

Island Economics, *Gabriola* SOUNDER, p.4, July 23, 2007

Dear editor

Good news. It looks like ferry fares are going up. This will serve several useful purposes, the main one being that as ferries get more expensive, people will use them less, and so there'll be a reduction in the burning of all that diesel fuel that contributes to global warming. Island produce-growers and farmers will also benefit as off-island produce's prices go up. And there will be less pressure on island services and resources as people elect to live where they don't need expensive ferries, and their dream of living in a suburb of Nanaimo becomes reality. The next very popular move, I suggest, is to do away with the free ferry rides for seniors. Do people living in million dollar plus homes really need this subsidy? Let's donate it to, say, paying off student loans and helping the working poor.

Sincerely

---

*Subsidiary note added November 2010 in the context of homelessness on Gabriola.*

If we truly want a balanced society with people of all ages and incomes, then I think we have to have a balanced island economy. And this all hinges on the ferry service.

If ferries are cheap and convenient, people will obtain their goods and services in Nanaimo, there will be no local businesses able to offer employment at decent wages and salaries, and we become, in effect, just a well-off suburb of Nanaimo.

If on the other hand, ferries are expensive and inconvenient, people will be looking for their goods and services from on-island suppliers, there will be thriving local businesses able to offer employment, and we become a more complete community. Although the effects are indirect, people who shop in Nanaimo because it's cheaper, or want the ferries to be cheaper and to run more often, or want a bridge, these people are moving Gabriola away from a community that is "balanced". I for one believe in shopping on-island whenever I possibly can because I'm old, and it's refreshing to have young, working, comfortably-housed people around. They're an asset.

The unknown in this point of view is of course the numbers. If you raise ferry fares and cut back services, is the loss of income by people who can no longer afford to commute to Nanaimo offset by the increase in local business activity? Only an economic study with hard numbers could resolve this, but we unfortunately live in an age where innumeracy is rife and I don't expect to see such a study any day soon.