

## **PLIC Needs-based Ferry Fare Recommendation**

WHEREAS, on November 23, 2010, the Whatcom County Council established a Citizens' Task Force for the Lummi Island Ferry; and

WHEREAS, on August 1, 2011, the Citizens' Task Force recommended that low income households be included as part of the island community, and that needs-based punchcards for pedestrians/passengers and for passenger vehicles be priced at 50% of the single ticket cash price and that this discount be made available to those of any age or ability who meet specific low income guidelines; and

WHEREAS, on November 23, 2010, the Whatcom County Council also voted to implement a \$3.00 surcharge per round trip on the Lummi Island ferry and has indicated no intention of removing this surcharge; and

WHEREAS, since that time the ability of any homeowner who might wish to sell a home and move off the island has been, and continues to be, extremely limited by the sluggish real estate market on the island; and

WHEREAS, without the continuing availability of needs-based fares based on the State property tax exemption many senior and disabled homeowners who presently qualify for reduced fares will face significant hardship; and

WHEREAS, 75 island households (approximately 12% of total year-round households) currently qualify for Lummi Island Ferry needs-based fares in the following categories:

- 42 – State Property tax exemption
- 9 – Medicaid recipient
- 13 – Low income 1-person household
- 3 – Low Income 2-person household
- 6 – Low-Income 3-person household
- 2 – Low-Income 4 or more person household; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Assessor's office will retain ongoing responsibility for qualifying 42 of those currently receiving needs-based fares based on the State property tax exemption; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Treasurer's office has asked for relief from the burden of qualifying Medicaid recipients and low-income households for needs-based ferry fares; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Opportunity Council has a goal of helping people become self-sufficient and offers a broad scope of services that benefit low-income individuals; and

WHEREAS, WTA, Island Transit, and Skagit Transit all offer reduced fare options ranging from 50% reduced fare to free for seniors and disabled individuals; and

WHEREAS, the current pedestrian card requires an outlay of \$92, beyond the reach of many participants, and there have been requests for a 10-punch card; and

WHEREAS, the Citizens' Task Force also recommended the implementation of electronic ticketing, which will simplify use of a multi-level rate structure;

NOW THEREFORE:

Protect Lummi Island Community (PLIC) recommends continuing to include low-income households as a part of the island community and addressing Whatcom County's request for relief from the discount qualification process by the following program:

- Retain the senior/disabled discount based on the property tax exemption, with the Whatcom County Assessor's Office providing a voucher to those island residents approved.
- Contract with the Opportunity Council to screen all other low-income applications, applying the HUD very-low income test to households. The Opportunity Council will maintain records and provide a voucher to those approved. The \$50 fee to process their application will be borne by the Ferry Fund. Required documentation will include:
  - Identification:
    - Social Security Cards for everyone in the household 18 years of age or older.
    - Current Government Issue Photo ID such as drivers license, state ID, passport, or military ID
  - Residential Information:
    - Proof of street address such as current utility bill, lease agreement, driver's license
  - Income Verification (Proof of income received for ALL household members for the preceding 12 months):
    - Earned Income – Pay check stubs
    - Unemployment – All unemployment stubs or a printout from Unemployment to be presented
    - Self-employed – Complete proof of gross income for the preceding 12 months to be presented
    - Social Security/SSI/TANF/Pension/Other – Proof for all cash benefit types presented
    - No Income – Any adult with no income required to declare and sign a release to check unemployment records
- Present tax exemption voucher or Opportunity Council voucher along with a photo ID to the Public Works receptionist for ticket purchase.

- Renew all vouchers annually in January.
- Create a new fare level -- a 10-ride Needs-based Passenger/pedestrian punchcard for \$37. This will replace the 25-ride Needs-based Passenger/pedestrian punchcard with essentially a revenue neutral effect.