

Ferry fare increases not all bad says Doe, *Flying Shingle*, p.3, 36(4), February 2008

Dear editor

Re. the ferry price debate, I offer the following. This is NOT because I think every item on the list below is true or a “good thing”, I am positively negative about that, but I offer it as an illustration of how, in my view, the island economy might not be as simple as commonly assumed in discussions on ferry pricing. The FAC has come up with a comparable list of reasons of why raising the price of a ferry ticket will be bad for us, and some of these items I could heartily agree with— making living on the island for the less well off being right up there. But, for example, in this particular case, is subsidising the ferry indiscriminately for everyone the right answer? I don’t know. My point is that assessing the relative importance of the items on both lists is difficult without measurement and without a numerical model of the island’s economy. Building a model is perhaps something an economically-minded group on the island might consider taking on.

Here’s the list. Raising the price of a ferry ticket will:

1. Discourage residents from shopping in Nanaimo making it easier for businesses on the island to prosper and provide on-island employment opportunities.
2. Discourage people from [living here and commuting to Nanaimo]. This will decrease the demand for rental accomodation [on Gabriola], thereby helping to keep rental prices down.
3. Discourage people commuting here from Nanaimo. This will also help maintain employment opportunities for island residents.
4. Discourage those considering moving to the island, thus reducing the rate at which land is developed and the price of housing.
5. Increase the contribution of islanders to the costs of running the ferry, thereby increasing their right to have a say on how island transportation services are provided.
6. Lower demand for ferry services, leading to shorter line-ups.
7. Decrease tourism, particularly, and maybe only, by those less likely to be spending lots of money here, thereby reducing overcrowding in summer.
8. Discourage people from travelling to the benefit of the environment.
9. Lessen the move for us to become culturally, socially, and financially integrated with the east coast of Vancouver Island and thereby maintain the relevance of the Islands Trust mandate of “preserve and protect”.

As I say, these are not all things I would be happy about, but who’s to say what the reality is without a model complete with all the chains of “causes and effects” built in so that it matches, as best it can, that reality.

Sincerely