

# The Association of VI Car Ferry Operators

## Boyson-Global Marine-Love City Car Ferries

Good Evening Senator Harrigan and all other Senators present.

I am Carmen Hedrington President of the Association of VI Car Ferry Operators. The Association of VI Car Ferry Operators is an advocacy group that lobbies on behalf of the existing car ferry companies in the US Virgin Islands. Our governing board presently includes representatives from Boyson Inc., Global Marine LLC. and Love City Car Ferries, Inc. All three car ferry companies are privately owned businesses providing a public service. Collectively these three companies have operated their St. John Red Hook route schedules for approximately 73 years. Our Car Ferry schedule begins at 5:30 am from St. John and 6:15 am from Red Hook; and ends 7:00 pm from St. John and 8:00pm from Red Hook. At times our schedule has been flexible to accommodate garbage runs and the concrete industry. We understand the time sensitive nature of the concrete industry and thus we have given them priority and special charter trips; even to surrounding developing Islands. (Example Global Marine has the last barge at 7:00 pm from St. John and has left as late as 8:30pm to allow for trucks that came for late deliveries to get back to St. Thomas to start their next days' deliveries on time.)

These three car ferry companies have contributed immensely to residents and visitors alike. In addition, the financial impact to the economy is immeasurable. Our contributions have been in the realm of health care (allowing persons that traverse to St. Thomas for regular health care needs to ride free and or at minimum cost), complimentary rides for VI Politicians, dignitaries, clergy, schools, etc. Not to mention, despite the many financial challenges, we have kept our prices below market value in order to ensure that residents can have affordable transportation between St. Thomas and St. John. Our prices have remained consistent for residents and tourist alike. Although we have been told our prices are too low.

Our companies have trained many young people, particularly our local men and women, allowing them to become captains, mechanics, engineers, welders etc. This is an added benefit to the community and to the boating and tourism industry.

The Goal of these three companies is to move commerce expeditiously and timely. Nevertheless, these vessels are machinery and things happen that are beyond our control.

These companies/vessels have mandated US Coast Guard Inspections and are regulated by the VI Port Authority when using their facilities.

Every vessel must go through an annual inspection; that is one year there is the safety inspection which is top side. This inspection goes through your life jackets, fire extinguishers etc. the

following year is the Hull Exam for dry docking and internal structure. For this inspection your vessel must be taken out of the water to see the integrity of the steel on the bottom of the vessel. This inspection can sometimes be timely and costly. Nevertheless, the VI car ferry operators are hoping that the USCG can be more sensitive to the uniqueness of these islands, the needs of our community and the circumstances as they arise. (Example the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Festival which is a very busy season for locals and visitors alike).

The facilities that our vessels berth at are owned and managed by the Virgin Islands Port Authority. Therefore, we are subjected to their rules and regulations while at their facilities. Thus, we are hoping to improve our working relationship with the Virgin Islands Port. Currently we pay a fee to the St. Thomas Port and the St. John Port for 24-hour use of their facilities. Nevertheless, the facilities are locked when the last ferry is docked and shut down. This prohibits car ferry owners, at times, from doing preventative maintenance to their vessels so we can keep the vessel running and meet coast guard standards. Furthermore, owners have no after hour access to their vessels if there is an emergency.

We understand that this past month has been a trying time for those who rely on the car ferry companies for transportation between these two islands. We are also aware the brief impasse with the car ferries made it difficult to move food, fuel, beverages and even the garbage trucks. The VI Car Ferry operators apologizes for any and all inconveniences this may have caused and we look forward to a better rest of the coming year/s. Currently we have three car ferries in full service and there are no lines no waiting. Nevertheless, it was difficult for us as well listening to our community ridicule our service. Please be reminded all three ferry companies are privately held family owned businesses providing a public service. None of these companies receive government subsidies. We have more often than not prioritize the good of the community over our bottom lines. Many don't understand the intricacies of these car ferry businesses. However, we believe we have served the community well despite the many, many, many challenges that we face.

Our goal is to serve and to make every passenger barge experience a positive and memorable one. Ultimately we would like to thank the people of the Virgin Islands for their continuous support.

Thank You

You can email the Association of Car Ferry Operators at [vicarferryassociation@gmail.com](mailto:vicarferryassociation@gmail.com) or our mailing address is P.O. Box 772 St. John, US Virgin Islands 00831-0772.