

Market Feasibility Study for the MS *Chi-Cheemaun*

Notes of the Public Consultation Session in South Baymouth – 2012-09-26

OSTC Terminal Building – 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM

The following is an unedited summary of comments made at the public session. They have been, to the extent possible, organized by key themes. Note that these comments reflect the opinions of individual participants at the public sessions, and as such do not necessarily reflect the analysis, opinions or conclusions of CPCS. These comments will be used in developing the analysis, conclusions and recommendations of the report.

After a brief presentation of the background and objectives of the study, CPCS's Project Manager for the study opens the question and comments period.

General comments

- Although participants agree that it is important to find ways to increase ridership by developing strategies that will enable to tap into new markets, it is as important to establish what can be done to keep existing clients and regular long time users. This is the client base of the *Chi-Cheemaun* and the preservation of their interests must be part of the objectives of the study.
- There is a lack of phone booths on both sides. Before boarding, passengers need to be able to make reservations for accommodation on the other side. In South Baymouth, cell phone access is very difficult, and often not possible. Phone booths in Tobermory have recently been removed and there is only one in South Baymouth. This is a major problem.
- Something has to be done for parking. There are not enough parking spaces on both sides for people who only want to walk-on. Someone offered additional parking spaces on a few occasions, but never obtained an answer from OSTC.
- There is a safety problem for children onboard the ferry. On at least two occasions, small children were seen balancing themselves on the railings. There is too much space between the bars of the railings and small children can go through and eventually fall in the water.
- If people come up to Northern Ontario, they eventually go down. If they come up by Highway 69, they often go down by the ferry. In that context, the four-laning of Highway 69 may be as much an opportunity as a threat for the ferry ridership.
- There might be less Americans but there are more Europeans.
- Every year, it is getting easier to take the highway around the Georgian Bay.

Marketing

- There is not enough awareness of the ferry in Ontario and elsewhere. There has to be more promotion done so that potential riders know that the ferry exists.
- Potential clients are people from very particular places, and they can be reached through advertisement in specialised travelling media.
- There is not enough advertisement made. The experience of riding the ferry has to be better publicised.
- Not enough people in the U.S. know about the ferry. There could be more U.S. tourists if there was more advertisement made in the U.S.

- The signage to access the ferry is deficient and almost inexistent. There needs to be signs promoting the ferry and informing travellers of the existence of the ferry in many places. Notably in Espanola and Owen Sound.
- The cycling market and the ethnic markets have huge potential and more has to be done to attract them. Promotion in ethnic community papers in Toronto and other urban areas has to be done.
- The ferry can be marketed as a mini cruise.
- The promotion of the ferry has to be done through, and in collaboration with, tourism attractions/activities. The ferry can be promoted as a means to reach these attraction/activities. It has to tie-in to existing activities such as hiking and cycling.
- The *Chi-Cheemaun* is an activity in itself and has to be promoted as such for walk-on passengers. This could be coupled with shuttle services on both sides to reach attractions.
- The 10% accommodation discount offered in the past in collaboration with accommodation operators should be brought back.
- There is very little information on Manitoulin Island in Tobermory.
- There needs to be a partnership between Bruce and Manitoulin to promote the region/ferry. The *Chi-Cheemaun* could host an open house where tourism operators could meet.
- There is a pilot project for a shuttle bus from Toronto to Tobermory to bring in people. Something should be done to see if the people taking the bus could also cross to Manitoulin.
- There is something wrong on the marketing side. Something is obviously not being done. There have been efforts made by people outside OSTC to develop marketing partnerships, but their offers have remained without answers. Something could be developed through the local radio stations.
- People have not stopped coming to Manitoulin. They are simply not crossing on the ferry anymore. They are not crossing because it costs too much.
- Tourism volunteers on the ship are very good. The Manitoulin Magazine informing on activities and attractions on the island is not sufficiently available in Tobermory.
- There needs to be more promotion of the experience of riding the ferry.
- There is an opportunity to work with the private sector to develop marketing strategies and promotions.
- Cross-promotional activities have to be implemented.
- The website needs to be updated to provide better information to passengers.
- Advertisement in the language of ethnic groups should be made in the ethnic media.
- The ferry should cooperate with tourism operators to develop a common marketing strategy.
- The drop in bus tours riding the ferry could be related to the fact that promotion made to bus tour operators has stopped in the past years.

Reservation system, costs, fares

- A lot of people are disappointed with the 15\$ reservation fee. They feel that it is unfair that this fee applies for three sailings out of South Baymouth, compared to only two sailings out of Tobermory. This is detrimental for commuters from Manitoulin Island.
- The priority pass system was better than the actual reservation system.
- The fares should be charged on a footage basis. There appears to be inconsistencies in the application of fares, especially when some cars are pulling trailers.
- There should be a student rate.

- The reservation system has to be changed and incentives must be offered. For example, there could be a reduction for return trips or return trips could be free of the reservation fee. Otherwise, the reservation fee could be deducted from the fare.
- Rules concerning reservations have to be more explicit. Nobody reads the fine print and many tourists are frustrated when they arrive one minute late and lose their reservation. More emphasis has to be provided on reservation rules that might impact clients of the tourism industry because other stakeholders have to manage the frustration of clients who take the ferry.
- The reservation system is a stickler. Removing it would increase ridership.
- People who get around frequently should get a break.
- The reservation system produces a lot of complaints that have to be managed by accommodation operators.
- The frequent user system was a good thing and should be brought back.
- Prices on week days could be lowered.
- The price to take the ferry is too high for a young family earning an average income. Many drive around to come and see their families because they simply cannot afford the ride.
- Do not increase prices.
- The ferry needs to be friendlier to the riders if it wants to keep them. The reservation fee is not client-friendly.
- If someone arrives one minute late for their reservation, they lose it. Instead, there should be a fee if they arrive late and be applied the full fare if they miss the boat.
- A fare could be applied only to cars. This would encourage people to carpool and to take the ferry.
- There should be incentives for small cars.

The experience

- There should be a shuttle on the island to carry walk-on passengers to their final destination.
- There needs to be Internet connections on the boat.
- More information on the geography, biology, environment, history, etc. of the region and the lakes has to be provided on the ferry. This could be done by hiring a student during summer. Someone offering guided tours?
- The Manitoulin Ambassador program was marvelous. The funding for hiring a student lasted for three years and eventually stopped.
- Options for better, healthier and local food onboard are required.
- The dinner cruise is an excellent activity and it is much appreciated.
- More activities are required for children. Should develop interactive games, educative games, or artistic activities for children instead of videogames.

Schedule and operations

- For business owners, having the passengers arriving only half an hour before sailing is not enough. It is essential that passengers have time to visit and spend money before leaving.
- Some passengers do not understand why motorcycles are allowed to board even though they arrive after cars, simply because there are hooks in the front of the ferry.
- Do we need four sailings? The schedule can be adapted to demand.
- Do not forget the ferry is an extension of highway 6.

- There should be electronic signs in Espanola and Owen Sound informing people on how full is the ferry for the next crossing.
- OSTC management is there to insure the operation of the ship. They have a lot to deliver to the Province and cannot do everything. It is a slim organisation and management tries to do their best.
- The one minute late rule for reservation has to be explicitly told to people reserving for the ferry.
- The last ferry at 6:10PM on Fridays is not late enough for people working on the other side.
- If the schedule is to be changed, please do not cut on the number of crossings.
- If something is done, the level of service should never be lowered.
- Arriving one hour before sailing is too long. Half an hour would be enough.
- For operational reasons, it is necessary to have cars arriving one hour early.
- Why don't people pay inside the ferry while it is crossing instead of before embarking?