



Brief on Accessibility

Background

The Canadian Transportation Agency is modernizing the regulatory framework in relation to accessibility.

The Canadian Ferry Association (CFA), previously known as the Canadian Ferry Operators Association, represents the ferry sector in Canada. It is an incorporated, not-for-profit, member-based organization, governed by an elected Board of Directors and managed by a Chief Executive Officer and employees.

An overview of Canada's ferry sector

Canada's ferries transport over 55 million passengers annually, along with 19 million cars and billions of dollars worth of goods..

The ferry sector is diverse in its structure, with various bodies responsible for ferry operations across the country. They include:

- A federal Crown Corporation,
- Provincial governments,
- Provincial Crown Corporations,
- Provincially owned companies,
- Municipal governments,
- Indigenous organizations,
- Private corporations.

Some provincial governments either operate ferries directly or contract private corporations and/or municipal governments to operate ferries.

It is also diverse in the communities it serves:

- Large urban regions,
- Small rural and/or remote communities,

The geographic areas served are wide and diverse, with journeys over oceans, lakes and rivers from British Columbia to Newfoundland and Labrador as well as Northern Canada.



Accessibility – a priority for the ferry sector

CFA has made accessibility a priority. Recent measures in support of this priority include:

- Making accessibility the theme of our 2016 Conference,
- Providing regular information to our members on various issues related to accessibility,
- Supporting our members by identifying sources of funding for improvements related to accessibility.

Accessibility – challenges ahead

1. Lack of national strategy

There is no national strategy on accessibility for ferries. We believe a strategy should first examine what is already done by the ferry sector and then identify the needs. The strategy should also clearly pinpoint the various regulatory obstacles to enabling increased accessibility.

- **RECOMMENDATION 1:** The Government of Canada should partner with the Canadian Ferry Association to establish a national strategy on accessibility in the ferry sector.

2. Age of the fleet

The average age of the national fleet is between 30 to 40 years old. Operators and owners are replacing ferries but this is being done gradually.

Accessibility is a key aspect considered when modern vessels are being built.

The building of passenger vessels includes consultation with Transport Canada on various issues. While this is a good solution, clarity and consistency at the outset would help the ferry sector.

- **RECOMMENDATION 2:** That the Canadian Transportation Agency and Transport Canada confirm that policies, guidelines and regulations do not contradict other policies on the building of passenger vessels.
- **RECOMMENDATION 3:** That the Canadian Transportation Agency and Transport Canada issue clear guidelines related to accessibility for new passenger vessels



3. Capacity of ferry operators and owners

As identified earlier, the corporate structure and geographic distribution of ferry operators and owners varies significantly. With these factors come challenges, mainly related to the financial capacity to undertake required renovations and / or replace aging passenger vessels.

- **RECOMMENDATION 4:** That the Canadian government increase the amounts available through funding programs such as the “Enabling Accessibility Fund”.

4. Code of Practice: Ferry Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities (Ferry Code)

A separate document will be provided to provide some of our views in relation to the “Ferry Code”.

5. Terminals

We disagree with the Canadian Transportation Agency’s intent to incorporate the *Code of Practice: Passenger Terminal Accessibility* in its proposed regulations. A Code of Practice should be a living document that is updated regularly in consultation and collaboration with industry. Incorporating the Code of Practice in regulations would make it difficult to amend.

- **RECOMMENDATION 5:** That the Canadian Transportation Agency not include the Code of Practice and other Codes of Practice in regulations.

6. One person – one fare

Policies implemented by most ferry operators are in place to support and enable passengers with disabilities, rather than creating undue obstacles or restrictions.

The policies and their official nature depend on individual operators. Some operators do not have written policies, however respect the requirements to allow extra seating at no cost for attendants.

We believe that qualifying passengers with disabilities should always be provided, free of charge, extra seating/passage required to accommodate their disability.



7. Seating in ferries

Our sector is proud of its efforts to accommodate passengers with appropriate and accessible seating.

There are no real concerns with the Canadian Transportation Agency's proposed requirements.

However we would strongly advise that the requirement be phased in gradually in order to allow operators time to make appropriate changes, if needed and that financial support be made available.

- **RECOMMENDATION 6:** That the Canadian government gradually implement any proposed changes in order to give operators and owners of passenger vessels time to adapt.
- **RECOMMENDATION 7:** That the Canadian government consider providing financial assistance to operators and owners when changes are introduced.

8. "Curbside" assistance

Ferry operations differ in size and capacity. This ranges from terminals able to receive thousands of passengers to ferries crossing rivers in small and remote communities.

The existing curbside support varies depending on operations. While it generally is adequate and operators are able to assist passengers with disabilities, we can't conclusively state that this is done with all operations.

Prior to adding requirements on this issue, we would strongly recommend that the Canadian Transportation Agency collaborate with the Canadian Ferry Association in its efforts to survey the sector nationally – and establish a national strategy (recommendation 1).

- **RECOMMENDATION 8:** That the Canadian Transportation Agency collaborate with the Canadian Ferry Association to survey the sector and help establish a national strategy.

9. Service animals



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Not unlike the airline sector, the medical documentation varies from operator to operator. This can have a negative impact on passengers.

- **RECOMMENDATION 9:** That the Canadian Ferry Association establish a national standard for medical documentation required in order to allow and accommodate service animals on board.

10. Training

Training is an essential component to ensure that passengers with disabilities are provided the support they require.

The type of training provided varies significantly based on the type of operator and geographic location (urban centres versus remote locations).

We believe that there should be an attempt to standardize some of the training while specific portions should address the location and types of passenger vessels.

11. Communications

As stated above, we would not support the inclusion of the technical aspects of Code of Practices – such as the Communications Code, in the regulations. See Section 5 (Terminals) of our response.

Summary of Recommendations:



- RECOMMENDATION 1: The Government of Canada should partner with the Canadian Ferry Association to establish a national strategy on accessibility in the ferry sector.
- RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Canadian Transportation Agency and Transport Canada confirm that policies, guidelines and regulations do not contradict other policies on the building of passenger vessels.
- RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Canadian Transportation Agency and Transport Canada issue clear guidelines related to accessibility for new passenger vessels.
- RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Canadian government increase the amounts available through funding programs such as the “Enabling Accessibility Fund”.
- RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Canadian Transportation Agency not include the Code of Practice and other Codes of Practice in regulations.
- RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Canadian government gradually implement any proposed change in order to give operators and owners of passenger vessels time to adapt.
- RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Canadian government consider providing financial assistance to operators and owners when changes are introduced.
- RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Canadian Transportation Agency collaborate with the Canadian Ferry Association to survey the sector and help establish a national strategy.
- RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Canadian Ferry Association establish a national standard for medical documentation required in order to allow and accommodate service animals on board.