Dear Lummi Island Ferry Advisory Committee,

At the end of the PLIC General Meeting on October 29, 2014, only two of the 33 attendees recommended moving forward with the proposal as currently written. On October 30, 2014, PLIC board members met and agreed that LIFAC should recommend that Whatcom County introduce an ordinance amendment to lower ferry fares, and we offer the following recommendations:

First and foremost, PLIC suggests that LIFAC present its recommendations in more detailed and concise assumptions/projections and extend the public comment period to allow for more feedback.

And if for any reason that is not possible, the PLIC Board recommends for your consideration:

1. Adding a 10-ride fare for needs-based passengers of $28. We first proposed this in our letter to you dated June 30, 2013 and understood this fare class would be added when further fare changes were introduced. Our original letter recommended eliminating the 25-ride needs-based fare when the 10-ride fare is adopted.

2. Reducing the 10-ride vehicle/driver needs-based fare to $60.

3. Changing the proposed fare for the 25-ride vehicle/driver as necessary to meet all criteria set forth in the County mandates currently referenced in the LIFAC proposal.

The 12 points made at the PLIC general meeting that are the basis for our recommendations have been attached for the benefit of those not able to attend that meeting.

We thank you for the extensive study that was undertaken to develop the current fare proposal and strongly urge you to consider our 3 priority recommendations above.

Sincerely,

The PLIC Board of Directors

Rhayna Blake, Chair; Mike Knueck; Jansen Pierce; Janet Lutz-Smith; Mary Ross; Dave Wing
Summary of Comments at the 10-29-14 PLJC Presentation of the Ferry Fare Proposal

1. No suggestions that the single ride fares should be changed.
2. There were however comments that all multi-ride categories need relief, not just the three fare categories specified.
3. By the very nature of the $3 surcharge, all of the lowest fares were hit hardest by the surcharge, especially passengers who experienced a 187% increase in fares. At the same time needs-based passengers were hit even harder with a 441% increase. The impact on needs-based vehicle/drivers was also twice as high as on the regular multi-ride vehicle/drivers. The island is losing its diversity and needs-based riders should see relief as well in order to counteract this trend.
4. Ten ride passes should not be more expensive per ride than 25-ride passes. Many who purchase 10-ride passes do so because they have a hard time budgeting for a 25 ride pass.
5. The previous request for the addition of a 10-ride needs-based fare for passengers has yet to be addressed. The current 25-ride needs-based fare of $92 is sometimes out of reach for those who need it most.
6. It is questionable that the County Council will pass a proposal that is so irregular and inconsistent with senior/disabled needs-based fares being higher than other multi-ride fares.
7. The model anticipates an increase in the ticket sales for medium and larger trucks in 2015 as part of its revenue projections. It was questioned whether this is a reasonable assumption.
8. It was suggested that LIFAC delay submitting this proposal to County Council until questions about assumptions and other comments could be addressed and that a schedule for resubmitting be developed that includes discussion of the proposal. It was also requested that the report referred to in the proposal be made available for review. And a time period for submitting comments should be identified and included.
9. We want to be able to say we stand behind LIFAC and we can't do that yet. It is important that a proposal be submitted to County Council that is sound and well thought out and that it be based on historical use, anticipated use and reserve need over a longer term than one year. If we don't take the time now to do this, we run the risk of reducing fares and then having to raise them again.
10. Will people want to stock up on “cheap” cards, knowing prices will increase? Islanders depend on the ferry and need to know what to expect. Radical swings in fares from year to year create a sense of uncertainty.
11. LIFAC is indicating that they will review the impact of these lower fares within the year. When fares were significantly reduced back in the 80’s, it took much longer to see the effect on ridership. If there is a significant fare reduction like this, shouldn’t it be in place for longer than one year?
12. But LIFAC is required to review fares on an annual basis.
Mike Skehan, on November 1, 2014 at 1.11 PM, said:

Our fare structure is now so out of whack with every other ferry system in the Pacific Northwest it is time for a complete and comprehensive review of the entire structure – something I hope LIFAC will do before throwing another band aid on the wound.

Here are a few examples of my research:

1. Nearly every ferry system maintains about a 3:1 ratio between vehicle/widriver and a passenger/pedestrian (for good reason, they take up less space, so you can sell many more tickets at little increase in operating cost – We’re currently less than 2:1, but used to be 4:1)

2. Most systems charge for vehicles by length, not the weight of the car or pickup. (Our fare for vehicles is based on cars and trucks with GVWR [Gross Vehicle Wt Rating] of 8,000 # or less. Many pickups today 3/4 ton and about exceed this limit but still pay the lower fare because no purser can remember them all as our vehicles have become heavier, and asking to see your registration would be ridiculous. State ferries use under 22 ft, which covers the vast majority of vehicles. Larger, longer and heavy GVWR commercial vehicles can be included in a simple truck schedule of small, medium, and large trucks that is fair for all.)

3. Most systems just charge a fare, and adjust it from time to time. Not us! (We slap on an arbitrary $3 surcharge and it stays long past it’s stated purpose, creating vast inequities between the user classes. LIFAC’s latest proposal leaves the surcharge alone, but slashes rates on only 3 classes of fares, yet leaves the other 20 or so alone)

4. All ferry systems have some sort of discount incentive to purchasing multi-ride fares, either passes or punch cards. Most only discount their basic fare by 20-33%. Our discounts are generally higher, and proposed to go above 50%. This further induces travel in vehicle classes, when we already have limited deck space in peak periods. Further incentives to travel are unwarranted.

5. Most systems have fares that do not penalize the occasional user to badly. If half priced punch cards for islanders is our key to the gate, and charging double for everyone else is a policy, it should be stated as such. “Visitors Not Welcome”. Low Income Either (as you have trouble coming up with hundreds of dollars to purchase the gate pass.

I want reduced ferry fares just like everyone else. Let’s do it in a meaningful way, with lots of public discussion, before we just throw something up against the wall and see if it sticks again. Operating expenses next year will likely require another 2% increase as it has been in past years, and keep in mind, our ferry crew have not had a raise in many years. Their contract is up again, and could go to binding arbitration if a fair deal can’t be found.

Should we then slap another surcharge on to cover wages?
COMMENTS ON LIFAC FARE PROPOSAL

11/4/14
Betsy Schneider
4285 Mafia View Dr.
schneider444@gmail.com

Good evening. I'm Betsy Schneider, and like others here tonight, I have some concerns about the LIFAC fare proposal. Of course, we are all interested in seeing a reduction in rates from the 3¢ surcharge, but we'd like to see it done in a way that floats all of our boats and brings everyone along.

This proposal provides no relief to the Island residents who need it the most – those who qualify for, and use, the needs-based fares. The fact is that even though the surcharge increased rates for low income, elderly and disabled folks dramatically more than the regular rates, LIFAC is proposing dramatic relief for everyone EXCEPT low income, elderly and disabled Island residents.

To be specific: when the surcharge was added, rates for the regular pedestrian pass went up 187%, while rates for the needs-based pedestrian pass went up 441%. Yes, that’s 441%.

At the same time, rates for the regular car/driver 10 pass went up 42%, while rates for the needs-based car/driver 10 pass went up 83%.

Looking at the LIFAC proposal, there is almost no relief from these massive and disproportionate rate increases for low income, elderly and disabled people.

Comparing rates before the surcharge to the rates in the LIFAC proposal, the regular pedestrian pass will be up 102%, while the needs-based pass will still be up 376%.

The regular car/driver 10 pass will be up only 8% from pre-surchage rates, while the needs-based pass will still be up 83%.

The amended LIFAC proposal states that the proposed new rate for the regular pedestrian pass "eliminates the need" for a needs-based fare in this category. I'm not sure from whose perspective this $11 reduction "eliminates the need" for a lower needs-based fare, but it can't be from the perspective of the low income people who would still be paying 376% more than before the surcharge, and who have struggled to pay these increases and stay on the Island, where many have lived for decades. This would be a dangerous step backward in providing reasonable relief to our low income neighbors and in trying to preserve economic diversity on the Island. Not to mention the fact that once this category is gone, we could have a hard time getting it back if, as is likely, fares increase in the future.

So I hope LIFAC will reconsider its position on this issue and offer the opportunity for more community input on the whole fare proposal.

Thank you.
Subject: request complete ferry expense/income model, data & predictions be made public
From: Wynne Lee <wynnelee@earthlink.net>
Date: 11/3/2014 1:52 PM
To: "charles.antholl" <charles.antholl@wwu.edu>, "Chris Colburn (wta)" <crisc@ridewta.com>, Byron Moye <byronmoye@gmail.com>, Greg Brown <gkbrown4@gmail.com>, Stu Clark <stuclark@stuclark.com>, Bob Busch <beverlyonlummi@q.com>, Mike McKenzie <mcwritterm@gmail.com>
CC: "lifac7@gmail.com" <lifac7@gmail.com>, Mike Skehan <KF7OKJ@gmail.com>, Rhayma Blake <rhayma@me.com>, Beth Walukas Louis <bwalukas@gmail.com>, Barbara Brenner <bbrenner@co.whatcom.wa.us>, Jill Nixon <jnixon@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Thanks with starting to move ahead with reviewing fares with an eye to recommending changes. Everyone appreciates your efforts and good intentions on this score.

Before any fare reduction proposal is sent to the County Council, I request that LIFAC consider adopting the following public process steps to ensure that any fare recommendation will be fully understood by ferry users and others. I believe it would be far better to get solid public support based on solid understanding of the proposal, before going to Council.

1. At tomorrow's meeting, vote to put a hold on sending the current fare recommendations to County Council until all public input and concerns are addressed.

2. Within the next week, please publish and effectively publicize the ferry operations/maintenance model (with data, calculations, assumptions, etc) that is the basis of the proposal. The online versions can easily be uploaded to google docs, the new LIFAC website or elsewhere. Uploading these files should take less than 20 minutes. Print out a couple of paper copies to put at the island or other county libraries.

3. Set and publicize a deadline (realistic - 2 to 4 weeks) for the public to submit written or verbal comments and suggestions, preferably in a location where they can be easily viewed and read by anyone (like the Planning Department does) at least online.

4. Schedule and publicize a LIFAC meeting for public discussion of this information and any alternative fare recommendations. Vote to revise, or not, the current recommendation.

5. Within 5 business days of that meeting, publish at least draft minutes including public comments and any action taken, plus next steps in the process of moving forward toward the County Council.

Thank you,
Wynne Lee
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