



Bell Island Ferry Users Committee

Pre-Budget Submission-January 26, 2011

Minister of Finance Tom Marshall

On behalf of the 1/2 Million people who use the Bell Island ferry service each year we are pleased to have the opportunity to present our Brief and have Government consider the importance of further investment investing in this essential service which is the foundation of Bell Island's economy.

In past pre-budget forums we have welcomed the opportunity to lay out the priorities for the continued upgrade for the service which serves our island population of 2,800 and sustains over 1,100 jobs on and off the Island

We applaud Government's past initiatives which truly are supportive of rural island communities and their economies .Government's adoption of the "**equivalent cost of road travel ferry rates policy**" has made it possible for 600 Bell islanders to work daily on the mainland. We are pleased with the fair and equitable rates **and urge that no increase be considered in 2011**. It should be noted

- 500 jobs are also sustained on Bell Island in addition to the 600 mainland commuters
- Housing upgrades and unprecedented housing sales and a doubling of property market values has been experienced
- Our tourism industry is surging ahead with 45,000 tourism visitors highlighted by the Underground submarine mine tour –a top 5 Provincial most visited attraction
- Personal tax returns show annual incomes of close to \$50,000,000 while income support funding has dropped dramatically

While much has been achieved critical investments beg to be addressed:

1. New ferry investment:

Our 2 ferries are ending their useful lives and are continuously out of service. In the past year of the close to **8000 scheduled round trips there were 15% or close to 1,200 cancelled sailings**. These cancellations can be contributed to frequent breakdowns, reassignment of 1 of our ferries to other services with no replacement vessels available to fill in and the absolute inadequacy of the unreliable support ferry the Nonia (referred to on Bell Island as the NO GO). These cancellations have at times crippled the service and hurt our economy and employment. **We need a commitment to begin design of new ferries for our service which carries more traffic per year than Marine Atlantic on the Gulf and more than all other 16 intra provincial services combined**

2. 50 year old Ferry terminal buildings are worn out and in a disgraceful state :

The ferry terminal buildings in both Portugal Cove and Bell Island are absolutely worn out and grossly inadequate and in quite an embarrassing dilapidated state. Both Councils (PCSP and Wabana) had a consultant prepare a very attractive proposal to build (under a cost shared arrangement) 2 new replacement buildings (one at each dock). These buildings would not only provide modern space for Marine Services Division to meet their passenger and staff servicing and storage needs but would also provide space for tourism and heritage purposes for the 500,000 annual customers.

The existing buildings have to be replaced

3. Operational investments

In order to continue to operate the ferry service effectively and efficiently commitments are needed for operational improvements:

- The need for on-site shore manager is compelling**
- The ticketing systems begs to be modernized –medieval practices exist**
- The lack of adequate shore parking for ferry users is a critical need**
- Efforts are needed to lower the number of sailings being cancelled**
- The ferry communication operations require a major overhaul –the service level is poor**
- The service requires a user friendly branding improvement**

4. **Commitment to protect current sailing schedule**

In recent days Marine officials have presented a new ferry schedule which proposed cuts if implemented would decimate our economy and lead to a reversal of all gains and benefits achieved from Government initiatives to improve the schedule and provide affordable rates.

Any plans to cut the number of scheduled trips should be reconsidered and abandoned and a two twelve hour shift system adopted as a vessel crewing model. Government's recent successful investments in Bell Island protected and built on.

In conclusion, the ferry service sustains a growing and more vibrant rural economy on Bell Island.

We are thankful for past investments and measures which have paid off in large dividends. We urge consideration and funding of capital and operational measures to modernize and rebuild our service to a more customer friendly and effective state.

Thank you for ongoing support and consideration from the Iron Isle

Mayor Gary Gosine

Chairperson of the Bell island Ferry Users Committee