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“Denman and Hornby Islands Want Improved Ferry Service to Buckley Bay”
(*The Daily Colonist*, October 28, 1929)

by **Graham Brazier**

[Part 3]

“Have I put this Idea to Rest?”

(Part 2 appeared in the May, 2023 edition and concluded
with the following quote from a letter by Denman Island Trustees Roxanna Mandryk &
Rolf Ludvigsen to Chief Executive Officer of B.C. Ferries in 1995:)

“We believe that a direct sailing between Hornby Island and Vancouver Island is the only long-term permanent solution which satisfies Trust policies as well as the interests of the Community.” That was 28 years ago!

That bold conclusion was largely a consequence of a more than decade-long struggle by the Denman Island Residents and Ratepayers Association (DIRRA) to convince governing bodies to take steps to manage the “hazardous cross-island” traffic. Initially, it was the Roads Committee that tried to convince the Ministry of Transportation and Highways (MOTH) of the 1980’s that there were measures that could be introduced that would make Denman Island roads safer for residents. They were a provocative group and, in addition to letter-writing to key officials in various government ministries in August of 1989, they organized a ‘Liberation of the Roads demonstration’ at the intersection of East Road and MacFarlane Road which featured unruly attention-getting behaviour on the road. Their efforts, however, were largely overlooked and, eventually, caused the committee to conclude that they had been tinkering at the edges of a problem that was much bigger in scope which they subsequently acknowledged in a letter to the Minister of Transportation when they wrote: “In the best of all possible worlds Denman Islanders would prefer to see Hornby with a direct ferry connection to Vancouver Island.”

DIRRA’s attention then shifted from MOTH to the B.C. Ferry Corporation (BCFC). Perhaps not surprisingly, at their first meeting in April of 1990 it was made clear by BCFC that a separate ferry to Hornby would not be considered. In response, the Roads Committee chose the July long weekend to introduce a ‘pace car’ with flashing hazard lights, which led ferry traffic across the island at the speed limit. Interest in the event, however, wasn’t much noted beyond the local media.

Over the course of the next few years a great deal of time and effort was devoted to attempting to develop procedures to reduce the need and the desire to speed from one ferry terminal to the other. A spontaneous response by a small group of talented wood carvers on Denman created a cluster of life-sized chickens and ducks which they hand-painted and placed on various roadsides in the hope of slowing the traffic. Ultimately, these protracted efforts were seen by some to simply reinforce and justify the need for a direct sailing from Vancouver Island to Hornby Island and, in 1993, this proposal was

once again put to B.C. Ferries. After responding that a direct sailing was not 'financially possible' an exasperated high-ranking official of the ferry corporation responded: "Have I put this idea to rest?"

Apparently not, for In December of 1995, DIRRA, with the knowledge that local Trustees supported the idea of a direct sailing to Hornby, responded by creating 'The Through Traffic Committee' to 'explore as many avenues of resolving or abating the problem as possible'. Almost immediately, the committee developed a survey which it circulated throughout the community and, when results were tabulated on February 1, 1996, it was revealed that 87% of respondents (470 of 542 individuals) "favoured a search for alternatives". This information was passed along to Islands Trust Council in an address by the Through Traffic Committee which concluded with a request "that Trust Council acknowledge that the deleterious effects of large volumes of through traffic passing across one island bound for another is a matter of great concern and further; that a study be undertaken by either senior planning staff or independent professional consultants to seek solutions which are consistent with the objectives of the Denman Island Community Plan and the objectives of the Islands Trust." Silence followed.

In the many years that have followed, BCFC has returned as the agency deemed most appropriate to address the community's interest in the problems associated with through traffic. A Ferry Advisory Committee involving the participation of several Denman residents was struck in the early years of this century but, as yet, no long-term plan committed to protecting the interests of those who live in 'this place' has been developed. The response of B.C.Ferries to growth has not changed. When the volume of traffic reaches a level that provokes congestion and a sufficient amount of displeasure BCFC introduces a ferry with a larger carrying capacity. One can only wonder where this might end.

So it seems that the idea has not been put to rest and that the words of 28 years ago remain applicable today.

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Sources: Notes from the Through Traffic Committee of DIRRA file.