

## **Comments regarding: *Connecting the Southwest: A Draft Transportation Plan for Southwestern Ontario***

I recently had an opportunity to review *Connecting the Southwest: A Draft Transportation Plan for Southwestern Ontario* and wanted to offer some comments regarding Action Item 11, Provincial Ferry Services. I am a resident of Pelee Island and as such I depend upon the ferry service operated by Owen Sound Transportation Company (“OSTC”). My comments are:

1. I am pleased to read in the document that OSTC’s operations have been brought under the Ministry of Transportation. This arrangement makes sense for Pelee Island.
2. I am concerned about what is meant by “streamlining of the delivery of ferry services.” All of the users of the ferry services want these services to be delivered in as efficient a manner as possible. However, if streamlining is a euphemism for cutbacks the Province will not achieve its stated goals of “the reliable delivery of ferry services as well as economic development by providing a more convenient experience for tourists, encourage local employment and create better connected communities.”
3. I have always felt that the present ferry schedule was developed with little regard for encouraging tourism, local employment, or the creation of better connected communities. In my view, the ferry schedule should provide opportunities for day-trips for tourists and for tradespeople to spend a full day on Pelee Island. At present, the earliest ferry from Canada arrives at 11:30 AM, which certainly does not address the needs of many visitors to Pelee Island. American visitors have no opportunity to visit Pelee Island on a day-trip. There should be at least one opportunity per week for American tourists to spend a full day on the Island during the summer months.
4. The current reservation system encourages some ferry customers (primarily part-time residents and Island agricultural businesses) to game the system by making reservations that they might or might not actually use. Frequently these reservations are subsequently cancelled when the customer realizes that they in fact have no use for them. In the meanwhile, potential tourists are turned away and Island residents have difficulty scheduling appointments on the mainland because there are no sailings available. OSTC has tried to address this problem by denying refunds for cancellations within five days of sailing, but this has not been an effective solution. The Ministry of Transportation should examine the policies of other jurisdictions (for example, British Columbia) where a charge is made for a reservation (at the time of booking) that is separate from the cost of passage. Reservations would be non-refundable and non-transferable. Travellers without reservations would be handled on a first-come, first-served basis. The fare for passage could be adjusted downward to make this change revenue neutral.
5. I am concerned that regular ferry service be maintained between Pelee Island and Ohio. This service is important for both tourism and for the many American cottagers who have seasonal residences on the Island. The anticipated retirement of MV Pelee Islander jeopardizes this service. The remaining vessels in the ferry service fleet are too large for the existing docking facilities at Sandusky, OH and are too large for the number of customers that presently use the service. The Province should do whatever is necessary to ensure that this ferry service is maintained, even if it requires a

partnership with a private ferry service operator with the Province providing docking facilities at Pelee Island's west dock.

6. I believe that an opportunity exists for the creation of a ferry service between Pelee Island and Put-in-Bay, OH. This is a relatively short distance when compared to the existing ferry connections. Tourism in both Pelee Island and Put-in-Bay would benefit enormously from such a link as many tourists at each of these destinations would have an interest in visiting the other island. Furthermore, since Put-in-Bay can be reached by ferry from Ohio, this service would provide an alternative route for Ohioans to reach Pelee Island and the rest of Ontario. The Pelee Islander might be an appropriate vessel for this service. The Province should make it a priority to encourage the development of a Pelee to Put-in-Bay ferry service by a private sector operator if it is not willing to provide this service itself. The Ministry of Transportation should make the west dock on Pelee Island available to whomever provides this service.