

## NB: New business model for Fundy ferry

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Source: The Spectator

**[SAINT JOHN, NB]** - As a result of **collaborative efforts** between the **Saint John Board of Trade** and **ADEDA**, a concept to underpin a new **business model** for the Digby ferry is in motion.

At a meeting last week in **Saint John**, the idea of creating a shipping and distribution centre around the ferry service was met with unabashed positivity by a roomful of stakeholders. **Digby Ferry Coalition Chair Warden Jim Thurber**, in partnership with **ADEDA Board Chair Warden Peter Newton** of Annapolis County, have secured an active champion in **Saint John Mayor Ivan Court**.



Warden Peter Newton (Annapolis County), Mayor Ivan Court (Saint John, NB) and Warden Jim Thurber (Digby County) are working together to build a thriving new business model for the Saint John-Digby ferry. The ferry link plies a 226 year-old trade route that for much of the region's history superseded overland trade routes in terms of importance for local commerce. Photo by Alan Rouse.

Fully aligned with ADEDA's position that the ferry should be considered an extension of the **Trans-Canada Highway**, Mayor Court said in an interview with the **Telegraph-Journal** that taking a pro-active approach is crucial.

By the end of January, 2011, current **funding arrangements** with the **federal government** will cease. In the interim, a concerted **intra-provincial effort** is needed to build a **viable plan** that will defray the **cost of service** to **taxpayers** and fortify the economies on both sides of the Bay. Although **seafood** is still the primary product shipped along this 226 year-old trade route, it is imperative that both provinces work closely with **Ottawa** to determine what other opportunities exist, or can be developed, to increase **commercial traffic flow**.

The idea of creating a **distribution centre** had been suggested in previous years but did not gain momentum. What's new is the focus on Saint John as an **energy and transportation hub**, combined with **private sector interest**, and how a **distribution component** now fits into the broader picture.

**Enterprise Saint John chairman Bob Manning** remarked, "This might be the time to look at it, with everything else going on in the region. This is not the time to look at the past, it's the time to look at opportunities for the future."

**ADEDA Business Development Officer Barry Dixon**, having management experience with **Sobey's** distribution centres, has been assigned the task of forging **partnerships** between Saint John and businesses in Southwest Nova Scotia. **Dwayne Stoddart of Irving Transportation Systems** stated simply, "The more volume that goes across on the ferry, the better off we are."

Also discussed was the impact the ferry's uncertain future has had on **tourism**. **Sean Will Payne**, representing **Tourism Saint John**, informed the group that two **motor coach companies** ceased service to the city when they realized the long-term outlook for the service was in question. "A long-term commitment is vital for both the city and the region," **Tammy LeBlanc of Hospitality Saint John** added.

Some positive news came from **Bay Ferries president and CEO Mark MacDonald**. "For the past fiscal year, the service increased its commercial traffic by more than 1,000 units," he said, adding that despite the increases, the service requires ongoing **government funding** just like any other **transportation infrastructure**.

**ADEDA Managing Director Mike Gushue** told the forum that the ferry's impact on Saint John's economy is now estimated at **\$12 million annually**, and will grow to **\$100 million over the next 10 years**.

Following **Minster Peter MacKay's** announcement last July for federal financing as an interim measure, **ACOA** published a request for proposals for a **transportation study** that will examine the **ferry service** and its impact on both Saint John and southwestern Nova Scotia. Responses to the RFP are now being reviewed and a **consultant will be hired by early June**. A report is expected by the fall of 2009.