



Town of Gibsons Ferry Advisory Committee

2026 Annual Community Position Paper on Route 3: Langdale—Horseshoe Bay

September 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Route 3 (Horseshoe Bay-Langdale) is a transportation lifeline for the Sunshine Coast, connecting residents, businesses and visitors to employment, education, health care, government services and economic opportunity. Rising population, increasing tourism activity, growing commercial demand, aging infrastructure and ongoing reliability challenges have compounded pressures on the route and highlighted the need for a modernized service strategy. The Town of Gibsons Ferry Advisory Committee supports the BC Ferry Commission's conclusion that Route 3 occupies a unique position within the BC Ferries system and requires creative solutions developed in partnership with the community. This paper identifies six priority areas for action as BC Ferries prepares its Performance Term 7 submission.

First, **the Province should increase Route 3's minimum service requirements** to reflect actual operating levels and community need.

Second, **BC Ferries should improve transparency and collaboration around the reservations system** while exploring solutions better aligned with the travel patterns of frequent users who are part of a ferry-dependent community.

Third, **Route 3 should transition to a dedicated fleet strategy centred on two purpose-built hybrid ferries operating hourly service**, delivering greater reliability, redundancy, efficiency and customer convenience.

Fourth, **BC Ferries should maintain reserve vessel capacity during fleet renewal to strengthen system resilience.**

Fifth, **Langdale Terminal Redevelopment should be restored as a funded capital priority**, with immediate improvements to accessibility, pedestrian loading, terminal circulation and planning for full-capacity use of both berths.

Finally, **BC Ferries should improve customer communications through more timely, transparent and actionable service updates**, ensuring travellers have the information they need to make informed decisions during both routine operations and service disruptions.

In regard of all these points, we call upon BC Ferries, the BC Ferry Authority and the Province to **convene the “creative solution” conversation** with our community, recommended by the BC Ferry Commission, before key PT7 service, fleet and terminal decisions are finalized.

Collectively, these recommendations emphasize that Route 3 is not simply another transportation corridor. Route 3 constitutes essential public infrastructure that underpins the economic and social wellbeing of the Sunshine Coast, and also Powell River—as the largest ferry-dependent communities in the province. Investments in service, infrastructure and communications should therefore be evaluated not only through the lens of operating costs, but as investments in resilience, economic productivity, public confidence and quality of life for a significant ferry-dependent region.

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Gibsons Ferry Advisory Committee (FAC) was initiated by Gibsons Council in spring 2026 in response to a lack of action from BC Ferries in replacing Ferry Advisory Committees with an alternative engagement model for ferry-dependent communities—and more specifically to the surprising front-page Coast Reporter story on March 13 that BC Ferries was increasing Route 3 reservations to 80%.

The FAC has been set up to facilitate advocacy, relationship-building and strategic engagement with BC Ferries and other relevant partners including the BC Ferry Authority, the BC Ferry Commission and the Province of British Columbia. It has representation from all local governments, Sunshine Coast Tourism and the Chamber of Commerce, and is intended to represent the entire Sunshine Coast. The FAC hopes to model a locally accountable structure for public engagement that could be expanded province-wide.

Route 3 (Horseshoe Bay–Langdale) is one of BC Ferries' most important transportation links, carrying approximately 13% of system vehicle traffic and 12% of passenger traffic. The route serves a unique mix of daily commuters, students, commercial traffic, tourists, secondary-home owners and residents requiring medical and government services in the Lower Mainland. The challenges facing Route 3 are becoming increasingly acute:

- Population growth on the Sunshine Coast.
- Increasing resident travel needs, particularly for commuting, health care, education, youth sports travel and access to other services.
- Rising visitor demand and a growing tourism economy.
- Increased commercial freight requirements.
- Physical constraints at Horseshoe Bay.
- Aging vessels and terminal infrastructure.
- Escalating operating and maintenance costs.

The Sunshine Coast community's concerns with BC Ferries service are complex, with a spectrum of opinions on everything from governance to toilet paper. As the Sunshine Coast is a ferry-dependent community, these opinions are also passionate; livelihoods and lifestyles on the Sunshine Coast frequently depend on reliable, functional ferry service. The FAC has been receiving public correspondence since its inception, to generate ideas and to help inform decision-making on formulating positions on behalf of the community in this paper.

COMMISSIONERS' PROBE

Essential context to this paper and any future planning for Route 3 is the BC Ferry Commission's "Probe into Route 3: Connecting Horseshoe Bay and Langdale" dated January 30, 2026. We accept the Commissioner's finding that BC Ferries has consistently met or exceeded the minimum round-trip requirements for Route 3; however, we have urged the provincial government to negotiate an increase in required round trips prior to Performance Term 7 (PT7).

Regarding the Town's question to the Commissioners of why Route 3 was designated a "major" (less subsidized) route in the Services Contract, we learned the purpose for doing so in 2012 was to "reduce the price cap pressure facing the Northern and Minor Route Groups." In answer to whether this designation was working, the Commissioners explained that **"Route 3 is an anomaly in that in character it is more like a Minor Route connecting a smaller coastal community with a large urban centre... [but] in terms of volume of passengers and vehicles it resembles a Major Route."** In recognition of this "unique character," the Commissioners recommended that **"the community, BC Ferries, BC Ferry Authority and the government work together to seek a creative solution."**

The Commissioners further recommended that **"BC Ferries involve the community earlier in the service planning process, ensuring that community input is obtained proactively—prior to the development of proposed options, rather than solely at the stage of seeking feedback on a preferred solution."**

Unfortunately, our FAC hereby reports that BC Ferries has chosen not to follow this recommendation. We understand the Corporation is currently finalizing its PT7 submission with no attempt at proactively obtaining input from our community. In conversation with BC Ferries, the Corporation has expressed the view that it is the responsibility of the Commission to solicit community input as part of the PT process.

This situation stands as a prime example of the confusing and vague governance system of ferry service in BC being contrary to the public interest. As observed by stakeholders and commentators, the complex governance framework designed in 2003 has resulted in confused accountability and finger-pointing among the different bodies associated with meeting public needs for ferry service in the province. Regardless, our FAC has decided to proactively broach "a creative solution" by publishing this position paper, which should be received as a public statement of intention to support the needs of the Sunshine Coast, and to do so in collaboration with the groups that deliver our ferry service. There will be time for BC Ferries to consider and address our input prior to the deadline of September 30, 2026.

MINIMUM SERVICE REQUIREMENTS IN THE SERVICES CONTRACT

As mentioned earlier, the Commissioners confirmed that BC Ferries has been meeting and exceeding its minimum contractual requirements to Route 3. However, Route 3's contractual minimum service level has changed very little since the Coastal Ferry Services Contract was established in 2003. Even with Route 3 being operated above the contractual minimum, overloads and reliability challenges have been significant. In fact, in 2025, 30.6% of Route 3 sailings were overloaded. Only 72.2% of sailings departed within 10 minutes of schedule. These indicators suggest that the additional service being provided is necessary, not surplus.

Route 3's minimum annual service level increased from 2,985 round trips in 2003 to 3,085 round trips today, an increase of only 3.4%. During the same period, minimum service levels increased by approximately 44% on Route 19 (Gabriola Island) and 62% on Route 23 (Quadra Island). Yet much like Quadra and Gabriola Islands, Route 3 is an essential transportation link for a ferry-dependent community. Since 2003, the population of the area served by Route 3 has increased by approximately 30%, and the tourism economy has grown by approximately 230%.

Route 3 is the Sunshine Coast's primary transportation link to the mainland and supports:

- Access to health care and specialist services
- Employment, education and training opportunities
- Airport access and regional connectivity
- Commercial traffic, supply chains and local business operations
- Tourism and the visitor economy, which support jobs and economic activity throughout the region
- Family, caregiving and community responsibilities

Route 3 is essential to both the daily lives of residents and the long-term economic health of the Sunshine Coast. Proximity to Metro Vancouver means that livelihoods and lifestyles of Route 3 users are tightly enmeshed, which distinguishes us from traffic on other major routes. Simply put, there is no practical alternative route for most residents, businesses or visitors.

In 2025, BC Ferries delivered 3,304 round trips—219 or +7.1% more than the contractual minimum. BC Ferries' own operating plan and actual service delivery exceeded the contractual requirement, indicating that the minimum no longer reflects the service level required in practice. Our position is that in recognition of the service challenges of our route this past performance term, and the real impacts on our community, the provincial government has a role to ensure a standard of essential public service keeps up with community needs, by bringing up the minimum number of round trips as required by contract up to at least 3,300.

RESERVATION SYSTEM

We appreciate that BC Ferries formally submitted its March 19, 2026 announcement of “Route 3 Service Improvements” to the BC Ferry Commission in the context of responding to the Probe. In and of itself, we reject this initiative as meeting the Commissioners’ recommendation to **“work together to seek a creative solution.”** For one, the only semblance of working together occurred when BC Ferries initially announced a lurch from an average of 50% to 80% reservations in the local newspaper, and the community response was so shocked and negative that it was dialled back to 70%. To be clear, though, we are extremely supportive of BC Ferries recognizing the opportunity to free up a vessel from Route 2 for two additional late-afternoon runs in the late afternoon shoulder season.

In some respects, though, the timing of these additional sailings worked counter to BC Ferries’ prerogative to statistically increase capacity utilization. Our committee is concerned that some of the assumptions and measures around this undertaking are misguided in regard to our community and its transportation needs. There is a small degree of flexibility and discretion within these needs as a small ferry-dependent community, but not nearly to the degree of travel behaviours between larger centres. As the Commissioners noted in the Probe, Route 3 traffic is **“mainly uni-directional (more traffic flows out of the community in the morning than what is coming in and vice versa in the afternoon), leading to lower capacity utilization.”**

The Commissioners’ knowledge of our community was borne out in BC Ferries presentation to the FAC on June 10, 2026, on how the new reservations system worked over the May long weekend. BC Ferries VP Brian Anderson reported that traffic increased significantly (80% up to 91% average capacity utilization) on the “busiest days and busiest sailings” but only 3% for the non-peak times that BC Ferries was hoping to nudge people toward with the use of discounted “fare savers.” Consequently, BC Ferries reported to our Committee that overloads actually increased during peak times; this qualifies as a failure compared with what the new system was expected by BC Ferries to achieve (which was the exact opposite: to draw vehicles away from peak sailing and onto off-peak).

In the pursuit of the “creative solution” and collaboration, our committee does not support a policy of forcing new conditions on Route 3 users without public input, and then hoping for behavioural change, with the irrational hypothesis that people might move from morning to late afternoon/evening runs. We encourage BC Ferries to correctly interpret this data and realize our ridership behaviour is different from Route 2’s and other major routes. The Route 3 reality is we often need to go into Vancouver in the morning for daytime appointments and activities, or perhaps longer-term travel we need to get an early start on; meanwhile, the June 10 data also shows that the busiest sailings on the way to Langdale are also in the morning—no doubt people coming for work appointments during the day, or trying to “make a day” out of a trip over to the Sunshine Coast, the commercial traffic needed to sustain our businesses and supply chains, or, perhaps, Coast residents who have incurred the expense to stay overnight in

Vancouver but still need to get back early the next day for work or other daytime responsibilities.

Whatever the reasons are, the data clearly shows that there is not much hope or practicality in trying to incentivize bookings from the morning to the afternoon and evening. We strongly encourage BC Ferries to work on collecting more granular data on why people are travelling, as this may help us all better understand what flexibility people might have to move to off-peak sailings, and what it might take to get them there.

In BC Ferries Vice President Melanie Lucia's letter to Mayor Silas White on March 19, 2026, she pointed out "overall utilization for Route 3 was 63% compared to 91% on the other major routes." Although we don't know where these numbers come from, it is not surprising to us that as the Commissioner has observed, our route is an "anomaly," not like other major routes. And this is not because how people choose to behave; rather, it is because they have no choice. Also in Ms. Lucia's letter, BC Ferries theorized that increasing reservable space will increase capacity utilization—we are eager to see how this has worked over the two-vessel system in the summer, which we recognize is a costly (but necessary) endeavour. [By the way, BC Ferries' most recent fiscal year report shows 68.5% capacity utilization for Route 3, 73.3% for Route 2, 75.5% for Route 30 and 88.8% for Route 1.]

Another data set that is crucial in communications with our community is the financial numbers on reservations revenue since March 19 vs. fare saver savings, as the commitment was that the trade-off would be net-zero. We further expect and hope that the Commissioner will want to see, and have the opportunity to scrutinize, this financial data so that we can all demonstrate to people that this the increase in reservable space is not merely a "cash grab," automatically resulting in a \$40 fare increase for every vehicle round-trip. This net-zero accounting was promised to the public during the announcement of this change.

We also need to highlight that when the Langdale ramp broke in early July, flaws in the new reservation system were immediately apparent when single-ramp loads were not even being filled halfway, despite the obvious demand and expectation that they would all be full. Travellers were instructed not to come to the terminal unless they held a reservation already, yet multiple sailings left berth with a great deal of lower deck space to spare. BC Ferries' explanation that the significant excess space had been set aside for medical/emergency use was unbelievable; we hope that the Corporation has thoroughly reviewed this situation to uncover flaws in the system, in potential communications with individuals with reservations, in the waitlist, and/or what the trigger should be for allowing more drive-ups. We can accept that it was an unusual situation with an unexpected side-effect, and thankfully it did not last long, but it would increase public confidence if BC Ferries conducted a post-mortem on what went wrong and how it can be avoided in the future.

Finally, given the realities of our route, we need to point out the flaws of relying on capacity utilization as a measure of success. Evening runs, especially from Langdale

during the week, are going to have very low ridership, given the nature of our community and its travel needs. Ideally, we would have smaller boats with smaller crews for efficiency, but as the Commissioner's Probe notes, BC Ferries contends that "a dedicated two-vessel option for Route 3 would increase capital and operating costs, and by using route-specific vessels the Company would lose overall flexibility—and resiliency—to deploy ships to support all major routes in event of an unplanned outage or change to customer travel patterns."

Therefore, essentially, the inefficiency of Route 3 being serviced by larger vessels, especially in the summer, should be more than covered off by the efficiency of the other major routes that apparently require Route 3 to adhere to their "standardized vessel" class. Consequently, BC Ferries' data that shows Route 3 losing the most money in the fleet and the other major routes making the most should be reconsidered to show that not only does Route 3 not get the same level of subsidy as other ferry-dependent communities, but furthermore that we are subsidizing the profitable major routes by being forced to share a larger vessel class with them, to support *their* efficiency.

Despite our conclusion that the new reservations system has been a failure, based on the data provided so far by BC Ferries, and moreover that "working together to seek a creative solution" has not yet been attempted, our FAC is willing to accept the changes so far as a pilot that is a precursor to a longer conversation and process that is designed to genuinely support the travel needs of this community.

1. First and foremost, it is clear that the data supports the need for additional shoulder season support sailings in the morning, rather than in the late afternoon (which, ironically, negatively skews capacity utilization data). The decision that an additional Route 2 vessel can be freed up to support us in the afternoon is generous, but a bolder and more creative solution would be to provide our ferry-dependent community with the extra support that is needed in the morning. In the spirit of creativity, it is at least worth a try on some days. Could nudging shoulder season traffic to different mornings, rather than from mornings to evening, prove to be more effective? It could be worth a try, to more equally share supplemental morning sailings between Route 2 and Route 3, in the upcoming Fall shoulder season, i.e. if there are hourly morning sailings on Tuesdays and Thursdays, perhaps these are the days when Route 3 travellers will plan their trips. As with every summer that the hourly service ends, we expect major delays and overloads to befall us in early September, and desperately hope BC Ferries can free up a vessel in the morning that does not need to go into refit quite yet.
2. While calls for "priority loading" for locals are very familiar from ferry-dependent communities and may come with challenges, what about exploring alternate solutions that attend to a similar goal of creating more assurance for frequent users of Route 3 for whom the service is essential? One idea is that BC Ferries offer a Nexus-card-style "product offering" for frequent travellers from both sides of our route. If people are frequent commuters who need their cars, they could pay to get priority access to reservations over a certain, transparent period of time. If they aren't taken up at a certain time prior to the sailing, those reservations would be released more broadly.

3. Similarly, when BC Ferries is capable of capturing user profiles with its new website in spring 2027, we propose that another option could be that an allocation of reservations for Sunshine Coast residents only be set aside, and released to the general public if they are not all taken up by a certain date prior to sailing.
4. Perhaps the easiest initiative could be for BC Ferries to transparently stagger the release of reservations, i.e. a percentage very early for people planning trips or long-standing appointments, but also a percentage held back for release closer to the sailing that could be catered to people making more short-term trips, and maybe a release in between. We understand that a staggering already occurs; however, it is not transparent, so locals/frequent users don't know when to look for a new release of reservations.

RIGHT-SIZING ROUTE 3 VESSELS

For decades, Route 3 has been served primarily by vessels originally designed or reassigned from larger Vancouver Island routes. As a result, vessel selection has largely reflected system-wide fleet availability rather than the unique transportation requirements of the Sunshine Coast. Currently, Langdale's primary berth is designed for the 6,500-tonne C-class, while the Coastal-class vessels are 10,000 tonnes and Summit class 11,800 tonnes. Coastal class vessels also require more fuel, increasing costs and environmental impact, and more crew; plans to close entire passenger decks in order to adapt a wrong-sized vessel to our community will be more than awkward, and undeniably inefficient.

Instead, Route 3 requires a vessel strategy designed specifically around local operational realities rather than the continued use of oversized vessels inherited from other routes. Replacing the current operating model with a dedicated two-vessel service using modern 250-AEQ (Automobile Equivalent) hybrid diesel-electric ferries offers substantial advantages in capacity, service frequency, reliability, terminal efficiency, financial sustainability, and passenger experience.

Two purpose-built 250-car ferries operating hourly would provide approximately 60% greater hourly throughput, significantly reduce wait times, decrease terminal congestion, improve resilience during mechanical failures, lower operating costs, and better meet the long-term transportation needs of the Sunshine Coast.

The Current Service Model

The current Route 3 service is largely based on a C-Class ferry carrying approximately 311 Automobile Equivalents (AEQ).

Current Performance Characteristics

Metric	Current Service
Vessel Capacity	311 AEQ
Sailing Frequency	Every 2 hours
Round Trip Cycle	Approximately 2 hr 20 min
Hourly Throughput	133.3 AEQ
Trip Throughput	155.5 AEQ
Terminal Holding Requirements	High
System Redundancy	Low
Failure Consequence	Potential route isolation

While large sailings provide substantial lift-off capacity, they also create several operational problems:

- Traffic bunching at terminals.
- Long wait times after missed sailings.
- Extreme congestion at Horseshoe Bay.
- Larger crew complements.
- Greater fuel consumption.
- Increased maintenance costs.
- Single-point system failure risks.

Future plans to “wrong-size” Route 3 even further to rely on Coastal-class and possibly Summit-class will only exacerbate these problems. At a minimum, significant capital-intensive upgrades need to be made at Langdale to accommodate Coastal Class vessels with their great length and tonnage, which does not at all increase service resilience with the continuation of a single-ship service and greater fuel costs.

Proposed Service Model

Our proposed model consists of two purpose-built 250-AEQ ferries featuring:

- Hybrid diesel-electric propulsion
- Battery energy storage
- Four azimuth RAD (Rotatable Azimuth Drive) thrusters
- Open vehicle deck design
- Gallery deck configuration
- Gross tonnage under key regulatory thresholds where practical
- Hourly departures in each direction

Under this model, passengers would experience a sailing every hour rather than every two hours. For most of the year, capacity would increase from 311 AEQ every two hours to 250 AEQ every hour. Hourly service would reduce the maximum waiting period to one hour, resulting in improved commuter reliability, reduced scheduling stress, improved commercial freight movement and better passenger satisfaction. A more frequent, smaller-group service model would also better accommodate Horseshoe Bay’s severe space and operational constraints by reducing traffic surges, holding requirements, terminal congestion, and roadway backups. Smaller, more frequent sailings would reduce discharge volumes and improve overall terminal performance at Langdale, as well.

Operating two ferries would provide essential redundancy for the Sunshine Coast, ensuring that mechanical failures result in reduced rather than completely interrupted service, substantially improving resilience and reducing the risk of community isolation. Hourly service would significantly improve commercial traffic reliability on Route 3 by reducing delays, improving freight and delivery scheduling, shortening queues, and providing greater flexibility for businesses and suppliers. During lower-demand periods, one vessel could operate while the other undergoes scheduled maintenance without disrupting service.

Hybrid diesel-electric RAD ferries would improve Route 3 through:

- greater fuel efficiency
- faster and more precise docking
- reduced maintenance and emissions; and
- compatibility with future shore-power infrastructure.

Route 3's significant operating costs would be reduced through smaller crews, lower fuel and maintenance expenses, reduced overtime, improved staffing flexibility, and simplified training and fleet management. Although the initial purchase cost of two vessels is greater, the combination of lower operating costs, higher service levels, lower maintenance costs, reduced congestion, improved economic productivity, and enhanced reliability strongly favours the two-vessel solution in cost-benefit analysis over the expected 35- to 40-year service life of the fleet. (See Appendix A for a rough cost-benefit analysis.)

Furthermore, one of the lesser-known but potentially significant benefits of a purpose-built 250-AEQ ferry is the opportunity to design the vessel below key Transport Canada tonnage thresholds while still meeting Route 3's capacity requirements. While the current C-Class operation commonly requires 26 to 34 crew members, modern automated hybrid ferries can potentially operate safely with crews in the range of approximately 12 to 15 personnel per vessel for 1200 passengers and as few as 8 for smaller loads, subject to Transport Canada safe-manning requirements, final vessel design, passenger capacity and emergency response procedures. Over a 40-year vessel lifespan, even modest reductions in crew size produce substantial operating savings.

The evidence indicates that two modern 250-AEQ hybrid diesel-electric ferries operated on an hourly schedule would outperform the current single-vessel model in nearly every meaningful performance category:

- 87.5% increase in hourly capacity and 60% increase in trip capacity.
- 50% reduction in passenger wait times.
- Reduced congestion at Horseshoe Bay and Langdale.
- Improved reliability and system redundancy.
- Better support for commuters and commercial users.
- Lower fuel consumption and emissions.
- Reduced maintenance and lifecycle costs.
- Greater compatibility with future electrification.
- Improved resilience during mechanical failures.

Most importantly, the proposal aligns vessel design with the actual transportation needs of the Sunshine Coast. Rather than relying on oversized vessels inherited from other routes, Route 3 would finally be served by ferries specifically designed for its operational realities, community needs, terminal constraints, and future growth. For these reasons, the deployment of two purpose-built 250-car hybrid diesel-electric ferries represents the most effective long-term solution for Route 3 and should be pursued as the preferred fleet strategy for the Horseshoe Bay-Langdale corridor.

Retain Existing Major Vessels Until Permanent Redundancy Exists

Although we recognize the cost and challenges of extending the lifespan of old vessels (perhaps more than any other community in BC through our recent experience with the *Queen of Surrey*), we also strongly urge BC Ferries to delay the decommissioning of vessels to always keep at least one extra vessel in reserve for operational redundancy as the Summit series enters service. Route 3 has a great need for hourly sailings into the shoulder seasons beyond the current summer service, especially in the morning, as the June 10, 2026 presentation by BC Ferries to our FAC demonstrated.

Although retaining older vessels carries some additional operating costs, those costs should be weighed against the significant economic losses caused by repeated service interruptions. A cancelled sailing affects thousands of passengers, disrupts supply chains, harms tourism, and reduces confidence in the ferry system.

LANGDALE TERMINAL REDEVELOPMENT

Langdale Terminal is the principal ferry gateway for the Sunshine Coast and a critical part of the region's transportation infrastructure. BC Ferries should restore Langdale Terminal Redevelopment as a named and funded priority in its Performance Term 7 capital plan.

The immediate capital priority should be a dedicated, weather-protected and universally accessible pedestrian-loading system, together with targeted improvements to transit, passenger pick-up and drop-off, parking and upland circulation. Separately, PT7 should fund the technical planning required to address the lack of full-capacity vehicle loading at Langdale's second berth. Both workstreams should be coordinated with Route 3 vessel-replacement and service planning, but the larger berth project should not delay the immediate pedestrian and upland improvements.

Background: A Deferred Capital Project

BC Ferries had already established the need for comprehensive Langdale improvements through its 2017–2019 planning and engagement process. The former redevelopment program included an overhead pedestrian walkway and an upland project addressing the terminal building, access road, passenger pick-up and drop-off, and parking. BC Ferries separated the projects specifically so that the “critical” pedestrian improvements could proceed while the broader terminal concept continued to be developed.

The pedestrian walkway was also identified in BC Ferries' PT5 capital planning as an operational investment. BC Ferries noted that Langdale had no dedicated foot-passenger loading system: passengers used the lower vehicle ramp while vehicles waited until they were clear. It stated that a dedicated overhead walkway would separate pedestrians and vehicles, permit simultaneous loading, and contribute to better on-time performance and system resilience. The comprehensive redevelopment did not proceed, but the conditions it was intended to address remain.

Current Operational Constraints:

1. Pedestrian Loading, Accessibility and Terminal Efficiency

Foot passengers at Langdale currently board ahead of vehicles using a long, largely uncovered route that crosses the vehicle ramp and enters the vessel through the lower vehicle deck. Vehicles cannot begin loading until passengers are safely clear, creating a recurring constraint on vessel turnaround and on-time performance.

The current arrangement also creates significant accessibility and safety challenges. Passengers using wheelchairs, walkers or strollers, and those carrying luggage must navigate lengthy and exposed walking routes, sloped surfaces, the vehicle ramp and the vessel elevator. When disembarking, elevator users must move through or

alongside vehicles on the lower deck, often with limited or even non-existent maneuvering space. The different boarding arrangements at Horseshoe Bay and Langdale can also cause confusion and further delay.

Congestion is further concentrated near the Berth 1 lower loading ramp, where passengers disembarking from Route 3 converge with passengers waiting to board. Access to the adjacent float serving Route 13 is also narrow and can become obstructed, particularly when Gambier and Keats Island passengers are often travelling with significant luggage. These overlapping passenger movements create additional delays, accessibility challenges and safety concerns within an already constrained loading area.

These deficiencies undermine BC Ferries' stated objective of encouraging more foot and bicycle travel. *Charting the Course* places increasing the share of passengers travelling without vehicles at the top of its hierarchy for managing future demand. Langdale's limited parking, inadequate transit-staging area, conflicts among buses, private vehicles and pedestrians, and lack of dedicated passenger loading collectively discourage travellers from leaving their vehicles behind.

Pedestrian infrastructure should therefore be treated as both accessibility infrastructure and capacity infrastructure. Making walking-on safer and more practical can reduce vehicle demand, improve loading efficiency and preserve vehicle-deck space for trips that cannot reasonably be made without a vehicle.

2. Upland Circulation, Transit and Parking

The terminal's upland configuration also requires significant attention. Transit buses, passenger pick-up and drop-off, taxis, pedestrians and parking traffic converge in a constrained area. Vehicles leaving parking and drop-off areas merge with ferry offloading traffic, while property boundaries complicate traffic management near the toll plaza and overflow area.

Terminal staff have continued to identify features of the former redevelopment plan, particularly a separate circulation loop for parking and drop-off traffic, as relevant to current safety and operational problems.

Parking capacity is also becoming an increasing constraint as passengers are encouraged to travel as walk-ons. As the existing lot is frequently full, vehicles are being left in undesignated areas within the terminal property and on nearby residential streets, including Langdale Heights. This has resulted in parking enforcement conflicts and neighbourhood concerns. Because nearby streets generally lack sidewalks, including routes used by children travelling to the nearby elementary school, spillover parking also creates pedestrian-safety risks. Without additional and better-managed parking options, these pressures will increase as BC Ferries seeks to shift more travellers from vehicles to walk-on travel.

The renewed project should provide safe separation of travel modes, adequate bus staging, functional pick-up and drop-off areas, accessible pedestrian connections, and a parking strategy reflecting the needs of commuters, short-term users, annual pass holders, and passengers travelling to Gambier and Keats Islands.

Furthermore, managing traffic more efficiently within the terminal will help to reduce and mitigate ferry traffic congestion outside the terminal on the bypass and Marine Drive, which has been severe at times in recent months.

3. Berth Capacity and Resilience

Langdale has two berths, but only the primary berth can load both the lower and upper vehicle decks. Berth 2 can load only the lower deck, substantially reducing usable vessel capacity when it is required during two-vessel service, planned maintenance or equipment failures.

The terminal therefore lacks full-capacity berth redundancy and remains dependent on a single upper-deck loading system. This vulnerability was demonstrated again in July 2026, when a mechanical issue at Berth 1 restricted loading to the main vehicle deck until full two-deck loading resumed several days later.

A second upper-deck loading system is a substantially larger and less mature capital project than the pedestrian and upland improvements. It should not be allowed to delay those immediate priorities. However, it must be addressed through PT7 planning because it affects resilience, maintenance continuity, summer two-vessel operations and the feasibility of future service expansion.

Requested PT7 Actions

Immediate capital project

BC Ferries should include Langdale Terminal Redevelopment as a named and funded project in its upcoming PT7 submission. The first phase should:

- deliver a dedicated, weather-protected and universally accessible pedestrian connection directly to the vessel passenger deck;
- permit pedestrian and vehicle loading to occur simultaneously;
- improve transit staging, passenger pick-up and drop-off, parking and pedestrian circulation, with safe separation among pedestrians, buses, and private vehicles wherever possible; and
- build upon the previous Langdale planning and engagement work rather than restarting the project.

Berth 2 planning commitment

BC Ferries should include a separate funded PT7 allowance to:

- assess options for providing upper- and lower-deck vehicle loading at Berth 2;

- establish interface requirements for current and future Route 3 vessels;
- identify costs, phasing, funding requirements and operational benefits;
- protect the space and infrastructure corridors required for the preferred solution; and
- publish an implementation recommendation and construction timeline.

The Commissioner's Route 3 Probe confirmed that replacement vessels intended for Route 3 will be included in the capital plan accompanying the PT7 submission. Berth, vessel and service-model planning must therefore proceed together.

Recommended Timeline

BC Ferries should:

- identify and fund both workstreams in its September 2026 PT7 submission;
- re-establish the Langdale project and begin early engagement by March 2027;
- complete the updated pedestrian and upland plan and the Berth 2 options assessment by March 2028;
- begin construction of the pedestrian and priority upland improvements within the first two years of PT7;
- complete those immediate improvements before the end of PT7; and
- establish a funded implementation commitment for full-capacity Berth 2 loading, coordinated where appropriate with future Route 3 vessel delivery.

Langdale's unresolved deficiencies affect accessibility, safety, on-time performance, vehicle capacity and system resilience. The immediate pedestrian and upland improvement projects are sufficiently developed to proceed. The larger Berth 2 investment requires further technical work, but that planning must begin now so that current terminal improvements and future Route 3 vessels form part of a coherent long-term strategy.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications are unquestionably critical to customer satisfaction in Route 3 service and moreover are increasingly essential to fundamentally get people onto the vessels. BC Ferries' desire for more reservations only makes clear communications and reliable technology more important. As *Charting the Course* states in its ultimate plan for Route 3, "Clear and easy to find information on conditions for different sailings can help customers make better decisions and encourage travel during less busy sailings."

Reliable, timely, and actionable communication is a critical part of the ferry travel experience for people travelling to and from the Sunshine Coast via Horseshoe Bay. The Ferry Advisory Committee recognizes that BC Ferries operates in a complex and dynamic environment: weather, mechanical issues, crew availability, medical emergencies, berth constraints, traffic volumes, and safety considerations can all impact operations, sometimes with little notice.

We also acknowledge that travelling with a reservation is often the most reliable option where available. Though also, many Sunshine Coast travellers require flexibility and must make real-time decisions based on the information available to them. In both these cases, often, the quality, timeliness, and clarity of BC Ferries' communications will directly affect whether people can make informed decisions about when to travel, whether to proceed to the terminal, whether to delay their trip, or whether to make alternate arrangements.

While BC Ferries has indicated that a reworked website is expected in the next year, a future website refresh will not address the immediate challenges ferry users are experiencing today. Shorter-term improvements to communication practices, update frequency, expectation setting, and customer-facing messaging are needed now.

Current Conditions (website/mobile app): Challenges

1. Information is not updated consistently or quickly enough

A recurring concern from Sunshine Coast travellers is that information on Current Conditions is not always updated consistently, particularly during delays, disruptions, or emergency situations. In some cases, guests are left trying to understand the true status of service by checking multiple sources, including different areas of the BC Ferries website, terminal webcams, social media, staff comments, and information shared informally by other travellers. Even the Vessel Tracker, once thought to be a reliable way to know where your ferry is, has recently been failing, including by showing vessels on Route 2 instead of Route 3.

When information is delayed, incomplete, or inconsistent, travellers are forced to make decisions based on assumptions rather than facts. In addition to the frustrations this causes, this reality is also inequitable: not all travellers have the time, digital access, familiarity with the system, or ability to interpret multiple sources while managing travel plans, children, medical appointments, work commitments, or mobility needs. A customer should not need to be an expert in BC Ferries' operations to understand whether they are likely to travel.

2. Current conditions messaging is often too vague to support decision-making

The Current Conditions pages are an important tool for ferry users, but the messaging is often too general to help travellers understand the likely impact to their journey. Statements about delays, service impacts, or loading conditions do not always provide enough context for customers to determine what they should do next. For example, many travellers are not aware that traffic held outside toll booths is not factored into deck space availability calculations displayed in Current Conditions. In another example, when a service delay is communicated without an estimated time impact, customers may not know whether they are facing a minor inconvenience, a missed sailing, several hours of delay, or no realistic chance of travel that day. Even when exact timing is difficult to predict, providing a best available estimate, range, or scenario-based guidance would be more useful than vague messaging alone.

3. Communication during significant disruptions has not met customer needs

The Sunshine Coast has experienced several significant service disruptions this year, including issues affecting service on April 15, 2026 and July 6, 2026 and beyond, as well as the medical emergency on April 19, 2026. During these types of events, communication has been particularly challenging. In these situations, Current Conditions were not always updated quickly enough to reflect the seriousness or expected duration of the disruption. As a result, travellers continued to proceed toward the terminal or remain in traffic and lineups without a clear understanding of whether they were likely to travel. This contributed to frustration, congestion, loss of confidence, and in some cases potentially unsafe conditions where people were stuck for long periods with limited options.

During the failure of the *Queen of Surrey* on August 28 and 29 and the subsequent simultaneous failure of the *Queen of Coquitlam* on August 29. During these failures the website/app was also not clearly updated such that people could make a reasonable call about travelling to the ferry, whether reserved or not. The updates on the website were delayed and at times inaccurate (at one point referring to the wrong boat on the schedule) and then further updates were unclear as to the status of the boats returning to service and associated delays.

In Terminal Communications: Challenges

1. Inconsistency of Messaging within the Terminal (employees, terminal screens)

A specific concern for Sunshine Coast travellers is the lack of clear, consistent communication once customers arrive at the terminal. During delays, staff do not always provide proactive updates or set expectations, and travellers may struggle to obtain a confident answer when they ask for information. Terminal screens can add to the confusion because, like the Current Conditions website, they may not reflect the actual service status. One Ferry Advisory Committee member experienced this at Horseshoe Bay last weekend: terminal boards and the BC Ferries website presented one version of the situation, while staff provided different information or were uncertain. It was unclear whether the traveller was likely to board, should continue waiting, or needed to reconsider their plans. Ultimately, the traveller had to use a third-party ship-tracking app to determine the vessel's likely status.

The key impacts of these challenges include:

- Reduced ability to make informed travel decisions: travellers cannot confidently decide whether to proceed, wait, rebook, delay travel, or make alternate arrangements.
- Increased congestion and frustration: when information is unclear, more people may continue toward the terminal, contributing to traffic backups and longer lineups.
- Loss of trust in official channels: if travellers repeatedly find official updates incomplete or delayed, they begin relying on unofficial sources instead.

- Added stress for vulnerable travellers: people travelling for medical care, with children and/or pets, with mobility needs, or under time-sensitive circumstances are disproportionately affected.
- Potential safety concerns: during major disruptions, unclear communication can leave people stranded in traffic or terminal areas for extended periods without sufficient expectations, options, or guidance.
- Negative perception of BC Ferries service: even when the root cause of a disruption is outside BC Ferries' control, poor communication can significantly worsen the customer experience.

The issue is not only whether a sailing is delayed or cancelled. The issue is whether customers receive the information they need, early enough and clearly enough, to make reasonable decisions or simply to know what to expect next.

Recommended Short-Term Solutions

The Ferry Advisory Committee recognizes that broader digital improvements may be underway, including the anticipated reworked BC Ferries website. However, the following shorter-term actions could improve the guest experience now and should not need to wait for a full website replacement.

1. Improve the clarity and usefulness of Current Conditions messaging

BC Ferries should update Current Conditions messaging to be more specific, practical and customer-centered. Where possible, updates should include:

- The nature of the issue, using plain language
- The expected impact to service
- Estimated delay times or approximate ranges
- Whether customers without reservations are likely to travel
- Whether customers should delay arrival at the terminal
- When the next update will be provided
- What options are available to customers

Even when exact timing is unknown, messaging such as “next update by 2:30 p.m.” or “customers without reservations are unlikely to travel before the 5:30 p.m. sailing” would be significantly more helpful than broad statements that do not support decision-making.

2. Establish a minimum update cadence during delays and disruptions

During significant disruptions, BC Ferries should commit to a clear update cadence, even when there is no major change. For example, updates could be provided every 30 minutes during major service impacts or sooner if conditions change. A “no change” update is still valuable because it reassures customers that the situation is being actively monitored and that the information has not gone stale. This would help reduce uncertainty and discourage customers from relying on unofficial sources.

3. Create a quickly updated “live status” or blog-style disruption page

As a short-term solution, BC Ferries should consider creating a simple, blog-style live status page for major disruptions. This page should be easy for communications staff or operations-approved personnel to update quickly, without requiring engineering support. The page could provide a running timeline of updates during significant incidents, including:

- Time of disruption
- Current operational status
- Expected customer impact
- Terminal traffic or lineup guidance
- Reservation guidance
- Next planned update
- Recovery progress once service resumes

This would create a single source of truth during high-impact events and reduce the need for customers to search across multiple pages.

4. Introduce or accelerate push notifications for route-specific updates

BC Ferries should strongly consider a route-specific push notification service for ferry riders. Travellers should be able to subscribe to updates for specific routes, such as Horseshoe Bay to Langdale, and receive timely notifications about major delays, cancellations, overloads, terminal congestion and recovery plans. This would be especially useful for Sunshine Coast travellers because many customers make decisions before leaving home, work, school or appointments. Push notifications would allow customers to adjust plans earlier and reduce unnecessary traffic toward the terminal. If a full app-based or account-based notification service requires longer-term development, BC Ferries could explore interim options such as SMS alerts, email alerts or web-based subscriptions for priority route notices.

5. Use plain-language customer guidance during exceptional events

During emergencies or significant operational issues, communication should move beyond operational descriptions and include practical customer guidance. For example:

- “If you do not have a reservation, please consider delaying travel until later today.”
- “Customers currently en route to Horseshoe Bay should expect extended waits.”
- “Vehicle traffic is currently exceeding available capacity for the next two sailings.”
- “We do not expect to clear the terminal until after the final scheduled sailing.”
- “The next update will be posted by 4:00 p.m.”

This type of wording helps customers understand the real-world impact and supports safer, more informed travel decisions.

6. Align communications across all customer-facing channels

BC Ferries should ensure that Current Conditions, service notices, terminal messaging, social media, and staff guidance are aligned during disruptions. Inconsistent information across channels undermines confidence and creates confusion. A single coordinated message, updated consistently across channels, would help customers trust the information being provided and reduce speculation.

Clearer and consistent proactive communication will not solve every operational challenge, but it can significantly reduce customer frustration, improve safety, support better travel planning, and rebuild confidence in BC Ferries' official information channels.

CONCLUSION

Route 3 occupies a unique place within the BC Ferries network. As the BC Ferry Commissioner observed, it combines the passenger and vehicle volumes of a major route with the essential-service role of a ferry-dependent community. For Sunshine Coast residents, businesses and visitors, it is not simply a transportation option but a critical public service that supports health care access, employment, tourism, supply chains and community life.

The recommendations in this paper are intended to address both immediate challenges and long-term growth. They call for contractual service levels that reflect actual demand, more meaningful community engagement in service planning, greater transparency and innovation within the reservations system, a dedicated vessel strategy designed around Route 3's operational realities, renewed investment in Langdale Terminal infrastructure, and significant improvements to customer communications. Together, these measures would improve reliability, increase resilience, strengthen economic competitiveness, enhance the travel experience, and better support the needs of a growing region. Clear, timely and actionable communication is not separate from service delivery; it is an essential part of it, particularly for a ferry-dependent community where travellers often make decisions based on real-time information.

At the heart of this paper is a simple principle: ferry service for the Sunshine Coast should be planned around the needs of the community it serves. That means recognizing that users of Route 3 require not only dependable service levels, vessels and terminals, but also accurate information that enables informed travel decisions. The Commissioner's recommendation that governments, BC Ferries and communities **work together to identify creative solutions** remains both relevant and necessary. As BC Ferries, the Province, the BC Ferry Authority and the Commissioner consider PT7, we encourage them to use this opportunity to begin a genuine collaborative discussion about the future of Route 3 and the service, infrastructure and communications investments required to support it.

Reliable ferry service should be viewed as an investment in resilience rather than an operating expense. Just as governments invest in highways, bridges, hospitals and electrical systems to ensure continuity and economic stability, investments in Route 3 service levels, vessel redundancy, terminal infrastructure and customer communications generate benefits that extend far beyond ferry operations. The Sunshine Coast is growing, and its transportation infrastructure must grow with it. The decisions made during PT7 will help determine whether Route 3 is equipped to meet the region's needs for decades to come, not only by moving people and goods efficiently, but by providing the confidence, predictability and information that ferry-dependent communities need to thrive.

APPENDIX A

Cost-benefit analysis of right-sized service delivery

Overview

While the acquisition of two purpose-built 250-AEQ hybrid diesel-electric ferries would require a greater initial capital investment than continuing to operate a single aging C-Class vessel, long-term economic analysis suggests the benefits significantly outweigh the costs.

The key objective is not simply minimizing vessel acquisition costs, but minimizing the total lifecycle cost of providing safe, reliable, and frequent transportation service to the Sunshine Coast.

Capital Costs

The proposed solution requires purchasing two new vessels rather than extending the service life of aging vessels or acquiring a single replacement vessel.

Although initial capital expenditures are higher, several factors offset this cost:

- Longer service life of modern vessels.
- Reduced annual maintenance expenditures.
- Lower fuel consumption.
- Lower emissions compliance costs.
- Reduced crew costs.
- Improved fleet reliability.
- Reduced service disruptions and associated operating losses.

Because Route 3 is one of BC Ferries' highest-utilization routes, any efficiency gains achieved on this route generate substantial cumulative savings over the vessel lifecycle.

Fuel Savings

Fuel is among the largest operating costs for any ferry service.

Compared with a conventional shaft-driven diesel ferry, hybrid diesel-electric ferries offer significant efficiencies through:

- Battery-supported operations in terminals.
- Reduced idling.
- Peak-load management.
- More efficient propulsion systems.
- Elimination of low-load engine operation.
- Reduced docking maneuver fuel consumption.

On a route with numerous daily departures and a significant percentage of operational time devoted to docking and maneuvering, these efficiencies have an outsized impact.

The ability to incorporate shore-power charging infrastructure in the future further reduces fuel dependence and protects BC Ferries from fuel price volatility.

Maintenance Savings

Current C-Class vessels are approaching an age where maintenance expenses are increasing rapidly.

Challenges include:

- Obsolete equipment.
- More frequent component failures.
- Extended refit periods.
- Long parts procurement timelines.
- Specialized repair requirements.

Modern hybrid vessels offer significant maintenance advantages:

- Modular gensets.
- Replaceable RAD drive components.
- Reduced engine hours.
- Simplified propulsion arrangements.
- Condition-based maintenance opportunities.

Unlike traditional propulsion systems that often require lengthy shipyard periods, many major hybrid system components can be serviced or replaced while the vessel remains in operation.

The reduction in downtime translates directly into lower repair costs and higher service availability.

Productivity Benefits

Hourly service creates economic value beyond operating savings.

Benefits include:

Commuters

- Reduced travel uncertainty.
- Fewer missed workdays.
- Greater scheduling flexibility.
- Increased labour mobility

Businesses

- More reliable freight schedules.

- Reduced inventory carrying costs.
- Shorter wait times for commercial vehicles.
- Increased access to Lower Mainland markets.

Tourism

- Improved visitor experience.
- Increased same-day travel opportunities.
- Greater spontaneity for leisure travel.
- Enhanced attractiveness of the Sunshine Coast destination.

These benefits generate indirect economic value that extends beyond BC Ferries' operating budget and contributes to broader regional economic growth.

Cost of Service Disruptions

The current operating model presents a significant single-point-of-failure risk.

When a primary vessel experiences mechanical difficulties:

- Sailings are cancelled.
- Commuters miss work.
- Medical appointments are missed.
- Freight deliveries are delayed.
- Local businesses incur costs.

The economic impact of a single major service disruption frequently exceeds the incremental operating savings achieved through reliance on a single vessel.

The two-vessel model substantially mitigates these risks by maintaining service continuity even when one vessel experiences mechanical issues.

Overall Cost-Benefit Assessment

Category	Single Large Vessel	Two 250-AEQ Ferries
Initial Capital Cost	Lower	Higher
Fuel Costs	Higher	Lower
Maintenance Costs	Higher	Lower
Crew Costs	Higher	Lower
Reliability	Lower	Higher
Throughput	Lower	Higher
Redundancy	Low	High
Lifecycle Value	Moderate	High