

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS  
DIVISION OF PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS**

**In Re: Rhode Island Fast Ferry, Inc.**

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**Docket No. D-13-51**

**REBUTTAL TESTIMONY OF  
ROBERT BILLINGTON  
President  
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council**

1. Q. Mr. Billington have you had the opportunity to review the Direct testimony of Mr. Edge on behalf of Interstate Navigation in this matter?

A. Yes.

2. Q. Do you take issue with any of his statements or conclusions?

A. Yes. While I appreciate the fact that Mr. Edge has acknowledged my professional standing in the Rhode Island tourism industry, I do take issue with his sweeping generalizations regarding the Tour RI program.

3. Q. How so?

A. First, I should point out that to my knowledge, Mr. Edge was not involved in any way, shape or form with Tour RI or Interstate's involvement in that program and the second-hand information he has been provided regarding it is at best distorted. Tour RI was not a "political idea". It was an economic development program. Although it was small in scale, the purpose of Tour RI was to introduce Rhode Islanders to Rhode Island, in order to drive tourism to locales within the State that Rhode Islanders may never have visited, with one intended salutary effect being the development of new tourism business for those locales. Part of the mission of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, as well as every other Tourism Council that participated in the program, is to increase tourism spending in a sustainable way. In fact, the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation was a participant in Tour RI and would not have been had the program not been consistent with its own mission of developing Rhode Island's economy. Thus, while Mr. Edge belittles the program as political in nature, I wholeheartedly

disagree. The fact that the tours took place only once a year is not a measure of its value in exposing Rhode Islanders to new local venues with the purpose of creating repeat business beyond the initial Tour RI experience.

4. Q. Do you agree with Mr. Edge's characterization that Tour RI was "heavily subsidized" and "ran out of steam in just a few years"?

A. No, I do not. Tour RI did not cease operating because it ran out of financial support. In fact, the program financed itself. I know this because I personally managed its finances. The fact is that we continued to add tours to the program due to demand and many lamented the loss of it when we decided to discontinue the tours. The real reason Tour RI ceased operating is that it required the active participation of all of the member tourism Councils and various other Districts decided to concentrate their efforts in other areas. Without this diversity of venues, BVTC simply could not offer enough Blackstone Valley tours to keep the effort ongoing. Nonetheless, an outside study concluded that programs like Tour RI, which concentrate on developing internal tourism, have been very important to Rhode Island's larger economy.

5. Q. Mr. Edge has placed great importance on the fact the Interstate component of the Tour RI Block Island ticket price was in essence free of charge. Does this change your opinion that response to that tour was evidence of pent up demand?

A. No, it does not. First, the implication that Tour RI provided tourism options to people who might not otherwise been able to afford them is unfounded. We did not request that Interstate offer travel free of charge, that contribution was

volunteered by Interstate. Also, we informed our customers that the market price of the tour would be in the \$75 dollar range. And, again, we knew that persons who participated in the Block Island tours had travelled to other New England tourism venues, so it was not as though they were financial shut-ins, as Mr. Edge implies.

6. Q. Do you have an opinion as to what Interstate's motivation may have been for participating in the program and offering free ferry transportation?

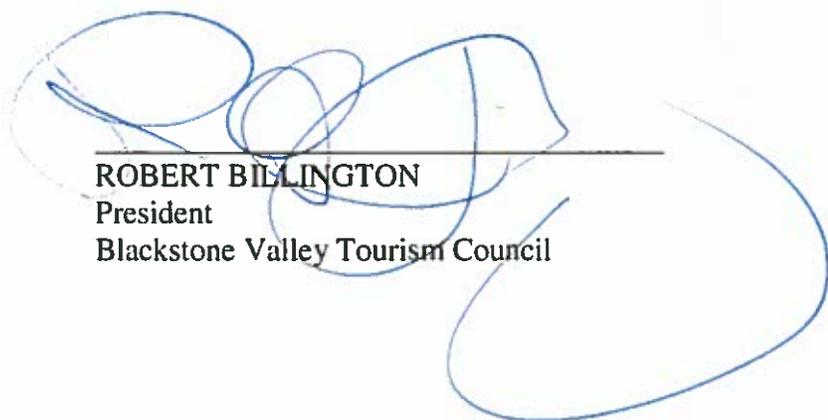
A. Yes. I believe they saw benefits twofold. Because the tours were in May of each year, they showcased the Island during what is known in the industry as a shoulder season, when the relative quiet of the Island is attractive to some. I also believe Interstate likely viewed the program as a relatively low cost marketing investment during an otherwise slower time of year that had the potential of creating repeat customers in high season.

7. Q. Have your opinions regarding the lessons learned from the Tour RI program changed in any way?

A. No. I still believe that the most significant lesson was that many Rhode Islanders do not travel to Block Island because it is viewed as distant and difficult to reach. But when they are presented with a more convenient mode of travelling to the Island they will take advantage of it.

9. Q. Does that conclude your rebuttal testimony?

A. Yes.



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**ROBERT BILLINGTON**  
President  
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council