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Editor, Times Colonist
Via Email: letters@tc.canwest.com

Dear Editor, Times Colonist:

Re: Islands Trust at fault for high fares, Ferries says

The Islands Trust will not be the scapegoat for BC Ferries' fare increases or loss of ridership. The Islands Trust is celebrating 35 years of fulfilling a provincial mandate to preserve and protect the Gulf Islands for all British Columbians. BC Ferries has a provincial mandate to provide transportation for those islands. We are doing our job, working to sustain complete communities on our islands despite complex external pressures. We would like BC Ferries top executives to do their job, and take the time to understand our communities before they blame fare increases on our locally elected representatives.

The province created the Islands Trust to arrest the rampant development that was beginning to destroy the islands in the early 1960s and 1970s. The Islands Trust has never said "no growth" in its Official Community Plans, and island populations have almost tripled since the Islands Trust was created. The external pressures that have increased housing prices throughout the Vancouver Island region have little to do with Islands Trust land use policies. Local trustees are acutely aware of the need for affordable housing and have taken many steps to support it, with few resources to do so. The Islands Trust's commitment to affordable housing is reflected in our policy statement, our strategic plan and in the hard work of locally elected trustees on Trust Council's affordable housing task force.

Fare increases of 80-100% in the past six years are clearly the major factor influencing ferry traffic. Traffic levels drop with each fare increase, and rebound with each fare discount. Similar patterns are found on routes outside the Islands Trust area such as the Sunshine Coast, central coast, north coast and the Quadra/Cortez Island routes. Just as tolls on the provincial road network discourage travel and affect local economies, higher ferry fares have slowed down tourist traffic, part-time residents' visits to their properties and, of course, discretionary resident travel.

Sincerely,

Sheila Malcolmson
Chair, Islands Trust Council

pc: Islands Trust website
David Hahn, BC Ferries CEO