

Bikes on ferries

At a recent (September 15, 2008) meeting of the Gabriola Ferry Advisory Committee (FAC), an accountant with BC Ferries indicated that the Corporation was considering introducing a \$1.50 charge for a bike (despite the fact that, as one committee member pointed out, the last time this happened, people just loaded their bikes into pick-up trucks).

Looking at this issue from the narrow perspective of a company economist, we can see that this might be justified if it could be shown that carrying a bike on a ferry incurs a cost. I don't really see how this can be given that, on the Gabriola-Nanaimo run, bikes do not occupy space that could be used for vehicles, and wheeling a bike on to the ferry does not cause any observable delays. One BC ferry representative claimed there was such a delay once when a group of more than 100 bikes was wishing to board, but this is such an unusual circumstance it can be ignored.

The "providing a service to the community" perspective however has to be completely different. People use bikes for various reasons apart from the fact that they like to travel that way and these reasons include:

- * travelling by car is too expensive
- * getting to where they want to go, when they want to go, by public transport is inconvenient
- * it's better for the environment
- * it's healthier.

If these benefits were accounted for on a societal basis, I for one would not be surprised if the accounting conclusion were to be that we should be paying people to use their bikes.

Let's just ask BC Ferries to forget this idea and do as the Nanaimo bus system does, and carry bikes for free. If there really are costs to the company, I'm quite willing as a senior vehicle driver usually driving alone and at no charge for myself to carry the burden.

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