

November 15, 2005

BCLTA

To develop and support library trustees to advance public library service in British Columbia



To: Library Board Chairs and BCLTA Liaisons

National Issues Update - Library Book Rate and CAP Funding

One important role of BCLTA is to keep our members informed of national issues. The purpose of this bulletin is to bring you up to date on two of these issues and provide resources for your Board to advocate for these programs.

The two issues highlighted in this bulletin are:

- uncertainty over the future of funding for the Library Book Rate, as well as the need to expand this rate to include other library formats beyond books
- proposed termination of the Community Access Program (CAP) in March of 2006.

At BCLTA we are asking you to:

1. **Include these two issues on your next Board agenda.** We have suggested some courses of action and, after a discussion at your meeting, ask that you choose the options that best reflect the will of your Board.
2. **Add your voice to BCLTA.** BCLTA will be writing to the Federal Ministers responsible for these programs and BCLTA's President, Lawrence Lavender, will be speaking to these issues at a meeting of the Provincial Advisory Committee to the Canadian Library Trustees Association (CLTA). We want to be able to say that we are representing Library Boards across British Columbia. If your Board supports these initiatives, please send an e-mail to mblack@bclta.org before December 12th so we can add your local Board to this list.

Trustees will have varying levels of familiarity with these two issues. For some library systems (such as Vancouver Island Regional Library) changes to the Library Book Rate would have very significant financial implications. For other libraries, the impact would be less severe. With CAP funding, many libraries have benefited from this program in the past; however, in some communities CAP funding does not go to public libraries but instead to other community agencies. (Note - CLA is urging the federal government to make libraries a key strategic access point in the CAP program.) Therefore, while we all want to speak with a united voice, you should tailor the message as appropriate to your library.

With the strength of all our members across British Columbia and indeed across the country, we know that we can deliver a strong message that can't be ignored.

Thank you for participating in this national campaign to maintain access to library services!

National Advocacy Issues

Background:

CLA has been lobbying government and department officials on a number of programs that relate to access to information for Canadians. Two programs are at the forefront of CLA's advocacy efforts right now: the Library Book Rate and the Community Access Program (CAP).



Library Book Rate

The Library Book Rate is a long-standing special postal rate that allows libraries to mail books to their users and to other libraries at one-twelfth the cost of the parcel post rate. It was established in 1939 to expand library service to remote rural communities and is still used by many public libraries for this purpose. It is estimated that the annual cost of this discount to Canada Post is approximately \$1.3 to \$2 million. (Source: CLA website)

On April 25, 2005, Canada Post announced its intentions to discontinue the existing Book Rate Program. On July 4, 2005, Canada Post sent a letter to CLA stating it will not be acting unilaterally to put an end to the Library Mail Rate; rather, it would be working with different government departments to secure the long-term funding need. Then, on July 22nd, the Hon. John McCallum, Minister of National Revenue and Minister for Canada Post, announced that the Library Book Rate (LBR) will continue past the March 31, 2006 expiration of the current agreement between Canada Post and the Department of Canadian Heritage. This announcement, however, does not mean that this issue is resolved, as questions remain such as where the funding will come from for the program.

As well, CLA and BCLTA would like to see the Library Book Rate expanded to include other library formats as the current rate applies to books only. A CLA survey indicates that in the short-term (first two years), shipments of non-book materials would be about 25 percent of that of books, or to use Canada Post estimates on its costs, about \$500,000 per year. Since very few libraries currently lend non-book materials (it's simply too expensive to do so), from Canada Post's perspective there would be little foregone revenue: most likely it would marginally increase Canada Post's revenue. Once the program reached some level of maturity, CLA estimates it would cost about the same as the book portion of the Mail Rate, about \$1.3 to \$2 million per year. While usage would be high, the size and weight of parcels containing CDs or DVDs are much smaller and lighter than books, so the cost per unit would be much lower.

Community Access Program

Since it was introduced, CAP has aimed to "provide Canadians with affordable public access to the internet and the skills they need to use it effectively The program plays a crucial role in bridging the digital divide; contributing to the foundation for electronic access to government services; encouraging on-line learning and literacy; fostering the development of community based infrastructure; and, promoting Canadian e-commerce." (Source: Industry Canada's CAP website)

CAP funding had been roughly \$40 million per year until the last two years, fiscal 2004/05 and 2005/06, when it was cut to \$25 million. CLA's position, in addition to ensuring libraries are key recipients of this funding, is that the program should be returned to \$40 million.

The loss to libraries, community networks and schools in B.C as a result of termination of this program would be substantial, having been estimated at over \$2 million. The impact on rural libraries will be especially pronounced. In many of these libraries, the only public internet stations are those made available and maintained with CAP funds. (Source: BCLA)

These programs represent two key ways in which libraries provide services to our users. Both are at risk, and CLA is conducting strategic meetings and conversations to keep both safe.

In addition to CLA's efforts in Ottawa, CLA and BCLTA need you, our members, and all in the Canadian library and information community to get involved.



How Library Boards Can Be Involved:

Our message is simply that we're looking for MP's support for a continuation, and ultimately an expansion, of the Library Book Rate. As for CAP, the program is set to end in March of next year. We need you to send your local MP the message that access to library services cannot be cut. Moreover, we want to see long-term deals in place to be sure that these issues don't come up again.

Your role is to take this information and bring it to the attention of your local MP. We suggest you begin with a letter and follow-up with a meeting.

Tell your MP how the Library Book Rate and CAP enable your library to properly serve the community. Don't hesitate to talk about the library's tight budget, and how services could suffer if the Library Book Rate were either to go up or to be cancelled. Mention the important role your library serves in the MP's riding, how CAP has benefited your patrons of all walks of life, and how the federal government could do more to support libraries like yours. If possible, add specific benefits from your local area that illustrate the benefit of the Book Rate or CAP funding in the past.

What motivates MPs is the impact of programs on constituents ... the ordinary Canadians your library serves. MPs, like everyone else, love libraries. But libraries are often seen as municipal or provincial responsibilities, and thus aren't as relevant to federal politicians. You have to demonstrate the value of the Library Book Rate and the Community Access Program for access to information for your users, to make federal investments in access real to your MP.

1) Action: Send a letter to your local MP.

We have provided a sample letter on our web site at <http://www.bclta.org/advocacy2.html> that can easily be personalized and customized to suit your local library's situation.

2) Action: Meet with your local MP.

Follow up to a letter is essential. We need you to follow up by requesting a meeting to discuss the two programs. Don't be put off if your meeting is with a policy analyst or other staff member, rather than your elected representative. A meeting with them can be a good first step towards meeting with your MP. If your MP is difficult to meet, insist that you at least talk by telephone so that you can express your views directly.

What do you want your local MP to do? You want support for the Library Book Rate and for the Community Access Program. You want your MP to be aware of the issues and to put pressure on key ministries, particularly Heritage Canada and National Revenue (responsible for Canada Post) for the Library Book Rate, and Industry Canada for CAP.

Further Resources:

In preparing this bulletin we drew heavily upon the information available on the CLA web site - www.cla.ca. On their home page, under the heading "Highlights", select "Advocacy Kit - CAP and Library Book Rate." There is considerable background available at this site so please check it out if you want more information.

As well, CLA would like to know about your meetings with local MPs. That way, they can log what's been done and leverage every meeting as much as possible. A debriefing form is available on their web site within the Advocacy Kit provided for these issues.

To assist in your efforts, a summary of "Key Messages" can be found on the following page.

Key Messages:



This list outlines the key messages, as prepared by CLA, that we would like to get across. They are not intended to be read to a local MP word for word, but they will give you an idea of the issues we are dealing with. There is more elaboration on each of these key issues on the CLA web site: http://www.cla.ca/issues/advocacy_cap_lbr.htm

Our main message is: The Government of Canada must ensure that these two key access programs - CAP and the Library Book Rate - continue in order to properly serve Canadians.

#1: Context: Libraries play a pivotal role in communities.

#2: The government has a number of objectives that libraries help meet - thanks to the programs like the Library Book Rate and CAP.

#3: The Library Book Rate puts reading material in the hands of Canadians who wouldn't otherwise have access to it - and that's how it helps fulfill the government's objectives. The program must continue and must be expanded to include other library formats. Minister McCallum's recent announcement does not mean that this message is less important. Rather, we must press to know the details of his announcement, to make sure that the program will indeed be unchanged from the public's perspective.

#4: The Community Access Program (CAP) is equally as essential. Not only must the program continue, but there should be a renewed focus on public libraries as delivery agents.

#5: These two programs ensure that Canadians have access to the tools and information that will allow them to participate in the new economy. The Government of Canada cannot let these programs be discontinued.