating ferry fares. These types of activities are consistent with the Provincial initiative Act Now BC, particularly sections on 'Active Youth' and 'Physical Activity and Youth'. Implementing the above recommendation in PT3 is a win/win/win initiative for youth, Government and coastal communities, both now and for the future. For BC Ferries it should in a small, but positive way, help mitigate declining traffic trends on the minor routes.

Appendix 1

Subject – A School District 47 perspective

SD 47 is a member of the North Island Athletic Association. This means that competitions in soccer, volleyball, basketball, cross country, track and field and golf involve league travel to Vancouver Island. Brooks Secondary has to play against schools on northern Vancouver Island in order to qualify for BC school sports championships. League play also has to be played in Powell River. Teams from the Island are becoming more and more reluctant to travel to Powell River to compete as the cost and time has become too great. As a result, Powell River teams (Brooks and Oceanview) have to travel more frequently to the Island in order to compete. Teams are starting to lose players because families are saying they are no longer able to afford the tremendous expense of travel.

On a personal note, when I coached volleyball for Brooks, Oceanview and Max Cameron schools we traveled almost every weekend September to December 1st for competition. Average cost for players for travel, hotel, vehicles and entry fee was about \$80 per weekend and this did not include the cost of food. Players from Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland did not have any costs close to this and they typically did not need to stay in a hotel. We have to find a way to create some equity. School kids travel free would be a huge benefit for this community.

Respectfully submitted, Doug Skinner, retired Teacher, Principal, Coach and current member of the SD47 School Board.

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