



All aboard! Canadian Ferry company launch fully inclusive vessels

Founded in 1960, BC Ferries is the largest passenger ferry line in North America, and second-largest in the world. Transporting over 20 million passengers a year, BC Ferries provides all major passenger and vehicle services for the coastal and island communities of British Columbia. With 35 vessels in their fleet, they provide an essential link from mainland British Columbia to the various islands and areas of the mainland without road access.

Contacta's partner for Western Canada, Advanced Listening Systems, has been working with BC Ferries since 2013. BC Ferries contacted Advanced Listening System after understanding the benefits hearing loop systems can deliver to their customers with hearing loss. They were keen to improve the experience onboard their vessels to assist this important section of the community.

The vessels are constructed mostly of steel, which can greatly reduce the signal sent by hearing loop systems. The Advanced Listening engineers devised a way to minimize signal loss issues onboard the steel vessels by ensuring optimum placement locations for the loop aerials.

Richard McKinley, Managing Director of Contacta Inc., assisted in the design of the project to ensure the systems would perform to EN-60118-4, the international standard relating to hearing loop. Initially, he carried out tests and measurements on the vessels and then provided layout plans for installation of the systems based on the results. The team at Contacta Inc. assisted the installation team further in the creation of a complex design involving a double phased-array layout.

The potential metal loss issue was overcome by using the ceiling height of the vessels. The team realised that placing the loop cable in the ceiling meant it was closer to the listener's ear. Installing the loop cable in the ceiling also meant it was not directly in contact with metal thus producing a far better signal strength compared to floor installation.

This installation included phased array Contacta HLD9 Class D drivers using a special Marine Grade 18-2 cable for the seating areas, and the Contacta IL-K300 hearing loop kits for the various 1 to 1 interaction points on the vessels.



The pilot project for BC Ferries included the installation of a large area hearing loop system at a large seating of the forward lounge for guests to hear announcements, as well as several 1 to 1 Loops at the cafeteria steam table, cafeteria cashier, and the Chief Steward's desk.

In 2019 Advanced Listening completed work onboard the Northern Sea Wolf, the newest vessel to be acquired by BC Ferries to be refit. The vessel is used on the scenic route to Northern Vancouver Island, known for its amazing views of both landscape and wildlife. With a vessel so focused on tourism, BC Ferries prioritized upgrading for customer satisfaction so that every location of the passenger area has been fitted with a hearing loop system. The Northern Sea Wolf now stands as an excellent example for accessibility in the world of travel and tourism.

The next step will see full installs of hearing loop systems in all seating areas, walkways, and locations of exchange. BC Ferries have specified that every new or refurbished Ferry must have induction loop systems installed as standard.