



Lasqueti Town Hall What We Heard Report

January 2024

Contact Us

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**ADAM
WALKER**
MLA
PARKSVILLE-QUALICUM

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Lasqueti Island is on the traditional and unceded territory of many Coast Salish peoples and the Treaty Territory of the Tla'amin Nation peoples whose presence and stewardship have spanned generations on this land now known as Lasqueti Island. We recognize the enduring connection that the Tla'amin and Coast Salish People have to their ancestral lands, waters, and resources. We express our gratitude for the opportunity to live, work, and appreciate the beauty of Lasqueti Island, and we commit to respecting their rich cultural heritage, traditions, and ongoing contributions.



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Executive Summary

The Island Trustees, the Lasqueti Ferry Committee, and Lasqueti residents have been persistently calling on the provincial government, through letters, emails, and petitions to request the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and BC Ferries to consider making changes to improve the safety, reliability, and accountability of the Lasqueti Ferry service to meet the needs of the Lasqueti community. With the current contract between BC Ferries and Western Pacific Marine (WPM), the current Lasqueti Ferry service operator, ending on March 31, 2024, the community has been asking for a public engagement process so that their voices can be heard and considered during the contract negotiation process.

As of January 2024, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure that is responsible for highways and ferries, and BC Ferries that oversees the contract with WPM to operate the Lasqueti Ferry, have not answered the call for a public engagement process.

To ensure Lasqueti voices are captured and heard, MLA Adam Walker, elected Lasqueti Island officials (Andrew Fall, Mikaila Lironi, and Tim Peterson) and the Chair of the Lasqueti Ferry Committee (Shelley Garside) hosted a Town Hall meeting on Lasqueti Island on Saturday, January 27, 2024. The purpose of the Town Hall was to provide a public forum to hear from the community about their concerns with the Lasqueti Ferry service. Lasqueti residents were invited to provide comments and suggestions in person and online regarding the Lasqueti Island Ferry. A survey was conducted at the session.

Eighty people attended the town hall meeting, 50 in person and 30 joined virtually. Participants included Lasqueti residents, those who own vacation properties on Lasqueti, the Canadian Coast Guard, and a representative from Western Pacific Marine.

This “What We Heard” report summarizes key themes captured during the public engagement.



During the public engagement process, the following key themes arose:

Passenger Safety: There are concerns with safety measures, maintenance, and crew training.

Accessibility: There is a need for improved accessibility for people in wheelchairs and those with mobility challenges.

Reliability: The need for a consistent and dependable ferry service was emphasized.

Service Frequency: Participants were divided on the desired number of ferry service days.

Communication & Accountability: There is a desire for clearer channels of communication, transparency in decision-making processes, and mechanisms for addressing concerns and issues.

Equity: Lasqueti residents would like access to the same programs as other BC ferry passengers, such as the Travel Assistance Program for medical appointments.

Infrastructure, Maintenance & Amenities: There are concerns and suggestions that deserve more consideration.

Environmental Impact: Desire for a more environmentally friendly ferry vessel.

Gratitude: There is a lot of appreciation for the ferry service and the important role it plays for the community.



Next Steps

MLA Adam Walker has committed to:

Provide Lasqueti Island residents with a summary of the Lasqueti Ferry Town Hall meeting in this What We Heard Report.

Share this report with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, BC Ferries, Western Pacific Marine, the Lasqueti Community Association Ferry Committee, and make it available to the public.

Use this report and the insights from the Town Hall to guide our ongoing advocacy efforts on behalf of Lasqueti Island residents.

Continue to be available to meet with Lasqueti Island residents to discuss matters related to the ferry service or any other issues.

Message from MLA Adam Walker



I want to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who attended the Lasqueti Ferry Town Hall meeting and actively contributed to the discussions. Your presence and valuable feedback are important to the engagement process and will assist me in better advocating on your behalf.

The primary objective of the town hall was to provide an opportunity for the community to voice their concerns and share their perspectives. As your elected provincial representative, my role is to listen attentively and recommend and support changes based on the insights gained during this meeting and from the correspondence and meetings with concerned community members.

I firmly believe that meaningful change can only be achieved through collaboration and collective efforts. Together, we can work towards finding effective solutions and improving the vital ferry service route 55 that connects Lasqueti Island to the rest of BC.

Your voices matter greatly, and it is essential for us to capture the true essence of the island's needs and aspirations. I genuinely appreciated hearing about both the positive aspects of the ferry service and the areas where improvements are needed.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Bryan Coe, Marine Superintendent for Western Pacific Marine for attending the town hall meeting and displaying openness to hearing your comments. I commend him for his willingness to bring your concerns back to the company for consideration.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge and commend the courage and willingness of all participants to speak up and share their unique perspectives. Your suggestions and ideas will play a crucial role in shaping the future of this essential service.

Rest assured that I am fully committed to conveying your valuable feedback to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, the President and Board of Directors of BC Ferries, and the General Manager of Western Pacific Marine. By working together and sharing your concerns, we can ensure that the decision-makers are well-informed and equipped to address the issues at hand.

Once again, I extend my heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you for your active participation in the Lasqueti Ferry Town Hall meeting. My office is always open to further dialogue on this or other issues. Together, we can make a difference and bring about positive change to ensure that the community has access to a safe and reliable ferry service that meets the needs of the community.

Sincerely,

MLA Adam Walker
Parksville-Qualicum

Summary of Feedback

Based on the feedback the following nine key themes emerged.



1. Passenger Safety



2. Accessibility



3. Reliability



4. Service Frequency



5. Communication & Accountability



6. Equity



7. Infrastructure, Maintenance & Amenities



8. Environmental Impact



9. Gratitude



1. Passenger Safety

There are concerns with safety measures, maintenance, and crew training.

- The primary concern raised by community members is that they no longer feel safe on the ferry and we heard there is a need for improved crew training and vessel maintenance.
- Whether the ferry operates in certain weather conditions is at the discretion of the captain and dependent on their experience and training.
- There is a concern that due to the lack of competitive pay and poor crew accommodations, it is hard to attract and retain experienced crew members.
- It was suggested that more training for new and inexperienced crew members is needed for passengers to feel safe.
- Having a safe vessel came up many times as critically important. There are concerns that the vessel is not adequately maintained and does not have a proper maintenance schedule.
- Questions were raised as to how often inspections are completed and who is responsible for maintenance. There is concern that the two vessels are not safe.
- There is a concern that safety protocols are not always being followed or could be improved.
- There is concern that in an emergency, there is only one light bulb if passengers have to evacuate; concern raised regarding mold; and concern that make-shift fixes by passengers are sometimes needed to allow the vessel to sail.
- There are issues with the ferry's toilets, including functionality, cleanliness, and lack of accessibility for those with mobility challenges were highlighted.
- A prevalent concern was that the toilets were changed from a marine style and low flush to regular house style toilets that are often out of order, making this a difficult one-hour sailing for many passengers and less environmentally friendly.
- A concern was raised that there could be inadequate lifeboat capacity.
- A comment was made that in an emergency, life jackets may not be sufficient in the ocean and exposure suits should be a requirement.
- The community does not feel that their health and safety are being taken seriously and would like to see immediate change.

Recommendations

A) Recommend that the ferry provider better communicate to the community the Transport Canada safety requirements and how they are being upheld as they relate to crew training, vessel maintenance, and emergency protocols.

B) Recommend to BC Ferries that the new contract requires that toilets be functional and accessible for all passengers and crew.

C) Recommend that BC Ferries ensures that the new contract allows for competitive crew pay and benefits.



2. Accessibility

There is a need for improved accessibility for people in wheelchairs and those with mobility challenges.

- People in wheelchairs are unable to access the salon due to the high door sill, restricting them to the outdoor covered deck, limiting their mobility on board the vessel and enjoyment of the ferry experience.
- The importance of improving wheelchair access and ensuring safe connections between the ferry and the dock was emphasized.
- A comment was made regarding the aging population and how uncomfortable the ferry seating is for seniors and those with medical or mobility issues.

Recommendation

D) Recommend to BC Ferries that the new contract requires a more accessible ramp with railings and upgraded washrooms to enhance accessibility and make the ferry more inclusive and accommodating for individuals with mobility challenges.



3. Reliability

The need for a consistent and dependable ferry service was emphasized.

- Community members frequently mentioned the stress and anxiety they felt not knowing if the ferry would be leaving as scheduled and if they would be able to get back home as planned.
- These feelings stem from not only weather conditions that affect the service but also from the possibility of a lack of crew to run the vessel, not being notified of cancelled sailings, frequent changing of rules for cancelling a sailing, being unable to reserve a trip in advance, not knowing if they will get on a sailing, and having to make alternate arrangements in case a sailing is cancelled.
- The maximum safe wind speed being reduced from 40 to 35 and then to 32 knots was brought up as a reason there have been more cancelled sailings, making the ferry less reliable for those who need it.
- There is a general understanding that the wind speed changes were made because of inexperienced crew members and a common suggestion was to have better training for crew members, and offer better pay and accommodations to attract more experienced crew members.
- It was mentioned frequently that the Lasqueti Island ferry service has not been improved upon (same ferry and worse service this past year or so) in almost 40 years, while the year-round population has grown from 300 to 500 in that time.
- Many people voiced that they believe the company “just does not care”.
- Not having a reliable ferry service threatens Lasquetians’ way of life and livelihood if they can not access the ferry.

Recommendation

E) Recommend that BC Ferries incorporate a stipulation into the new contract about how information and cancelled sailings will be communicated to the public.



4. Service Frequency

Participants were divided on the desired number of ferry service days.

- Some community members expressed a desire for a 7-day ferry service instead of the current 5-day service to increase accessibility for educational opportunities (particularly high school), economic opportunities (being able to get to work, get business supplies, or get products to customers), and for medical appointments (limited ferry service is a barrier to accessing medical services and medications in a timely manner, and with an aging population this is a growing concern).
- Some community members expressed the desire to maintain the current 5-day ferry service to retain the island's current way of life. They voiced concerns about the potential risk of growth and development if the ferry were to operate 7 days a week as well as the added traffic this would bring to the main road. The unique and cherished aspects of the island's way of life are valued, and there is a desire to maintain its distinct identity.
- Other community members expressed the desire to modify the current ferry schedule, such as increasing the number of sailing days while decreasing the number of sailings per day or finding a middle ground by increasing the ferry service to 6 days by adding a Sunday morning sailing.
- Having a ferry service that is "inconvenient" to get on or off Lasqueti Island was considered a good thing that brought many residents to the island in the first place and helped preserve their desired lifestyle.
- For others, lack of consistent and daily service hinders their ability to connect to services and people which can affect their health, their livelihood, and their teenagers who need to move off the island to attend high school.
- Some mentioned the particular inconvenience of not having a sailing on Tuesday so if you miss the boat on Monday or if it is cancelled you have to wait until Wednesday (during July and August) or Thursday (for the other ten months) to get home.
- There was a suggestion to add an extra ferry run just before Easter when people are coming back to see their families for spring break and the holiday long weekend.

Recommendations

F) Recommend BC Ferries and the provider host public engagement sessions regarding the frequency of the ferry service before making any scheduling changes.

G) Recommend to BC Ferries that there be a stipulation in the new contract that if the last sailing on Monday is cancelled, if possible, a makeup sailing is scheduled for Tuesday, and if this is not possible, the rationale is timely and publicly communicated.



5. Communication & Accountability

There is a desire for clearer channels of communication, transparency in decision-making processes, and mechanisms for addressing concerns and issues.

- Community members highlighted the importance of improved communication between the ferry company and the residents, particularly regarding service disruptions.
- With no public website to access information and updates regarding ferry sailings and no mailing list to join, there is no consistent and reliable way to receive updates from WPM.
- There is a desire for a formal complaints process with WPM as well as the provincial government/BC Ferries.
- A comment was made that WPM has not been responsive to residents' concerns.
- Particularly concerning to many community members is that there has been little or no acknowledgement by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to their correspondence and they have received no response to their correspondence from BC Ferries.
- Residents would like to know what the repercussions are if WPM does not fulfill their contract obligations. There appear to be no consequences and residents believe WPM should be held accountable for delivering the services outlined in their contract.
- Many residents are calling on the government to open up the contract for bid rather than renew with WPM.
- If the contract with WPM is renewed, the community would like to see more accountability measures included in the new contract.
- A suggestion was made to limit the next contract to one year for more accountability.
- A community member raised a concern regarding the collective agreement with WPM crew members.
- Some people expressed the desire to have the Lasqueti Ferry route status changed from unregulated to regulated. As an unregulated route, there is a concern that there are no accountability measures and mechanisms, little oversight, no reporting, and the route is not included in long-term plans.
- With each new captain comes a new set of rules and how things should work. Residents would like more consistency which could be accomplished through more written policies and manuals outlining the process.

Recommendations

H) Recommend that BC Ferries ensures the new contract includes a complaints process and a requirement for the provider to communicate ferry information to the public promptly.

I) Recommend that BC Ferries ensures that the new contract includes more meaningful and enforceable accountability mechanisms/consequences for contract non-compliance.

J) Recommend that BC Ferries and/or the ferry provider conduct an annual customer service survey and share results and next steps.

K) Recommend MLA Adam Walker's office to research and communicate the process for changing a route status from unregulated to regulated and what that would mean for the ferry service.



6. Equity

Lasqueti residents would like access to the same programs as other BC ferry passengers, such as access to the Travel Assistance Program.

- Lasqueti residents would like to be able to access the BC Travel Assistance Program available to other BC island residents who require ferry travel for medical specialist appointments.
- Community members raised concern that the ferry currently does not have adequate freight allowances as do other ferries to similar islands. Suggestion was to find ways to allow for more freight capacity or allocate some sailings to carry freight.
- Another suggestion was made to have a regular barge service to Lasqueti as there is for other Gulf islands. This would relieve the ferry of crowding and difficulty loading.
- Some people expressed the need for an online booking system that allows for a percentage of the seats to be purchased in advance and the remaining seats could be allocated for walk-ons. This would alleviate stress and reduce the time and planning needed to get on a desired sailing.
- Some participants expressed a desire to be able to pay for their ferry ticket with a debit/credit card.
- There was a suggestion to offer ferry ticket booklets where residents can prepay for a booklet of tickets to alleviate needing to have cash on hand for the ferry ride.

Recommendations

L) Recommend that BC Ferries consult with residents regarding the potential use of the BC Ferries reservation system or a unique reservation system that allows a certain number of tickets for each sailing to be reserved in advance.

M) Recommend that BC Ferries include in the new contract the option for passengers to pay for their ferry ticket with a credit/debit card.

N) Recommend that BC Ferries extend the Travel Assistance Program to include the Lasqueti Ferry.

O) Recommend that BC Ferries include in the new contract the ability for freight to be transported more regularly, either by designating sailings to freight or making allowances for more freight to accompany each sailing, or consider providing a freight subsidy program in line with other remote communities.



7. Infrastructure, Maintenance & Amenities

There are concerns and suggestions that deserve more consideration.

- Differing options were raised regarding the Centurion VII (current ferry vessel) and whether it is up to the task.
- Some were concerned about the lack of maintenance on the vessel and the age of the vessel; others thought the boat was just fine for the task.
- Concerns were raised regarding the adequacy of the replacement vessel, the Hollyburn.
- A recommendation was made to have a crew member present more hours to allow more time for loading the ferry, instead of having to build a shelter for people to wait.
- Concerns were raised regarding the condition of the accommodation for the ferry crew and that its location is a deterrent to attracting and retaining crew.
- A concern was raised about the lack of parking for the ferry.
- A suggestion was made to increase passenger capacity with a larger boat with more capacity and fewer runs.
- There was an appreciation that the crew turned up the heat when passengers got on; another community member was concerned that the crew would not turn on the heat because they were trying to save fuel.
- There was recognition by residents that the ferry is subsidized by people who do not live on Lasqueti Island and that upgrades to the vessel or a new vessel would cost money.

Recommendations

P) Recommend that BC Ferries engage with residents on Lasqueti Island about the long-term plans for vessels for the Lasqueti – French Creek route.

Q) Recommend that BC Ferries ensures that the new contract continues to include the requirement for the provider to engage with community members and commit to working collaboratively to better serve the community and that the provider be obligated to honour this commitment.



8. Environmental Impact

Desire for a more environmentally friendly ferry vessel.

- Calls were made for the ferry service to consider transitioning to electric or zero-emission vessels to reduce the ferry's carbon footprint and contribute to climate change mitigation.
- A comment was made that an electric vessel would not be able to handle this service route as this is the roughest part of the Strait of Georgia.
- There was a general understanding that this is a longer-term goal and is not as pressing as the safety and reliability concerns raised.

Recommendation

R) Recommend that when BC Ferries engages with residents about the long-term plans for the ferry vessel these include discussions around environmental impacts.



9. Gratitude

There is a lot of appreciation for the ferry service and the important role it plays for the community.

- Longtime residents expressed their gratitude for their years on the island and the unique lifestyle it offers, and appreciation for the role ferry service plays.
- There was recognition and appreciation of the importance of the ferry service for island residents to maintain a connection to medical services and the outside world.
- Many community members articulated their gratitude for the crew and the good job they are doing.



Summary of Recommendations

A) Recommend that the ferry provider better communicates to the community the Transport Canada safety requirements and how they are being upheld as they relate to crew training, vessel maintenance, and emergency protocols.

B) Recommend to BC Ferries that the new contract requires that toilets be functional and accessible for all passengers and crew.

C) Recommend that BC Ferries ensures that the new contract allows for competitive crew pay and benefits.

D) Recommend to BC Ferries that the new contract requires a more accessible ramp with railings and upgraded washrooms to enhance accessibility and make the ferry more inclusive and accommodating for individuals with mobility challenges.

E) Recommend that BC Ferries incorporate a stipulation into the new contract about how information and cancelled sailings will be communicated to the public.

F) Recommend BC Ferries and the provider host public engagement sessions regarding the frequency of the ferry service before making any scheduling changes.

G) Recommend to BC Ferries that there be a stipulation in the new contract that if the last sailing on Monday is cancelled, if possible, a makeup sailing is scheduled for Tuesday, and if this is not possible, the rationale is timely and publicly communicated.

H) Recommend that BC Ferries ensures the new contract includes a complaints process and a requirement for the provider to communicate ferry information to the public promptly.

I) Recommend that BC Ferries ensures that the new contract includes more meaningful and enforceable accountability mechanisms/ consequences for contract non-compliance.

J) Recommend that BC Ferries and/or the ferry provider conduct an annual customer service survey and share results and next steps.

K) Recommend MLA Adam Walker's office to research and communicate the process for changing a route status from unregulated to regulated and what that would mean for the ferry service.

L) Recommend that BC Ferries consult with residents regarding the potential use of the BC Ferries reservation system or a unique reservation system that allows a certain number of tickets for each sailing to be reserved in advance.

M) Recommend that BC Ferries include in the new contract the option for passengers to pay for their ferry ticket with a credit/debit card.

N) Recommend that BC Ferries extend the Travel Assistance Program to include the Lasqueti Ferry.

O) Recommend that BC Ferries include in the new contract the ability for freight to be transported more regularly, either by designating sailings to freight or making allowances for more freight to accompany each sailing, or consider providing a freight subsidy program in line with other remote communities.

P) Recommend that BC Ferries engage with residents on Lasqueti Island about the long-term plans for vessels for the Lasqueti – French Creek route.

Q) Recommend that BC Ferries ensures that the new contract continues to include the requirement for the provider to engage with community members and commit to working collaboratively to better serve the community and that the provider be obligated to honour this commitment.

R) Recommend that when BC Ferries engages with residents about the long-term plans for the ferry vessel these include discussions around environmental impacts.

Survey Results

Only participants who attended the town hall in person were provided sticker dots to use to answer the following 12 questions. See Appendix A for photos of the visual results.

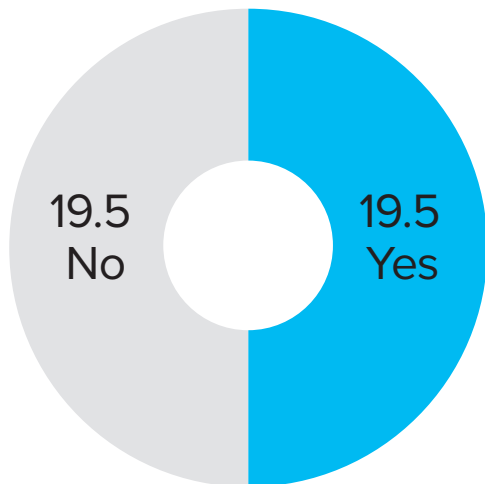
Please note that this is not reflective of nor representative of all Lasquetians; rather it provides a starting place for further engagement as per Recommendation Q.

Recommendation Q: Recommend that BC Ferries ensures that the new contract continues to include the requirement for the provider to engage with community members and commit to working collaboratively to better serve the community, and that the provider be obligated to honour this commitment.

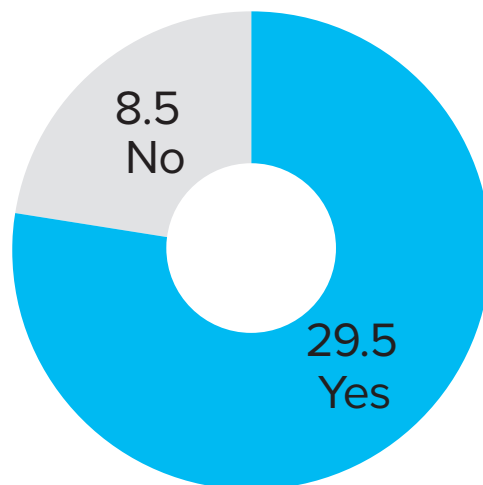
1. Does the ferry schedule currently meet your needs?



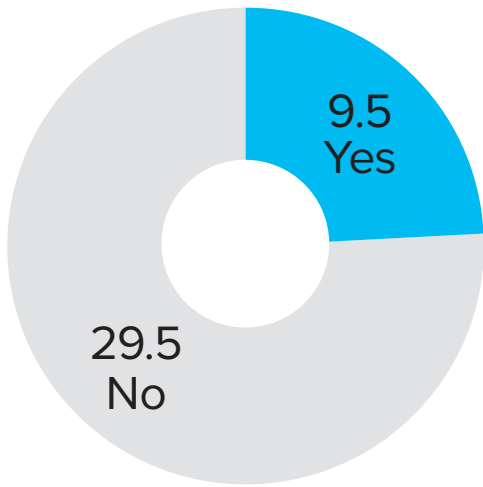
2. In the future, would you like to see the addition of ferry runs for the Lasqueti Ferry Service?



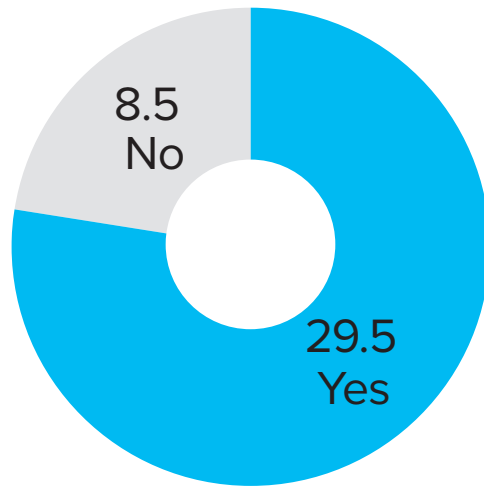
3. When there are cancellations due to mechanical or crew issues, do you believe BC Ferries or the contractor should provide water taxi services?



4. Are you happy with the current Ferry Pass System?



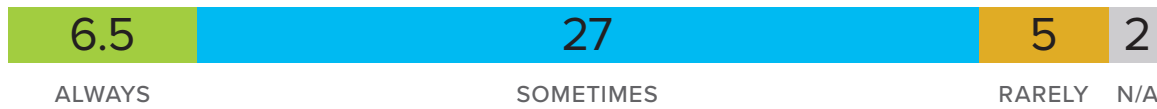
5. Do you think the Fare System is fair and reasonably priced?



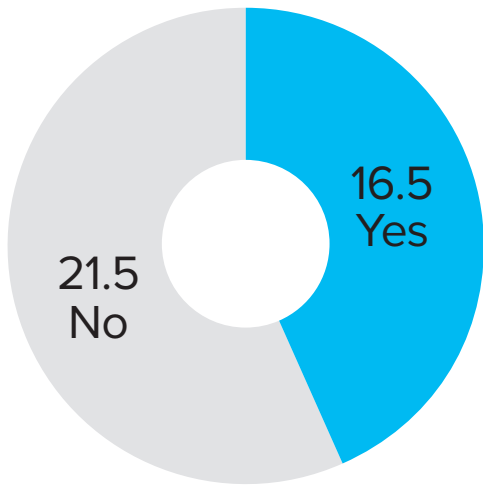
6. Does the freight capacity on the ferry suit your needs?



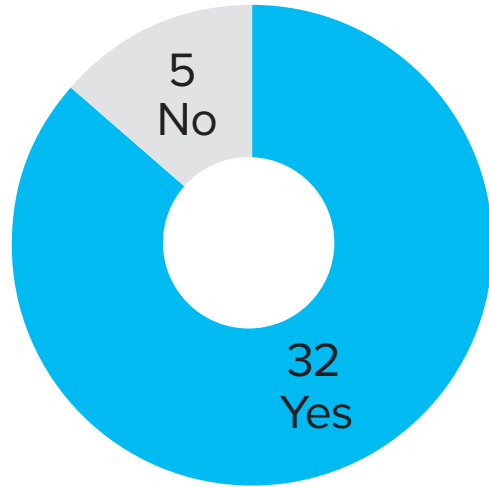
7. Do you find the current ferry service creates accessibility to get to your medical appointments?



8. Do you believe people with disabilities should be able to access lower fares?



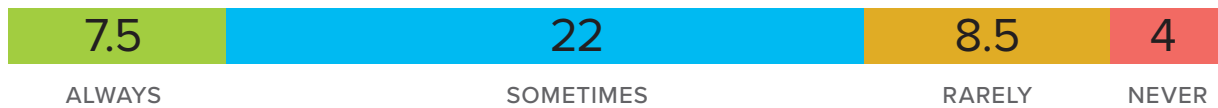
9. Are you in favour of implementing a Travel Assistance Program similar to the one available on BC Ferries to support those traveling for medical appointments?



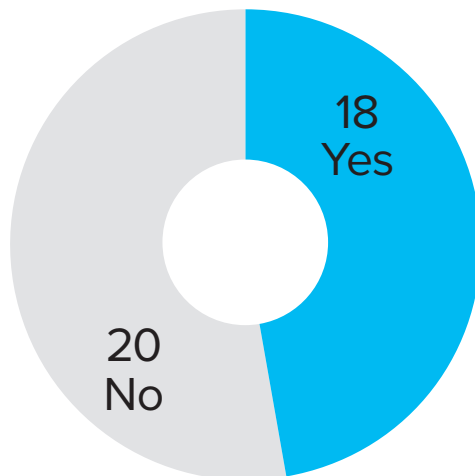
10. Do you feel communication from the ferry operators is adequate?



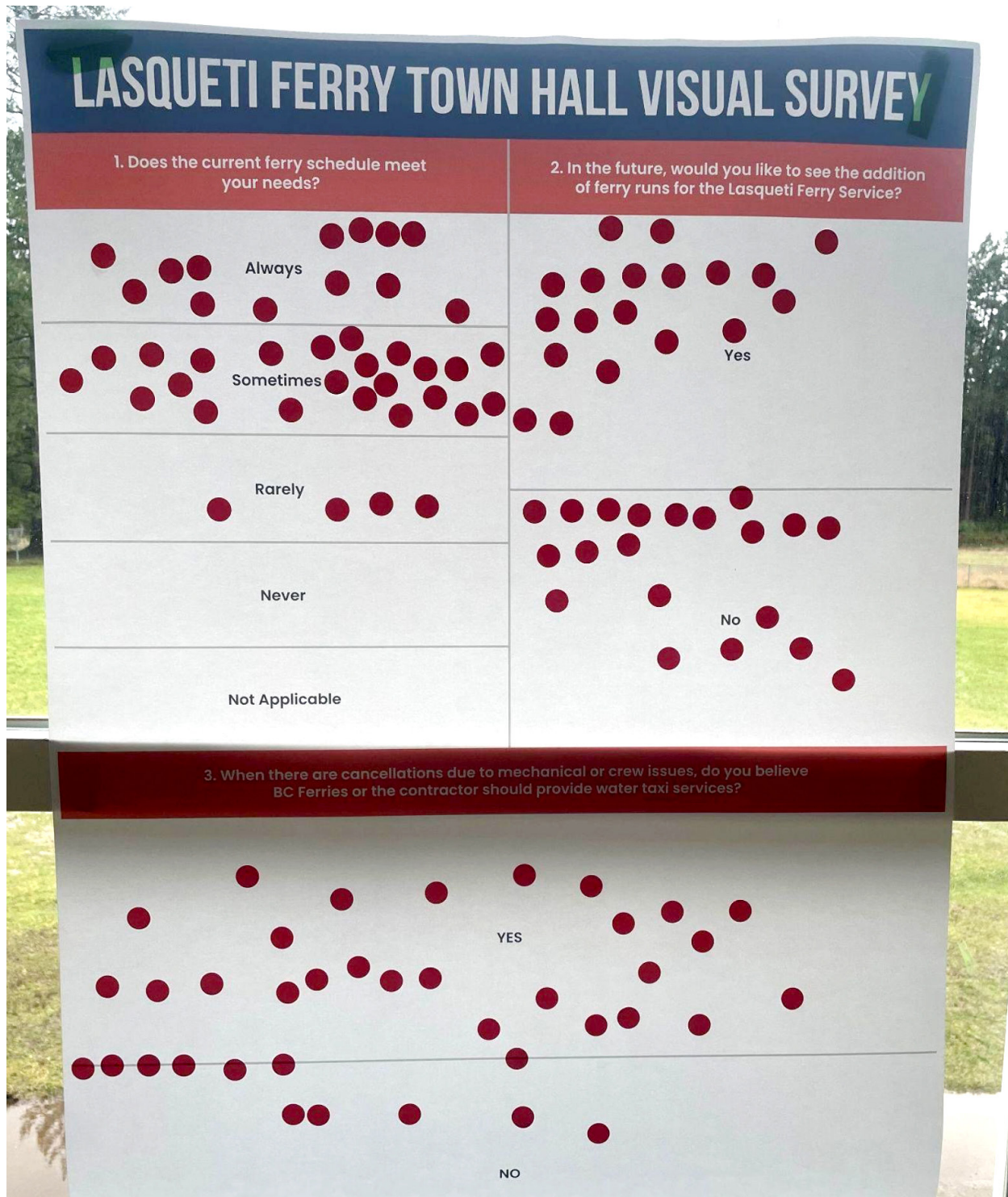
11. Do you have concerns about safety on the ferry?



12. Are you concerned about the carbon footprint of the Lasqueti Island Ferry Service?

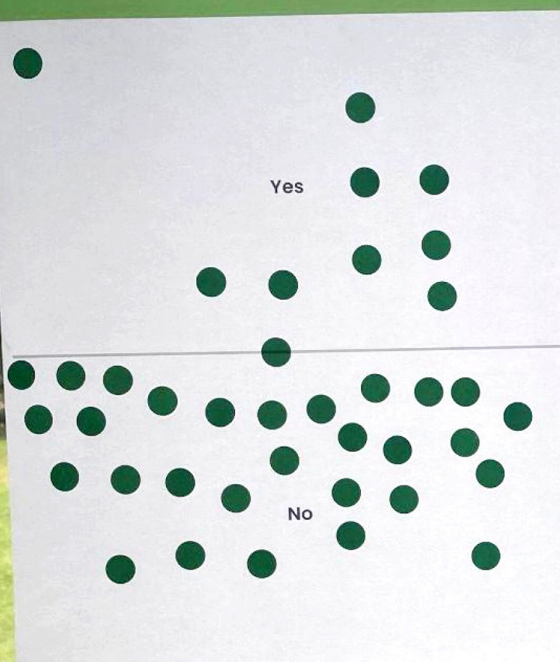


Appendix A: Visual Survey Results

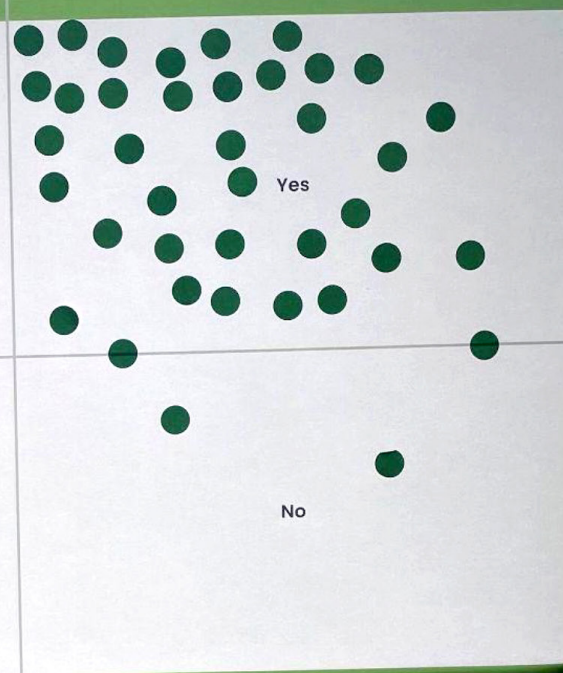


LASQUETI FERRY TOWN HALL VISUAL SURVEY

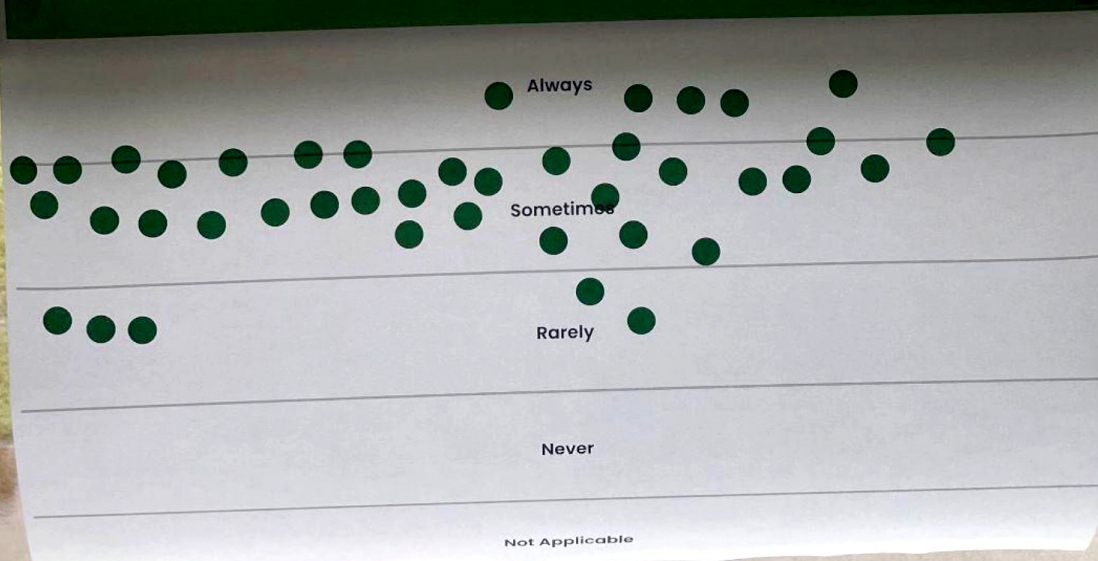
4. Are you happy with the current Ferry Pass System?



5. Do you think the Fare System is fair and reasonably priced?

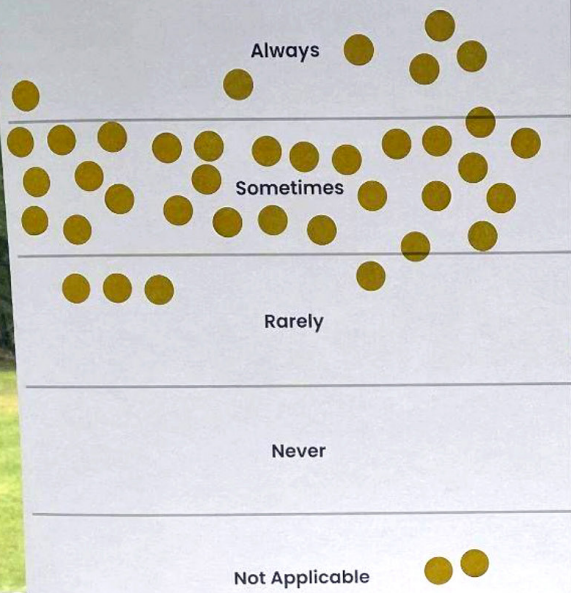


6. Does the freight capacity on the ferry suit your needs?

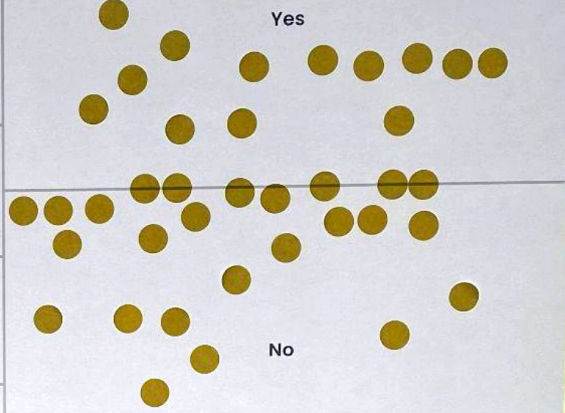


LASQUETI FERRY TOWN HALL VISUAL SURVEY

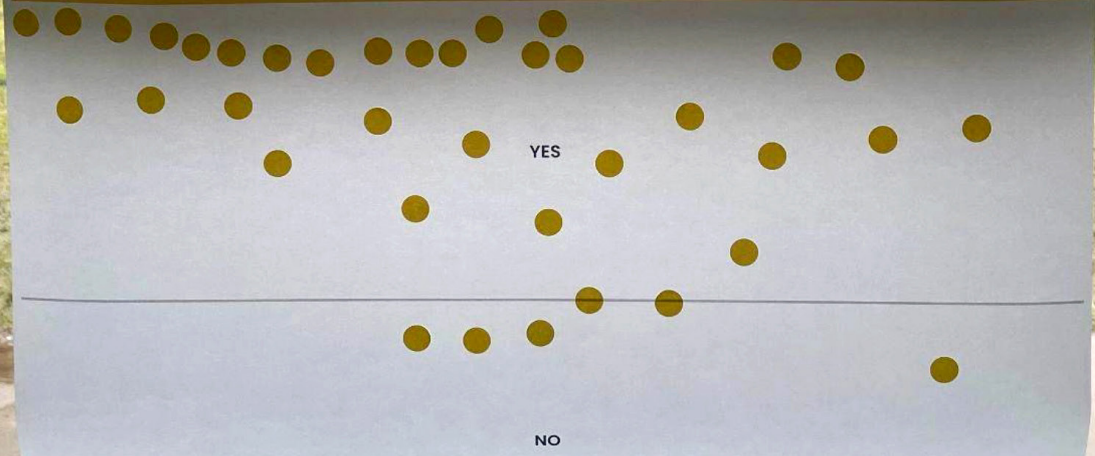
7. Do you find the current ferry service creates accessibility to get to your medical appointments?



8. Do you believe people with disabilities should be able to access lower fares?

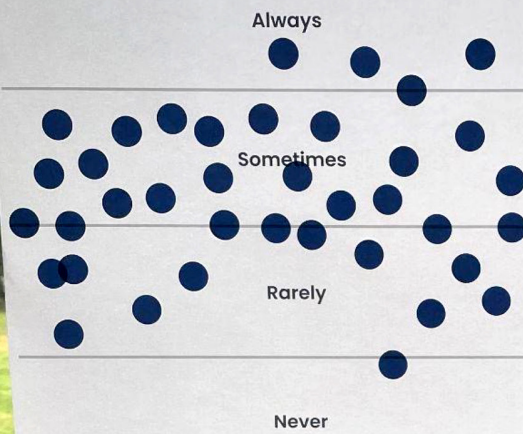


9. Are you in favour of implementing a Travel Assistance Program similar to the one available on BC Ferries to support those travelling for medical appointments?

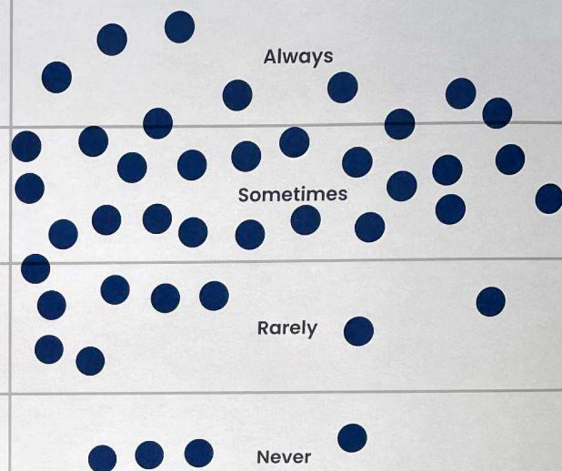


LASQUETI FERRY TOWN HALL VISUAL SURVEY

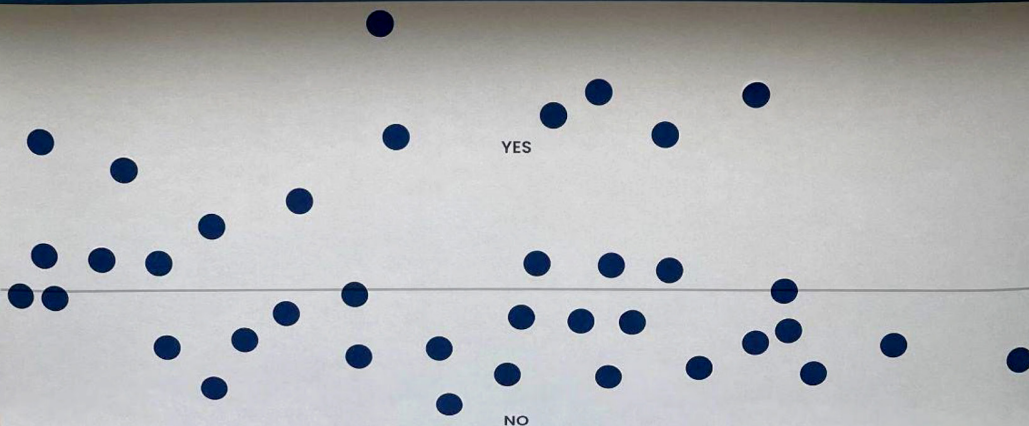
10. Do you feel communication from the ferry operators is adequate?

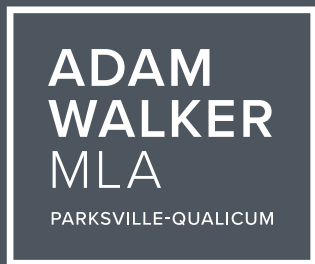


11. Do you have concerns about safety on the ferry?



12. Are you concerned about the carbon footprint of the Lasqueti Island Ferry Service?





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