



**February 2026:**

# **Transporting Electric Vehicles on BC Ferries:**

**Addressing a policy barrier to zero-emission  
vehicle use in ferry dependent communities.**

Prepared by Ivan Bulic  
Gabriola Transportation Society  
Gabriola Island, BC

## Executive Summary

In June 2025, BC Ferries implemented a policy effectively banning the transport of inoperable or damaged electric vehicles (EVs) on BC Ferries vessels.

While this was framed as a compliance measure set down by the Transportation of Dangerous Goods (TDG) Act, the policy relies on a presumption of risk rather than technical diagnostics.

This has created a critical infrastructure gap for the approximately 19,000 EV owners and operators in ferry-dependent regions including the Gulf Islands, Sunshine Coast and Vancouver Island, where local EV repair and maintenance facilities are scarce.

To resolve this, BC Ferries should transition from a "blanket ban" to a verification-based model. This would align with best practices as utilized by Washington State Ferries and UK based Caledonian MacBrayne Ferries, while allowing BC Ferries to maintain safety without compromising the province's CleanBC initiatives.

### Recommendations:

- **Implement a "Certified Safe for Transport" Protocol:** That BC Ferries replace the ban on carrying inoperable or damaged EVs with an inspection-based system that could include signed declarations from certified ( BCIT, VIU, Red Seal, etc) technicians confirming a vehicle's battery is stable and de-energized. (see Appendix *WSF Transport Form for Damaged EVs*)
- **Harmonize with Provincial Policy:** Align BC Ferries operational rules with the intent of the CleanBC program and Zero-Emission Vehicle Act to ensure public infrastructure supports, rather than hinders, the transition to green energy.
- **Adopt Tactical Safety Loading:** Following international standards, load certified "inoperable" EVs last and on the weather deck (where available) to allow for rapid emergency response.
- **Establish Clear Technical Thresholds:** Define "damage" according to industry standards to ensure minor issues like cracked windshields or flat tires do not trigger a transport refusal.

## EVs - The new reality

Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in British Columbia – causing 42 percent of total emissions in 2023.

Most British Columbians still drive gas or diesel powered cars and trucks to commute to work or bring home groceries. In order to reduce vehicle emitted GHGs and toxic pollutants, the government of BC has been a leader in promoting the adoption of zero emission electric vehicles through programmes that include targeted sales mandates of EVs, expanded vehicle charging networks and more skills training for electric vehicle maintenance.

As of late 2024, Insurance Corporation of BC data show that there are about 195,000 light duty zero emission vehicles including both pure EVs and plug in hybrids in BC. While most are located in the Lower Mainland, approximately 19,000 are in ferry dependant communities and regions including 2,000 on the Gulf Islands, some 13,000 on Vancouver Island and approximately 4,000 on the Sunshine Coast.

Although BC Ferries does not specifically record how many EVs they transport, it would not be an unreasonable assumption to estimate the number of EVs transported, particularly from ferry dependant communities, as a ratio of the total number of registered vehicles; i.e. of the approximately 700,000 vehicles on Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands and the Sunshine Coast, *EV's make up about 2.7 percent.*

Like all motor vehicles, EVs require periodic servicing, maintenance and repairs. But currently (2025) there are limited EV repair and service facilities on the Gulf Islands, the Sunshine Coast and other ferry dependant communities on the Mid and North Coasts.

Most EV owners and drivers in these regions have few options other than transporting their damaged or inoperable vehicles on BC Ferries even if only for servicing or minor repairs of flat tires, broken windshields, dents and scratches, or computer issues that may render an EV in-operable and in need of towing or transport.

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[gts@gabriolatransportation.ca](mailto:gts@gabriolatransportation.ca) | 672.476.0309 | <https://gabriolatransportation.ca>

## BC Ferries' EV transport policy

In June, 2025, BC Ferries introduced a policy that *“If an EV cannot move under its own power or has any signs of damage to the battery, it will not be permitted onboard.”*

*“This is because if the EV’s safety management systems (such as active battery monitoring and thermal controls) are non-functional due to immobilization or damage, BC Ferries cannot verify the safety of the battery, which presents a serious risk in a marine environment.”*

BC Ferries is basing its no carriage of damaged EVs policy on the federal Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulation (SOR/2002 - 286, Schedule 2 that *“Lithium ion cells or batteries and lithium metal cells or batteries that are damaged or defective... must be packed... in accordance with Packing Instructions P908 or LP904...”*

*...It is forbidden to transport lithium ion cells or batteries and lithium metal cells or batteries that are damaged or defective and that... produce a flame or a dangerous evolution of heat... under normal conditions of transport.”*

BC Ferries derived its policy based on an interpretation of the 2014 Amendment to Canada’s Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act (1992) which states that **“it is forbidden to transport lithium ion cells or batteries that are damaged or defective and that under normal conditions of transport are liable to disassemble rapidly, react dangerously, produce a flame or a dangerous evolution of heat.”**

BC Ferries’ policy is based on the interpretation that a **damaged EV’s lithium ion battery still contained in the vehicle is effectively being transported without the legally required special packaging.**

Transport Canada specifically states that damaged or defective lithium vehicle batteries must be removed and transported separately. This regulatory text is the closest thing to exact wording in law that underlies the BC Ferries ban — it doesn’t literally say “damaged EVs are banned from BC Ferries,” but it *does* legally require that damaged batteries be treated as dangerous goods and packed properly before transport, which is effectively impossible when the battery is still inside a vehicle that is inoperable.

BC Ferries does *not* determine whether an EV battery is actually damaged. Instead, they apply a presumption-based rule driven by Transport Canada guidance and operational limits.

## How BC Ferries' EV policy works in practice

BC Ferries staff are not trained or authorized to assess lithium-ion battery integrity. They do not use diagnostic tools, scan vehicles, or access onboard fault codes, nor do they rely on manufacturer damage thresholds.

No technical determination of battery condition is made at the terminal. BC Ferries staff and crews rely on observable status, not battery condition.

BC Ferries treats EVs as potentially dangerous if any of the following apply:

- Vehicle is inoperable (won't drive under its own power);
- Vehicle is being towed, winched, or carried on a flatbed;
- Collision damage involving the vehicle underbody;
- Visible signs such as fluid leaks, burning odour, exposed wiring or deployed airbags.

None of these confirm battery damage, they merely raise uncertainty. Transport Canada treats "Damaged or defective lithium-ion batteries" as dangerous goods unless proven otherwise. If the battery cannot be confirmed as undamaged, it is treated as potentially damaged.

BC Ferries cannot determine why an EV is inoperable, so they presume the worst case. BC Ferries is not saying a battery is damaged, they are saying they cannot prove it is not. If an EV is damaged, inoperable or towed and the battery condition cannot be verified, it is treated as a potentially damaged lithium ion battery and refused.

BC Ferries' interpretation of the TDG regulations and refusal to transport any inoperable or towed EV, even if that EV's batteries are not proven to be damaged or defective, means that all EVs that need to be towed or transported to a service facility will not be allowed on board any BC Ferry.

## Concerns and Uncertainty

In July, 2025, Salt Spring Island Towing was prohibited from towing an inoperable EV despite it not having been in a collision or indicating any issue with its batteries. Days later Mid Island Towing in Nanaimo experienced a similar refusal when they attempted to transport an EV with a malfunctioning computer from Nanaimo to Horseshoe Bay.

“Anything on a regular car that wears out, can wear out on an EV,” said Scott Waddle, an EV service technician, and owner of Precision Auto Service in Langley.

“That can include heating or cooling systems, other accessories and the technology systems in the more advanced vehicles. At the seven-to-10-year mark, suspension problems aren’t uncommon.”

The apparent blanket application of BC Ferries’ policy so far has left EV owners concerned, given the multitude of other things that can go wrong beside damage to battery. And it isn’t only private owners who are impacted.

Gulf Islands School District 64 utilizes five electric buses on Salt Spring island that will need to be transported at some time for repairs or servicing.

The CRD’s Parks and Recreation department operates three EV and hybrid vehicles on Salt Spring Island and is planning on replacing its remaining two gas powered vehicles with EVs in 2026/27. All of these vehicles may at some point need towing or transport off the island.

The Gabriola Island Community Bus (GERTIE) operates two 18-seat electric transit vehicles that if damaged or requiring repairs would need to be towed and ferried to a facility in the Lower Mainland.

Associate Dean of the BCIT School of Transportation, Mubasher Faruki, noted that “BC Ferries’ step sort of came out of the blue. It was an understandable first step in establishing a policy related to the safe handling of EV batteries, but they aren’t alone in trying to get on top of the issue.”

“What I’m seeing in this industry right now, policy-makers are definitely caught flat-footed or playing catch-up with trying to design regulations and policy around EVs.”

## How rules for transporting EVs are made

Of the millions of vehicles carried annually on board ferries worldwide since 2020, about 28 per cent are electric vehicles (EVs). This is forcing operators of passenger and roll-on, roll-off (RoRo) ferries to adopt new policies and practices for the safe transport of increasing numbers of EVs, specifically those that are damaged or non operable and need to be towed or transported on board.

The International Maritime Organization is the United Nations agency responsible for global maritime security, safety and environmental protection.

The IMO's International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code sets the standard for transporting dangerous goods including lithium ion batteries and the vehicles containing them.

The IMO is currently **developing updated mandatory regulations for the transport of EVs with a target implementation date of January 01, 2028**. Until then the IMO is working with the International Union of Marine Insurance and other organizations to formulate best practice guidelines for ferry operators.

In Canada carriage of dangerous goods is governed by the *Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act & Regulations* (TDG 1992) and the *Canada Shipping Act & Dangerous Goods Shipping Regulations* both of which incorporate the IMDG Code.

## Transport Canada's interim best practice guidelines:

Until updated IMDG Codes are in place, Transport Canada issued a *Ship Safety Bulletin* (SSB No: 04/2024) outlining recommended best practices for the safe transport of EVs on Canadian ferries as developed, among others, by the American Bureau of Shipping and the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency

1. The American Bureau of Shipping (2022) *Best Practices for the Transport of Electric Vehicles on Board Vessels*:

“The current industry best practice when transporting damaged EVs should be (to locate them) in a designated area; this should be on the weather deck where available.”

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[gts@gabriolatransportation.ca](mailto:gts@gabriolatransportation.ca) | 672.476.0309 | <https://gabriolatransportation.ca>

2. United Kingdom Maritime and Coastguard Agency MGN 653 (M) 2023 Amendment 1 Electric Vehicles on board passenger roll-on/roll-off ferries:

“5.2 Bodywork scrapes, damaged headlights, windscreen cracks etc. do not impact the battery and would be acceptable.”

“5.3 EVs that have been damaged sufficiently to indicate that battery damage may have occurred, should be thoroughly inspected by a competent person before being allowed to be transported. The inspection should assess the risk of fire, and subsequently the risk to the vessel. Competent persons may include those recognized by the Institute of Motor Industry “Tech Safe” accreditation, or similar.”

“5.6 Where there is suspicion that the battery pack may be damaged then the battery should be disconnected and carried separately in compliance with the international code for the maritime transport of dangerous goods. If it is unclear if the battery is damaged the recommendation is to apply this provision and not accept it for transport.”

## What other ferry operators are doing

Operators of large ferry systems comparable to BC Ferries have adopted policies and practices that appear to be more flexible than BC Ferries regarding the transportation of damaged or inoperable EVs.

Washington State Ferries (WSF) operates a service that is comparable to BC Ferries in terms of numbers of passengers and vehicles carried, the geography of small island communities that it serves, and weather conditions that WSF vessels face.

Where WSF differs from BC Ferries is in operating under different US regulatory frameworks, risk management approaches and operational philosophies.

WSF serves remote island communities where being unable to move a damaged EV could have significant economic and logistical impacts.

Reasoning that a more nuanced policy than an outright ban was required, in November 2025, the Washington State Department of Transportation introduced a formal inspection and documentation process that *allows damaged or inoperable EVs on Washington State Ferries if they are safe and stable with no fire, electrical or heat hazards.*

How it works is that before boarding, tow drivers or EV operators must complete a **Washington State Ferries Transport Form** (*see Appendix*) which states the reason for the tow, specifying if a non electrical issue (such as a flat tire or mechanical problem), and that the EVs voltage system has been inspected and is in a stable de-energized state.

The form must be signed by a qualified technician certifying the vehicle meets industry standards for transport of damaged EVs. EVs that show visible damage, leaks, or any signs of being unsafe upon inspection by crew may be refused boarding.

Damaged or towed EVs, including hybrids/alternative-fuel vehicles, are loaded last to allow for a more effective emergency response if needed.

Ultimately, it is the master of a Washington State Ferry who **has final authority to deny transport** if there are outstanding safety concerns.

Caledonian MacBrayne Clyde and Hebridean Ferries (CalMac) operates 35 medium and small ro-ro passenger ferries serving over 50 destinations along the rugged west coast of Scotland linking mainland points with islands in the Clyde, Hebrides and remote peninsulas.

Many of these routes are lifelines for remote communities that often have no road alternatives and only basic vehicle repair and services facilities. Caledonian ferries are a key part of the regional transportation network, especially for commuters, students, tourists and trucks delivering essential supplies.

CalMac regularly carry EVs including plug-in hybrids, e-bikes and e-scooters.

If an EV is damaged, CalMac will **not transport the vehicle unless the battery is removed or the vehicle has been certified as safe for transport at sea by a competent authority** such as a UK Institute of Motor Industry TechSafe accredited technician.

Marine Atlantic is a federal Crown corporation that operates large ocean going ro-ro ferries between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland & Labrador subject to the same Transport Canada regulations as BC Ferries.

Unlike BC Ferries, WSF or CalMac, Marine Atlantic does not provide short distance service for small ferry dependant communities. Marine Atlantic does not mention any specific policy about damaged or

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[gts@gabriolatransportation.ca](mailto:gts@gabriolatransportation.ca) | 672.476.0309 | <https://gabriolatransportation.ca>

inoperable EVs being treated differently from other vehicles. Their *Terms & Conditions* say that the ship's master can refuse to load a vehicle if it would pose a danger to life or property, but they don't list specific rules on inoperable or damaged EVs.

## Certified inspection of damaged EVs

Both WSF and the UK require qualified technicians to certify if a damaged or inoperable EV can be safely transported on board a ferry. In the UK technicians are certified by the Institute of Motor Industries TechSafe program. In the US it is the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) who certify qualified EV technicians.

In BC the BCIT School of Transportation offers Red Seal technicians a certification program equivalent to IMI TechSafe and ASE.

The BC government is further expanding EV technician programs in partnership with institutions province wide including Camosun College, Vancouver Island University and Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

## Are EVs a risk on ferries?

Carrying dangerous goods at sea is routine, but it comes with well-recognized risks that are managed through international rules, ship design, training, and emergency planning.

In 2024 Transport Canada's issued *Ship Safety Bulletin (SSB No: 04/2024)* outlining guidelines for the safe transport of EVs on Canadian ferries. The bulletin notes that EVs are becoming more common in Canada and, "*while not more prone to fires than ICE (internal combustion) vehicles, EV require special procedures.*"

A United Kingdom Maritime and Coastguard Agency report (*MGN 653 (M) 2023*) notes that "*EVs are commonly carried onboard UK ro-ro ferries. Fires in these vehicles do not release significantly more energy than fires of traditionally fuelled vehicles and are not at greater risk of fire.*"

As of late 2025, **there are no confirmed incidents in the UK where a damaged EV itself caused a fire or major hazard on a UK passenger ferry.**

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The International Union of Marine Insurance, Best Practice for the Safe Carriage of EVs. (2022) states that “there is no experience yet with large numbers of older EVs and the share of EVs in the global vehicle fleet is still comparatively low.

“EVs have been transported at a large scale since 2020. As statistics continue to be gathered, it is currently estimated that, in general, **the frequency of EV fires compared to fires in conventional vehicles is lower** when driven over the same distance.”

## Washington State Ferries:

**There is no verified record of an accident caused by an electric vehicle (EV) fire on board any Washington State Ferry.**

## BC Ferries:

**There is no record of an EV related fire or incident aboard a BC Ferry vessel.**

The most significant recent incident involving a vehicle fire on a BC Ferry facility occurred in November 2018, when an **ICE camper van caught fire** while boarding the *Queen of Alberni* in Tsawwassen. **Terminal crews doused the fire which caused no injuries or significant damage.** The *Queen of Alberni* resumed her journey after a short delay.

## EV Incidents On Board Ferries

No single agency keeps a global tally on fire related incidents on passenger and ro-ro ferries, but from safety investigations and news reports, there have been dozens of vehicle-on-passenger-ferry fires since 2010, ranging from small single-vehicle blazes extinguished on boarding to major vehicle-deck conflagrations that destroyed ships.

## EV fire on Pearl of Scandinavia:

The best documented incident involving an EV fire on a ferry was in November 2010 when a **home converted Nissan caught fire** on the vehicle deck of the ferry *Pearl of Scandinavia* while en route from Oslo to Copenhagen. **The EV operator was charging his vehicle with a sub standard extension cord** which resulted in the batteries going into thermal runaway and sparking a fire.

**The ferry's fire suppression system extinguished the fire, and no passengers or crew were injured. The ferry continued on its journey to Copenhagen.**

This remains the **only confirmed passenger ferry fire incident where an EV** was identified as the origin of the fire.

Meanwhile, conventional fossil fuel powered vehicle fires remain a serious concern aboard ferries worldwide. The most significant incidents were the 2014 fire started by a refrigerator truck aboard the Italian ro-ro ferry *Norman Atlantic* that **killed 30 passengers and crew**, and the 2022 fire that started in a diesel transport truck aboard the Italian ro-ro ferry *Euroferry Olympia* that **killed 11 persons**.

## **Why BC Ferries' EV Policy Matters**

In 2019 the Government of BC passed the *Zero-Emission Vehicle Act* establishing a regulatory framework requiring manufacturers to ensure an increasing percentage of zero emission EV vehicles are sold in BC with the purpose of cutting greenhouse gas emissions and supporting a broader provincial climate agenda.

The Zero -Emission act was aimed at reducing the use of fossil fuel powered vehicles that are currently responsible for about 25 per cent of global CO2 emissions; the main driver of climate change. The adoption of EVs is also a straightforward way in which ordinary citizens can significantly reduce COs emissions.

By adopting a blanket policy of banning damaged or inoperable EVs from carriage on ferries, BC Ferries is sending a message contrary to the intent of the zero-emission act, and fuelling a misimpression that EVs are problematic, that they pose an inordinate fire hazard, or don't fit the needs of ordinary drivers, especially those on ferry dependant island communities.

Many Gulf Islanders, where EV adoption has been particularly high, say the BC Ferries policy strands EV owners when their vehicles break down and can not be towed on a ferry for repair. Local towing operators and vehicle owners are frustrated by the sudden nature of the BC Ferries policy that was announced without public consultation or consideration of the lack of practical alternatives open to EV owners

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[gts@gabriolatransportation.ca](mailto:gts@gabriolatransportation.ca) | 672.476.0309 | <https://gabriolatransportation.ca>

BC Ferries' focus, moreover, on the potential fire risk from damaged lithium-ion batteries may add to public fears about EV safety, despite no evidence from Transport Canada of serious incidents of EV fires on ferries in Canada.

There is a perception by many in British Columbia, and elsewhere, that BC Ferries has banned EVs from ferries. This misunderstanding can add to misleading impressions that EVs are unsafe or outright unwelcome in public infrastructure.

The BC Ferries policy may also be compounding larger worries about charging access, costs, and policy direction — making some British Columbians more hesitant or skeptical about embracing EVs. Rather than highlighting the environmental benefits of EVs, the BC Ferries towing policy seems to reinforce a perception that EVs are not practical because if an EV breaks down in an island community, standard ferry transport routes are blocked.

Lastly, when BCFerries issues a policy that differs from existing government policies on EVs it can feed a broader narrative that EV adoption isn't fully "practical yet" in BC.

## Sources:

- AMERICAN BUREAU OF SHIPPING: BEST PRACTICES FOR THE TRANSPORT OF EVS (2022)
- BRITISH COLUMBIA FERRY SERVICES INC.
- BC INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY: SCHOOL OF TRANSPORTATION
- CALEDONIAN MACBRAYNE CLYDE & HEBRIDEAN FERRIES.
- DANISH MARITIME ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BOARD.
- GULF ISLANDS DRIFTWOOD: JULY 08, 2025.
- CLEANBC: OUR NATURE OUR POWER OUR FUTURE.
- INSURANCE CORPORATION OF BC
- INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION
- INTERNATIONAL UNION OF MARINE INSURANCE
- MARINE ATLANTIC FERRIES
- SCOTTISH FINANCIAL REVIEW
- UNITED KINGDOM MARITIME AND COASTGUARD AGENCY
- VANCOUVER SUN: JULY 07, 2025
- VICTORIA TIMES-COLONIST: JULY 02, 2025
- WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

## Appendix:

WASHINGTON STATE FERRIES TRANSPORT FORM FOR DAMAGED HYBRID, ELECTRIC AND ALTERNATE ENERGY VEHICLES (EV).