



## CENTRAL COAST REGIONAL DISTRICT

DATE: 1 May 2014

TO: Board Chair Reginald Moody and Board Members

FROM: Darla Blake, Chief Administrative Officer

SUBJECT: **BC Ferries – Request for Action and Direction**

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### RECOMMENDATION

**That the Central Coast Regional District Board directs the Chief Administrative Officer to send the proposed draft letter for saving the Discovery Coast Ferry (direct sailing between Port Hardy and Bella Coola), to Premier Christy Clark, Transportation and Infrastructure Minister Todd Stone, Mike Corrigan (BC Ferries President) and others as listed in the report of 1 May 2014.**

### STRATEGIC PLAN

**Goal 2** – Investment and Support for Public Infrastructure and Services

**Objective 3** – Our objective is to lobby senior governments and their crown agencies for continuous maintenance, improvement and scheduling of regional transportation infrastructure

### BACKGROUND

Since November 2013, much has happened to lobby the Province on the matter of the cut to Route 40 between Port Hardy and Bella Coola. The Province's decision to cut the service effective from April 2014 will greatly impact the tourism for our region.

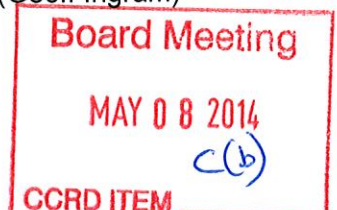
Alliances have been formed with other Coastal Regional Districts and communities affected by the Minister Todd Stone (Transportation and Infrastructure) in November 2013 to reduce services and cut Route 40. Chair Moody-Humchitt has been working with the Save the Discovery Coast Ferry lobby group who has put out frequent press releases and letters to the Province.

The Chair and the CAO have also attended numerous meetings and discussions along with our peers at UBCM, AVICC and other meetings including Bella Coola Valley Tourism.

Director Lande and the CAO attended the local rally to protest the loss of the Queen of Chilliwack, on 15 March 2014.

### Meeting with Minister Yamamoto – 24 April 2014

On Thursday 24 April 2014, the CAO and nine other strategic members of the community affected by the decision to cut the Queen of Chilliwack direct sailing service met in Bella Coola with Minister Yamamoto (State Minister for Tourism and Small Business), her EA (Geoff Ingram)



and Peter Harrison (Director of Partnerships, from Destination BC). While it was good to have the Minister come to discuss the loss of the direct sailing on Route 40 with us, it was very clear Minister Yamamoto has little influence on decisions made by Caucus.

The community group was clear on its objectives, looking for long term solutions with a return of the Queen of Chilliwack (or a comparable vessel) to bring much needed tourist dollars to our fledging tourism industry. Concern was also expressed for the future of our residents, businesses, hospitals, schools in the region; with potential decreases in jobs and affordability to stay in the region.

When asked for a commitment from the Province to complete a Socio-Economic Impact Study for our region, as a result of the loss of Route 40, Minister Yamamoto said she was not able to make such a commitment.

When asked if there was a Provincial Economic Development Strategy and how did the Bella Coola and the region fit into such a strategy, she advised she didn't know what the overall strategy is and that Minister Bond would be the better minister to direct that question to. Minister Yamamoto was clear; the province is focused on LNG.

Minister Yamamoto felt if it at all was possible, there were opportunities for private enterprise to provide a direct link ferry service into the future.

The group shared their concerns with the Minister on the inappropriateness of the MV Nimpkish and the challenges that will face tourists traveling on this vessel, for up to 9 or more hours.

The minister indicated a desire from the Province to develop a "working group", however they have been unsuccessful getting anyone from BC Ferries to be a part of such a group.

The minister ended her visit with a tour of the MV Nimpkish, which happened to be in port on the day.

## **DISCUSSION**

CCRD have been asked by "Save the Discovery Coast Ferry" lobby group to take the opportunity to remind the government and BC Ferries that the decision to cut the direct sailing portion of Route 40 between Port Hardy and Bella Coola, and the replacement of the MV Queen of Chilliwack with the MV Nimpkish is not only short – sighted but also economically unsound.

Although the government responded to the loss of Route 40 by increasing the number of sailing and altering the Inside Passage (Route 10) schedule to compensate. The decision to use the tiny 16-vehcile MV Nimpkish is inadequate to carry even a fraction of the typical summer traffic of the MV Queen of Chilliwack. Other unacceptable consequences of using the MV Nimpkish include:

- Alienation of the international tourism industry, who now refer to British Columbia as "tourism hostile"

- Devastating the \$6million tourism industry that was generated by the MV Queen of Chilliwack
- Causing the closure of dozens of businesses and loss of hundreds of jobs
- Limitation to health services to Central Coast communities
- Severely damaging the socio-economic fabric of communities throughout the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast and Northern Vancouver Island
- Violating the human rights of the disabled and the elderly

Back in December 2013, the CCRD Board committed to fight for the retention of the MV Queen of Chilliwack on the Route 40, direct sailing between Port Hardy and Bella Coola.

The fight needs to continue; and the Board needs to keep up its pressure on the Province by working with the region's tourism operators on rational, fiscally responsible changes that will enhance revenue of BC Ferries and the province, and result in vibrant, economically stable communities.

Save the Discovery Coast Ferry lobby group have asked the Board to send the proposed letter below, to the Province. This would require Board approval.

**To:** Hon. Christy Clark, Premier  
 Hon. Todd Stone, Transportation Minister  
 Hon. Naomi Yamamoto, Tourism and Small Business Minister  
 Hon. Michael de Jong, Finance Minister  
 Hon. Shirley Bond, Minister of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training  
 Mike Corrigan, BC Ferries President  
 Donna Barnett, MLA Cariboo-Chilcotin  
 Jennifer Rice, MLA North Coast  
 Clair Trevena, MLA North Island & NDP BC Ferries Critic

**Re:** Discovery Coast Ferry

It has become increasingly clear that the cancellation of the direct portion of Route 40 between Port Hardy and Bella Coola and the replacement of the Queen of Chilliwack by the Nimpkish is a short-sighted and economically unsound decision. I urge you to correct this problem immediately.

These specific changes are meant to save only \$725,000 for BC Ferries, but that was before it became clear that the Nimpkish would require significant refurbishment to survive the passage, that the Nimpkish would need to run more often than planned, and that alterations to the Inside Passage route would be required. Each of these changes will have heavy financial costs, and taken together they vastly outweigh the originally projected savings. Replacing the *Queen of Chilliwack* with the *Nimpkish* will increase operating costs for BC Ferries this year.

Without mining and forestry, tourism was touted as the economic driver for the Central Coast. But the *Nimkish* is simply inadequate in every way for the role it's being asked to perform. The range of problems this will cause includes:

- alienating the international tourism industry, who now refer to British Columbia as “tourism-hostile”
- devastating the \$6 million tourism industry that was generated by the cancelled ferry service
- causing the closure of dozens of businesses and the loss of hundreds of jobs
- limiting health services to Central Coast communities
- severely damaging the socio-economic fabric of communities throughout the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast and Northern Vancouver Island
- violating the human rights of the disabled and the elderly
- giving British Columbia a black eye on the world stage

I am asking you to commit to retaining the Queen of Chilliwack on Route 40 for 2014, and work with the region's tourism operators on rational, fiscally responsible changes that will enhance revenue for BC Ferries and the province, and result in vibrant, economically stable communities.

Sincerely,

Your Name (required)

**CONSULTATION – N/A**

**LEGISLATION /POLICY – Nil**

**BUDGET/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Within current approved budget:	N/A
Requires further budget consideration	N/A

**RISK MANAGEMENT**

Administration has evaluated potential risks with the proposal and assessed these as negligible with no requirements for controls.

Although, the risk of doing nothing may indicate to the province and communities who are also lobbying for the retention of the direct sailing between Port Hardy and Bella Coola, that the CCRD Board is not concerned with any loss of the service, or the long term future for the Bella Coola region.

**CONCLUSION**

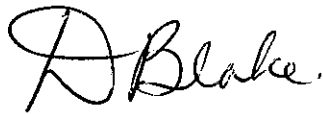
The Board is being asked to send a proposed letter to the province which has been drafted by the Save the Discovery Coast Ferry lobby group.

The Board Chair has been working with the Save the Discovery Coast Ferry lobby group.

The introduction of the MV Nimpkish as a viable alternative to the Queen of Chilliwack direct sailing service is not acceptable. Pressure on the province, therefore, must continue for the return of a direct sailing service between Port Hardy and Bella Coola.

Administration would recommend the Board direct the Chief Administrative Officer to send on behalf of the CCRD, the proposed draft letter for saving the Discovery Coast Ferry (direct sailing between Port Hardy and Bella Coola), to Premier Christy Clark, Transportation and Infrastructure Minister Todd Stone, Mike Corrigan (BC Ferries President) and others as listed in this report.

Respectfully submitted



Darla Blake  
**Chief Administrative Officer**