

Public Input

4/30/2020

When you were talking about important things to consider, I think transparency is important as well. Often when there are changes coming there is no communication. For example, the Mat has been pulled from the schedule, as a taxpayer and user it would be good to know why, and is it being taken care of.

Replacing vessels, we understand that there may be federal money for building but we passed on it so we could build them in Alaska when we were building the Tazlina and Hubbard. Planning outside of the Political arena so that it doesn't get changed every four or eight years. Listen to the Captains, mates, and engineers!! Thank you for working on this. Nancy Berg, Viking Travel Inc.

5/6/2020

Dear AMH Reshaping Group:

I read the group will be leaning heavily on the Northern Economics Study, I recommend the McDowell Group study be given equal if not more attention. The ongoing pandemic will cause much of the data to be not useful during the pandemic and I expect slow growth coming out of it. I say this looking at the price of oil and the State's reliance on it for the majority of spending revenue.

Here are some points I offer for consideration:

- Population data: Census data is generally not accurate; note that to date only 37% of Alaskans have filed for the 2020 Census. I was contracted in 2010 to provide local water transportation to and knowledge of housing units outside the Pelican, Alaska city limits. My paperwork is not at hand, but off hand I am counting the houses south of Pelican; I easily come up with 20. The majority of these are seasonally occupied and do not appear in the census as residents; but the owners are very likely using the AMHS to come to their seasonal homes. On the north end I can think of 7 housing units; there are probably more but since we reside on the south end I am not as familiar without my subdivision plats. This measure is important as it not only reflects upon AMHS use but also upon a community's economy.
- Economy vs. Ridership; this is kind of like what came first the "chicken or the egg". In my opinion in the communities that are demonstrating an effort to build an economy and showing results, the presence of the AMHS is vital. It is only vital if the service is scheduled, dependable, and repeated. The service can be three times a week if that is what is needed or once a month. People that are investing their time and money into a business need to know they can get goods and people in and out.
- Life after the Pandemic. Well, again in my opinion it will take a while to get ridership back up. This is the time it would be such an advantage to have the availability of one or two smaller ferries to handle the smaller markets and perhaps some of the mid-size markets as needed. I would rather see a 120' boat with capacity of 125 persons and 20 vehicles and a crew of 12 or less leaving some people at the dock than I would a larger vessel with 24 or more crew transporting 5 to 15 passengers. This is a reality we need to consider when building the next ferry.
- None of our ports should have terminal/docks that can accommodate only one type of ferry; they need to be universal.

I will likely have more to say later; for now I am on a medical required trip and my time for commenting is limited. Thank you for considering this brief message.

Norm Carson, President
Pelican Chamber of Commerce
Pelican, Alaska

5/7/2020

Commissioner Barrett and Committee Members:

We have been traveling and I have been playing catch up on listening to the previous meeting and finding time to put my thoughts down on one communique. In addition to the email I sent yesterday please consider the following:

- Someone suggested there are communities the AMHS can not afford to serve. Coming from a remote and small market community obviously that caught my attention. I strongly believe the response to that is; "How do we serve certain small market communities?" Representative Stutes hit the nail on the head, come back to the communities and ask what is the minimum level of service needed to keep our economy and/or community viable. We must find a level of service that is sustainable with the boats we have until more appropriately sized boats are available to certain routes.
- The AMHS budget is glaringly large within DOT. I will point out that communities on the road system receive other State services that coastal communities do not receive but those dollars are not obvious as they are spread out among a number of other Departments, such as Public Safety and Department of Law. Having been a former State Trooper Commander I can certainly affirm that road systems require more than just a snow plow and a grader. This is not an excuse to not find a means to be more efficient with marine transportation; it is simply a reality we should be aware of.
- If we are to allow our economy to grow we should be looking to deliver marine transportation in the most efficient manner possible without being reticent about there being a subsidy; we do need to keep it that subsidy at a reasonable amount. I believe the answer falls within the right equipment for the right routes, universal docks, and minimum crew quarters to allow the crew to overnight onboard at a port.

Thank you,
Norm Carson, President
Pelican Chamber of Commerce
Pelican, Alaska

5/7/2020

Dear Reshaping Group,

Some quick feedback from the 4/30/20 meeting from an out-of-state visitor and user of the ferries.

1. I agree 100% that you should be speaking with employees and crews of the AMHS to get their insight and suggestions regarding ALL aspects and operations of the ferry system. They are uniquely situated to see, hear, and otherwise experience the decisions made by previous administrators and can make suggestions. My last trip was in August 2019 from Kodiak to Dutch Harbor and back and I bet Purser Maggie, Steward Kathy, and food server Sheryl of the Tustumena could give you some good insights because I talked to them a bit about the ferry system and they were reflective of the whole ferry situation. Plus, they had a lot of interactions with other passengers and could provide passenger experience observations. Obviously, there are plenty of crew to speak with but if I wanted an insight to the ferry system, I would include these three.

2. Dynamic Pricing doesn't make sense to me as it penalizes people who may find out they need to use the ferry at the last minute. However, if there was a legal way to charge a modest surcharge on the passenger fare only to out-of-state users of the ferries, I would accept that as someone who would be subject to it. Since I don't pay any of the local or sales taxes or fees throughout the year that a resident would pay (and I assume a portion goes toward the DOT and AMHS), paying a surcharge would be my contribution to operating expenses. For example, 5% on a fare of \$400 would only be an extra \$20, but it might help given the high number of visitors that use the ferry in the summer.

3. Lottery!! I see this as a way out-of-state people like me could support the ferries. Our lottery in Virginia has does well in supporting our education system. Please consider this option. Perhaps this could be some sort of private sector partnership, maybe with Alaska Air?

I heard some good comments last week and wish you all the best as you tackle this important issue.

Thank you all for the work you are doing. I look forward to listening to future meetings and eventually being on the ferries again!

Stay well,
Beth Lynk , Virginia Beach, VA

5/14/2020

Greetings Admiral Barrett and members of the Reshaping Work Group:

I would encourage the working group to explore the possibility of securing federal 'continuing appropriation' authority in support of operations and maintenance of the Alaska Marine Highway Service (AMHS), similar to the federal interest in maintaining the dredge depths at the Port of Anchorage (Cook Inlet). See document links below.

<https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/85/500.pdf>

Douglas and Juneau Harbors, Alaska: House Document Numbered 286, Eighty-fourth Congress, at an estimated cost of \$1,394,000;

Dillingham Harbor, Alaska: House Document Numbered 390, Eighty-fourth Congress, at an estimated cost of \$372,000;

Naknek River, Alaska: House Document Numbered 390, Eighty-fourth Congress, at an estimated cost of \$19,000;

Cook Inlet, navigation improvements, Alaska: House Document Numbered 34, Eighty-fifth Congress, at an estimated cost of \$5,199,200;

<https://www.poa.usace.army.mil/Portals/34/docs/operations/RH/anchorage/2019AnchorageHarbor.pdf?ver=2020-04-23-170116-897>

Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005, P.L. 108-447, Title I, Division C, 118(a) and 118(d) modified the project authorization for the Port of Anchorage in Anchorage, Alaska, directing the Secretary of the Army to construct a harbor depth to minus 45 feet mean lower low water for a length of 10,860 feet. Federal maintenance shall be in accordance with Section 101 of the River and Harbor Act of 1958, except that the project shall be maintained at a depth of minus 45 feet mean lower low water for a length 10,860 feet.

Rationale:

The federal government currently recognizes the AMHS for federal transportation funding (i.e., the ferry system is eligible for vessel construction and shoreside improvements funding through the US Department of Transportation programs).

The federal government National Highway System (NHS) links the continental United States to Alaska through the AMHS, thereby connecting the NHS roads within Alaska to the national grid.

Given the established national interest in an interconnected grid, then it stands to reason that there is a national interest in having a safe, reliable and efficient maritime service where NHS grid is dependent upon that maritime link (i.e., AMHS).

Additionally, given the recent system-wide failure within AMHS (i.e., a large part of the reasoning behind the formation of the AMHS reshaping group) coupled with the Covid-19 pandemic restricting traffic for American interests through Canada due to border closings, perhaps this is the appropriate time for the State of Alaska to request of our Congressional delegation that they consider advancing a federal interest in the operations and maintenance of the AMHS such that the national interest in a connected NHS grid between the continental states and Alaska is assured to a higher standard, much as the federal government recognizes the need for a navigable channel in Cook Inlet to the Port of Anchorage. (Imagine, for the sake of conversation, if the federal government did not contribute \$17m (approximately) annually to dredging in Cook Inlet...would the Port of Anchorage be viable?)

If a continuing appropriation of federal dollars for operations and maintenance were to be secured, the overall business plan for a forward-looking AMHS (post reshaping) would be far more achievable.

Thanks for your public service in serving on this working group.

John Walsh, Juneau

5/14/2020

I would like to comment on the ferry schedules for SE and hope that you can address this issue in your reshaping.

Ferries in SE are used to travel to...and from places in Alaska as you well know. However, schedules rarely reflect this. Case in point, if you look at the schedules for this summer (which have now changed 3 times) I can get from Kake to Juneau twice a month. That's fine: I can live with that. However, I can't get home. Or if I can, I'm stuck in Juneau for 10 days to 2 weeks. Most people here want to go to Juneau to shop for things they can't get locally, get out of town for a few days or for health care. We want to load up our vehicles with groceries and head home in a reasonable time.

Consistency would also help. Ideally if the schedule was the same every month, say we could get to Juneau twice a month (with a vehicle) and come back in about 4-5 days, fine.

That way we in Kake could plan around it. Thanks for listening,

Elaine Garrett, Kake, AK

5/26/2020

Dear Admiral Barrett and AMH Reshaping Work Group Members,

Please find attached comments respectfully submitted by the board of Renewable Juneau in regards to the reshaping and retooling of the Alaska Marine Highway System. We appreciate your request for public input and your willingness to think out of the box and to work to position our AMHS on a more reliable level of service, and with lower costs. Renewable Juneau is a nonprofit (501c3) organization providing information, education, and advocacy to support local climate solutions – renewable energy, heat pumps, electric vehicles, building efficiency, and carbon offsetting – in Alaska’s capital city.

The marine highway reshaping group is faced with the daunting task of retooling our Alaska Marine Highway System to ensure Alaskans have access to essential transportation services among Alaskan coastal communities. We appreciate your request for public input and your willingness to think out of the box and position our AMHS on a more reliable level of service, and with lower costs. The board of Renewable Juneau suggests that Alaska look at the transformation that is occurring in fleets world-wide and the universal need to reduce operating and maintenance costs while improving service. We can all learn from how the transformation of these fleets was implemented.

Many of Southeast Alaska’s coastal communities are blessed with current and future hydropower and other renewable energy resources that could fuel our ferry system now and for decades to come. Kodiak, Sitka, Swan Tyee communities, Juneau, Haines, and Skagway either have hydropower/renewables, interties, or could build more. AMHS energy dollars could stay and circulate in our Alaska coastal communities. Ferry terminals can become vessel charging stations for ferry batteries and vessels can utilize Alaskan renewable energy resources to supplement and optimize operating systems and efficiencies already proven in more advanced and nimble ferry systems.

Ferry systems worldwide are transforming to battery-electric and diesel-electric hybrid systems to reduce operating and maintenance costs, improve reliability (less system complexity and less downtime), and in many cases, increase speed. Washington, British Columbia, Greece, and Baltic European ferry systems have already begun the conversion of their fleets with lower operating and maintenance cost success. Other systems are beginning transformations. It appears that electrification of the marine ferry industry is the future and Alaska should seriously consider the opportunity to enter the future and become a leader as our AMHS retools and reshapes.

Electric ferries and operating systems have lower operating costs.

Electric and electric hybrid ferries are more efficient and cleaner.

Suggestions:

1. Gather economic, operational, maintenance, and analysis reports for electric ferry deployment and transformation from BC, WA, Norwegian, Danish, and other ferry systems.
2. Have your reshaping group conduct a site visit and ride with BC & Washington hybrid ferries.
3. Analyze lessons learned from other successful systems and adapt and customize these to AMHS for Alaska optimization.
4. Suggest AKDOT / Administration / Legislature seek federal resources and work with our congressional delegation and others states to develop federal programs for resources and assistance for state ferry systems for electric and electric hybrid ferry systems and infrastructure to assist America’s reshaping marine transportation.

Below is a graphic of one of BC Ferries, a diesel-electric hybrid Island Class Ferry.

Renewable Juneau appreciates the opportunity to weigh in on your strategic planning and asks that you consider our recommendations. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance in your planning and future discussion on electric and diesel-electric hybrid ferry vessels, vessels that will become the increasingly common system of choice for the world’s leading ferry operators. Regards,

Margo Waring, Renewable Juneau, President

5/30/2020

Tera Ollila and Reshaping Committee Members, It has come to my attention that there are those who would justify removing Pelican and Tenakee Springs by the claim that we are all here to "live off the grid". We have heard this before from those who do not live here. Speaking for many in Pelican, we live in this unique and beautiful location for many reasons, not the least that there was, for many years, a reliable transportation system to support our contributions to the Alaska economy in addition to a remote lifestyle. In addition to being a world class sport fishing destination, Pelican contributes to the national food chain with a growing commercial fish processing facility operating as Yakobi Fisheries and hosts many small fishing fleet boats in our harbor. That is what Alaska is known for, and what Pelican is all about.

As Mayor, I have always promoted a reduced AMHS sailing schedule to Pelican to meet the needs of our elderly population and businesses so we can continue to be part of what makes Alaska great.

I hear a lot of common sense discussions about smaller boats in the future, interim contract services, and reduced sailings. Any and all would save the Alaska DOT considerable amounts of money and allow the AMHS to continue with its mission to keep Southeast Alaska moving forward. I 100% endorse those ideas.

Many thanks to Norm Carson, our Chamber of Commerce President and all around Pelican representative with AMHS matters, and I invite the Reshaping Committee members to come on out for a visit and see an amazing example of what make Alaska unique and keeps the visitors coming in and the fish going out.

The State of Alaska needs these small communities connected and prosperous.

Thank you, Walt

5/31/2020

To Whom-

We have used the Ferry for many years in our Business and other travel. To even think that the Ferry service will exclude any places is simply absurd.-

I have been in Business for over 60 years and not all parts show a profit or even break even, but all parts of any business are so important, start cutting one or two out and pay the price. An average is what is important. If the ferry is a non-profit then it should be a non-loss also? I have visited with a ferry person and ran this by them, I was told it made sense so. An example if 2019 showed a loss then take that as a carry-over loss to 2020 and add a sure charge based on the projected use for 2020, use, being a person or the number of cars-trailers etc. Based on the 20 foot rate, this perhaps makes too much sense, but an idea, better than simply doing damage to the places that need this valuable service.-

Good luck

Larry Jarrett

6/18/2020

Dear Work Group Members:

Yesterday the LeConte sailed from Juneau to Pelican, the first ferry we have had in our port since October 2019. Pelican is not served by private barge service, the ferry is our only marine hauler of heavy freight. On arrival there were 34 passengers that disembarked; not bad for being in the middle of a pandemic. Eleven oversize vehicles drove off loaded with building materials and household goods. Jerue and Smith Transport had all 4 of their trucks loaded; they alone brought out 36,000 pounds of freight. Because these were all large vehicles, the car deck was full. Three baggage carts were towed off; all completely packed.

I do not have the return trip passenger load; all the oversize vehicles returned to Juneau. The local seafood plant sent to Juneau approximately 15,000 pounds of value added frozen fish. The fish were caught locally and processed by employees. In Juneau the fish will be stored in a leased warehouse pending distribution to the lower 48. The AMHS like its counterpart land road system is clearly a huge part of our economy. This one relatively small event supported the following cogs in the economic wheel of Alaska:

- A Juneau based freight company.
- A commercial seafood plant in Pelican.
- A warehouse in Juneau.
- Lumber businesses in Juneau.
- Stores in Juneau.
- Freight companies that brought the goods to Juneau that were then sold..
- Alaska Airlines will be freighting a good portion of the commercial fish south.
- Employees of the seafood plant in Pelican.

This is a far cry from the comment I heard earlier this year by a consultant who stated that most of the people utilizing the ferry were locals that took their "Toyota" to Juneau to buy groceries. This community can survive with reduced service; it cannot with no service.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Norm Carson, President

Pelican Chamber of Commerce

6/18/2020

DOT,

The City of Pelican is 100% with Norm on this, we are a part of Alaska's economy, and a perfect working example of small communities moving forward during difficult economic conditions.

Also, Norm and I have both been lobbying for reduced service throughout the AMHS difficulties, showing not only willingness to work with the DOT but also a firm grasp of the realities involved.

And I had to come to Juneau to even see a Toyota.

Respectfully,

Walt

7/22/2020

If the tiny country of Norway can overcome the same problems facing Alaska, why can't we do likewise here in the U.S.A.? It's almost a disgrace that the only way to drive from one state to the other in continental North America is to pay more than my vehicle is worth on a state run toll ferry system, or spend two days in a foreign country. Can't we find a solution similar to Norway's? - Dan Hart

7/29/2020

Dear Admiral Barrett:

I am writing you in response to your request for input on the essential community ferry needs for Gustavus dated July 22, 2020. Although I have submitted multiple documents such as resolutions, letters and testimony on this subject (attached), I am happy to provide a response. As you will see in this response, for Gustavus: Save our Road, Save our City!

First, it is important to understand that Gustavus is not on the road system - besides the ferry. It is also important to be aware that Gustavus does not have a barge ramp. Transportation of goods, services, and people are only available by plane or boat. Most of this is done via commercial service such as Seaplanes and the ferry. The weather in this region makes travel via seaplane unreliable. In addition, the amount of cargo that can be shipped via seaplane is very limited. Finally, the cost of travelling via seaplane is unaffordable for many.

The ferry offers reliable, predictable, and safe transportation to and from Gustavus. Medical appointments, food, materials for home repairs, or equipment for construction and other purposes can only come by ferry. Please keep these points in mind as you read the responses below.

Baseline Ferry Service - what service does the ferry provide in support of essential economic and social wellbeing that cannot be met by other means such as commercial air or barge service?

As identified above, the City does not have a barge landing available. Therefore, essential economic and social wellbeing is only provided by the ferry; seaplanes cannot accommodate the scope necessary to fulfill the need. The ferry provides safe, reliable service for both commercial and residential purposes. Grocery shopping, medical appointments, connections for trips to the lower 48, provisions, and the list continues.

Does the need change between winter and summer?

No. Clearly, the winter months does not have the number of people that rely on the ferry. Many are seasonal residents and business owners, as well as visitors. But the need for essential services of the approximately 550 full-time residents does not change.

What frequency of service would address the essential service need?

The community of Gustavus NEEDS service twice a week, every two weeks at a MINIMUM. It is necessary to have the turnaround be 1 or 2 days so that people can meet appointments, shop for food and supplies, and other personal activities.

Service this summer has attempted to follow this schedule, but did not consistently, and it was a hardship on some. However, if Gustavus could get twice a week, twice a month with a 1 or 2 day turnaround, it would provide the ability to keep our town viable.

Frequency of Use by Gustavus School

The Gustavus School is part of the Chatham School District. The school utilizes the ferry for many of the same purposes as the town - supplies, materials, transportation of teachers, students, and parents for activities and other needs.

Is it movement of people, vehicles, or freight that is most important to your community?

It is all of the above. As discussed previously, all of the movement choices are important. Ferries without the ability to deliver cargo, transport vehicles for people to get around Juneau affordably, or deliver/pick-up goods is critical.

Can essential passenger and vehicle service address your requirements?

No. As described above, cargo/freight - both coming and going- is critical to the businesses and residents of Gustavus.

Other perspective or ideas that could assist in structuring a more reliable system.

I realize that you may read this response and say, "oh, another community asking for everything," but that is not the case. Gustavus NEEDS the ferry to survive. The Alaska Marine Highway is our road. Just like pavement, highways, or railroads, the ferry system is our transportation lifeline. SAVE OUR ROADS, SAVE OUR CITY.

Calvin Casipit

8/5/2020

Good afternoon,

Please find attached Sitka's response to the AMHS Reshaping WG survey.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond, and thank you for your good work on such a challenging task.

John M. Leach, Municipal Administrator, City and Borough of Sitka

Dear Admiral Barrett,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide community input to the AMHS Work Group. We understand the financial sustainability challenges AMHS is facing, so we value your work in determining community ferry needs as you make recommendations for future service levels.

Sitka enjoys a wide range of government, Tribal, educational, and healthcare partners who depend on regular ferry service. SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) is expanding into a regional healthcare hub, and ferry travel is essential for people seeking healthcare from outside of Sitka. Our U.S. Coast Guard personnel depend on ferry service every summer to move their families upon receipt of new transfer orders in or out of Sitka. Our Tribal Citizens and families of elderly in our Pioneer Home and long-term care facilities rely on ferry service to connect from smaller villages. We are dependent on ferry service to attract new conventions, meetings, and visitors to Sitka, and inadequate service will be highly impactful resulting in significant economic hardship to our community. Independent travelers and many others within our community will suffer from a reduced level of ferry service.

At an absolute minimum, we believe that one (1) weekly north bound stop and one (1) weekly south bound stop, year-round, is essential to support community, economic, and social well-being that cannot be met by other means. Many small communities that connect to Sitka do not have year-round air service, nor can Sitka residents gain access to the road system without ferry service.

The level of travelers undoubtedly decreases in the winter months; however, airline ticket costs tend to increase while flight schedules are reduced. Regular ferry service will provide a lower cost, and more reliable, form of travel during periods of bad weather that typically cancel air travel in Alaska.

Sitka is also an educational hub for the State of Alaska. Besides our local Sitka School District, Sitka is a host to the Mount Edgecumbe High School and University of Alaska Southeast campuses. Our schools depend on regular ferry service throughout the academic year for sports, club, and extracurricular activity travel since airline travel becomes more expensive outside of peak summer travel months.

Freight is normally barged into our community, but there are little to no places in Sitka to buy or sell new boats or vehicles. Those purchases are normally done in larger cities and the ferry is the easiest way to ensure those transactions are possible. Our ferry service is also crucial to supplying groceries and

Providing for today...preparing for tomorrow

consumer goods to other smaller communities that do not have barge service. Alternating passenger and vehicle service is a good stop-gap measure for our community; however, that alternative reduces overall access to the road system.

Sitka has enjoyed service provided by the Fairweather Fast Ferry in previous years and would prefer to see two stops per week. In addition, a stop that connects Sitka to Angoon is necessary.

Throughout the years, through repeated letters and resolutions, Sitka has requested equitable service with the rest of the region – a baseline service level of at least two (2) north and two (2) south vessels per week. In this time of budget crisis, we look forward to working with AMHS and other Southeast communities to create a schedule that provides a parity of service. It is critical that this request and need be recognized and addressed by the State.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John M. Leach

Municipal Administrator

8/7/2020

Please find below a response to the attached letter to community leaders.

AML collaborated with our municipal leaders to produce a video that runs through for each community the importance of the local government and AMHS. We have attempted along the way to address Admiral Barrett's questions, but I believe what you will find is a strong interest in the outcomes of the Working Group and an interest in further engagement.

Here is the link to view or share and share with the AMHS Working Group - <https://vimeo.com/445391183/6a4968beb2>. Please note that while some of the information is older, it's an attempt at least to provide some additional information to you. The slides with the calendar dates aren't suggestive of an actual schedule, but are more a representation of what members communicated to the Northern Economics study and have updated as best they can. I think you'll see from the testimony what's worked and hasn't, how things may or may not need to be adjusted, and a willingness to figure things out together.

We have encouraged everyone still to communicate directly in response to Admiral Barrett's letter their own individual perspective.

Please let me know if you or any of the Working Group have any questions. I really hope that everyone will take the time to watch the video in its entirety, especially as there is some good discussion at the end, in my opinion.

Thanks again!

Nils Andreassen

Executive Director, Alaska Municipal League

8/9/2020

Please discard my letter of August 1 and replace it with this one; I found an error in the # of sailings recommended. We would actually be requesting 11, a decrease of 6 from the usual 17. This would be a 35% reduction in service. Thank you—Norm Carson Pelican, MTAB

Dear Admiral Barrett and Group Members:

Here is a response to Admiral Barrett's questions as presented in the letter of July 22nd:

Q. "What baseline of ferry service you believe is essential to support community, economic, and social well-being that cannot be met by other means."

I have been following the AMHS issues for several years now and recognize this year is very crucial for ferry service to the rural communities. During the past decade Pelican has traditionally seen two round trip sailings from Juneau during the summer schedule and one in the winter. There were some years where we received some extra sailings because the State budget could afford it. We had one summer where the Pelican route received heavy publicity and walk on fares were reduced, this did increase ridership and increased revenue. Critics argued the AMHS should not be acting as a tour boat; however, this did allow the route to earn more revenue and serve the community. If there were an AMHS boat that was designed more for the rural community routes, then we would see a better return at the fare box.

Specifically I believe the very baseline service Pelican requires is one sailing from Juneau in the months of March, April, May, June, July, September, October, November, and December. In the month of August; two sailings. In the months of January and February; no sailings. If this pattern were followed it would be a reduction from an average of 17 sailings in previous years to 11 sailings. This recommendation represents a 35% reduction in service; we cannot cut any further.

Having said the previous, this scenario allows an opportunity for strategic partnering and targeted service growth that in turn offers a winning opportunity for both the AMHS and Pelican's economy.

Pelican is served by regular floatplane service; this does not meet the need of shipping heavy freight in or out. We also know that air service is weather dependent; this is exacerbated in the winter months with shortened daylight hours. Pelican is not served by private barge service.

Service levels are influenced by local economy, population, culture, other transportation services, geography, etc. Pelican has a growing economy. The past decade has seen Yakobi Fisheries increase production of value added commercial fish product. There has been an expansion in the sport fishing lodge business, two new ones added and another increasing client capacity. In 1990 there were no sport fishing operations, today there are 8. The responsibility of local government has also increased, generally because of State or Federal mandate. Most notably these responsibilities are seen in safe domestic water, sewage treatment, garbage collection, and harbor maintenance. Pelican is fortunate to have one of the very few hydroelectric facilities found in any small Southeast community.

Pelican is a community with a very transient population. Granted we have lost population over the past 20 years; but our seasonal population has bounced upward. Yakobi Fisheries employs 24 workers at the peak of the commercial season; the sport fishing lodges employ approximately another 20 seasonal workers. Seasonal residents are another factor in Pelican's population; by my count that is approximately another 20 property owners that travel in and out of Pelican between March and December.

The commercial fish and sport businesses, along with local government responsibilities, have created the opportunity for other businesses to exist. The local café, the short term room rental, and the freight business based in Juneau are important factors in the local economy. The freight business brings approximately 30,000 pounds of freight to Pelican, loaded on 4 trucks of at least 30' transported on the ferry, each sailing during the summer months. Pelican hires two large septic trucks from Juneau annually to come and pump out the city's septic tank.

These are all statistics that one does not see in the Northern Economics Survey; indeed the Survey would lead you to believe that we are about to disappear. If there were a more appropriately sized ferry for the small communities, the essential level of service could be increased and incentivize more economic growth. The reality is that our communities have evolved into roll on roll off vehicle freight needs whether that be private or a freight business. Where frozen fish were once spilled into the hold of a freight boat, now vacuum packed frozen fillets are carefully put into 10 x 20 freezer containers, loaded onto a trailer, and towed onto the ferry. At Pelican our commercial fish processor is exporting annually a product valued at approximately two million dollars. We are long past the years of the 65' mail boat delivering mail and freight to the outlying communities, logging in 600 miles per week year round.

Q. "Should cost of service be a consideration?"

It should be considered as a level of service to be provided and from a management perspective is the method of delivery appropriate? Within this, the economy of the ports served should be considered. If service to a rural port were dropped, there would be a ripple effect to other communities as well as the one dropped. Until we come to grips with a more suitable vessel for the small ports then our best option is to define a minimal level of service with the vessels we currently have.

Q. "Can freight transport needs be met without transporting vehicles?"

No, we have adapted to the roll on roll off model. The unloading of freight at the face of a dock is not cost effective for the either the shipper or the receiver.

Q. "Is the movement of people, vehicles, or freight that is most important?"

Well, it is freight on a vehicle, be it a trailer or truck that is most important. Rolling freight is cheaper to handle and more efficient on either end. Sling loading lumber, machinery, boats, etc. is just not practical and especially not at each of the ports served.

Q. Governance model.

I support a public corporation similar in concept as to the one proposed by Southeast Conference.

Thank you for considering these comments and best wishes as this process moves forward.

Norm Carson Pelican

8/10/2020

Thank you for the opportunity to share about the impact of AMHS service and needs for the community of Cordova.

Cordova is a small, commercial fishing community, with no connection to the surface road system aside from the ferry. Home to Copper River Salmon, a high value fishery that is a vital part of the food chain, Cordova is currently the 11th largest seafood port in the U.S. with an annual ex-vessel value of \$95MM. Cordova has spent decades building over \$1 billion of infrastructure--including the largest commercial fishing fleet in Alaska--representing 750 small, independent business owners and hundreds of millions of dollars of private sector investments in seafood processing plants and shipping facilities. The AMHS is a key link that facilitates and improves the economics of these ventures, including the 350-plus Prince William Sound fishermen who live on the Alaska road system in communities like Wasilla (120), Homer (100), Anchorage (100) and others that need to get their families, boats, vehicles, and equipment back and forth to Cordova in the spring, fall and intervening timeframes.

Many aspects of the fishery rely on the marine highway to move staff, vehicles, boats, property, and equipment in and out of town. Coupled with a growing tourism industry and the vital presence of the US Coast Guard, Cordova experiences large seasonal influxes each year.

Cordova citizens enjoy a high quality of life, including access to an award-winning school district and year-round recreational activities in the Chugach National Forest and Prince William Sound. Cordova is poised for growth in both the seafood market and tourism. However, we recently endured 9 and a half months without ferry service, causing severe impacts to local businesses, cost of living, health, quality of life, and our school system.

For the community of Cordova, lack of usable, reliable AMHS service compromises the world-class seafood catching and processing business which threatens the economy and food security of our state and nation. Cordova is in jeopardy of slipping from the 11th largest seafood catching and processing port in the U.S. with an annual ex-vessel catch value of \$95,000,000 to 26th, where it ranked a decade ago. This at a time when City of Cordova port and harbor improvements and the newly developing fisheries and shellfish farms are positioned to move Cordova into the top 5 US seafood ports within 10 years to grow domestic strength.

A regular, dependable ferry service with a schedule that takes local business and civic needs into account has been shown to significantly stimulate economic growth both in Cordova and throughout the State of Alaska by connecting our citizens, businesses and our world class fishery to the southcentral and statewide infrastructure.

1. What baseline of ferry service do you believe is essential to support community, economic, and social well-being that cannot be met by other means (such as commercial air, and/or barge services)?
 - a. Cordova believes 3 departures per week can work in summer, at a minimum.
 - b. 1-2 departures per week can work in winter, as long as they accommodate tournament schedules.
 - c. However, Cordova would like to give input on the schedule to assure it fits our needs, which vary by season. If so, you'll see revenues double.
2. Does the need for ferry service significantly change between winter and summer?
 - a. Cordova is a highly seasonal community. Fishing needs and tourism are important in summer. School and personal needs (healthcare, business trips, and supply runs) are important in winter.
3. What frequency of service would address the essential service you need? For example, can your needs be met with a every two-week schedule?
 - a. A ferry every two weeks would definitely not fit Cordova's needs very well, and would result in less overall use of the marine highway, which is necessary both as an avenue of commerce for local businesses and as a vital roadway to fill critical personal needs for residents.
4. How frequently does your school use the ferry system?
 - a. In a typical year, on average, the school district uses the marine highway system for six roundtrips per month from August through May, commonly peaking in November and again in February, each averaging around a dozen trips.
 - b. Departing Thursday or Friday, returning Sunday would work best to accommodate ASAA schedules. That would fit Cordova's main winter festival as well.
5. Is it movement of people, vehicles, or freight that is most important to your community? Can your essential needs for freight transport be met without transporting vehicles?
 - a. It is difficult to answer whether the movement of people, vehicles, or freight are "most important" to Cordova. For personal uses, a vehicle is necessary as shuttle service from most PWS ports is basically non-existent, and car rentals are limited and costly.
 - b. Cordova's shelves are largely filled by box truck, which is freight that requires both a person and vehicle to move from Anchorage through the Whittier tunnel. In most instances, without a vehicle Cordovans cannot reach their destinations, which lie hundreds of miles beyond the ferry terminal and often involve a toll tunnel (where walking and biking are not permitted).

c. Other avenues of transporting freight exist but are much more costly and mostly bypass Alaska vendors, sending that money out of state.

6. Could a combination of alternating passenger and vehicle service address your requirements?

a. A combination of alternating passenger and vehicle service would not address Cordova's needs. People need their vehicles with them to get to their destination, whether it is to move goods, people, or services.

There is inherent value of the Alaska Marine Highway to serve Alaskan residents, businesses, and visitors:

- The AMHS is an INVESTMENT in Alaska. In 2014, the State of Alaska general fund contribution of \$117MM to the AMHS resulted in a total return on investment of \$273MM.

This is a return of more than 2 to 1 to the Alaska economy.

- The AMHS system benefits from business traffic from coastal communities like Cordova. Businesses in coastal communities use the AMHS to spend millions annually in Anchorage and with vendors statewide. Their alternative is to buy from Seattle and ship via Seattle barges. Not only does this expense burden small businesses, but it cuts economic output to Anchorage and other statewide vendors. For example, a local Cordovan restaurant & hotel owner estimates a savings of \$50,000-100,000 annually when running freight trucks directly to Anchorage via Whittier from Cordova. This business alone spends hundreds of thousands of dollars with Anchorage and in-state vendors each year. Copper River Seafoods, an Anchorage-based seafood processor that relies heavily on PWS fish, has spent as much as \$1.4 million in fares in a single year when schedules were reliably consistent.

- Six out of the top twelve ports in the U.S. by dollar value of seafood landings rely on AMHS to connect them to the surface road system. Seafood processing plants play a critical role in Alaska's economy and depend heavily on AMHS for transport of work crews, construction materials, and products. It is critical to maintain cost-efficient transportation for the companies and peoples investing in these seafood ports.

- AMHS plays an integral role in Alaska's visitor industry, carrying over 100,000 non-resident passengers annually and bringing in outside dollars to the state. Among those who entered and/or exited Alaska via AMHS, the average per-person spending was \$1,700. Applying this average to the roughly 17,000 ferry passengers who enter/exit Alaska via the ferry yields a total annual AMHS visitor spending estimate of \$29 million. Now is not the time to impose additional travel barriers on those wishing to support Alaska tourism businesses.

- AMHS users hail from across the state, not only port communities. Anchorage was the #2 source of AMHS trips booked; Palmer/Wasilla was #4 and Fairbanks was #7. Please be aware of the impact AMHS budget decisions will have on all Alaskan residents.

- Cordova recognizes the fact that the AMHS does need reform; however, much of the work has already been done! For two years, the AMHS Reform Initiative committee has worked diligently, dedicating countless hours to a comprehensive study completed by the McDowell Group and Elliot Bay Design Group. This honest approach to reform must be recognized and utilized as we work together to improve and fund the AMHS statewide.

- Cordova supports the policy recommendations clearly laid out in Mayor Koplin's white paper.

- Design vessels and support infrastructure specifically for the region they will serve

- Place the vessel and infrastructure in that region and keep it there

- Develop operating decisions (operations and maintenance) from the ground up

- Chart and Maintain a Strategic Course (governance and finance) for the System

- Provide reliable, consistent service

- Prioritize customer service and convenience, not system convenience

- Maximize the federal capital funding for the system.

While we appreciate the work the AMH Reshaping Group is doing, reliability and consistency is also extremely important. All parties must realize the impact it would make on our already fragile economy and state infrastructure to decimate or remove one of our primary modes of transportation within the State. Thank you for considering the community of Cordova's response and recommendations for the Alaska Marine Highway Working Group. We understand the considerable pressure on AMHS to deliver reliable regional service within the budget constraints the state is experiencing. It is not an easy task. We hope the working group will consider the guidance offered by local communities, not as self-serving recommendations but as a way to ensure system success. We believe there is a win-win solution that can be achieved.

Helen Howarth, City Manager, Cordova

8/10/2020

Dear Admiral Barrett:

We are writing in response to your request for information regarding basic level of ferry service for our community.

The Petersburg Economic Development Council (PEDC) is charged with leading economic development efforts for the Petersburg Borough. The PEDC is led by a 10-member board of directors representing a range of business interests. Our comments are focused on the AMHS role in economic development and supporting the business community.

REGIONAL COMMERCE For many years, the AMHS served as a “highway” allowing businesses to reach customers in many communities. Service providers, such as specialty contractors, inspectors, healthcare providers, etc., could travel with their vehicles, equipment, and supplies. Goods could be sold and shipped from Petersburg to large and small communities on a regular basis when there was regular, reliable, and affordable ferry service.

This level of ferry service no longer exists, and regional commerce has suffered as a result. Barge or air freight are the only available transportation options. Air freight works for small items but certainly not for contractors or larger goods. Intra-state barge service is cost prohibitive and is not a viable option for most small Alaskan retail businesses.

One way for the AMHS to promote commerce within the region is to include some sort of transfer service. Goods cannot be sent from Petersburg to Hoonah or to Southcentral Alaska because the AMHS does not provide a means to move an unaccompanied vehicle from one ferry to another in Juneau. A transfer service would broaden the reach of Petersburg’s regional businesses and increase service and competition for all.

SEAFOOD Petersburg is one of the top seafood ports in Alaska and in the nation. For several years, Petersburg processors were able to deliver fresh seafood to market using the AMHS. The AMHS provided a cost-effective and relatively quick access to these markets through its weekly Bellingham route and twice-weekly Prince Rupert route.

The reduction in ferry service severely restricted our processor’s ability to access the fresh market and the lack of ferry service during the last few months has greatly reduced landing and processing of certain fresh market products in Petersburg. Barge and air freight are the only available options. AML and Samson Tugs, while reliable, offer once per week service and add several days to shipping time, which is not acceptable when moving a fresh product. With the elimination of the combi-aircrafts, Alaska Airlines offers a once a week freight service into Petersburg. Coordinating seafood landing times and poundage with available space on the freighter hasn’t resulted in a workable situation for at least one of our major processors and continues to be a limiting factor for another of our mid-sized processors.

VISITOR INDUSTRY

We’ve spent considerable time and money marketing Petersburg as a great destination for independent travelers. The AMHS offered unique experiences for travelers, such as navigating the Wrangell Narrows that cannot be enjoyed from an airplane or from a large cruise ship. The AMHS offered flexibility, connections between smaller communities, and an attractive price point to potential visitors.

Unfortunately, limiting service to Bellingham, eliminating service to Prince Rupert, frequent cancellations, uncertainty over whether the ferry will operate, scheduling ferries on successive days but then having no service for a week all deter visitor travel and makes it difficult to convert our marketing efforts into our community as a viable destination for the independent traveler.

We are fortunate to have twice daily jet service into our community and the number of passengers disembarking at the airport have increased in recent years. Alaska Airlines does not provide enough lift capacity to make up for what we’ve lost in ferry traffic. Further, the cost of flying into Petersburg is significantly more than into larger communities placing us and other rural communities at a disadvantage.

Another way the AMHS could support the Visitor Industry is to partner with local businesses to offer unique experiences on the ferry. Cultivating private sector partnerships would amplify AMHS’s marketing and increase passenger numbers and revenue.

BASIC LEVEL OF SERVICE NEEDED

We certainly understand the enormity and complexity of the task before you and are hopeful this information will provide some understanding of the opportunities and challenges surrounding the AMHS and transportation options in our area.

We believe the basic level of service needed to support commercial activity in Petersburg is:

- 2 northbound and 2 southbound port calls per week connecting Petersburg to Bellingham and/or Prince Rupert to the South and Juneau/Skagway to the North.
- Coordinate mainline service to connect with routes to smaller communities and to Southcentral.
- Transfer service so goods could be moved from one ferry to another to facilitate regional and statewide commerce.

Board of Directors Petersburg Economic Development Council

8/12/2020

Good afternoon from Kake Alaska, my name is Joel Jackson the President of the Organized Village of Kake the federally recognized tribe. We depend heavily on the ferry system it's our Highway here in southeast Alaska, to cut services is like shutting down roads in the interior of Alaska. We have the hardest time traveling in the winter because of bad weather the planes can't fly, our elders needing to go to the hospital the only way is by ferry, going to shop in Juneau or our school children hopefully will get to resume sports shortly, so as you all can see we rely heavily in the ferry. Thank you for your time, keep our ferries running. Joel Jackson

8/12/2020

Hello, Maybe we need to look at other states. Such as Washington State. R.Gaona

8/14/2020

AMHS, Reshaping Work Group

Dear Group, I worked as a Chief Purser with the AMHS from May 16 1964 to April 12 1999. During my career I served as a Patrolman and then Regional Director for 8 years total with the Inland Boatman's Union of the Pacific. From 1982-1984 I worked relief Chief Purser on all the vessels. 1985-1987 IBU Regional Director. 1988-1991 Chief Purser on the Malaspina. 1992-1999 I worked as Chief Purser on M/V Aurora. I would like to share some scheduling ideas with this group. My passion for the ferry system and the great people of Alaska who depend on the continued service of the AMHS, has not diminished with retirement. I sincerely hope that some of what I have proposed here can be of use as your task force strives to come up with crucial solutions for the communities of Alaska who depend on the AMHS. Assuming normalcy in a post-COVID future and more budget flexibility the following minimum summer schedule is proposed for your consideration. During our current COVID crisis, service to outlying communities is more critical than ever. The proposed schedule would provide connected routing for all vessels. Through routing of vessels from Bellingham to Skagway and from Bellingham to Whittier would cease, this would result in significant increases in service. Service in and out of Whittier would double. Service out of Bellingham would be twice weekly. If implemented it would dramatically increase frequency of service and potential revenue.

Since AMHS moved from Seattle, the potential to double service out of Bellingham exists. Approximately 12 hours of run time was eliminated. Normal run times for the Columbia from Bellingham to Ketchikan is about 36-38 hours. This would allow two round trips from Bellingham to Ketchikan in one week with at least 4-6 hours of turnaround time at each port. The Columbia would feed traffic for ports North of Ketchikan, for the Matanuska and Kennicott. The Matanuska and Kennicott would feed Bellingham traffic to the Columbia southbound. This results in an additional sailing every two weeks out of Bellingham. So the Kennicott would use Ketchikan as a Southern terminus. On one of the Columbia sailings out of Bellingham it would connect with the Kennicott. The Columbia would pick up Whittier and Yakutat traffic to deliver to the Kennicott in Ketchikan. Since the Kennicott would not be on a through voyage from Bellingham to Whittier, it would be able to service Whittier once a week instead of only once every two weeks. It could make the round trip from Ketchikan to Juneau, Yakutat, Whittier and back to Juneau and Ketchikan in one week instead of two weeks. The Kennicott could, within this schedule, make the Juneau to Ketchikan transit via Sitka replacing the absence of the Columbia's current schedule Southbound out of Sitka. Also the Kennicott could service Sitka from the ocean, if need be, eliminating slack-tide concerns in Sturgis Narrows. The Tustumena could likewise be scheduled on a weekly basis from Kodiak to Homer so that Kodiak traffic could access Kennicott's Whittier sailing via land road from Homer to Whittier. Kodiak would receive Whittier access once a week instead of every two weeks. The Aurora would run from Cordova to Whittier, via Valdez and connect with the Kennicott so that both Prince William Sound and Kodiak Island were accessible to the Kennicott instead of the Kennicott having to service Southwest ports out of Whittier under the current schedule. The Columbia would only have four ports of call in one week, Bellingham to Ketchikan, Ketchikan to Bellingham and back to Ketchikan. All of the routing North of Ketchikan would be eliminated. All the minus-tide restrictions in the Wrangell Narrows would be eliminated. The slack-tide schedule restrictions in Sturgis Narrows would also be eliminated. The Matanuska would connect with the Columbia on one Columbia sailing from Bellingham to Ketchikan and take Bellingham traffic destined for Wrangell, Petersburg, Sitka and Juneau. The situation with Prince Rupert being as it is, with no service currently, and nothing projected in the future the Matanuska would not need to go to Prince Rupert freeing up approximately 12 hours of running time. The Matanuska would be able to make three round trips between Ketchikan and Juneau via Wrangell and Petersburg every week instead of two every week. One of the trips the Matanuska would stop in Sitka northbound so that Sitka would have mainline service once a week, Northbound. Southbound the Kennicott and Matanuska would connect with feeder ferry traffic from Skagway and Haines. Alaska Class Ferries or possibly the Malaspina, depending upon its future availability, could provide service for Haines and Skagway.

The benefits and the advantages are considerable mainly because of the increased frequency of service resulting in more commerce potential for all communities serviced by the Alaska Marine Highway System. During the summer of 2019 the Matanuska, the Columbia and the Kennicott were all in service. It should be noted that the cost of operating all three vessels should not increase by any degree of significance with this proposed schedule. Four to six hours of turnaround time in Bellingham, for the Columbia should work. Loading the Columbia in Bellingham would be much less time consuming because all vehicle traffic would be loaded for one port instead of seven ports. The amount of vehicle traffic in the Bellingham staging area would dictate the need to use the upper car deck. If the Columbia's main car deck can accommodate all the vehicles in the Bellingham staging area there is no need for the time-consuming and labor intensive process of loading the upper car deck. With two sailings out of Bellingham, they could even consider eliminating using the upper car deck due to the fact that they would be taking considerably more traffic North because of two sailings per week.

Suggestions to mitigate the inconvenience of passenger and vehicle ship to ship transfers in Ketchikan.

1. Try Scheduling both Ketchikan arrivals during daylight hours.
2. Consider availability of a local work crew to assist the ships crew clean and make up cabins in Bellingham and Ketchikan. Also in Ketchikan shoreside help with baggage handling may be needed. It should be noted that using a local work crew to help clean and make up cabins on short turn-arounds, is not unprecedented. We used such a work crew on short turn-arounds in Prince Rupert in the past.
3. Transferring passengers would be expected to be ashore for several hours in Ketchikan which would provide opportunity for various tours and local businesses could provide amenities.

The following are additional ideas for the future security of the AMHS:

1. Recognize the AMHS as a major part of Alaska's Highway infrastructure.
2. Recognize continuity of minimum annual scheduling levels as critical to maintaining service and increasing ridership revenue.
3. Recognize that political influence over management, scheduling and budgeting is detrimental to items 1 & 2.
4. Enact legislation to remedy the problem.

Travel and commerce are two priorities of any major highway. AMHS has a third priority, revenue. Revenue should increase significantly with more service to Bellingham and Whittier. AMHS additional operational costs should be minimal since all three mainline vessels are in service with this scheduling proposal and there could be operational savings. As long as COVID remains a huge problem and with Canada addressing COVID by closing their borders, the Alaska Marine Highway System becomes even more crucial to the communities it serves and to the entire state of Alaska. The CARES act money should be considered in funding the AMHS due to Alaska residents being critically impacted by Canada closing their borders. Side-note. Regarding cost of operation of the AMHS. We always hear about the price of oil and contract negotiation, crew, and all these astronomical costs, including ridership being down, not getting the revenue they use to etc. A significant cost to operating the ferry system since 911 is the expense of federal security and safety regulations that the AMHS has had to absorb as a result of the terrorist attack. These costs are significant as was pointed out to me by a retired AMHS Captain. Homer H. Sarber, Retired AMHS Chief Purser

8/15/2020

Dear DOT/AMHS and interested parties,

I believe I've written more letters/emails commenting on the AMHS than on any other single subject. It's ridiculous that Alaskan residents have to continually fight for this marine highway and that the Dunleavy administration in particular still just doesn't get how vital a role it plays in the life of Southeast Alaska (SEAK) residents and other coastal community folks. We are all weary and angry over this continuing baloney now reflected in the DOT Operating Plan for Winter 2020 - 2021.

It's alarming that once again many communities are stated in the plan to be without service for 2 months or even the whole winter. As the Coast Alaska August 10 report says, "In most cases, only one ferry will be assigned to each route with no slack in the system," (see Alaska ferry planners working on lean winter schedule - KCAW). The same situation last winter created much hardship and dysfunction. It's ridiculous that you've asked for comment without providing a full schedule. And if that full schedule is released after this prior comment period without opportunity to comment further before finalizing, you're going to have a bunch of even more angry people at hand.

How about cutting off the interior Parks Highway entirely for months at a time? How about abruptly closing it to all drivers periodically because the maintenance hasn't been kept up or you decided the money was better spent elsewhere? That's pretty much what has been done to much of the ferry system fairly regularly for the last few seasons, strangling SEAK, Prince William Sound, and other locations from accessing medical facilities, businesses, food resources, family, and other essentials. And now taking it a step further as implied in this current operational plan for the AMHS, by analogy, how about not announcing when or if the Parks Highway will be open any given day?

Now in COVID times, in particular, Haines and Skagway are newly and completely isolated without the ferry because the closed border eliminates use of the highway. Planes often don't fly because of weather in all our coastal towns, even in summer. This past Sunday I had a trip planned to provide medical escort by ferry from Haines to Juneau on the LeConte for services not available at the local clinic. The vessel run was cancelled due to crew C-19 infection, no replacement or back up was available (a key complaint in past comment periods), we couldn't fly due to weather, and so the surgery had to be cancelled. You can imagine that's not necessarily easy to reschedule. It was highly inconvenient, stressful, and can be downright dangerous in some cases. Numerous examples of similar occurrences (including the 2019 ferry strike that wreaked havoc on travel, small businesses, and scheduled events during the SEAK State Fair) were reported in residents' comments over the last 2 years as we have struggled to sustain ferry service.

The budget crisis is a reality, I get that. But the AMHS is an essential service, it's infrastructure that makes life work in the communities that have ferry service, but no road, and with limitations to air travel (most towns only have small airports or floatplanes, which are highly weather dependent). Partly by providing ferry service, the state attracted and promoted desired population growth since the AMHS planning process during the 50's and in every boom & bust surge we've had since (like post-statehood population growth, the pipeline, and other economic enticements). Ferries brought people in from Outside to work or relocate or do military service. Ferries transported locals to and from the interior and between coastal communities for jobs and recreation. Not to mention ferry tourism that has brought millions of \$ to the entire state, not just to the coastal ferry terminal ports.

The state's recent neglect to maintain and replace vessels, along with the lack of forward planning to keep the system smoothly operating has caused considerable hardship across Alaska. Coastal residents should not bear the brunt of a situation that resulted from government mismanagement that began years even before the Dunleavy administration. There is no comparable condition for the land-based highways of Alaska- they just keep on operating, even when earthquakes abruptly destroy parts of them (as in late 2018, when repairs were immediately implemented to get people back on the road ASAP). Why isn't the AMHS, so vital for transportation to residents in the coastal areas of the state, given the same value and respect? We've spent plenty of money on plenty of studies that all indicated the vital role of AMHS.

As to reduced revenues, the current dire situation can't be placed only on COVID's shoulders. This tough spot came from a long progression of budget reductions and mismanagement. Part of the ferry management should be to buffer lean years for whatever reason, not just the extreme current case of COVID restrictions. The AMHS has also been supported by federal dollars, some of which have been squandered - inappropriate vessel designs, new terminals like in Haines virtually unused. Where is the AMHS

proportional percentage of Alaska's federal highway funds currently? And how about explaining why there's no info about the possibility of CARES funds providing support to the ferry system?

Now on to the current operational plan. I am extremely disappointed to find little detail in the plan. I'm disturbed that you only gave us a few days to comment on a general plan instead of a schedule. We need to know how many weekly ferry visits each community will receive in order to comment on the schedule adequacy, not just the general plan. We need to know WHICH days so we can plan trips, so we can know if the schedule will work to keep life going. So many seasonal residents and college students use the ferry to go south in the fall or winter. How can they schedule those trips? Will there be regular scheduled stops at each port? If we don't have a ferry on a given day or week, will it be because you have no plan or because you changed your mind or because something failed? Maybe you think if we have no expectations we can't complain. It's all preposterous and seems like a silly and ineffective way to do business with the public.

We need to know the details and exceptions to the general schedule outlined in the operating plan. We need an explanation of why there is so much layup time for most boats. We need to know what the status and longterm plans are for the Tazlina, Hubbard and Columbia that show no service in this period, and what is the plan for the Malaspina that went into longterm unmanned layup in Ketchikan last fall (as far as I know). You don't provide that info. Releasing this skeleton operational plan for a 6-month period BEFORE we have been told the recommendations of the governor's latest AMHS Reshaping Workgroup team is also not helpful. The latest info I'm aware of is from mid-July ("Marine highway advisory group seeks to right-size Alaska's ferry fleet", July 19, 2020 by Jacob Resneck, CoastAlaska; Marine highway advisory group seeks to right-size Alaska's ferry fleet).

I sincerely hope this letter gives you an idea how concerned and fed up people like me, a lifelong, ferry-dependent, coastal Alaskan, are about the ferry system's continuing crisis and the state's failure to FIX IT! Our essential infrastructure and service needs did not stop just because COVID hit us.

Molly Sturdevant
Haines, Alaska

8/21/2020

Dear AMHS Work Group,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Please do not disregard our comments as we are not Alaska residents. Our son lives in Juneau and we have become captivated by southeast Alaska. We have spent most of our past 8 summers there except for this current summer. Please consider our comments as experienced travelers and people who appreciate and understand much about Alaska, including history, people, remote places, and past and present economic conditions. Hopefully we can represent a "knowledgeable visitor" viewpoint.

AMHS is our cruise ship. Only better. We have enjoyed not only the incredible scenery, but getting to know the boat crews and other passengers. We have visited most every port in SEAK except Pelican. With cruise ships and air travel becoming less desirable (they have never been desirable for us...), we believe tourism represents an important funding and sustaining source for AMHS. We understand that the primary purpose is to serve Alaskans, especially in small, remote communities, and we agree with this priority. Please don't neglect Hoonah, Petersburg, Gustavus, Kake or the many other small communities where AMHS is their lifeblood.

Consider evaluating where AMHS profits from visitors such as us. Market to people who do not yet know the pleasure of sharing space on a ferry with working Alaskans or a young passenger going to spend a week with Grandmom. Bump fares up a bit if necessary, and even consider a surcharge (if legal) for out-of-state passengers and vehicles. Make sailings less frequent if necessary, but don't drop ports. We have enjoyed many a sailing from Prince Rupert (yes, we understand the latest security issues and costs) and seen fairly full boats.

It sounds like reason is prevailing and we wish you good luck with these future plans. If we can be of further assistance for brainstorming, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Ken and Claire Oravsky, Billings, MO

8/22/2020

Dear Sirs;

Please consider how much the AMH effects the very livelihood of Cordova due to its impact on the economic, educational, social, and health of its citizens and taxpayers. Many "old timers" of the community have pulled up stakes and moving out of the community due to the infrequency and unpredictability of the ferry service in recent years. The citizens depend on the ferry to provide economical transportation to obtain household goods and products from Anchorage at an affordable cost. As the ferry cuts back on services to our community so does the influx of tourists and new population to the community. A lot more people are moving out of the town of Cordova than moving into it, largely due to the infrequency and unpredictability of the ferry system.

PLEASE support our community when determining the upcoming schedule.

Thank you; Concerned citizen

8/22/2020

It has been said that use of ferries is down. I say, of course. The Marine Hwy has decreased the number of ferries and therefore decreased service which in turn has decreased ridership even more. Gone are the days when Sitka and surrounding communities could use ferries exclusively to allow our youths to compete in music, athletics and academics. Ten/fifteen years ago one could send the team/group to a nearby community and get them back in a 3 day period. Now, it takes longer and parents have to weigh whether their student is allowed to compete or if that student will have to stay home because of too many school days being lost.

I used to be that I could take the ferry at night, sleep on the ferry, arrive in Juneau the next morning, drive off the ferry, shop, hike and have the latest recall done on my car and be back on the ferry Sunday night arriving early Monday morning in time for work, now I'm lucky if I can get back in 2 weeks. The ferry was a source of transportation, now it is a luxury. The fast ferries were supposed to improve things. One was supposed to be home docked in Sitka and all of a sudden it was docked in Juneau. I know that these issues do not affect the daily lives of the rest of Alaska, but please understand that it is not just your bottom line, but Sitka's and the rest of Southeast AK as well.

How can we improve our ferry system, economically, provide employment, provide transportation and provide the rest of the USA a unique way of seeing southeast Alaska?

I really do hope that you take my points seriously and try to address them.

Gale Kehres

8/23/2020

I read your commentary in the Alaska News, but am unclear what the specific changes are to the ferry system. As you know, Kodiak relies on the ferry for many essential needs. Would you please list the specific changes you are making to the ferry system.

Thank you, Fran March

8/23/2020

To whom it may concern,

Travel using the Alaska Marine Highway is vital to communities all along the Aleutian Chain. Having grown up in Sand Point and having the opportunity to use the ferry Tustumena all my life it is imperative to continue this service. People in the communities it stops in rely on constant service from the AMH. From visiting relatives, transporting vehicles and goods, and tourism the services received over my last 50 years has varied but has been always used and valued! Continue this service to the villages it serves, including Kodiak, it is essential.

Jennifer Eubank

8/23/2020

I am a retired professional ship manager. I have worked for many shipping companies both foreign and domestic. To operate efficiently, an operator must utilize the ships in a steady fashion. The costs of ship maintenance are high so it makes no sense to invest in the maintenance then not utilize the ship. An efficient ship operation will NOT have any long term layoffs. Ships need to be in operation year round.

To establish an efficient operation, you need to identify the number of vessels needed, then get rid of all excess ships. For long term planning, there needs to be consistent direction; changing political administrations devastates the efficiency.

Paul Johnsen

8/24/2020

Here is my input about the future of the Alaska Marine Highway System. It is simple to say and not easy to implement: It needs to be reliable and serve Alaska's key coastal communities who have no other means of transportation service besides air transportation. By "key" I mean places like Cordova, which inexplicably is not receiving ferry service this winter. It does not need to be profitable. The service does not need to be daily or even every other day, but it needs to be regular. The cost to the customer needs to be reasonable, both for freight/vehicles as well as for the individual. The ferries need to be better maintained to prevent the long period of time they are under repair and out of service. Some should continue year round.

I personally, fortunately, do not depend on ferry service for my daily or regular needs. However, thousands of people in Alaska do. I also take ferries frequently throughout the state for recreational purposes, to get to a cabin, a lodge, a campsite, a town.

Carol Johnson

8/24/2020

Thank you for the work you are doing. It is an honest attempt to revise the AMHS under trying circumstances.

It is very unfortunate that the team was not able to go to Ketchikan and work directly with the management team. Examining options/ideas directly with the Port Captains, Route scheduler, Passenger Services folks, Engineers, Officers, Crew Schedulers and Budget Managers would have been extremely valuable to the Reshaping team. Focused and direct questions/ answers are missing from this effort, and it is hurting the process. Without hearing and dissecting the operational/contractual challenges that add cost and confusion to the management of the system in a direct discussion, it is almost impossible to fully understand the intricacies of the AMHS as it exists today. Please take a hard look at getting the two teams together in a safe, controlled way before you have finished your work. It is a critical missing link in this process.

I hope that the priorities of the reshaping team are designing a funding mechanism that doesn't shift with political winds or individual Legislators wishes. I have experienced both up close and personal, and in both cases operational decisions were made that AMHS staff knew were not in the best interests of the system or the state. This interference is real, and it is destructive to the morale of good people who are trying to do the right thing. It is destructive to the relationship between management and the ships crew. Canada had much of the same problems and they changed their process for the better. In a nutshell their Ferry managers provide routes with a dollar amount and their parliament approves the funding, and stay out of the managers way. They have a schedule for ship replacement that is foundational to their planning, and they stick with it.

Contracts with the three Unions have become complex and arguable in almost every way possible. An inch becomes a mile with every change, and there is no mutual benefit, just mutual distrust. The IBU squandered most of the good will that had been so public when the original AMHS budget slash was released. They took the advice of their Union rep from San Francisco and went on strike for minimal changes in their contract at the most important time of the year for system revenue and visitor/community travel. That was an incredibly stupid mistake, and it cost their customers dearly when they could least afford it. The animosity between the employer and the employee's has damaged the system's functionality in tangible ways, and it must be addressed. I will leave that there.

Cost savings are possible, even while re-opening bars onboard vessels. The system of procuring food and alcohol that has been created over time is a waste of time and money. Real progress was in the works to clean up and organize this part of the system, but it has stopped completely in the past year. Take the Kennecott for instance. If you have the cashier in the dining room check ID before entering the bar (you close the door in the walkway from the outside, not the inside) and pay that cashier 20\$ for a card that you insert into the cocktail/beer or wine machine in the bar, you have an adult service without the cost of a bar tender (or two).

You can change the procurement rules to encourage local breweries/distilleries and restaurants to supply food and drink directly to some vessel's and share the revenues. They get free advertising and the ferry supports Alaskan small business and saves money by not having to warehouse liquor/beer/ food or have ship's crew making sandwiches/pastries to sell. This would work exceptionally well on the day boat's Tazlina and Hubbard.

If the two new Alaska class ferries listed above have crew quarters installed (draft engineering was done over almost two years ago) the system now has two new vessels that can serve the Canal and PWS with some minor dock improvements. No lost service when a ship is late coming out of overhaul or has mechanical issues that take her out of service. Without the additional quarters, you are stuck with two day boats in a system that only has two day boat routes (Metlikatla). If, in the future a new terminal and road is constructed at Berners Bay, you simply don't crew the vessel for longer runs. If there is an avalanche (rock or snow) along the way from Berner Bay to Juneau, you crew the vessel accordingly using the quarters and continue to serve Skagway and Haines.

Again, thank you for your service and passion. It is greatly appreciated by many. Shirley Marquardt, Executive Director, SouthWest Alaska Municipal Conference (SWAMC)

8/24/2020

I live in Haines, I don't travel much and I'm writing because a friend has asked me to. We think that even someone like myself who hardly travels has a point of view that matters within the whole picture. I'm seeing that Haines will always have some ferry service this winter, so I can say lucky us! I feel for those communities totally shut out or with sizable gaps.

This reminds of how budget cuts are going in Haines. There's one voice in the community asking that cuts happen evenly across all departments and all entities that the borough has traditionally supported. I think he has a good point, the majority of the assembly members think differently. Somehow they act as if they've got the last word on what's important to the community. It feels like partisan politics and that feels badly.

I hope AMHS is not run like that and I would like to see a calendar without any communities totally losing ferry service.

Thank you, Evelyn Vignola

8/24/2020

Greetings:

In terms of economic development and work transportation, a ferry three times a week between Haines & Juneau is minimum. It cannot be just surrounding a weekend. Many need to get to Juneau during the work week for a few days and then return. Juneau is too expensive to spend the whole week in hotels and restaurants.

A Monday, Wednesday, Friday schedule would allow Haines to work in Juneau and also go to Juneau for weekend events and not completely be left out of economic growth. It would also allow consistent transportation for those needing to access the road to Anchorage and Fairbanks, as well as military relocation needs. This is especially important in the winter when flying is very unreliable and the private boat options do not exist.

Thank you, Lenise Henderson - Haines, AK.

8/24/2020

Please bring back our previous Ferry Services. Since Alaskan communities are mostly small communities not on the road system our Marine Highway System is a vital network for everyday life in the villages and small communities.

If our services are not restored I fear our way of life and Alaska's Core will become extinct. This Gentrification will ruin tourism and Alaska as we know it. Small villages and towns will no longer exist everyone will be forced to leave; relocating to the three biggest cities in Alaska. Residents cannot afford to fly everywhere and supplies and groceries brought on the ferries is vital. Residents should not be excluded from a normal life. Alaskans that live on the road system are not more deserving of basic need; transportation to medical care and access to supplies. Being rural should not be an offense; excluded from connection to the rest of our great State of Alaska in this modern world.

Many of these residents are our 1st peoples. I sincerely hope our State Marine Highway Transportation System is not being neglected and destroyed partially because of racism and white privilege. Either way it is not fair that the larger cities in Alaska and those on the road system have more privilege than the rest of the residents. People live in these rural coast areas too. Many families for generations --much longer than most.

PS: The smaller "Fast Ferries" are a boondoggle and a bad idea as they are not reliable in Alaska's big open seas; where cold and storms are too much for them. They have and will continue to cost too much. Some school teams have been stranded in Southeast Alaska a while back when a big Ferry broke down and the coaches refused to put them on the "Fast Ferries" because it is too dangerous in bad weather.

Sincerely-- Dru Sorenson (Sourdough Dru)

Hope, Alaska

8/24/2020

Dear Sirs,
 All individuals in communities within SEAK have been negatively affected for the multiple years as the dependability, service, and schedule for transportation has been in decline. Many individuals have voiced how it has negatively affected their access to family, work, recreation, and resources.

I work as an Emergency Programs Coordinator for the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ). The decline in AMHS service has left SEAK vulnerable in the face of many types of emergencies and disasters. CBJ utilized Federal Grant funding to procure mobile Emergency Shelters and Disaster Supplies and strategically staged these resources in seven communities through SEAK. The intent was for each system to serve the community it is staged in, smaller communities that are near, or be combined with any or all the other systems to create a large shelter that can serve a bigger population. These systems are stored in large trailers and storage units so they are quickly mobilized. We facilitated training and exercises in remote communities in SEAK to have teams ready to utilize this resource when needed. These systems can be efficiently transported utilizing the AMHS, to remote communities with no airstrip or only small aircraft capabilities, as well as to larger communities. They are difficult or impossible to transport on aircraft, without enlisting the Air National Guard. The current COVID pandemic is a good example of when these systems are being used in small communities as a quarantine/isolation shelter, testing sites, and supply storage. The AMHS Ferry's could also be utilized as self-contained floating shelters for communities in a disaster where sheltering on land is compromised. For example if an earthquake or landslide separated the community from vital resources.

AMHS is an important asset to those in SEAK in both everyday living needs and emergency/disaster support for our SEAK Communities. SEAK communities whether large or small have only air or water access. That means we are transportation vulnerable and have many challenges to overcome. The AMHS provides a vital role in filling this vulnerability. This resource must be restored to a dependable asset that supports our communities. I support making a robust budget a priority to reverse the pasts oversight and neglect of this vital resource in Alaska. Thank you, Michelle Brown, Emergency Programs Coordinator, City & Borough of Juneau

8/24/2020

Hello my name is Jeff Snedgen. I am a builder in and resident of Seldovia, Alaska. Here in Seldovia all of our building materials and other goods come from Homer or beyond. We rely on the ferry to bring those materials to us.

I can envision a reduced number of landings but having no ferry service at all to Seldovia would financially devastate the town. A reliable year-round ferry service is crucial to our survival. Thanks for your time

Jeffrey Wayne Snedgen

8/24/2020

To whom it may concern:

This is a note from me asking you to strengthen and not weaken the ferry system. So many people and businesses in Southeast depend on this marine highway. If you need to make cuts this is not the place to do it. Look how much you have already stripped the service to its bare bones. These communities are where Alaskans live and it's YOUR job to serve them. Thank you for reading my email. Please do not make more cuts to the ferry system —if anything it needs beefing up.

Denise Carroll

8/24/2020

I have lived in SE Alaska for 35 years and have extensively made use the ferry system for work and travel. I have been dismayed by the decline in service and neglect of this vital transportation and economic link. It is a shame that the system was not designed to be more effective and leaner when there was funding to chart a better operating plan for the system.

The ferry system has invested in mainline ferries of differing sizes, fast-ferries and now dayboats. I am shocked to see ferries fail due top deferred maintenance. How is this not properly budgeted and planned by the AMHS? The changes in ferry types has not resulted in a better, more effective and streamlined system. It is time to get it right, without wasting funds studying the problem to death. There are numerous examples of well-run ferry systems in the world. It is time to join their ranks by deciding the best boats to serve our community and develop a plan for moving the system to that level.

I feel the system is wrought with inefficiencies. The on-line ticketing and scheduling system has too many schedules and is too challenging, even for locals, to easily plan and book a trip. There have to be successful models we can emulate. It also makes no sense to book and print documents online but also show up early to stand in line at the ticket window at the terminal to finalize the documents. On-stop online reservation and boarding documents should be mandatory.

It is frustrating to go through the boarding process. Other ferry systems allow simple drive-on and off with minimal guidance. Why does ours require several people to direct the queuing area, even more directing loading on the vehicle deck and others directing people off the vehicle deck. It should be much more intuitive and straight-forward and efficient. I recommend designing the boats and facilities so any empty ferry can be loaded in less than 30 minutes.

I often take a bike or kayak on the ferry and I am discouraged that I pay extra for these items but none of the ferries have appropriate facilities for securing them. I am willing to pay for service but if I am charged, service should be provided. I have literally been told to "put it over there against the equipment" too many times. My bikes and kayaks cost more than many of the cars that are neatly parked in a line. These items deserve proper accommodations or should be free.

I do not need cabins, food service or bars. I think it is appropriate to streamline these services so we can have an effective transportation system. Perhaps local food carts to serve ferry passengers everything from coffee to gourmet take-on food rather than serve food on-board. This would only work if the loading/unloading is made more efficient. Thank you. Jim Rehfeldt

8/24/2020

Hello, I am a lifelong Alaskan, I do not live in a Coastal Community but I have used our ferries for both recreational and freight needs. I am full support of maintaining and improving the Marine Highway system however, it is clear that adjustments will be warranted. My suggestion or perhaps questions is, why don't we shift to a more needs base system rather than one that is convenient or nice to have?

Specifically, could we not eliminate one or two of the road accessed ports in Southcentral Alaska? Do we really need service, Homer, Whittier and Valdez? Correct me if I'm wrong but at one time Seward was served as well and was cut from service; I am among for some of the very same thinking. In the same line of thinking, could we not eliminate service to either Haines or Skagway? Not sure if this would create a significant savings but on can in a matter of hours drive between the two communities to catch a Ferry if need be. Finally, the big question is why we have service all the way to Washington State, this seems like an exorbitant expense, of fuel, labor, wear and tear on equipment that is already old, not to mention maintaining the facilities a 1000 miles from Alaska. Mind you if one absolutely needs to use a ferry or wants to, BC Ferries runs on a basic parallel path, AMHS could resume service to Prince Rupert the end of the line for BC ferries.

With what I would call a realignment or restructuring, Alaska Ferries could now focus on better and more frequent service to the communities that need Ferries instead of being stretched thin as it is now and one that is inefficient.

Put in the perspective of my desires, I and my family will use the Ferry again to access Southeast or perhaps Kodiak or Cordova but if I have to drive to Homer or Skagway instead of Whittier and Haines, then I'll simply adjust my trip; would rather have a vibrant and functioning system. I think of it as similar to the restructuring of our city transit system here in Anchorage a few years back, we shifted from a sporadic nice to have system to one that is for needs, and is more user friendly. Buses now arrive every 15 minutes instead of one an hour and ridership is up.

I think you for your efforts and consideration.

Cordially, Shawn O'Donnell.

8/25/2020

Greetings

My suggestion for cost cuts would be to eliminate One of two road access terminals in PWS. This same cost cutting thinking did away with one of two road access points in Cook Inlet about twenty years ago. CI used to have a terminal at Seward and Homer. Seward terminal was eliminated almost 20 years ago. PWS used to only have on road access terminal from 1963 to around 2000 which was Valdez.

Since Whittier became a full access terminal it has become a double edge sword. It would seem the Valdez terminal could be eliminated. Although it is argued that is a high tourist route, between Whittier and Valdez. But I suggest it should be eliminated due to the fact that there is a road between Whittier and Valdez. If tourists want to transit PWS they could still sail Whittier to Cordova and then Cordova to Whittier.

If there was only the Whittier terminal used it would still service the gulf cross sailing. Take the political aspect of Whittier- Valdez and Valdez-Whittier out of the equation. My next suggestion would be to run one ship for two weeks a month in the winter with sailings closer together so that ridership would increase. Passengers need to sail out and back into communities for a few days at a time (3, 4 or 5 days) The current PWS sailing schedule of two weeks between sailings results in no workable schedule for rides. Passengers cannot afford to be gone for two full weeks and can't get off work and school for that long. So in the winter it could run two weeks on and then docked for two weeks. It would mean less crew needed for continuous coverage. If the vessel serviced between Cordova -Whittier one day then overnight at Whittier dock and then vice versa. It then could service Cordova to Tattilek to Cordova and On other days Whittier to Chenega to Whittier.

Suggesting two Cordova -Whittier- A week

Two Whittier-Cordova - a week

One Whittier to Chenega -Whittier - A week

One Cordova to Tattilek - Cordova - A week

Having the ship lay at Cordova & Whittier at night. Crews would sleep and could do crew changes at Whittier lay overs. Summer would be sailings all four weeks per month. Winter sailing would be two weeks sailings per month.

I've been using the ferry in PWS since 1966. I own a commercial fishing vessel with my husband that is a tender/crabber/long liner. I've helped in the operation of our vessels since 1980 and if the PWS ferry were a private enterprise and I was a part of what and how it would operate to be more cost effective, this is what I would implement. In recent years the AMHS has turned into a political football with politicians directing sailings and ship design to feed their district tourists. It was first designed and enacted by our state founding fathers for transportation to communities that did not have road access and to save lives from deaths by air travel especially in winter. Please eliminate all sailing between two ports that have road access. It is duplicating infrastructure that we can no longer afford. i.e. Whittier to Valdez, Valdez to Whittier. Thanks for hearing my suggestion. - Denise Branshaw, Cordova, Alaska

PS: I have family in Valdez. Cordova and Valdez are connected by business, families, community sports, etc. I am looking at the bottom line on this issue. It is what I would suggest even though my grown children and my school age grandchildren being in Valdez.

You see for many years now already we have not been able to go between Cordova and Valdez due to the schedule doesn't go that direction and if it does we get charged two sailing at double cost meaning we would have to sail to Whittier, stay on the ship and sail to Valdez. Cordovans who want to go to Valdez get off at Whittier and drive. So the tourists can sail from Whittier to Valdez!! That really is ludicrous, don't you think? Well Cordovans think it is!!

Just all food for thought!

Denise Branshaw

8/25/2020

I am writing to ask your working group to support a ferry system that covers all communities in SE Alaska and the more northern communities that have thrived with a constant ferry service for the past some 50 years. When you take away the ferry service you take away the stability of these communities. Jobs, services like construction, plumbing, mechanics, and small businesses being able to keep supplies to provide to their patrons, ferries are needed to keep the supply chain going. Not having ferries compromises people's health by not giving them access to see doctors or needed medical care. Some people are not able to fly or can't afford the cost of flying.

I hope that you consider a schedule to keep Gustavus moving this winter and in the future. I believe that Gustavus would benefit most from having a Monday and Thursday schedule. This allows each week a chance to go to Juneau for medical appointments and shopping and being able to return in a reasonable time. This gives the option of travel Monday to Thursday and Thursday to Monday.

Please take into consideration the comments you receive from the public and the comments you hear from your upcoming meetings. Please do not come into these meetings with a pre-determined agenda for the ferry system. Listen to the public and work with the public to make the ferry system one we can all work with.

Thank you,

Deborah Hemenway

8/25/2020

Hi. My recommendations as a resident of Southern Southeast, connect small ferries with public transit. Forget hauling cars on the ferry. Emphasize people to live healthy lives by bringing bicycles or kayaks or riding public transit. Juneau transit doesn't connect to auk bay, but it should. Coffman Cove needs to connect to Petersburg. And Craig bus needs to go to Coffman. What if, imagine the ferry operating as a cooperative. Locals (members) can get sweet winter deals or flash sales, that nonmembers (tourists) cannot.

Membership could involve an annual fee (no greater than \$100). Southeast needs to be its own ferry authority.

And please, please, please, work with Alaska Airlines air mileage program. I would love to be able to earn miles on the ferry.

Santiago Bedia (From Hyder, a town that use to have a ferry)

8/25/2020

To Whom It May Concern,

I am a nearly lifelong Alaskan who values the importance of the Alaska Marine Highway System and believes the State of Alaska has a responsibility to ensure coastal communities in Alaska receive regularly scheduled marine highway transportation services. I encourage the AMHS Reshaping Work Group strive to provide a sound and reliable service to the residents of coastal Alaska. Please consider these items for consideration when putting forth recommendations:

- 1) Every community currently served by the AMHS deserves and needs to have at a minimum, scheduled monthly sailings.
- 2) Every user of the AMHS deserves a system that is reliable and predictable. Unforeseen cancellations due to mechanical or weather are expected but past decisions and cancellations are unacceptable and long-term lack of service is extremely detrimental to users of the AMHS.
- 3) Past management decisions made by the Alaska DOT in regards to vessels have been detrimental and several new vessels are not even capable of accomplishing the AMHS mission (Hubbard and Tazlina). Please put forth a sound and defensible long-range plan for vessels to ensure a successful future for the AMHS. Forming a smaller fleet that provides less overall service but offers backup and reliability to scheduling may be required.
- 4) The actions of the Alaska DOT in fall of 2019 crippled many coastal Alaskans and the poor service and decisions made by Leadership is unacceptable to me and many others as Alaskans. Please ensure that the Leadership of the AMHS is positioned to succeed and is not influenced by political actions.

I am very disappointed in our current Alaska Administration and in the lawmakers who don't support maintaining the AMHS. I am hopeful you as a group can put together a bipartisan plan that can ensure a sustainable AMHS business plan. Thank you for your efforts.

Chris Lunsford - Juneau, Alaska

8/25/2020

As a lifelong Alaskan from Southeast I am urging the AMHS Reshaping Group not to cut off or reduce ferry service to communities In Alaska. The ferry is our road system and more cuts and cancellations will be devastating. Especially during this most critical time of economic uncertainty. To eliminate a major transportation system at this time will strike at the heart of our economy. We won't save any money and we will have almost no infrastructure left to connect coastal communities with the main population centers on the road system.

How can we survive as a state if we don't commit to a vital and essential transportation plan that includes a comprehensive and robust ferry system which benefits the whole state?

Gina Spartz, Juneau

8/25/2020

I live in Juneau and must pay hundreds of dollars just to get to a road to drive to the nearest Walmart so I am very interested in our States transportation system. As evidenced by the creation of this Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Workgroup, the current structure and/or operating policies of the AMHS are not designed for long term success. This workgroup must not simply look at ferry operations or fees, Alaska needs a complete review of our transportation needs.

The large population centers of Alaska have less and less need for ferries because they have roads and railroads and are questioning the perceived disproportional prioritization of precious state dollars. It does not matter what moral or historical precedence our State has relied on in the past, the political winds as well as the votes will only continue to shift in the direction of the perception of fair spending of the state's money, regardless of design. I would like to see Alaska have a complete transportation plan that is looking at ways to make our reliance on ferries smaller, such as bridges and roads wherever it is even remotely possible. This will lessen the stress on the AMHS by reducing the number of routes that must be covered by ferries. Alaska must also have a bipartisan long-term plan for the AMHS capable of withstanding the short-term political whims that are inevitable in a challenging budget/politically polarizing environment.

I wish this workgroup luck in doing what is needed, and best for Alaska.

Thank you, Scott Cichoracki - Juneau

8/25/2020

Please do not spend any more funds towards this super expensive transportation option that the majority of Alaskans do not use!
And move the capitol to the people!

Thanks for listening,
Shirley Morgan, Wasilla, AK
AK resident since 1981

<p>8/25/2020</p> <p>Why does the State of Alaska need to provide ferry service to its coastal communities?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Most residents cannot afford to stay in small "villages" without the economic boost the AMHS brings. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ferry tickets are more affordable than flying b. Vehicles can affordably move from port to port <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal vehicles 2. Construction vehicles for development, maintenance, mitigation 3. Consumable goods, Medical equipment (Mammogram), Carnival 4. State Contractors use the AMHS to move equipment and goods which results in lower bids!!! c. Communities are connected when there is a road 2. Can the Urban Centers absorb the influx of "Village Residents" when they can no longer afford to be in the villages? <p>How can the AMHS increase revenue without major tariff increases?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bring back the amenities that give the ferry experience a healthy dose of the Alaska Spirit <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Forest Service interpreters in the summer b. Video Arcade/Toddler Play c. Gift Shop/Bar/Movies 2. Price vehicle passage per foot/per trip no matter how far away or how close to sail date it is purchased. 3. Figure out why your computer system says no room available for vehicles yet the car deck is not totally full. 4. Price staterooms so passengers can afford to use them. Better to charge less and rent them than to have them empty. 5. Have a lottery for a 1 year pass or tickets for 2 all inclusive. AMHS collects the \$\$ and honors the prize. 6. Actually listen to the employees, passengers and communities. There is probably a genius concept that could turn this ship around.
<p>8/25/2020</p> <p>I believe the AMHS can return to a time when the ships ran on schedule and carried large numbers of passengers and vehicles. I worked as a deck officer from 1969 to 1999 on board the AMHS vessels. Twenty four of those years as Master. Prior to the influx of large amounts of oil money in the 70's, it was pretty much a bare bones operation. The office staff was small and the ships were well managed. One serious benefit was that all the vessels were of a similar design and the machinery was the same. Then the oil money came and with it big ideas on how to spend it.</p> <p>We need to get back to running a system designed for providing a</p>
<p>8/25/2020</p> <p>Alaska Ferries</p> <p>I opinion is to outsource to be able to run more efficient right now unions make it non profitable.</p> <p>We either save jobs or save tax payers money.</p> <p>Thank you , Jim McDevitt</p>
<p>8/25/2020</p> <p>I support fully funding the Alaska State Ferries. That is our highway yo travel to the small Communities in Alaska.</p> <p>The Alaska Ferries are the life line for the rural communities, to get their groceries and other goods to the small villages.</p> <p>Loretta Pittman - AK Resident.</p>

8/25/2020

Why should every Alaska resident have to pay huge subsidies for the small portion of people who use the services of the ferry system? While it is true that the state helps to fund road building and maintenance throughout the state the dollar amount per user is much less. There are things that Alaska can no longer afford and continue to fully fund with the decline in oil revenues, and the Alaska Marine Highway is one of them.

If you can privatize the Alaska State Ferry system that would be great, but I doubt any entity would want to buy (or even be gifted) such a black hole unless they just wanted to liquidate its assets, which would not solve the problem for the residents it currently serves. Maybe it could do well if privately managed by a reputable company though.

As another option, you could look at the revenue it generated last year and add that to the same amount per capita that is spent on roads by the state along the rail belt and give them that amount as this year's operating budget and let them decide how they want to spend it. Continue that funding process for several years and see what the people who are actually involved in the operation come up with. Maybe the employees could find efficiencies or do a better job of scheduling / marketing when they realize they would have to find a private sector job if they didn't spend less than they made. That would be the most equitable way to see if they can continue on as a state run entity without being an undue burden on the entire state population.

Sincerely, William Spencer

8/25/2020

You people must not live in South East. Alaska. The ferry is vital to all communities on the amhs. Food doctors .dentist visits. Planes cannot fly for weeks at a time. You are cutting the throats of small communities trying to live our Alaskan life. Close the sterling hwy. And the Glenn too. It's the same Damn thing.

8/26/2020

Hello,

Please know that the Alaska economy needs the ferry to operate year round on a regular schedule.

There are many, many reasons why regular year round ferry service is important to coastal communities AND to the rest of the State of Alaska communities as well. The most important being the use of OUR highway the Marine Highway is needed for safety. A secondary or alternate means to travel to and from coastal communities is very important to the safety of communities and residents.

The health of the Alaska economy loses a great deal when ferries are not consistent. Coastal community members shop all over Alaska for personal needs and to keep their businesses going. Losing that business to the lower 48 by not having year round ferry schedules has a large negative impact to the State of Alaska economy.

Alaskans and visitors traveling by ferry has long played an important role in the history of Alaska. In state tourism is a large part of summer business, not having those customers is detrimental to my business and many others in coastal Alaska.

Please find a way to create a ferry schedule that is regular and year round.

Sincerely,

Natasha Casciano

Cordova Gear

8/26/2020

Suggestions-

Market the AMHS system better. (For example market the Aleutian trip to birders)

Reduce rates for Alaska residents to increase ridership. People want to staycation and riding the ferry should be much cheaper than flying.

Review number of Steward positions and possibly privatize room cleaning services.

Change upper management and bring back the woman from Dutch Harbor who had a vision for the system and some local knowledge.

Have a ferry on standby in case one breaks down, so you have fewer gaps in Service.

Replace the Tustumena with a new ship.

Come up with a long term plan so all SE ships fit at all SE docks, and same concept for SW ships & ports.

Bring back the bars and serve espresso in them during the morning.

Sell AMHS merchandise in vending machines.

Interview ship captains (I am not one) to see what their suggestions are.

Drive slower on some routes for fuel efficiency.

Get rid of ships that aren't running to save on moorage.

Take the politics out of the management and budget.

Come up with a 5 and 20 year plan.

View the ships like the road system, the streets and highways aren't required to generate revenue.

These are practical suggestions. Thank you for your time.

8/26/2020

I would like to comment on the future of the AMHS for northern SE Alaska. I think we should end the mainliner service at Juneau, and proceed to develop a new ferry terminal at the south side of Berners Bay, using the existing highway to connect both vehicle traffic as well as (with bus service) walk-ons to and from Haines/Skagway. We have the new class of ferries which are, I believe, more efficient at loading/unloading, further speeding the process of travel between Haines, Skagway, and Juneau. The fares would be cheaper due to shortened distances and quicker load/unload turnaround times, and this would also solve the issue of Coast Guard regs for crew shifts being too long. I also believe this would encourage more use of the service which would keep the boats on the water more, bringing in more needed income, especially in summer months where possibly a couple runs a day could be justified, making the dream of same day round trip shopping trips from Haines theoretically possible. Thank you. Dave Nussbaumer, Haines, AK

8/26/2020

Good afternoon Working Group,

I look forward to hearing the AMHS Reshaping Work Group's meeting and public input this evening. Further, I appreciated Chairman Tom Barrett's opinion piece in the Anchorage Daily News a couple days ago, Fundamental change on the horizon for Alaska's ferries (link below).

In his update, Mr. Barrett reassuringly notes that all past reports analyzing the AMHS function have been reviewed by the Work Group, including those from the Southeast Conference. I hope they include all the reports from the AMHS Reform project, from the McDowell Group, and "The Value Of Alaska's Marine Highway In 25 Stories". That input from all stakeholders is being considered is also encouraging. We all understand that these are challenging budgetary times and that "Fundamental changes to AMHS involving multiple stakeholders will be necessary." It's too bad these past reports and need for change weren't taken seriously before cumulative neglect brought on the current drastic deterioration of the system. It's too bad the outcry for a public corporation model of AMHS management wasn't given due attention early in the Dunleavy Administration. Let's hope that genuine fairness is applied in the evaluation of what that fundamental change should be.

"The workgroup's concerns and recommendations are coalescing around system governance, budget and budget planning, essential service levels, fleet makeup, maintenance, cost structure and business practices. But, in the end, with the will to work together to implement fundamental change, Alaska can have a more reliable marine highway system, operating at less cost and providing coastal communities transportation that helps support their fundamental economic, educational, social, health, and mobility goals." Mr. Barrett also asked a good question: "What service level can you live with if the service you receive is more reliable and predictable?" The answer will vary not only by region, community, business vs personal interest, etc. it's going to have an extreme variety of individual opinions on what is essential.

It is the people's will that the AMHS be managed, maintained and prioritized with the same focus that our other Alaska highways receive. I rarely use the Parks Highway, but I do not deny the need and right for the residents of interior Alaska to be able to rely on its availability. I believe every coastal community with a ferry terminal needs more than 0 service per month, more than a single roundtrip per month, and at least a weekly service schedule in winter and 2-3 per week in warmer months. You really can't compare Haines' needs to Chignik's, or these communities to the hub communities of Juneau or Valdez. We need backup vessels to step in when breakdowns or COVID infections stop a scheduled sailing. We need vessels that are designed for the conditions and localities where they're used. We need to stop throwing bad money after good, and good money after bad.

The public comments below include observations and concerns about the overall needs for the reshaping process, although they were originally written in response to the Winter 2021 Operational Plan recently released, to DOT and my representatives in Southeast Alaska. They reiterate examples of why a complete governance restructuring HAS to take place. I favor the Public Corporation model.

I look forward to the Reshaping Work Group's report in September and hope that compiled public comments will be available for the public to review along with it. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Molly Sturdevant, Haines, AK

8/26/2020

To Whom It May Concern, For many years the Alaska Marine Highway system has been mismanaged and now, we the public, are facing the consequences. Ferries were built that didn't work in our waters. How could such design flaws have happened and then no one be held accountable for them? Most recently ferries have been designed that don't allow them to be used effectively — i.e., crew has to be housed in hotels, rather than on the ferries. Now, we can't even count on the pared down ferry schedule. Often ferries are canceled at a moment's notice. We can't plan travel more than a few weeks in advance sometimes because there is no schedule at all. When the rules change, whether due to Covid or something else, we are given no notice. We arrive at the terminal and are told we can't get on the ferry, even though another one may not be coming for days. And, to add insult to injury, the more undependable the ferry system becomes, the more fees you heap on us. Now, we have to pay different fares based on how many people are on the ferry. We have to pay for any change to our travel plans. Even the airlines no longer charge such fees and at least we can count on them flying when they say they will. The ferry system is essential to us in Southeast, just as roads are to those who live in the Interior. The state maintains those Interior roads and should do the same for our water highway here. We do not need anything fancy. We can bring our own food. We don't need you to serve us alcohol. What we do need is a reliable schedule provided months in advance so that we can make arrangements for travel. We also need for the ferry system to get rid of all these ridiculous extra fees that you have heaped upon us.

Thank you, Sharon Resnick, Haines, AK

8/26/2020

The Alaska Marine Highway is our "road system" just as highways up north have paved highways. Just as the people up north need a transportation system, those of us in Southeast must have a road system and it is our ferry system. We depend on it for transportation, shipping food to Southeast, bringing patients to Juneau for medical treatment, for visiting friends and relatives in other communities and for travel outside Juneau for vacations. Please return the ferry system to full funding and full schedules. Thank you.
Gary Miller, Juneau, AK 99801

8/26/2020

Dear AMHS Reshaping Work Group,

As an Alaskan, I strongly believe it is the responsibility of the State of Alaska to provide reliable and timely ferry service to coastal communities. This has sadly not been the case in recent history and the towns that have received reduced ferry service have felt significant financial impacts that continue to reverberate in their economies. Furthermore, when the ferry schedule is unpredictable, making use of the scant ferry coverage becomes harder and subsequently ferry usage probably suffers. The AMHS Reshaping Work Group should make sure that there is regular service for residents of coastal Alaska, and especially for small communities such as Pelican, Kake, Tenakee, and Hoonah. I would like the Work Group to consider these recommendations: 1) At a minimum, communities should have monthly service. 2) Schedules should be published early and service should be reliable. 3) Vessels should be designed so they can serve all communities in case of breakdowns and required maintenance. 4) AMHS Leadership should be separated from the State's executive branch so that political influences do not alter AMHS operations and long-term planning every four years. It seems to me that the current Alaska Administration has abandoned their responsibility to support many coastal communities and I find this abhorrent. I hope the AMHS Work Group can see beyond politics and will strive to develop a working ferry system that serves all Alaskans.

Thank you, Patrick Malecha Juneau, Alaska

8/26/2020

Good afternoon,

I am writing this in response to our AMHS. As a lifelong resident of Ketchikan the value of the AMHS to our community it of utmost importance. Without this system in place we are, in essence, stranded on our island. When we travel to the lower 48 we have only one mode of transportation available to us for taking a vehicle and that is the ferry system. Dropping the ferries like was done last winter and most of the spring and summer has guaranteed that many of us were not able to leave the island. It has also increased the cost of goods and services in Ketchikan.

Another very important part of the ferry system is the Prince Rupert run. As a comparison we had a 33 foot travel trailer that we bought in 2015 for going south on extended trips to visit our family and friends that live down in the lower 48 states. To take our travel trailer on the ferry to Prince Rupert with our truck and three people was under \$1400 round trip. After the Prince Rupert stop was eliminated I priced going to Bellingham with the same vehicle, (57 feet overall). For 3 people, the truck and trailer, and a stateroom, the cost was just under \$14000.00. As you can well imagine, we cannot afford to take our truck and trailer south on vacation any longer.

I have heard many statements over the course of the last 2 years about how the AMHS is not financially able to continue without substantial rate increases. Here are my thoughts on that matter. The AMHS was never intended to be self-sustaining. There are not enough people in SE Alaska to support the ferry system entirely. Let's compare apples to apples though. THE AMHS is SE Alaska's highway. At each port there is a toll booth requiring anyone who wishes entry to that highway (HWY 7) to pay a massive toll to enter the highway. Where else in the state is there a toll booth that, when leaving a community to drive on the highway, you must pay a substantial toll to enter the highway? How about we put toll booths on every highway leaving Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kenai, etc. and when a person wants to leave their community they must pay a toll based on how far they will be traveling on said highway. It seems perfectly fair to me as this is what is expected of me.

Cutting funding, mothballing ships, selling ships for pennies on the dollar, are measures that are killing us here in SE Alaska. We are intentionally left out of all decision making and ignore as any voice of reason or value in the state of Alaska. On many fronts I have experienced this personally in Anchorage. People look at us like we are foreigners in our own state and would just as soon cut us off and send us to Canada. Please, when considering the importance and value of the AMHS, do not eliminate our only highway in SE Alaska that can get us out of our communities!

Sincerely,

Jeffrey A. Hendrickson

Lifelong resident of Alaska, specifically Ketchikan

8/26/2020

The Alaska Marine Highway system is crucial for those of us living in Southeast Alaska, in addition to other coastal regions of our State. Referencing Frank Murkowski's "Point of View", published in the Ketchikan Daily News of August 21, 2020, the Reshaping Group indicated that the governor's prepared budget for AMHS was inadequate. Indeed, it appears the Governor is doing all he can to eliminate the Alaskan ferries. Quoting Murkowski's article, "The AMHS is both a resource and a major business. In SE Alaska alone, the payroll was \$65 million with 1,017 personnel in 2014. It carried 242, 648 passengers that year. Traffic has dropped dramatically to 135,000 last year." This was avoidable. In my opinion, the ferries suffer from lack of maintenance, in addition to new management appointed by each governor, which meant decisions were ever-changing. As the oil money diminished, cutting ferry maintenance was allowed, so we rode 50-year old ferries, and service was eliminated during the winter of 2019-2020 cut when the Malaspina broke down. Suddenly small villages lacked regular access to grocery stores or medical care rather than the more expensive and risky option of flying.

Apparently, the Governor does not recognize the importance of maintaining ferry service to small towns and native villages, or for the connection to Bellingham and Prince Rupert. Other transportation methods such as roads are subsidized, but he is unwilling to give credence to the essence of Southeast where I have lived for 46 years.

I arrived on the ferry in 1974, and have ridden various ferries from Kake where I lived for 10 years. I relied on the Le Conte to get to Petersburg for groceries and the birth of my first child and other medical needs. When I became a commercial salmon fisherman, I ferried to Kake from Haines in the fall. Later when I moved to Petersburg, I used to ferry to attend meetings in Juneau, or return from fall fishing in Haines. The ferry was reliable and relatively inexpensive. When my sons attended public schools in Petersburg and Ketchikan, they traveled on the ferry for band concerts or sports. Kids loved the trips and were generally polite as it gave them a chance to meet students from other towns. Schools appreciated the help of the AMHS as students boarded with sleeping bags, pillows and homework. It was the Alaskan way. Riding the ferry was an event for visitors, who could stop in Ketchikan for a short visit, ride on to Wrangell, Petersburg, Juneau and other towns. They often brought vehicles or walked on but it was more personable than being on a cruise ship where visitors often have only 4 or 5 hours in a town before leaving for the next destination.

Bars were closed on the ferries a few years ago. I'm not much of a drinker but the bars were always full on every trip I took. The excuse? The labor costs were too great? Sounded to me that someone was doing all in their power to make the ferries not able to provide revenue. How crazy is that idea? Everyone knows that selling liquor is a great way to make money. This was in a prior administration and was a stupid way to disrupt revenue. Now passengers bring their own booze onboard. Dunleavy promises us that we'll have a "full dividend" and as much as I have appreciated the dividend, and paid for my son's college education with it, I am more interested in maintaining the health of our state. The elderly, kids' care, social service programs and the ferry system are more important to me than a full dividend.

Our state and our nation must think as a community and do what benefits all. There have been many stupid mistakes made – the fast ferries were a boondoggle from the beginning. They used enormous quantities of fuel, must avoid logs, gillnets, and other hazards to stay on step. British Columbia eliminated them but Alaska went ahead and soon found they don't work in our waters. This ridiculous decision making is the fault of appointing people who can't or won't think long term and don't know anything about marine transportation. If the ferries are privatized, that will force their closure. The Alaska ferries require subsidies but it's the same as the postal service – we must maintain our access for the special demands of this State. Please maintain our ferries. Sincerely, Victoria McDonald

8/26/2020

Hello, my name is Kimi Boal. I was born and raised in Juneau. My memories of traveling on the Alaska Marine Highway system include returning home from Seattle after a trip to visit my grandparents when I was nine or ten years old. As a child I loved the layout of the ships, the various lounges and cafeterias and decks — amazing fun for a kid. In fourth grade our class took a trip to Glacier Bay. I don't remember the Glaciers, but I do remember sleeping on the solarium deck and being woken up to see the Northern Lights. I was in band and we took band trips or took trips with track or basketball. Our family took our van on the ferry to visit relatives in Whitehorse and Teslin. I remember traveling on the Le Conte in rough water and sitting in the forward lounge, looking out the side windows and seeing the water level go up and go down and not feeling seasick.

I believe these vessels should be considered historic landmarks, like the Space Needle or the Empire State Building. They are not replaceable and should be preserved. I don't know the challenges you face budget wise, but I do remember when I worked for a Transit organization down here, one of the top accountants joked about hiding money in a budget so that they wouldn't get less money in the upcoming year. Money can be found in budgets. I know that where there's a will, there's a way, when something is important. Money shouldn't guide all decisions.

Some ideas I have are:

1. Increase rates for out-of-state travelers, who travel for pleasure, not necessity.
2. Charge higher rates to cruise ships, as Alaska may be considered a cheap cruise, because it is closer, but the residents and future generations pay the price from the pollution.
3. Tax tourists in the shops that are owned by out-of-state companies.
4. Allocate the penalties paid by cruise ships to the Alaska Marine Highway System
5. Advertise in the Lower 48 — when I tell people about the ferry system, they have never heard of them. Everyone has heard of an Alaskan Cruise, but no-one knows of the option of taking the ferry.
6. Make the ferries Historic Landmarks with protection from being dismantled.
7. Seek charitable contributions from Microsoft, Starbucks and Amazon.
8. Use some of the PDF money to fund the AMHS.

These vessels have historic significance and are one-of-a kind. Don't sell them. I hope to take my children and grandchildren on these ships. The trip is amazingly beautiful and I don't think many people know about this aspect. The AMHS is part of SE Alaska's identity and culture and everything possible should be done to preserve it. I graduated with a business degree from the University of Washington and I am a CPA. I offer my assistance, if there is any way I can help. Thank you.

8/26/2020

The Alaska Ferry system is perhaps one of the most iconic features of Alaska. It unifies the major populations in South-central and Southeast. It is our highway. Unlike a highway, it never gets potholes, ices up, requires repaving or plowing, etc. But the ferries require the maintenance to be a functional highway and the State of Alaska has reduced our system to the equivalent of a potholed, one lane dirt road. This is unacceptable.

I ride the ferries all the time—Bellingham to Petersburg. I don't fly. I first rode the ferry in 1980 and dined with white tablecloths, Alaska salmon and white wine served at my table, and incredible scenery. I rode to Haines just for fun. It was this trip that forever endeared me to Alaska and I finally moved here from Seattle 20 years ago. I worked as a dentist in remote villages and took the ferries all over SE. I then drove my 1899 tugboat up the coast and used it for smaller villages. I am no stranger to boats. If I can single-handedly keep a 73' antique tug running (for 25 years now), the State can do better. I am now retired in Alaska and loving it.

I might add that I spent 6 months last winter (2019-2020) boating and training to central Turkey—to within 200 miles of Syria, again just for the fun of it. I mostly took boats. Freighters and ferries. I rode Hurtigruten—about my fourth or fifth trip, also the Irish ferries—they are wonderful. The Hurtigruten from Fredrickshavn to Oslo runs simultaneously North and South seven days a week, even in winter. It had about 7 decks with two dedicated to children. A huge restaurant, bar, game section, etc. They also run boats up and down the coast to dozens of towns—serviced daily all year round. It is the pride of Norway. And our boats sit tied to docks and break down continuously. Restaurants are greasy spoon standard, the shops are closed, dogs roam the passenger lounges, the off-ramps are broken and one has to drag bags over tie-down bumps, ducking mirrors and stepping over dog mess. It once took me two hours to disembark in Bellingham.

OK—here's what you need to do:

- Get federal highway dollars to fund the system as if it were a highway—the State of Alaska is incapable.
- Tax the citizens of Alaska at the state level if you have to. We in SE already pay for roads in Central Alaska—turnabout is fair play.
- Put the boats back in Seattle—where the people are. I was born in Bellingham, my daddy was born there (1909) and I love the place. Just the visibility in Seattle will sell passengers.
- Work a schedule. Without a dependable schedule, people will not and cannot plan their trips.
- Two Seattle-Haines per week; summer and winter. Advertise it!
- Market the system like Hurtigruten does or Holland America—you've basically given the most scenic franchise in the world away for free—you've given up.
- Open white-tablecloth restaurants on each larger vessel. Put National Park interpreters onboard. Schedule stops longer and better timed so towns like Petersburg can get their school kids to perform dances on the dock. There used to be a bar right next to the ferry terminal here 40 years ago.
- Marketing, marketing, marketing. Sell the sizzle. Alaska has the most stunning coastline on the planet. It rivals Norway, New Zealand and Chile.
- Charge fair but affordable services. I often spend \$1500 for a single round-trip and it's still worth it. Price pointing needs to be considered—perhaps family rates?
- Lastly—open the bars, tune the piano and put a guitar available to play. Put out puzzles, books, magazines, interpretive materials and give short guided tours in towns. Hire Tony back.
- Build it and they will come.

Doug Leen

Petersburg AK

8/26/2020

Simply stated, AMHS is not just one of many choices for Skagway, to connect with other necessary services. It is the ONLY one for prolonged periods in both summer and winter, due to weather and economics. It's used for all our population for medically necessary urgent travel. Supplies necessary for families and communities, mail delayed and weathered out, service providers in all disciplines, transport of vehicles, tourism when we are in a good space, and so many other needs are met by this transportation option. Please find a way to preserve our way of life. Sincerely, Lynne Cameron

<p>8/26/2020</p> <p>We need year-round, reliable transportation via our ferries. We need it more than once a week. We need it more than twice a week. What would it be like for the Seward Highway to only have limited days of operations??? Well the fjord is our highway and it needs to remain open. We as a community have stated over and over again that we do not support a road. Let me say that again. We do not support a road. Keep our AMHS open and operational.</p> <p>Rebecca Hylton Skagway, Alaska</p>
<p>8/26/2020</p> <p>I have traveled with you years ago and it was such a great experience however. Recently I phoned the AMH to get a price quote for myself and my truck and was floored by the answer. Over \$3200 to transport one ol disabled Vet and a regular pickup truck from Whittier to Bellingham. Ridiculous!</p> <p>Now \$3200 will more than pay for enough gas to drive through Canada but due to my disability that drive is impossible. Thus making AMH my only option. Assuming I win the lottery soon and can afford to pay such a huge price.</p> <p>Signed stuck in the lower 48 Steve Harrison</p>
<p>8/26/2020</p> <p>Please fund AMHS fully, without the connection that AMHS services provide many southeast Alaskans will be affected negatively. AMHS was never meant to turn a profit, it is a public service. I think this oversight committee needs to stay intact, the issues we are dealing with today are from YEARS of mismanagement. I would like to see former or current AMHS employees sit on this committee. The employees of these ships know the routes and mechanics of these ships more than anyone else, so why not let them have say in what happens? I would encourage the state to ask themselves how we are supposed to get young people to get educated in Alaska and stay in Alaska if they can't even be guaranteed good paying state jobs anymore? AMHS is southeast Alaska's lifeline...please fully fund it! Let's take our fair share of revenue from the oil being pulled from our ground and put those tax dollars towards keeping AMHS afloat...use those dollars to keep our citizens and economy afloat. Let's stop giving all our travel business to private companies like Alaska air...we used to bring home newborns on AMHS now you can't trust that the ferry is even going to show up?! I know this pandemic hasn't made things easy, but please don't let our leaders use that as an excuse these problems have been happening for a LONG time, not just because of the pandemic. Keep up the hard work!</p> <p>Thank you --Jillian Privett</p>
<p>8/26/2020</p> <p>Hello. As you know, all of us have depended on all of the ferries for years. This is our highway which was promised to us many years ago. Without our ferries, this has made a horrible hardship on many people, not to mention a financial strain. Please consider keeping our ferries to all of us small towns. Thank you—Linnea Brooks in Wrangell, AK</p>
<p>8/26/2020</p> <p>We have been using AMH for well over 50 years. Some years several trips on the ferry. It really doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out why ridership is down. They have priced themselves so high that the average person cannot afford to ride the ferry. We no longer utilize the system like we have in the past since the cost has become so prohibitive. Often times we have been on the ferry where there are more employees than passengers. The state rooms are really a joke. You are paying the same rate as you would for a 5 star hotel room. For what? An oversized closet. When Motel 6 starts looking like a luxury room, you know something is wrong. As far as having to pay more the closer to departure day, that is a major screw up. Comparing AMH to the airlines is like comparing apples to oranges. Why not do like the cruise line does to fill up their empty spaces? It's really sad what has happened to the ferry system. When it was ran the way it was years ago, it was usually full and you had to make reservations in advance in order to get a space. If you were on standby, you were darn lucky to get on. Maybe it's time to stand back and figure out what has happened to the system and why. Had the system not lost more than they have gained these past few years by always raising prices? Sincerely, Lawren and Carole Smith</p>
<p>8/26/2020</p> <p>I suggest that Alaska raise our motor fuel tax to match the national average. Then pay the country of Norway to build Alaska's marine highway system. They are highly successful in Norway. Sincerely, Mark Miller</p>

8/26/2020

The Alaska Marine Highway System is a vital artery to all of S.E. Alaska and beyond as you are well aware, but changes need to be made to keep it afloat. Why not try going back to basics? I would suggest we go back to the way it all started back in 1963. The original 3 mainline vessels ran thru S. E. Alaska starting at Prince Rupert, B.C. Canada going North as far as Skagway. This route let the vessels get two round trips a week per ship verses the one round trip per week when a ship goes to Bellingham, WA. With two round trips a week you are able to move twice as many passengers and vehicles for the same cost to the state but at the same time providing twice as much service to our communities. This utilizes the vessels more effectively and provides a much more affordable ticket to Prince Rupert. Let's cut back the costs to our traveling public in order to gain more traffic which will help keep the ships running. As it stands now the passage ticket cost keeps going up and ridership keeps going down. This will then provide a reason to get rid of the ferry systems all together. On another note - we could also run our ferry system to Hyder, Alaska if we can't work out a deal with Prince Rupert. Hyder is connected to the same road system and is in Alaska - so invest in Alaska might be the answer. The old A.M.H.S. schedules used to be set up to help service the Van/Barge lines in S.E. Alaska when there was Van traffic going thru B.C. Canada but this has changed so let's focus on safety and convenience to our traveling public. In the past recent years to Prince Rupert there were trips arriving into Canada at all hours of the morning in the winter time. This put them in Rupert when it was late and dark. I do not recommend one drive in the dark due to unknown road conditions or wildlife on the road. I know of a family that perished after leaving Prince Rupert when the ferry got in late one night due to a mechanical issue that had occurred on the M/V TAKU. I have lots of stories to tell and ideas to go with them but I'll end this by saying that I have lots of experience on AMHS from 1968 thru 2004 when I retired from there as Chief Purser. I can only hope your group can keep things running and I want to Thank You for working on this.

8/26/2020

Good Afternoon, Committee and Chairman

Our current system was created with one thing in mind to establish a Marine road that would fuel economic stability and freedom to all who lived in isolated communities, inaccessible without a bridge along the coast, the ferries are that bridge.

It has worked for that purpose and in the past it has worked well, a steady well running system that delivered goods and services. Unfortunately it has fallen into disrepair and been the butt of many jokes the mighty fleet and those who serve the State of Alaska have watched a rapid decline within the last ten years to a system unrecognizable by many's acceptable standards hence we have lost market shares. There are those who live on hard pavement who criticize and wonder "how does it benefit me?" The 2015 McDowell report answered those questions, as the many small business owners of the mainland saw a huge hit in their bottom line, some even have gone out of business because of the follies of the ferries. The key to a sustainable future is reliable service, efficient operations and a price that promotes reasonable expectations, get rid of the Dynamic pricing and bring back promotions, like driver goes free in the off peak season. Plan and have meetings in each communities and illicit response from stakeholders to find out, what is the minimal service they require. The system in its heyday saw lot of passengers and tons of freight, when logging was king, after the boom the system never adjusted to those realities and the ferries continued needless service to places that did not need as much service to their communities. Another suggestion is keep all current vessels running, if you park vessels long enough they seize up, plan constant rotations of use and even the fast ferries use them (they have a purpose, like the Lituya) or sell them no one will buy a product that does not work. The current money that comes from the feds could be used for operations, reworking of the streams of the money pots and to ask for congressional delegations help, also ask for money from corporations and municipalities and Non Profits, its time communities pay some to keep up levels of service. We are all in it together and some out of the box thinking is necessary and prudent at this juncture, the reality of the State Budget is paramount we need to enact changes now!

Finally, we employees out on the vessel are experts in the field and are counted out in the decision making our ideas are original and genuine, we have spent careers out here keeping things going. We need to promote exceptional crew members to Shore side seasoned Captains, Chief Engineers, Chief Pursers and Chief Stewards, the wealth of our knowledge should not be lost in the shuffle institutional knowledge is disappearing and the forgetfulness of the past could cost billions in the future use your greatest asset, vessel crew. Bring back respect for and admiration of the fleet it will keep people seeking State of Alaska service jobs in this needed industry. The State of Alaska cannot live without transportation, esp. Coastal Alaska the idea of building roads is beautiful but in the current reality not a real solution considering the enormous cost, without any returns. If ran right the AMHS can keep running and even pay for itself, it can happen. Let's go to the drawing boards and come out with a workable plan.

Thank you all in your endeavors to keep Alaska the Great Land, Respectfully,

Robb Arnold, Chief Purser

8/27/2020

To whom this concerns.

re: ferry schedule

My comment is simple. Don't pass by communities with little to no ferry service coming in early 2021(according to the planned stoppage).

The Matanuska will be running when other ferries will not be running early 2021. Please modify the proposed schedule to include Hoonah on the Matanuska run.

In light of the "all lives matter" movements, please make sure the very Ferry service dependent small communities are remembered.

Thank you for asking for our input.

James Erickson

Hoonah, Alaska

8/27/2020

Hello,

This public comment is written on behalf of myself and my family who live in Juneau Alaska and use the Alaska Marine Highway System. I would like to see better long term planning for upgrading the ferry fleet that isn't subject to change every time there is a new Governor. Maybe a nonprofit corporation could plan better looking 30 years into the future and we need to open up the bidding for new ship construction to out of state shipyards. I also would like to see a more consistent ferry schedule in the upper Lynn Canal, a lot of residents in Haines and Skagway use the ferry to commute to important high paying jobs like the Kensington mine and Greens Creek mine. Travel by Air Taxi is very weather dependent and during the winter sometimes there is no service for weeks at a time due to weather.

Thank You

Daniel Parks

8/27/2020

I am hoping this group will keep Hoonah on the schedule of at least once a week. I live in Juneau but my family lives in Hoonah. Previously, individuals were able to get on the ferry and go over for visits during the weekends, going over on a Friday and returning on a Sunday or Monday. It was an ideal schedule for individuals who worked and for families to come to Juneau and get their shopping done.

The ferry system is really important for Southeast. Not having this available has shown need regarding food being delivered to stores, families not able to afford flying over to Juneau to get their shopping done and cultural events not happening as much in the villages. During the months of October/November the ferry is always needed because of cultural events happening in either Hoonah or Angoon. Events are scheduled during the weekend so having a weekend schedule for Hoonah and Angoon would be ideal.

I also do not understand the purposes of having Tenekee on the schedule. Each time I was on the ferry going to Hoonah, a stop was made in Tenekee to drop of one person. I see no justification for this. Thank you for taking our comments.

Ernestine Grimm

8/27/2020

To the Members of the AMH Reshaping Work Group,

I have been riding the Alaska Marine Highway for about 35 years. Most of these journeys have been on the M/V Tustumena from Seward to Prince William Sound and in the last 30 years Kodiak, Port Lions, and Homer.

The Alaska Marine Highway is extremely important to the coastal residents of Alaska because it is our highway, which allows us to be contributing members of the Alaskan society and much more. Providing for this highway for residents of Alaska is what I believe to be a States obligation to provide essential services to its people.

I would like to offer the following ideas to this work group.

#1 Talk to the captains and crews of the ships in the fleet for ideas on making this highway better and more efficient. Over the years, I have often heard ideas from crews about better efficiency for the AMHS. These folks live on these ships for a good portion of their working lives and know the ins and outs of what works and what doesn't. They say that they are never asked for their opinions on efficiency and how to make the system work better for all users. Start here in reshaping this highway.

#2 Forward Fund the system-this is an effective way to encourage ridership and help profits. If people know they can count on a schedule a year out, they are more likely to plan and book reservations. The short 6 month at a time scheduling (or even shorter) is not working, and the lack of bookings are evidence of this.

#3 Get a new Tustumena ship built- the State needs to appropriate it's 10% of funding to begin building this vessel. It has been vetted and designed and this needs to happen for southcentral and southwest coastal communities.

#4 Eliminate all State run docks and privatize shoreside services such as reservation/terminal locations and tie ups.

#5 Sliding Scale fees are just plain wrong. This past year was the first time I can ever remember this happening within the Marine Highway System. Most people do not mind inflation and paying a bit more for traveling. But charging more if a reservation is available and made shortly before a sailing is not very appealing to travelers.

#6 Advertise/public awareness of the AMHS- We run a lodge and get many calls from Alaska residents wanting to travel to Kodiak and wondering how to get here. They have no idea they can drive to Homer and ride the ferry to destinations on Kodiak Island.

Any business needs to spend a portion of their budget on advertising in some form to make it successful. Kodiak uses the Ferry system for transporting vans of goods, groceries, building supplies, construction equipment, commercial fishing equipment, people and their vehicles, and more. We all know that when we actually get on the ship, we will make it to our destination. These ships are the most reliable and safest way to travel between coastal communities and mainland Alaska and Washington.

In the last 5 years, people have become disenfranchised because we never know if we will have a ship. Scheduling and breakdowns, longer shipyard periods, and budget constraints have affected the way users spend their money to ride the Alaska Marine Highway. There is a direct correlation between maintenance and running an efficient business and providing service.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on reshaping the Alaska Marine Highway.

Kathryn Adkins

Kodiak Wilderness Adventures

8/27/2020

Dear AMHS working group,

I appreciate your mission to explore new ideas to make the ferry system work better, but I don't think you need to reinvent the rudder. Southeast Alaska used to have great ferry service, even in hard times, and it can again.

You've already realized that a state subsidy is needed, even if you make an attempt to privatize the system. But I wouldn't go the privatization route. This is the public's marine highway system, no different than any other highway, and it must be treated as such. The day you privatize is the day you lose faith in the public's ability to run the system. Please don't go there.

As public appointees, rather you should set a goal to restore service to what it once was. I believe a bipartisan Marine Highway Authority is a much better alternative for making the system run more efficiently, while still having the public mission of service as the goal.

For us in upper Lynn Canal, where we are used to seeing full ferries helping the system make a little money, back we need ferries daily or 6X a week in the summer, and 3-4 times a week in the winter. This type of schedule serves the needs of we Alaskans and visitors to our state who rely on consistent, reliable service.

I know times are tough - they are everywhere – but you need to fight for state subsidies (hopefully with new revenue streams from the state) to get out of this funk we are in. We have enough ships; we need to find a way to put them back to work!

I rode parts of the BC Ferry system last year and was amazed how wonderful their ferries are. Service was exceptional. We used to have that kind of system we can be proud of, and it's time we have the political will to make that happen again.

Stay safe and well,

W. Jeff Brady

8/28/2020

AMH Reshaping Group,

My name is Toshua Parker and I own and operate ToshCo, the only grocery, hardware and lumber store in Gustavus. When the Ferry is running, we ship 100% of our products for the entire town on the LeConte.

When you're considering reforms for the Ferry one thing to pay close attention to are the politics behind the scheduling. For example, Gustavus and Hoonah are serviced together on a combined run with the LeConte. That combined run makes a great deal of financial sense since our communities are relatively near to each other.

What doesn't make sense is the LeConte only services our ports every other week and every single sailing is overbooked. You can't get a vehicle reservation, period. In fact, as far out as the current schedule reaches for bookings, there is not a single vehicle space available from Juneau to Gustavus.

At the same time that this infrequently serviced Hoonah-Gustavus run is constantly overbooked and almost unusable due to the high demand, the LeConte has been scheduled to run from Juneau up to Haines and Skagway up to four times per week with a nearly empty car deck (as reported to us).

The reason the car deck is empty on these Northbound runs is partially because of the reduced travel from COVID and partially because the Matanuska is also running to Haines and Skagway from Juneau and she's taking most of the traffic.

So while the LeConte spends 4 days per week capturing very minimal revenue traveling up Lynn Canal, it's turning away thousands in fares in ports with high demand which are starving for more service. In fact, even though the LeConte is currently servicing Hoonah and Gustavus, it's still taking multiple private landing craft runs per week to those same ports to augment the Ferry in order to handle the volume of groceries and essential supplies. It's really crazy.

The same thing happened a year or two ago when someone with some political clout in Sitka demanded more service. AMHS took service away from the paying ports like Gustavus and Hoonah and rerouted the LeConte to Sitka on a weekly run. That scheduled run was nearly empty. If you know the LeConte, you'll know that she doesn't have any berthing quarters for passengers and the trip to Sitka is an overnight trip. So the passengers continued to ride the mainliner vessels, which do have passenger berths and the LeConte ran empty. Again, at the same time Hoonah and Gustavus were desperately trying to charter private vessels to augment the reduced Ferry schedule which no longer provided adequate service to get supplies to town.

The Ferry needs to be run like a business if it's ever going to be sustainable. Sure it will never make a profit, but it needs to recapture the maximum amount of ticket revenue. And NOT by continuing to raise prices. It needs to be scheduled to provide the highest level of service to the ports with the most volume while still servicing the smaller ports with adequate service to maintain their communities. If you would simply compare the percentage of car deck space booked to each port so far in 2020 you might start to see where some of the problems lie.

FYI, when we've asked for these numbers before I've been told that those specific metrics don't exist. Really? You're telling me the AMHS can't look at each port annually and compare the percentage of the car deck space taken? You can't tell me that the Hoonah-Gustavus runs average 95% car deck capacity and the Angoon or Tenakee runs average 15% car deck capacity? How on earth are you supposed to schedule service to these communities without those metrics?

It's like running an airline and trying to schedule flights with no idea how many seats are typically booked on each flight. So without that data I'll wing it and schedule one flight per week from Los Angeles to New York (that's a long way and probably burns a lot of fuel) and maybe 4 flights per week from Los Angeles to Albuquerque since its closer. Of course what I didn't know without those metrics is that 3.5 million passengers per year need to travel between LA and New York compared with maybe 200,000 to Albuquerque.

Please see if you can find the 2020 car deck numbers for the LeConte as an experiment. If you can, compare it with this proposed schedule below and see how that would compare with the real deck traffic. Then compare it to what the ship is actually scheduled to do:

Proposed Summer LeConte Service from Juneau: Tenakee: once per month, Pelican: every other week, Angoon & Kake: once per week, Gustavus & Hoonah: twice per week, Haines & Skagway: twice per week (maybe three times per week on a normal tourism summer). That still leaves some free days which could be assigned to higher traffic ports.

The problem is if you compare that with the LeConte's real schedule you'll see just how much time is wasted servicing ports without traffic. In many regards the AMHS is flying blind and is in desperate need of real leadership who stand up to political pressure and do what makes sense for the sustainability of the entire system.

Don't just keep raising prices; it's already to the point that the pricing is driving traffic away. Look at how you can run the fewest number of vessels to service the highest numbers of passengers and vehicles while not fully cutting off any of the communities you serve.

Thank you. Regards,

L. Toshua Parker

8/28/2020

Thank you for accepting user comments as you consider the future of the Alaska Marine Highway System. I am a 65 year resident and it is my intent and desire to remain in Alaska, and specifically in the City and Borough of Juneau. I depend on the Alaska Marine Highway System and urge you to fully fund operations, to maintain vessels and to create a dependable schedule to serve residents. I do believe that the health and safety of Alaskans are at risk when we do not have a safe and accessible method to travel. Clearly, the recent pandemic has highlighted how critical this issue is for Alaskans. Many of us are required to travel to the lower 48 or to the interior for medical services and are unable to return by air due to surgical issues, the ferry is our only answer. For many communities, the ferry is the only reliable answer due to weather. For other communities, the ferry is the answer to providing cultural connections. For our youth, travel by ferry is a part of the educational and recreational curriculum in schools. The recent history of neglect, which seems linked to a desire to build a road which has proved illegal as well as ill conceived, is shameful. I would like to see the Alaska Marine Highway System removed from Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and managed as a separate State corporation. I encourage public and private partnerships. I ask that the priority be placed on transport of Alaskans to and from the nearest roaded communities. Thank you, I appreciate your service on this group.

Barbara Frank

8/28/2020

To Whom It May Concern,

I have two questions for the AMHS Reshaping Work Group:

- Have you considered a Costco-style membership ticketing model? For example, passengers would have the opportunity to pay an annual flat fee; that fee would then allow those passengers to access lower fares through the duration of their membership. I believe that a membership-based ticketing model would make AMHS services more affordable to those who depend on AMHS most, create a steady and predictable source of income, and would allow for upticks in general ticketing prices.
- When approaching the topic of replacing older ships, have you researched inverted-bow ships? Ulstein designs and builds ships with their X-BOW design that has been primarily used for vessels that frequent rough and choppy waters like cruise ships, RoPax vessels, oil and gas exploration, fishery ships, as well as vessels that install offshore wind infrastructure. The X-Bow is designed to provide better handling in rough seas and to lower fuel consumption by causing less hydrodynamic drag.

<https://ulstein.com/innovations/x-bow>.

Thank you for your time,

Kevin O'Neal-Smith

8/28/2020

I'm sure you have heard all of the many, many reasons why the Alaska Marine Highway system is so important to Alaska and its residents. We rely on it for health care, supplies, services we can't get in our own towns, recreation and school activities among numerous other purposes.

The tourists who use the system bring much needed economic support to those same communities through their spending on food, accommodations, activities and purchases. More economic help comes back to the state from the ferry system through employment of many state residents.

It's been said the Marine Highway System doesn't pay for itself. Of course not. Even toll roads don't pay for themselves but this system at least brings in funds that help mitigate its expense when properly managed. This includes providing reasonable scheduling and not cutting off communities for months at a time.

Thank you for taking my comments.

Megan Pasternak, Sitka, AK

8/29/2020

Alaska Marine Highway System Economic Reshaping Report

The need to support all of Alaska is obvious from ferries to bypass mail delivery. Alaska is unique, now is the time to rethink an approach that has no boxes to conform to and be as creative, resourceful, ingenious, as I know many Alaskan have proven themselves to be.

Labor: who loves to be out on the water? Has experience? Willing to teach? Willing to learn?

Trade: Cooperative collaboration in communities.

Mechanical: Energy alternatives exploring solar, wind, tidal

You get the idea no I do not have all the answers yet so many times the answers reveal themselves with the right Questions.

We have come a long way from statehood in 1959 lets keep moving forward with innovations.

Connie Harris

Palmer, AK

-Connie-

Sent with positive intentions

8/29/2020

Path to Transition

For years AMHS has provided excessive services, an excessive number of ports with an excessive number of ferries in relation to the number of passengers served per ship. There are currently twelve vessels on the AMHS roster as compared to what was available in April 1967 and at that time provided excellent service. Over the years AMHS provided thru fares and “drivers go free” programs making the trips more affordable.

As the state of Alaska strives to reign in unsustainable spending beyond what our annual revenues generate, it is with great pleasure and a sense of appreciation to see the AMHS reducing the number of ferries and sailings as cost cutting measures while still providing this mode of transportation to our coastal communities.

In southeast Alaska I suggest eliminating the number of ports as follows: Bellingham and Skagway. These ports are interconnected by roads to other transit points and by doing so would provide cost savings to the AMHS (maintenance on vessels and port facilities) and increase the number of passengers per boat and be more affordable out of Prince Rupert and Haines.

The reason for the connection to the lower 48 (Seattle/Bellingham) was due to excess rock slides on the Yellowhead Highway between Prince George and Prince Rupert and since then, highway conditions have vastly improved.

It has also been repeated many times that military personnel are in need of the Bellingham run for reasons of not being able to get personal weapons or themselves through Canada to their next duty station. The support behind these statements are in error – upon transfer of station the government will move service members, house hold goods and dependents from the old duty station to the new duty station utilizing whatever transportation options are available. If in fact the government will not include personal weapons with house hold goods, then military personnel can ship them from one FFL holder to another and pick them up close to the new assigned post. As to military owned weapons, military personnel are required to sign them in at their old post to be reassigned a different weapon at their new post.

Adding last-minute sailings beyond what is built in to the approved schedule for special events (beer festivals, marathons, snow mobile races, high school athletics and etc.) result in additional expense and disruption to established schedules, and should not be allowed. A solution would be to have the event holders conform to the AMHS schedule for the sake of greater efficiency and less cost or have the local municipal governments pay the added expenses that come with additional sailings or altered schedules. The state population as a whole should not be asked to shoulder the added cost burden that occurs with these added sailings for local communities promoting economic or extracurricular athletic activities.

Following the above recommendations and avoiding service to Pelican and Tenakee due to the residents originally desiring to “live off the grid.” I believe AMHS Southeast could run smoothly and efficiently with 1-2 mainline ferries and one day boat. This will require a little trip pre-planning by customers rather than having the luxury of additional ferries that was once provided.

The existing Kake terminal was recently replaced and it is not economically viable to construct/reconstruct a road from Kake to Petersburg as it would also require another new shore side facility as well as another vessel to get people and vehicles to the existing terminal in Petersburg. Having worked in government Budget and Finance for a number of years, I found it quite easy to alter the direction of funding based on new and more urgent priorities. Alaska DOT should explore these alternatives more effectively otherwise this road would never have been considered and the funding directed to the AMHS maintenance and vessel replacement program. Granted, the federal government has designated transportation corridors but that doesn’t compel a road has to be built for the sake of building a road.

The traffic to and from Sitka can be handled easily with the two mainline ferries (one north to Haines & one south to Prince Rupert) arriving and departing here per week or every other week. The current schedule indicates that a five-day layover in Petersburg is now required to get from Sitka to Haines which adds more of a price burden after food and lodging is tacked on reducing customer affordability.

Bouncing from one web page to another on the AMHS website to determine scheduling changes caused by maintenance needs or layup is an indication of poor planning and detracts from the concept of predictable and reliable service. An annual and long-term replacement schedule/plans for vessels incorporating past design failures and docking facilities should be studied, plans developed and reviewed and signed (so someone can be held accountable), funded, adhered to and incorporated into an annual sailing schedule rather than one every six months. By not having an annual sailing schedule disallows the AMHS customer from making travel plans from one season into the next which usually isn’t published until the eleventh hour leaving one wondering and sometimes wandering.

Thank you.

Greg Overturf, Sitka, AK

8/30/2020

In Gustavus, the ferry is essential and reduced sailings and increased prices are a hardship. We need to get to Juneau for supplies and medical appointments. If the spacing of ferries is far apart, we have to pay for lodging in Juneau which is too expensive. If there are fewer ferries, consider having two in a week and then skipping weeks so we can get back from Juneau with our vehicles. We even sleep in our vehicle when we go to Juneau, and having to do that for a week or two before the next ferry isn't an option! The cost of flying is higher, and then we don't have our vehicle for transportation in Juneau and can't carry building supplies and groceries back. Also, if the price has to be raised, raise it for tourists and not residents.

Thank you for your consideration of our situation.

Michele Cornelius

Gustavus, AK

8/30/2020

I believe the AMHS can return to a time when the ships ran on schedule and carried large numbers of passengers and vehicles. I worked as a deck officer from June of 1969 to June of 1999. Twenty four of those years I sailed as Master. Prior to the influx of large amounts of oil money in the 70's, it was pretty much a bare bones operation. The office staff was small and the ships were well managed. One serious benefit was that the ships were of a similar design and the machinery was the same, with the exception of the Wickersham, which was foreign built and under a foreign flag and her time with the AMHS was only a few years. Then the oil money came and with it big ideas on how to spend it. There were a number of us who argued against the idea of high speed ferries and other new vessel designs and zone systems with day boats. The three original ferries were ideal for the SE Alaska, Prince Rupert and Puget Sound runs.

We need to get back to running a system designed for passenger convenience and at a price that doesn't cause people to have second thoughts about traveling on the ferries. The bars and gift shops should be restored and we should look into the possibly of privatizing these, as well as the food service. Mainline ferries and whatever feeder ferries are needed should be the main focus and there must be a lot of passenger ship talent out there who could provide some valuable advice on how to put it all together.

As you can see my focus is primarily on the SE Alaska operations, but the entire system needs some serious revitalization and put in the hands of people interested in seeing the system brought to its full potential, rather than having politicians and bureaucrats dabbling with it.

Finally, in this very uncertain world, if there should be a serious disruption in commercial service to Alaska, the Ferry System could be a valuable lifeline.

Sincerely,

Capt. Art Johnson

8/30/2020

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yes, we need a separate AMHS division. The current arrangement has allowed us to have no medium or long range plan. Admin. seems to just run it day to day, our boats have gone obsolete, and the whole operating plan is no longer valid. This has resulted in the current predicament. Needs have changed, and we did not bother to anticipate this.

The first and most important thing to acknowledge is that this is a public service, not a business. A business needs to maximize profits for that business. The economic model for a public service is different. The need is to maximize the benefit to the public as a whole, whether that benefit is returned to the public service or not. Do the most good possible for the economy, not the provider. Much of the good done will have value, but not be recoverable to the AMHS, as in people travel to our town to buy goods that are not available to them at home, benefiting Alaskan businesses, but we don't have a way to charge the businesses for this. Many studies have shown that the AMHS has a very positive effect on the economy, yet requires a subsidy. Without competitive rates, travel would occur less, losing the benefit to the economy that that travel would produce. Boats should be full to maximize benefit, and as departure gets closer, rates should drop till they fill up, the opposite of the current "dynamic pricing". If the last spaces go for free to seniors, veterans, etc. more good would be done at the same cost.

Our boats are obsolete, as well as our routing. I advocate for a hub and spoke approach to keep the mainliners covering more ground in less time, as they are the most expensive to run. They would load in Bellingham with only two destinations, Ketchikan and Juneau. This would simplify loading the boats, which should be much quicker than it is today with so many stops to account for. Loading today is very slow and tedious. When they stop in Ketchikan they would have only one remaining destination, and would just drive on. Small day boats would serve the hubs such as one to Prince Rupert, one to Wrangell and Petersburg on the south end of the island, bypassing the Wrangell narrows. Another to Haines and Skagway, etc. These would be small boats allowing for more frequent trips when needed, and less trips per week when demand reduces. Mainliners would also be sized to allow for scheduling like every other day service in the busy season down to two trips per week or so in the slow times. Large boats limit our ability to provide frequent service, and make scaling to demand more difficult. When the IFA went to small boats and daily service ridership expanded greatly, doing maximum good for the local economy.

Yes, these changes would require quite a few new boats, but our fleet is really old, and we need new boats anyway. We just need a new plan of operation. Running large mainliners infrequently, and slowly, by stopping in every port, loaded to allow loading and unloading in so many places while a large boat and passengers and crew waits and then repeats this procedure again and again makes for very slow and expensive travel. We can do much better. We have the data for demand to calculate the right size of ships. We can have faster travel, lower fares more economic activity, and lower costs, plus most importantly, do as much good for the economy as possible, as required for any public service.

Thanks for listening to my perspective,
Karl Powers

8/31/2020

Mr. Chairman, honorable members

I believe there are two components to the question regarding the AMHS system

Short Term bandage issues and needs

Long Term Governance

Both of these are difficult due to the budgetary issues that are and will be faced by the SOA.

Short term I believe you have to acknowledge that the AMHS is a highway not a ferry system. It connects communities without access to roads and services that are enjoyed in the main population centers in Alaska. Many if not most of these communities serviced have few if any other reliable options that provide for affordable logistics and transportation.

I think that we all have to realize that the SOA will not subsidize the system to the degree required for it to retain its size and service capability.

With that in mind, even though the long line connections to WA & BC are historically the largest revenue generating routes I believe you have to prioritize intra port services that primarily serve Alaska communities over the long haul mainliner routes. This will not be easy but getting people from Hoonah to Juneau is more important than getting people from Bellingham to Ketchikan.

With these two things in mind, I believe we need to look at reconfiguring the system so it meets the needs of Alaska intra port services. I am the owner of Alaska's largest, by foot print, moving company. My company is the primary contractor to the USCG for moving services in SE, Kodiak and Cordova. I think it is a shame that the lack of the AMHS Highway service makes it impractical to service Cordova, Sitka, Juneau, Kodiak, Dutch, & Ketchikan via highway. The lack of capability this year has doubled costs and denigrated service which is passed on to the customer and ultimately passed on to all residents as it moves through the economic system

When there is service, the dynamic pricing makes it impossible for me as a business person to know my costs and price accordingly. The highway is not an airplane where you can use a dynamic pricing system for business pricing.

Long Term the system demands a public private corporate structure. This has been apparent for so long and studied to death that only those who want to kill the system or have a personal agenda do not recognize the need for this partnership.

I suggest to you that because it is a highway system it has to be run for the benefit of the public. It is not a business but it can be managed using business tools and freedom to meet the long term needs of the citizens of AL.

Chiefly, it needs to be run apolitically with the ability to access private and public expertise and resources. The capital costs, planning window and operating costs must be managed as if the AMHS was a business and not by the whims or wishes of each legislature, which I will call the Board of Directors and the CEO, the Governor.

I do not believe you are going to solve the challenges faced by the system effectively without an empowered professional board. Not a board that represents particular regional or political interests like MTAB but a Board comprised of the best minds we can find like an independent Board of Directors of a Fortune 500 company. Legislation to this effect was introduced under the Walker Administration. It needs work but the basic framework of a governing system is there.

Every day we put off making hard choices for another study or fact finding commission, will make it less likely that the system will survive for anyone. Greg Wakefield

8/31/2020

To the nice folks in the Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Work Group:

The ferries are crucial to the survival of uniquely Alaskan communities.

People in coastal communities need those ferries, and many of us love them!

These Alaska Highways are a necessity for many, and a treasure for us all.

Please, save the ferries — all of them!

Sincerely,

Helena Spector, Anchorage

8/31/2020

I live in Gustavus own property in Gustavus and work at greenscreek mine .I have depended on the ferry to go home and come back to work since the Ferry started coming to Gustavus . We need a dependable ferry to help this community.

8/31/2020

Hello,

Please consider that the ferries are vital to our way of life and while it may seem intangible to some, the benefits outweigh the costs in more ways than one.

Also, a very real likelihood is that if the ferry service is further reduced or removed, some communities in Southeast Alaska specifically may be reduced in number as people will no longer be able to afford to live there, thus reducing further the economic viability of the region.

I strongly urge you to do your utmost to keep the ferries going!

Thanks for your consideration.

Gene Cornelius

Gustavus, Alaska

8/31/2020

As an Alaska resident for 40 years, 20 of them in Southeast (Juneau/Hoonah/Haines), I personally know the necessity of the AHMS. For small communities like Hoonah, where I taught for four years, regular ferry service is every bit as vital as highways are on the road system. It's not called the Alaska Marine HIGHWAY system for nothing. THESE SHIPS AND THE ROUTES THEY TRAVEL ARE OUR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION NETWORK. Imagine if access to the Parks or Seward highways were drastically cut--say, open only 50 percent of the time, or less. The residents who are served by these vital arteries of travel and commerce would be outraged, and the state's economy would be crippled. The Alaska Marine Highway System is no different. Requiring that it be profitable, or privatizing it, would be the direct equivalent of demanding that our public highways be profitable.

So what's the answer in this time of economic shortfalls? The answer is simple: some sort of taxation, and/or cutting back on the permanent fund. Also, consider increasing ferry fees, perhaps for everyone, but proportionately more for non-residents of the given communities, or those traveling for recreational purposes. Unpopular and painful? Sure. But necessary. Once upon a time, we briefly enjoyed a conduit of shared wealth thanks to the trans-Alaska pipeline. But those heady times are long gone, and unlikely to return.

Funding for public services, including ferry and road service, and public safety and education, are vital to our well-being. Let's put on our big boy and girl pants and come to grips with economic reality. Impose taxes of some kind--a statewide sales tax, perhaps--and cap/regulate the permanent fund checks. Alaskans need to wake up to the truth that we don't have some sort of magic privilege to expect public services for free. Let's get on with it--the sooner, the better.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Jans

Haines, AK

8/31/2020

Hello:

Yesterday I returned from a weekend getaway to Haines. How wonderful to be able to get out of My home town of Juneau considering COVID has all but prevented air travel.

Besides enjoying a vacation, I was able to bring groceries to several friends that live in Haines a small freezer to one and several specialty items, that are not sold in Haines to support their diet (severe food allergy).

During my 32 years living in Haines, not one summer has gone by where I do not travel by ferry. Additionally, as a Special Education Teacher working for SERRC, I have used the ferry to get to SE communities when small planes could not operate due to weather.

The limited limited ferry service SE AK experienced last winter proved to be a huge economic burden to many.

Please do the right things and offer a consistent ferry schedule for all of our communities.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Amy Kesten, Juneau, AK

8/31/2020

Although you have heard over and over about how important the ferries are to the people of Alaska's wellbeing, consider that they are also important, actually essential, to the economies of every single town in Southeast Alaska. Directly essential. And indirectly essential to the economies of Anchorage and Fairbanks.

Not only do the ferries provide transportation to families, school groups, tourists, athletic teams, they also carry the goods that will be in grocery stores and other shops. The ferries provide the cohesiveness that we need to operate as a region. There is no other public transportation. The ferries are essential. Without the AMHS, Southeast Alaska and its people cannot flourish. It is just as clear as that.

Bridget Smith and Jim Asper

Juneau, AK

8/31/2020

Last night on KTOO I watched a news feature from the state's film archives on the Alaska Marine Hwy system from 1978 when Bill Hudson was in charge. While it was great to see people young again what was most startling was the persistence of the same problems the feature identified--and the continuation of different ideas about how to make ferries better and more affordable.

1. Management of the ferries is political rather than professional. It was a problem in 1978 and still is. We need expert management by professionals, not by people who change with every election.
2. We need to solve the maintenance problem, invest in maintenance and not make short term money savings dominate over long term investment.
3. One other idea that was voiced by some is a bad idea: Hire fewer workers and weaken the union.

If we had adopted professional expertise to run the Marine Hwy, paid attention to maintenance expertise, we would not be in the current position. We can still do it.

Margo Waring

Juneau, AK 99801

8/31/2020

Thank you for accepting my comments as you consider input from AMHS stakeholders.

As a 46 year resident of Alaska, having grown up and lived in Anchorage and now, Juneau I have used the ferry system while living in each of these communities to travel from Haines to Prince Rupert and Bellingham many years ago, and from Juneau to other Southeast communities after moving to Juneau in 1991.

I have two points for your consideration.

1. Among the many elements of operations you must consider I would like to point out that ridership began to decline most significantly when schedules were changed frequently, routes changed, and visitors and resident travelers could no longer rely on vacation or other travel to and from Alaska and around Southeast via the AMHS. I realize that those and other cost-cutting efforts including loss of food and beverage services, and more were implemented to try to keep budgets in line, however, these efforts have been counter-productive to maintaining and growing ridership. The extreme inconsistency of scheduling and locations has been a serious threat to the viability of AMHS and needs to be remedied. Whatever else is enacted, this issue has to be resolved.

2. Each time we have a new governor and administration, the AMHS operations are changed, usually not for the better, and too often by politically appointed people who know little or nothing about ferry operations, construction, maintenance, and repair. The can gets kicked down the road by successive administrations and the costly repairs or replacements aren't completed because of the pressure to cut state budgets and the ferry system has taken hard hits. Now, as before, administrations and legislators say we can't afford to fix the system and those from road/railbelt and bush communities have little investment in maintaining it.

I ask that you go back to the inception of the AMHS, re-read the intent and purposes for developing it and remember that Southeast Alaska and the other communities served by the AMHS are as Alaskan as those on the road system. The AMHS is our road system and it must be maintained with the same priority given to communities served by our highways and roads.

If a country like Norway can serve so many tiny communities having small populations with their first full-electric and hybrid ferries already in operation, reducing emissions by 30% and 70 partly or fully electric ferries already commissioned to take over transport by 2022, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50% until 2030, and to be carbon neutral in 2050, Alaska should be able to develop a viable plan for operating a ferry system in coastal communities off the road system. We have to think outside the box and further down the "road" instead of endless band-aid old solutions that keep us stuck in place using the same tired "solutions" that don't work. Commerce and communities are suffering. Yes, funds need to be invested to make this work effectively and businesses often use revenue generators to subsidize less profitable, but necessary departments to achieve their missions. That 's how businesses operate and the AMHS is the peoples' business.

Thank you very much for your work in this group. I hope you can generate recommendations based on best practices worldwide that would best meet the needs of our communities and the State of Alaska.

Pamela Watts

Juneau, AK

8/31/2020

To whom it may concern:

I am a 38 year resident of Juneau and have travelled with the Ferry System many times.

I am saddened to witness the defunding and mismanagement of the Ferry System.

My comments are of a general nature and are as follows:

The ferry system benefits the entire state economically, and as such should be fully funded and have a full schedule of sailings to all coastal communities, as well as Bellingham.

The ferry system should be based on the needs of the communities of coastal Alaska and not on profitability. The ferries are our roads, and as such should be based on providing transportation opportunities like roads in mainland Alaska.

Sincerely,

Pat White

Juneau, Alaska

8/31/2020

Greetings,

As a Pelican resident, I was pleased to hear about the LeConte being available for Pelican for winter months except February and March.

Please let this news be accurate and please let us know the days as soon as possible. We plan trips to Juneau and other travel around the ferry and appreciate the vital service to our community very much!!

Thank you for being there for us and our businesses!

Sandra and Joe Quinn

8/31/2020

To whom it may concern,

I've been a part of several ferry operations throughout the country. My recommendation would be to get the ferry operation up and running from Cascade point to Mud bay. This would require minimal road work and could be up and running quickly. A one way trip would take around 2 hours at 16.5 knots. It be a large reduction in day to day operating costs. We could finally use the vessels built for a day crew. We could also open up the possibility for day commuters from Haines to Juneau. Juneau's affordable housing could be in Haines.

Ultimately, I would like to see the road extended to the Kensington Mine, where another Ferry terminal could be built on the site of the existing Kensington mine dock or the opposite side of the peninsula. This project would effectively link the mine to Juneau by a road and potentially link two mines by ferry making multiple trips per day cost effective due to potential mine traffic and the trip time could be reduced to 1 hour if the docks where positioned correctly. There could be other variations of this involving a Berners bay ferry and a road across the peninsula and Lynn canal ferry.

Thank you for your time.

Robert Shoemake

8/31/2020

I would like to voice my strongest support as a resident of Southeast Alaska for a more robust ferry service. Our recent service following the continued cuts in funding for the Marine Highway has been inadequate and has directly caused hardship to the people who depend on it.

It has been shown that the State's investment in the ferry system prior to Governor Dunleavy's cuts yielded a 2-1 return in overall economic impact. Where else in the State budget have we seen such a clear positive result?

Here in Southeast, our coastal communities are dependent on the ferries for our community health and well-being. These ferries are a lifeline providing access to health care, groceries, and other goods. The ferries are our highway, linking the villages, towns, and cities of the Panhandle to each other and to the conventional road system.

Please restore the funding and service that are vital to our state.

Alicia Hughes-Skandijs

Juneau, Alaska

9/1/2020

It is with disappointment and frustration that I am offering comments, once again, related to the AMHS.

I, and my family, have been users of the AMHS for over 40 years and have seen a steady deterioration, especially over the last 15 years. The causes have been discussed and analyzed before, so there is no need to rehash them. The current status of the system is that it is essentially no system, not serving the communities it was designed to serve with either a minimum number of port calls or fares that promote individual/business usage. Covid 19 added energy to the AMHS death spiral.

Your task is to pull the system back from the brink. You have gotten testimony about the AMHS as an essential service, and I will just say “ditto” to all of those arguments. It’s a fact that cannot be disputed.

Here are my additional comments:

1. Provide minimum, fair, equitable service to the coastal communities of SE and SW Alaska that had been getting service prior to the Dunleavy disastrous budget cuts. Communities like Sitka, with a population of 9,000, have been too often cut off from fair service because of its location on the “outside”.
 2. Secure reliable state funding with the same prioritization as roads in the rest of Alaska. Essential service. The road system and AMHS should not compete for the same limited funds in a win-lose situation.
 3. Forward fund the AMHS? Please continue to consider this. Arrange for some of the Railbelt legislators to visit coastal communities and see the real need. We spend way too much time talking just to each other in the affected regions. The legislative appropriation power is in the hands of our neighbors/fellow Alaskans in the Railbelt. It may get harder to garner support given the result of the Aug. primary — doesn’t bode well for AMHS support after the Nov. election, but these folks must be convinced to support the system. (How easy will it be for Railbelt legislators to get themselves and their cars to Juneau in January? Will there be a cross-Gulf ferry or ferries to Juneau from Haines?)
 4. Create a public corporation as long as a stable mechanism for funding is built in. It has been determined, many times, that the AMHS cannot exist without state funding. I don’t know the best model for this....that’s your task.
 5. Use some of the CARES ACT monies as immediate relief for the winter schedule, and as seed money for a future better schedule and/or to get maintenance done to get ferries back online. Justification? It’s an essential service on many levels, including the fact that the AMHS provides “eyes on the water” and emergency marine assistance during all seasons of the year, helping to protect Alaskans and others using the waterways.
 6. Ditch the dynamic pricing structure. It’s a disincentive as travel by ferry is unlike scheduling travel on a major airline. Locals often have to use the ferry with little advance planning. Medical visits, car repair needs, unplanned shipping of items....whoever came up with dynamic pricing clearly didn’t understand the customer base.
 7. Reconnect communities with a long history of cultural, social, economic history. ex. Sitka and Angoon. Port Lions and Kodiak.
 8. Rebuild ridership. The destructive loop of unreliable, expensive service = low ridership = evidence that the ferry isn’t needed (wrong) = more poor service/high fares = lack of faith in the system/potential riders no longer even consider a ferry option. Death by a thousand cuts.
 9. With reduction of service - loss of experienced crew who have to look for work elsewhere; cost of “mothballing” the ships. The long-term costs of this are huge. I want a ferry operated by crew trained for and experienced in navigation on our waterways.
 10. Survival of coastal communities - small businesses, the economic driver of the fisheries, families raising their children in coastal communities, access to transportation for medical care, supplies that cannot go by plane, school programs - this is really the essence of the need for the ferry system. It’s a way of life at stake.
- Good luck as you tackle this huge issue. Support and protect the AMHS as an essential service which benefits the entire state, requires state funding, and contributes to the sustainability of Alaska’s coastal communities.

Sincerely,

Brenda Campen

9/1/2020

We need to have these vessels supporting our communities. We need to continue to have a reliable system that people can depend on!

Thank you, Craig Ring

9/1/2020

My name is Maureen Moore & I currently reside on Douglas Hwy in Juneau. In the many years of living here in Alaska I have been lucky enough to also have been a part of the communities of Hoonah, Ketchikan, Homer & Gustavus, all communities that rely on the Alaska Marine Highway system.

I recall a conversation with a long-time employee in which she said, "We carry the babies home from the hospital & we carry the dead bodies home to their families, too." That, to me, sums up how vital the Marine Hwy is to coastal communities, it supports life. Literal life in the form of access to health care & hospitals, to affordable food to restock the pantry for winter; economic life for bringing material goods to market & bringing goods into the community for resale... ALL of this also supporting the economies of the larger communities of Juneau, Ketchikan & Sitka. Educational life is supported when our students are able to gather & compete, not only in sports, but for things like Robotics, Drama, Debate & Forensics, and to attend workshops in art & culture. And then there's the social life, especially that of the indigenous communities... getting to Celebration & Gold Medal, attending potlatches to honor elders & other family members, visiting family members in care facilities. We surely owe our indigenous neighbors an affordable method of transportation to facilitate their being able to stay in the communities they love. After all, we have benefited from the resources we extract from this land, be they sustainable or consumed & never to be replaced.

Those are a few of the human & humane reasons for continuation of the highway system in SE... always remembering that it IS a highway system, a road system, not unlike the thousands of miles of pavement that serve other areas of the State.

I also have a few comments about the strictly political way this issue is being viewed.

First, although some may not want to "divide" our State by making comparisons of the size of our investments in any given area, I believe it bears reminding folks that it's the way it is. Our State is divided into regions, boroughs, towns & cities & voting districts. Every year our political representatives are tasked with "dividing" up a set amount of money so every district is satisfied with the performance of their representative. They form "coalitions" to levy power one against the other to "bring home the bacon". No judgement here, just the facts.

I have attempted to collect more facts about what we spend on paved highways, both building them & maintaining them. Seemed a fairly straightforward thing to ask for... not so. The DOT budget was over 900 pages long in FY 2019 & listed every employee position across the State & the cost thereof, BUT no clear numbers on road building. It would seem that Highways & Aviation are ONE category in the budget, although the Marine Highway System is its own category. All this makes it easy to see what the ferry system costs us, but not what we spend on paved roads. Which leads me to wonder, what numbers ARE being used to weigh the value of the ferry system?

The McDowell Group report in 2016 determined that the return on investment was more than double. They also state that:

- 95% of AMHS employees live IN Alaska
- AMS spent over 84 million with over 500 Alaskan businesses in 2014
- 2/3 of AMHS bookings are from Alaskans
- Anchorage residents were the 2nd largest subset of travelers & ANC saw 4.1 million in sales from the AMHS
- Each out of state ferry passenger spent almost 2X what a non-ferry visitor did

We spent 117 million of General Fund monies on the AMS in 2014.

How much did we spend on paved roads?

Using the numbers from the McDowell Group study, it sure looks like the AMHS is a good investment, in addition to being of immeasurable value to our health, the education of our youth, and the social strength of communities & cultures.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen E. Moore

Juneau, AK

9/1/2020

The current dynamic pricing system should be eliminated.

It is impossible to plan ahead for necessary medical appointments. Being penalized for making last minute reservations is a real hardship for Alaskans. \$50.00 - \$100 isn't going to make or break the ferry system but can make a huge difference to people that have to get to a facility for medical help.

Very few if any people are traveling for pleasure. They are traveling out of necessity.

Please consider abolishing these penalties.

Thank you

Lauri Ritter

9/1/2020

Alaska's Marine Highway System is unique, world-famous, and an innovative, truly American way of responding to transportation needs in a rugged, coastal environment where getting all communities connected to a (always hazardous) road system would be prohibitively expensive to construct AND maintain.

The coastal ferries work. I do not live in Alaska, but have visited Alaska regularly – on 29 separate trips – over the past 35 years. On many trips I have traveled by the ferry system. Indeed, my first ever visit to Alaska in the mid-80s was by ferry from Seattle to Juneau—on the Matanuska. I repeated that voyage with my son in 2017, (from Bellingham) and on other trips have taken short ferry trips from Juneau, for example to Sitka, or Kake—or several times to and from Haines.

However my favorite trips are the overnight, multi-day ones; each time, I have traveled as a deck passenger and put my sleeping bag on the [covered] deck. This is a world-class wonderful way to travel. My favorite trip has been the Aleutian islands run on the Tustumena, which I have done twice from Homer, and WOULD have done again this year, had not COVID 19 forced me to cancel my 2020 planned Alaska trip. But I am anxious to do that fascinating trip again. And twice I have enjoyed the cross-gulf voyage from Juneau to Whittier.

However, recent cuts in service and cost increases are effectively destroying your ferry system. Certainly they are discouraging its use and its users. Does Alaska not realize what a world-renowned treasure this marine highway system is? What other state has something special like this? You should promote it, boast about it, highlight it in ALL tourist literature and keep it up to date as a special attraction. Actually ENCOURAGE its use by both Alaskans AND visitors. Yes, I KNOW that many coastal communities depend on it, and this is clearly vital for Alaska and Alaskans. But I must emphasize that even for a visitor like me – it is also vital. It is THE best way to visit the BEST state.

At least it used to be. It used to be the best state. Please keep it that way—with your Marine Highway System.

Don't let a treasure vanish for not appreciating it enough. The Marine Highway System MUST be kept up, maintained, and enhanced.

Vicky Hoover

San Francisco, CA

9/1/2020

Dear Working Group Members,

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on AMHS service.

This past Winter, my husband and myself were stranded in Ketchikan from January to June, when AMHS stopped all service North and South from Ketchikan. Not exactly what we had in mind when we visited our son with our vehicle. We are frequent ferry travelers as we have family throughout Alaska, and currently live in Tenakee Springs.

It has been our custom to travel from Tenakee to Juneau, then North to Skagway or South to Ketchikan, then to Prince Rupert to travel the loop back to Juneau, then TENAKEE. It has been a wonderful way to see Alaska and visit our adult children, and friends.

After speaking with many other frustrated ferry travelers, I learned many reasons as to why they were choosing not to ride the ferry.

Cost for vehicles and passengers has made in unaffordable for most. The inability to have a reliable schedule, where travel was assured, and constant change that was not beneficial to passengers were just some of the reasons. Tour groups need to plan way in advance, and are no longer able to count on a reasonable schedule. Business owners have had to sell out or close business because of the unreliability of AMHS scheduling in many communities. It's hard to plan group events such as conferences, Touring groups, weddings, funerals, or city events, when there are so many cancellations, or changes.

Many businesses use the ferry to move vehicles and goods between communities in SE. I am a small business owner and am open pretty close to year round. We rely on AMHS to move goods, and people to our community, especially in the Winter when air service can be greatly affected by weather. There have been weeks without any air service due to weather, and that is exactly when we need ferry service the most. It is our lifeline to medical, and the movement of food/goods, people and services from Juneau and throughout SE Alaska. In the last three years we have personally had to cancel scheduled family holidays together, medical appointments, and memorial services for family. Major life events have been canceled or postponed due to AMHS lack of service to our communities. We have been unable to buy wood products from Hoonah residents, or building products from Sitka as we have done in the past.

We have enjoyed service for more than 50 years to TENAKEE and other SE communities. Our livelihoods and communities are inextricably connected through AMHS, and it is a shame that we are in the situation we find ourselves with an extreme lack of service. Please keep consistent scheduling, with affordable rates, to 'Keep Alaska Moving!' We are all in this together! This is our Highway, and more important to SE Alaska than any Anchorage Highway, which require no payment or funds from the residents of Anchorage.

Thank you,

Cyndi Roman

9/1/2020

Dear Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Work Group:

I am very concerned about the future of the Alaska Marine Highway System. I live in Gustavus, where the ferry service has been drastically reduced in the past year. We did not have ferry service from mid-January to mid-June (only part of that time was for dock renovations), and large gaps last fall, and very few ferries this summer. We, like many communities, rely on the ferry as reliable transportation to Juneau for doctors' appointments, work, groceries, visiting family, school activities, and getting supplies. The weather in the winter can be so bad that no flights can go in or out for days at a time, and when that happens we only have the ferry. Also, in the winter we only have small planes that cannot accommodate all people – including those with medical conditions or that are disabled and cannot physically get into the plane or their wheelchair or other equipment cannot fit on the plane. We need the ferry!

Ridership has been low due to COVID-19 this year, but that is not the only reason. The ferry schedule has been very limited, inconsistent, and unreliable. Either there aren't ferries scheduled when people need them, or they get canceled so often that people make other plans to avoid the chance of missing their important trip to town. The ridership would increase if we had more regular scheduled ferries, and if we could actually believe that the ferry will show up (and not break down, be decommissioned, or cut entirely). The ferry service is a Catch-22. You can't pay to run them without ridership, and you can't get ridership if you don't run them regularly and consistently. You can't cut the ferries or make the schedules staggered, inconsistent, and unreliable and then complain that no one is using the ferry! There has to be a balance. And we cannot look at the ferry system as a profitable business. There needs to be enough revenue to operate the system and to pay for repairs, but there does not have to be profit above that – it is a service! How many roads in this country make a profit? I can't think of any, including toll roads. The tolls are to maintain the roads, not for profit.

My suggestion is to come up with a practical schedule that serves all of the communities in Southeast on a regular basis – absolute minimum once a week per community. Run as many ferries as you can afford at a time, because we don't want to end up like last year where the only ferry in service broke down with no ferry ready to back it up. And boats need to be used to stay in good shape – dry dock is not a good long term or short term solution. There is clearly money to build useless roads or unnecessarily upgrade other roads, like the Kake Access road from Kake to nowhere, or paving the last 50 miles of the Dalton Highway. If the state can spend millions on these projects for oil companies or logging operations to use the roads, then surely we can find the money for Alaskans to use the Marine Highway. So fight to allocate more funds to AMHS. Or if it is necessary to create a new department that is separate from the rest of DOT to get the funds that AMHS needs, then do that. Alaska is struggling financially, but that does not mean we cannot afford to run the ferries. Cutting the ferries is cutting off the lifeline for many communities.

Another consideration in how to increase ridership should be to remove or change the new dynamic pricing system. Especially now that capacity is limited due to COVID procedures, it is unaffordable for many people to take their car on the ferry if they are not the first to book a ticket. I can understand a minor dynamic pricing, but to increase by up to 50% is a good reason for many people to not take the ferry even if they need it. Stable pricing, or a much smaller increase with dynamic pricing, would very likely increase ridership enough to pay for itself.

I have a couple of ideas to cut costs: sell the Hubbard because it was not built in a way it can be used regularly, and reduce administrative/reservations/office jobs. First, the Hubbard cost millions to build, was not built with crew quarters or to fit all docks, and has never been used. Sell it while it is still in mint condition and use the money to maintain the ferries that have been proven to work for Alaska for the past 60 years. Or use the money from the sale to add the correct door and crew quarters to the Tazlina so that it can be used regularly. I own an older boat, and like many other boat owners I know that boats can last many decades if they are properly and regularly maintained. So there is no reason to sell any of the older boats "because we can't afford them" or because they are past their prime. There is no such thing for a boat that is properly maintained to be past its prime. The State needs to keep on top of regular maintenance, which would result in fewer major overhauls and breakdowns throughout the years.

Second, I imagine that payroll and administrative costs are a huge expense. Obviously, a vessel needs a full crew to sail and needs dock crew to get the vessels in and out of port safely. But do we really need so many administrative positions? Can there be some cost savings if some of those jobs were consolidated? I don't like suggesting cutting jobs, but cutting a few office jobs seems worth it to keep the system running versus cutting many more crew and dock jobs because of reduced or cut schedules. We need the crew and dock workers to keep the ferries running, and we need the ferries to run to pay the expenses. If you have to make cuts, cut some of the office jobs. And if there are multiple commissioners or upper management, as there are with other departments within the State of Alaska system, then cut or reduce some of those, too. Clearly upper management has not been all that useful in keeping the ferry system running in the past few years, anyway. In summary, don't try to make AMHS a profitable business, remember that it is a service; create a more consistent schedule for all communities and ridership will increase; use and regularly maintain the vessels to prevent major problems; don't sell off the old ferries; and don't cut our lifeline! Be true to the mission of the department and "Keep Alaska moving through service and infrastructure." Thank you for reading my comments.

9/1/2020

The Marine Highway is an essential service for Southeast Alaska. It needs to be normalized. Ferries need to be running and in good repair.

I am a dual citizen and I have been unable to expeditiously settle my legal and financial affairs in Whitehorse since 2019 due to restrictions on the ferry service and Covid.

Limitations to the ferry schedule affect all areas of our lives including food, transportation and keeping families in touch.

Ferries also are good for business. They bring in tourists and seasonal workers.

We need the ferries.

Carole Bookless

Douglas, Alaska

9/1/2020

Dear Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Work Group:

I am concerned about the future of the Alaska Marine Highway. This is our road in coastal Alaska, our public highway system. I don't see how it is even a consideration to cut off our road system.

Southeast Alaska, as well as all the other coastal communities connected to the Alaska Marine Highway, needs the ferry to be consistent and to have regular sailings. We use this to road get to jobs, doctor's appointments, school events, buying groceries and supplies, tradeshow, fairs to sell our goods, travel to see family, travel for vacation, and bringing tourists and seasonal workers to our small towns. We need the ferry system to function in order for our communities to function.

This is an unusual year being that everything is modified due to COVID-19, but the ferry system had problems before the pandemic started. We need to come up with a good plan to keep the ferries running. Part of that is to have regular and consistent sailings. Minimum one vessel a week per community, and more than one vessel on line at a time. It was a disaster when the only vessel on line broke down with absolutely no other vessels ready to fill the gaps. That is unacceptable. We have a fleet of good vessels. If they are maintained regularly, and if they are not kept in dry dock for long periods, there is no reason they cannot run forever. As a commercial fisherman, I am a boat owner and I know that boats need to be used to stay in good shape. Keeping a boat tied to a dock or in dry dock is not good for the boat or the motors. Keeping the ferries running will help keep them in shape, that and regular upkeep.

If the sailing schedule was more consistent, with a schedule that people could actually believe will happen and with sailings that aren't so spread out that you can't do a round trip in a reasonable amount of time, then more people would use the ferry. People have lost confidence in the ferry system for many reasons: cutting the schedules, taking vessels off the schedule, canceling sailings, not having vessels ready to fill unexpected gaps, and waiting until the last minute to reveal a limited sailing calendar. If the ferries are available, people will buy the tickets!

Also, dynamic pricing was a mistake. Increasing the fares by up to 50% along with the increase in cancellation fees makes buying a ferry ticket unaffordable to many of the people that need it the most. The combination of the two changes is a problem. If you are unsure of your schedule and want to wait until the last minute to book a ticket so you don't have to pay the high cancellation fee, you can no longer afford the ticket because the fair went up by 50%! Either eliminate the dynamic pricing, or make it less dynamic. Maybe an increase of 15% for last minute tickets would be more reasonable. I think that the dynamic pricing actually reduced ridership because it made the tickets too expensive for many people.

Overall, I support the Alaska Marine Highway system. I think it could thrive like it used to if a good plan is put in place. My biggest suggestion is to keep the ferries running, because the more regular and consistent the sailings are, the more ridership and revenue you will get in order to operate.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely, Matt H., Gustavus, AK

9/1/2020

Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Work Group

Dear Members,

The Alaska Marine Highway is called a Highway because that describes its significance to all of us who reside in coastal Alaska and who depend upon its existence to facilitate the regions commerce, provide safe, dependable transportation for essential services, such as medical, and give students and others the ability to foster connections between communities that would otherwise be impractical. It allows those who would otherwise be unable to afford to travel beyond their communities the opportunity to do so, adding to the diversity and economic health of the regions served.

Poor and costly planning decisions have plagued the system and have contributed to funds being squandered that would otherwise have contributed to supporting a robust contemporary fleet of appropriate vessels.

There is an expectation that highways and roads throughout the state be maintained in good repair and these expectations are commonly met without charging users a user fee. Those of us, who use and depend upon the Marine Highway, pay a user fee to do so. Why are there no fees being charged for the thousands of residents and visitors who drive and impact the integrity of our roads everyday? Is there a similar Work Group assessing the profitability of our road network? Considering Alaska's coastal regions have always enhanced the wealth and allure of our entire state and that the AMHS has been an essential ingredient for its continued growth and prosperity, are fees being considered for those who drive our roads to be used to share in the expense of our Marine Highway? If not, why not?

To suggest that the AMHS should be self-supporting defies how most, if not all, contemporary public transportation functions; the AMHS, should not be uniquely scrutinized as an entity expected to turn a profit. It is as essential as any other means of transportation in the state, perhaps even more essential than most due the unique characteristics of the communities it serves. The vibrancy, innovation, economy, health and future of coastal regions and of those of us who reside here, is at stake, and your decisions will either cripple the future welfare and sustainability of these communities, or allow them to prosper.

We encourage you to invest in the communities the AMHS serves by recommending that this Administration support a safe, dependable and predictably scheduled ferry service. All communities that have flourished in the part due to the benefits of the AMHS must continue to be served. There is an intrinsic richness to the character of our coastal communities that greatly enhances the diversity of our state and its value to our country and the world. As these characteristic become less common globally, we should be doing all we can to support and maintain their viability.

Thank you for serving.

Sincerely,

Kip and Patricia Kermoian

9/2/2020

I would like to voice my strongest support as a resident of Southeast Alaska for a more robust ferry service. Our recent service following the continued cuts in funding for the Marine Highway has been inadequate and has directly caused hardship to the people who depend on it.

It has been shown that the State's investment in the ferry system prior to Governor Dunleavy's cuts yielded a 2-1 return in overall economic impact. Where else in the State budget have we seen such a clear positive result?

Here in Southeast, our coastal communities are dependent on the ferries for our community health and well-being. These ferries are a lifeline providing access to health care, groceries, and other goods. The ferries are our highway, linking the villages, towns, and cities of the Panhandle to each other and to the conventional road system.

Please restore the funding and service that are vital to our state.

Lizzie Solger

9/2/2020

To Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Working Group:

The name AK Marine Highway says it all... it is a highway. It provides an essential access route among SE communities and to the rest of Alaska, Canada, and the lower 48. Much needed goods and services travel via the ferry, including those related to buying food to eat, medical/dental appointments, social connects, business and industry, cultural events, construction and so on. The ferry helps facilitate nearly every aspect of our lives, basically, by moving people and goods where they need to go. In that way, the AMHS has been a cornerstone to SE communities with a long history that continues to fuel the vitality of SE communities. It should not be jeopardized. It should, instead, be supported as an essential transportation link.

The AMHS receives federal dollars. Unduly compromising ferry service is on par with limiting or eliminating access to the Glenn Highway or the Parks Highway or Alaska Highway and it is surprising that a legal fight along those lines has not yet moved to the forefront of discussions.

I support the need to reassess schedules and identify ways to save money. Privatization is an untenable long-term solution. AMHS is a government-supported responsibility to its people. I support having commissioners recognize this and who work hard to make the system efficient, dependable, and utilitarian. I do not support administrative dismantling of a transportation system in a manner that hobbles the health, growth, and vitality of SE AK communities. Fundamentally, the AMHS is a highway system and should be treated as such.

Thank you for your hard work. Judy Sherburne

9/2/2020

Please accept the attached letter from Aleutians East Borough Mayor Alvin D. Osterback as comment to AMHS Reshaping Work Group.

Thank you.

Ernie Weiss

Natural Resources Director

Aleutians East Borough

Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Work Group

The Aleutians East Borough communities of Akutan, False Pass, Cold Bay, King Cove and Sand Point rely directly on Alaska Marine Highway System service during summer months. These seasonal twice a month ferry runs to Southwest Alaska are necessary for the transport of goods and people, students, teachers, fishermen and health care workers. Tourists to Alaska are drawn by the incredible voyage through beautiful Southwest Alaska waters.

The Aleutians East Borough Assembly is committed to supporting the critical marine highway infrastructure. The Marine Highway is our highway. The Assembly has passed numerous Resolutions¹ in support of a sustainable ferry system to meet the needs of residents of our region, including adequate vehicle space for points south west of Kodiak. The Assembly supports sustainable funding, even forward-funded to provide a more reliable system, attracting more ridership. A future governing board for the marine highway should include adequate representation from Southwest Alaska.

A Strategic Plan Initiative² of the Assembly resulted in an Action Plan that states: 'The AEB will continue to advocate for continued service at current levels to AEB communities in the Gulf of Alaska, i.e. twice a month service during summer months. The AEB will also continue to push for the Tustumena replacement vessel. The AEB will also be actively pursuing funding for any needed upgrades for ferry dock facilities in AEB communities.'

The Assembly urges the State of Alaska to fulfill the obligation to replace the aging MV Tustumena that has served our region so well these many years. The Aleutians East Borough is ready to partner with the State and others to commit to a sustainable marine highway through Southwest Alaska. The document Draft: Reshaping the Alaska Marine Highway System provides a good starting point for a discussion on reforming the system. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on AMHS Reshaping Work Group.

Sincerely, Alvin D. Osterback, Mayor

9/2/2020

Hello, I was born in Ketchikan and have lived in Sitka and Juneau for the last 6 years. Ferry service is not discretionary but absolutely necessary for life in coastal Alaska, just as necessary as the highway that connects Anchorage and Fairbanks to the rest of the continent.

To provide this necessary service to coastal communities will require capital investments in the actual ferries to ensure they are operating in a cost-effective and reliable manner. It isn't possible to cut our way to reliability.

I hope that you will find a way to fund the ferries in a way that continues to provide this absolutely fundamental, necessary service to coastal Alaska. Jackson Matthew

9/2/2020

AMHS Committee,

The ferry system is our primary transportation link to the rest of the region and state. It is just as important as roads are, such as the ALCAN and Glenn Highways. It needs to be treated as such and fully funded to provide necessary service to our residents and visitors, there is no excuse for not doing so. Please take the politics out of this process. Public mass transportation is the future for our state, country and planet.

Sincerely,

Thom Ely

Haines, AK

9/2/2020

Definitely change the Marine Highway System into an independent "business" similar to the railroad. It should NOT be jerked back and forth with each new political administration. The costs are too great to run a service that way.

Eva Loforte

9/2/2020

In 1982 my husband Joe Harshman (deceased from a boating accident in Pelican in 2009), and I entered the State of Alaska Land Lottery and won the right to buy a piece of property located in Phonograph Creek Subdivision, just outside of Pelican. Beginning in 1987 Joe and his brothers built a small cabin that has become our family's treasure. We used the State AMHS for personal travel and to bring our building supplies, boats, and truck from Juneau every summer.

After Joe's death, my family and I have continued to spend summers in Pelican every summer. When I remarried, my husband loved Pelican as much as I do, and we built a home in Pelican town beginning in 2014. Using the Marine Highway for all of our building supplies, Jerue and Smith Transport brought every bit of building material and household furnishings from Juneau. We couldn't have done it without AMHS. We wouldn't have even considered building a home in Pelican if we knew the ferry system was going to be eliminated.

We are summer resident of Pelican, typically spending 2-3 months a year there. Friends and family visit every summer because of the marine highway.

I consider the Alaska Marine Highway just that...a HIGHWAY. And highways have to be maintained. Southeast Alaska communities rely on and expect this Highway to be maintained and service to continue. Please keep all of the State Highways maintained, including the Alaska Marine Highway.

I realize this is a "reshaping" group and I don't have the answers on how to reshape the AMHS. I do feel with as many scheduled ferries that Hoonah and Gustavus have that Pelican could/should have a continuation of at least one of those ferries every month.

I appreciate everyone's help with keeping our State Highway's maintained to keep Alaskans moving and the economy of the rural communities alive and prospering.

Respectfully,

Colleen Harshman Robertson

9/2/2020
To Whom it May Concern,
As you look at reshaping our marine highways I would like you to remember it is our highway. When you go to improve the mainland roads you make them wider and add more lanes so you should be looking at making our marine highway better for the users too. We use the marine highway the same way as the mainland highway is used. We go for groceries, doctor appointments, pick up supplies, visit family and friends, go on vacations, our schools use it for ways to take our kids to different activities and many other things. Please just remember that it is our highway.
Thank you
Sheila Biehl, Port Lions, AK

9/2/2020
It is absolutely cruel to treat SE Alaska the way you did last year with the ferry schedule. This is our lifeline in SE Alaska. Especially in the winter when flights are cancelled most every day!

Please give all communities a ferry at least once monthly. The price of groceries getting flown in is almost in doable for most seniors. Please have a heart!
Tom Hlavnicka
Hoonah

9/2/2020
To whom it may concern:
As you discuss and determine the future of the Alaska Marine Highway System, please consider the needs of our rural, coastal communities.

I grew up in Juneau and appreciated the ease with which ferry travel seemed to take place when growing up, from school sports trips to family excursions to visiting friends around the region loaded up with Costco supplies. Now, the basic transportation needs of our communities are not being met: the lack of accessible transportation to use for doctors' visits and the lack of reliable, affordable goods in our stores are symptoms of a larger problem.

Reliable, consistent, and affordable transportation is integral to the lives and livelihoods of our community members.

The Alaska Marine Highway can be that. Similar to roads, marine infrastructure and planning must be maintained and invested in. Please support a stronger ferry system. Thank you for your time and consideration, and thank you for your investment in Alaska. It's a special place.

Laurel Stark
Juneau, AK

9/2/2020

To the Members of the AMH Reshaping Work Group,

I have been riding the Alaska Marine Highway for about 35 years. Most of these journeys have been on the M/V Tustumena from Seward to Prince William Sound and in the last 30 years Kodiak, Port Lions, and Homer.

The Alaska Marine Highway is extremely important to the coastal residents of Alaska because it is our highway, which allows us to be contributing members of the Alaskan society and much more. Providing for this highway for residents of Alaska is what I believe to be a States obligation to provide essential services to its people. I would like to offer the following ideas to this work group.

#1 Talk to the captains and crews of the ships in the fleet for ideas on making this highway better and more efficient. Over the years, I have often heard ideas from crews about better efficiency for the AMHS. These folks live on these ships for a good portion of their working lives and know the ins and outs of what works and what doesn't. They say that they are never asked for their opinions on efficiency and how to make the system work better for all users. Start here in reshaping this highway.

#2 Forward Fund the system-this is an effective way to encourage ridership and help profits. If people know they can count on a schedule a year out, they are more likely to plan and book reservations. The short 6 month at a time scheduling (or even shorter) is not working, and the lack of bookings are evidence of this.

#3 Get a new Tustumena ship built- the State needs to appropriate it's 10% of funding to begin building this vessel. It has been vetted and designed and this needs to happen for southcentral and southwest coastal communities.

#4 Eliminate all State run docks and privatize shoreside services such as reservation/terminal locations and tie ups.

#5 Sliding Scale fees are just plain wrong. This past year was the first time I can ever remember this happening within the Marine Highway System. Most people do not mind inflation and paying a bit more for traveling. But charging more if a reservation is available and made shortly before a sailing is not very appealing to travelers.

#6 Advertise/public awareness of the AMHS- We run a lodge and get many calls from Alaska residents wanting to travel to Kodiak and wondering how to get here. They have no idea they can drive to Homer and ride the ferry to destinations on Kodiak Island. Any business needs to spend a portion of their budget on advertising in some form to make it successful.

Kodiak uses the Ferry system for transporting vans of goods- groceries, building supplies, construction equipment, commercial fishing equipment, people and their vehicles, and more. We all know that when we actually get on the ship, we will make it to our destination. These ships are the most reliable and safest way to travel between coastal communities and mainland Alaska and Washington. In the last 5 years, people have become disenfranchised because we never know if we will have a ship. Scheduling and breakdowns, longer shipyard periods, and budget constraints have affected the way users spend their money to ride the Alaska Marine Highway.

There is a direct correlation between maintenance and running an efficient business and providing service.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on reshaping the Alaska Marine Highway.

Kathryn Adkins

Kodiak Wilderness Adventures

9/2/2020

To whom it may concern:

I am submitting these comments to the Alaska Marine Highway reshaping group. I am hoping that this working group along with suggestions from people who use the ferry system will find a way through this and return the AMHS to the shining example of marine transportation it has been. I thank the group for holding a public teleconference and taking written comments. Here are some of my thoughts:

I have used the Alaska Marine Highway System throughout the nearly 40 years I have lived on Prince of Wales Island. It has taken me to other Alaskan communities and the lower 48 and Canada to visit family and friends, attend medical appointments, get vehicles to dealerships, and transport school groups to various events. It was always a reliable and cost effective means to travel, especially with a vehicle. But I can honestly say that in the last few years we have been forced to barge our vehicles, fly in inclement weather, and pay ridiculously high prices for less reliable service.

I personally have been turned around mid-way to Prince Rupert due to a ferry workers strike and had 3 different trips with a vehicle cancelled with very little notice. In one instance we had to barge a pickup because of the exorbitant cost of a one-way ticket home from Bellingham. What has happened to this system?

Some suggestions:

1. Get rid of dynamic pricing!

It's a slap in the face to those of us trying to use this system as a means of transportation, not as a visitor planning our dream vacation to Alaska months in advance. This dynamic pricing system not only increases fares as the travel dates approach but also adds another increase as availability decreases. By doing this you are forcing people to barge their vehicles and fly. We are now looking at buying another vehicle to store near family in the lower 48, because the cost of one round trip from Ketchikan to Bellingham with a vehicle is nearly as much as our vehicle is worth!

Just yesterday I looked at fares in September for one-way from Ketchikan to Bellingham with a small 16' vehicle, 2 passengers, one a senior citizen, no stateroom. I rounded off the fares, but all were over the stated amounts: Ketchikan-Bellingham, Sept 2 \$1900, Sept 3 \$2100, Sept 7 \$3100, Sept 23 \$1800, Sept 30 \$2000, Oct 3 \$2100

How does a person make sense of this? And why are there 2 ferries to Bellingham only one day apart? Normally when bringing a vehicle we took the Prince Rupert run, which was a quarter of the cost. These prices are just too high, and so if DOT is looking to crush the ferry system this is one way to do it.

2. Bring back the Prince Rupert- Ketchikan run!!

This has always been an economical and reliable way to get a vehicle to the lower 48. It just makes sense, as it's close and connects us with our Canadian neighbors. We have used this run regularly for over 30 years until the service was cancelled in 2019. There have been various reasons stated for why this run was canceled, but I believe solutions can be found for all of them if it were made a priority. If it truly is a security operations issue, then have people go through customs in Ketchikan like other boats.

3. Consolidate sailings

On the Ketchikan to Bellingham and Ketchikan to Prince Rupert runs, it might make more sense to have less frequent sailings at certain times of the year, so that other communities can receive at least some service during the winter. A Prince Rupert run perhaps 2-3 times per month would allow for some service elsewhere. The most important piece here is reliable and predictable service. This has been lacking in recent years. The schedule of maintenance needs to be planned out so there is always an operational ferry ready to go online in case of a breakdown. It seems like there are enough vessels to make that happen.

4. Analyze the efficiency of the workforce, ship maintenance and services.

As with any organization, agency, or business, excessive overhead, poor efficiency and poor planning can cause it to go under (bad pun). I have been aboard Alaska ferries with what seemed like too many employees having too little to do. As much as I believe in unions as a way to protect workers, some of them become too powerful. I also think you can overhaul the food service, by allowing a private business to run this aspect of the AMHS.

5. Realize the importance of this system to coastal residents and find ways to fund it. Rather than cutting the budget to the AMHS, we need a real infusion of funds, at both the state and federal levels, and we need to return to serious talks about generating revenue for this state that includes a state income tax and a reduced PFD check. People can bite this bullet. I'm curious why some of the funds promised by the federal government to relieve hardships during the Covid-19 pandemic are not being used to prop up some aspect of this failed system. I think we have seen with this pandemic that the infusion of funds and creative thinking is helping businesses, organizations, and states remain solvent, why not the AMHS? Thank you for allowing the public to weigh in on this very important matter, and thank you for tackling such a project. Sincerely, Cheryl Fecko, Craig, AK

9/2/2020

I have been a Juneau resident since 1976 and have relied on the ferry system to take me all over Southeast Alaska. I also use the ferry to take my car and trailer to the road system in Haines and Skagway. The thought of losing regular and reliable ferry service is frightening. I have family in Anchorage and want to drive up to see them as well as to tour the rest of Alaska and the Yukon. The ferry system is our marine highway. It is a basic part of the physical infrastructure that Alaska residents rely upon. The fares are pretty expensive already, and I am firmly behind a healthy budget increase to support the system.

The state has been steadily reducing ferry service for years and not maintaining the fleet. It is a shame that a state as wealthy as ours has been has not invested in an essential transportation service to southeast and all coastal Alaska communities. It feels like all the money goes to oil companies and Anchorage. Meanwhile Southeast universities, ferries, and other rural areas are left behind to dwindle and survive as best as they can.

It would profoundly diminish the quality of life of those who use the ferry system for the cuts experienced to continue or, god forbid, increase.

A very concerned Alaskan.

Barbara Craver

9/2/2020

Greetings and a thank you to all, for the time and energy you are putting into the reshaping of the AMHS. It's not an easy task, but a very necessary one. Hopefully it's not too late.

I am a lifelong Alaskan, born in Cordova. Kodiak has been home now for 47 years. I've utilized the AMHS since 1963.

My husband & I have made up to 6 round trips using the AMHS from Kodiak to Homer in a year. It's been more like 2 to 3 a year now. We encourage as many people as we can to utilize the ferry vs flying. Telling them they don't have the cost of renting a vehicle, plus they can load their vehicle up with whatever shopping they've done and don't have to ship it, less handling. There are numerous things contributing to fewer trips for us: space available now on the ferries due to Covid 19, dynamic pricing & the schedule, mainly the Kennicott's.

Years back the AMHS offered Alaska residents a discount on a round trip during the more slack time for the ferry service. Maybe something like that can be reinstated to improve ridership. I believe it was a 30% discount. Don't remember all the details of how it worked, am sure those kinds of things can be accessed. We gladly took advantage of it to go off island to Christmas shop. Have our deer meat processed & pick it up on the way home.

Eliminating the dynamic pricing would be positive as well. As it is, the trip we made this past July cost us \$1,012.00 round trip from Kodiak/Homer for 2 seniors, a truck & basic state room both directions. Now even though we booked 4 weeks in advance for our next trip, 5 weeks in advance for the return it's costing us \$1,075.00 round trip. Our stateroom heading out is \$118.00, the cost of the same room on the return was \$163.00. For \$168.00 we can get a 4 berth room, so we upgraded. This is crazy! It's like we're being penalized. It just goes to show, despite planning a month in advance to depart & 5 weeks in advance for the return, there shouldn't be such a price difference. The dynamic pricing is very negative in the long run.

This dynamic pricing is more like how the airlines charge. At least with them, they give out frequent flyer miles. The AMHS doesn't even give us frequent floater miles.

It was just today that I listened to the 1st part of your last meeting. Captain's Mayer and Nystrom shared a wealth of information. There has to be more incentive to help bring up the ridership. I know some people just won't ride on the Tustemena because of her age. But then, the Kennicott bypassed Yakutat & us last week due to a mechanical issue they had & laid in Juneau. A recent storm kept the Tustemena tied up in Homer. Both are back on track.

Schedules of sailing is a big factor as well. On the Tustemena we get aboard in the evening, get a good night's rest & arrive in Homer ready for the drive, mostly during daylight hours. Very important especially with all the wildlife, mainly moose in that area. We prefer night sailings so we arrive home in the morning, because we've got plenty of shopping to unload & put away. Day trips on the Kennicott aren't so bad for coming home vs going to Homer. A day trip going to Homer usually means having to get a hotel room in Homer before driving to Anchorage for us.

It seems as though the school districts utilize the AMHS when students need to travel off island for sports or different school activities. There again, scheduling is so important. Back in 1972, I got aboard the Tustemena in Anchorage and rode all the way to Kodiak. Don't remember how long or often that schedule lasted. We used to be able to ride between Cordova & Kodiak in 1967. And know it was still available in 1974 & 1978.

No matter what, when one travels anywhere in the world, it's weather permitting. More so in the waters the AMHS's ferries travel. Our safety is first & foremost and appreciate that the Tustemena is restricted not to travel in 18' seas or bigger. Who wants to be in that kind of weather, even if it is a brand new ferry? I traveled from Kodiak to Seward in 30 some footers, back in January 2000. Needless to say, it was a very long ride, with hardly any passengers or vehicles on it.

Thank you for listening. The AMHS is very important to not just us in coastal communities, it has a trickle down affect. We stop for food & fuel starting in Homer, Anchor Point, Soldotna, Kenai, Sterling, and Anchorage. We've even traveled from Whittier to Cordova on the AMHS. From there to Valdez, then onto the Alcan. Hopefully things work out sooner than later. The AMHS has been kicked down the road too long & far. Hopefully you are the ones to make the turn for the better. And give the public the confidence to ride again, with a working reliable schedule & dependable ferries.

Best regards,
Gina Johnson
Kodiak, AK

9/2/2020

Hello,

I am making another comment regarding the reshaping of the Alaska Marine Highway.

If your thought process takes you to totally revamping the system, think about using ships to cover localities-

For instance, the "Tusty" or her replacement would stay in Kodiak and travel to those communities on Kodiak Island with docks and then go down the chain in the summer/fall months on a similar schedule- then use the Kennecott every two weeks to connect Kodiak to Homer or Whittier or both-Schedule the chain trips to coincide with the Kennecott in Kodiak so that travelers from the chain could connect to the mainland. Or the "Tusty" could make that Kodiak-Homer trip once a week.

Do the same with a ship covering Prince William Sound and Yakutat/ and a couple to connect the Southeast communities
Seems like this would save on wear and tear of vessels and may optimize ridership.

I am NOT in favor of the additional fees just announced for folks boarding at docks that charge the ships for tying up. To my knowledge there was no notice to those communities or any sort of negotiation between the State and the communities prior to implementing additional fees. Those tie up fees are minimal and the funds these communities receive are used to pay their people to tie the ferry up and untie her.

Also, the schedule that was just put out includes huge service gaps in the Spring for Kodiak Island. We need to fix this! We need our Marine Highway to be reliable, affordable, and safe- once again please remember that this is Coastal Alaska's Highway and an essential service to Alaskans.

Kathryn Adkins
Port Lions, AK

9/2/2020

Hello,

I'm writing (again) out of concern for the state's slow bleed of our beloved Alaska Marine Highway System.

You can point out Covid and suggest that revenue decreased because of the pandemic. Yes. But you also need to own your actions as a state agency, and the decisions made by an inept governor for the slow demise of the AMHS.

Please return to the drawing board on this unacceptable winter schedule.

1. Where is the Malaspina? Did she indeed accrue the damage suggested by some sources last winter due to state negligence
2. For many years, a person in Sitka could hop on a winter northbound boat, not layover in Juneau, arrive in Haines, and return south 6 days later. Where are these winter runs?
3. Why is the Kennicott not making port calls in Sitka in its north or southbound run?
4. Why are communities not receiving ferry service for entire months at a time? And in fall/winter, Sitka receiving 0-1 or 2 ferry stops?
5. Can we expect service out of Sitka in April, May, and June next summer?
6. When can we expect to see Prince Rupert added again?

We NEED weekly service out of Sitka. Take a calendar month and organize it as such:

Week 1: Southbound

Week 2: Northbound

Week 3: Southbound

Week 4: Northbound

Or something to that effect, something that can be relied upon, expected, and served. The Cross-Gulf and Bellingham runs are ridiculously expensive. As an Alaska resident, I would expect a discount to be able to put my car on the boat and travel to either of these destinations. As it stands, I can't afford either of these runs. At least Prince Rupert was an affordable option to a road system to the south.

I've really been dismayed at the handling of AMHS under Dunleavy and look forward to his departure from office. That said, you folks need to make sure that regular service is provided to all ferry-served, coastal communities year-round. That's your job. This winter schedule is bullshit.

Sincerely,

Kersten Christianson

105 Gibson Place

Sitka, Alaska 99835

9/2/2020

To whom it may concern:

The ferry system is vitally important to us in small communities. It has helped us to bring appliances, vehicles, ATVs, and tons of groceries over the years.

They say the Kennicott cannot come to our dock here in Ouzinkie. NOT TRUE!!! It came here 3 times in the spring of 2016; I was on it each time going to Kodiak. The ferry goes right past our village on its way to Port Lions.

Please continue putting our village on the schedule with the Tustumena and/or the Kennicott. The ferry is vital to our way of life as we do not have a store here in the village. In winter it is hard to get to Kodiak for appointments, shopping and medical help.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely

Georgia Smith

Ouzinkie

9/2/2020

Hello, thank you for hearing my comments during the teleconference today. I've included them here in written format as well, in case that is helpful.

The Alaska Marine Highway System serves as a vital transportation corridor just like the Glenn, Richardson, and Seward Highways. It is the only surface-road-connection for businesses and individuals in communities like Juneau, Sitka, Ketchikan, Cordova, Kodiak, Dutch Harbor, and many others to buy and transport large equipment, specialty items, and bulk quantities from within the state. It is an interstate (you could even call it an international) road, and (just like the Glen, Richardson, and Seward Highways) it is the responsibility of the entire state (all its residents) to pay for the continued access and upkeep of this critical piece of the state's transportation infrastructure. I will echo the question of many others during this comment period: "why is the AMHS expected to pay for itself when none of these other roadways are held to the same standard?" The fact is that the entire state of Alaska benefits from the Alaska Marine Highway System, and not only as a significant amount of its ridership. Businesses in coastal communities use the AMHS to spend millions annually in Anchorage and with vendors statewide. Their alternative is to buy from Seattle and ship via Seattle barges or online. Not only does this expense burden small businesses, but it cuts economic output to Anchorage and other statewide vendors. For example, a local Cordovan restaurant & hotel owner estimates a savings of \$50,000-100,000 annually when running freight trucks directly to Anchorage via Whittier on the ferry. This business alone spends hundreds of thousands of dollars with Anchorage and in-state vendors each year. Consider for a moment how many businesses like this exist in each of the 27 Alaskan communities dependent on the AMHS as their primary connection to the road system.

Providing a consistent, reliable schedule at least 6 months if not a year or more in advance is necessary for businesses to utilize ferry service and it is extremely important to the success of the Marine Highway that schedule is based on the needs of the users. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to the user interface for buying tickets online as well. I can't tell you how many calls we get at our visitor center from first-time users confused and unable to successfully book a ferry ticket online. The AMHS also directly benefits from business traffic. Copper River Seafoods, an Anchorage-based seafood processor that relies heavily on PWS fish, has spent as much as \$1.4 Million in fares in a single year to transport employees and equipment, and to export seafood when schedules were reliably consistent. Businesses are really struggling right now due to the pandemic. Now is not the time to place another burden on businesses and weaken the mode by which many Alaskans buy Alaskan.

Coastal Alaskan residents are well-aware of the benefits to Anchorage and the rest of the state from business traffic originating in coastal communities. How can we make that message resonate with the rest of the state? The Alaska Marine Highway System could benefit significantly from an awareness campaign targeted at in-land Alaska residents. Whatever your recommendations are as a group, I'd encourage you to consider including that piece.

Tourism is really suffering as an industry in Alaska right now because of the pandemic. Cruise lines have become a huge part of the tourism economy and it may be a while before they are able to operate safely at the same level they have in the past. Before cruise ships, many travelers used the Alaska Marine Highway as their "cruising option" in Alaska. The primary demographic who is still traveling for pleasure right now is what we (in the industry) call the "Independent Traveler", and they are your ideal AMHS customer. Capitalize on that. Work with statewide and community tourism groups to promote travel within the state on the Marine Highway.

In closing, I want to thank you for your efforts on this committee and sincerely thank you for this opportunity for public comment. The Alaska Marine Highway System is too important to Alaska to mismanage.

So, Cordova supports the seven clearly laid-out policy recommendations in Mayor Clay Koplins white paper.

- Design vessels and support infrastructure specifically for the region they will serve
- Place the vessel and infrastructure in that region and keep it there
- Develop operating decisions (operations and maintenance) from the ground up
- Chart and Maintain a Strategic Course (governance and finance) for the System
- Provide reliable, consistent service
- Prioritize customer service and convenience, not system convenience
- Maximize the federal capital funding for the system.

Cathy Renfeldt

Executive Director

Cordova Chamber of Commerce

9/2/2020

To the Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Group,
Travel Juneau, the convention and visitors bureau for the capital city, encourages you to promote a fully-funded service for the benefit of all Alaskans and the independent visitors who travel to our great state.

The AMHS is necessary to the health and well-being – economic and otherwise – of many Alaskan communities. It serves as a lifeline for medical care and supplies, shopping, moving large equipment from community to community, and much more. One rationalization for short-funding the AMHS is that “ridership has decreased.” However, to see why ridership is lower, one need only to look to the cancellations caused by funding shortfalls alongside multiple ships in dry dock for inspections or repair with no inventory to pick up the slack. The current pandemic skews the ridership numbers even further.

However, a major concern for coastal communities is the lost opportunity of visitor travel, especially in the Inside Passage. The system’s lack of committed funding and leadership has paralyzed planning efforts, including the ability to schedule service past the current year; bus tour companies, for example, usually solidify their itineraries 2-3 years out, and many have stopped looking at Alaska because of AMHS’ unpredictable scheduling and sudden changes mid-summer. This has enormous economic implications statewide, as ferry passengers often travel into the Interior on extended vacations.

According to a McDowell Group study conducted in Juneau in 2018, 43% of the visitors who arrived by the ferry stayed in a hotel or motel, and stayed in town at least four nights on average. They spent, on average, \$440 per person, per trip. The more visitors we and our sister communities can get by ferry, the greater the potential benefit and opportunity for community development. The economic impacts to all coastal communities include hotel stays, excursions, retail and restaurant spending, all lost to short-sighted funding which has led to cancellations and scheduling challenges. Independent travelers wishing to bring their cars, bikes, or RVs to the state have been frustrated at the nearly constant schedule changes; these are higher-end travelers who can do most to help the state’s visitor industry rebound following the pandemic.

To succeed in the near and long term, the AMHS needs:

- Full funding commitment for at least a market cycle to allow for operational and strategic planning.
- A fleet designed to be interchangeable so as to minimize service disruptions in the event of breakdown or scheduled maintenance.
- A day-run schedule in the summer to maximize transit movements of visitors and their vehicles throughout the Inside Passage.
- A commitment to a trained and stable workforce.
- Leadership and management that works independently from appointed DOT commissioners.

Decades of politicization have prevented the long-term planning and advocacy the system needs, and the problems the Marine Highway continues to face deserve long-term solutions. The AMHS is a public good; the state has no toll roads and doesn’t demand that other state transportation corridors pay for themselves. Travel Juneau encourages the Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Working Group to recommend strong, stable leadership that has authority to operate independently and has the foresight to plan well into the future. Until that happens, we encourage higher levels of funding so that our citizens and visitors have the regular, consistent service they require and deserve.

Thank you. Liz Perry

9/2/2020

The community of Seldovia is blessed to have the service of the Tustumena with her friendly and hardworking crews. This COVID year is historical for her shortest season in 50 years July 2nd thru Sept 29...Ridiculous. Lose of service and jobs for countless thousands are unethical treatment. Not to mention the massacre to the lifestyle of the Aleutian Chain having only 3 runs to her unique and isolated communities. First WWII now NO Alaska Marine Highway service.

One senior walk-on in Homer to Dutch Harbor RT is \$740.00 totaling around \$1740.00 with stateroom and food = unbelievable.

Alaskans are being held hostage unable to afford the cost gouging prices to explore more of our beautiful coastal Alaska. How about some toll booths on Alaska’s road systems?

Yeah right.

All Alaskan should speak out. Coastal communities bring revenue to the interior cities.

Don’t take the state’s financial misspending of the FHWA’s funding of 15 to 20 million per year for Alaska Marine Highway’s 35 communities and 3500 marine miles. Stop the roadblocks.

Alaska Marine Highway = essential

Coastal lives matter. Mary Pedlow

9/2/2020

My name is Glenda Hutton, and I am also speaking for my husband Bob Hutton. We have lived in Hoonah, Alaska for 45 years.

The ferry is a state service that is absolutely essential to the economic well-being of coastal communities. Ferries are no less vital for our coastal communities than roads are for communities interconnected by a road system. No one questions the fact that our government funds highways, and no one should question our government doing the same for our ferry system, which is called the Marine Highway for a very good reason.

As we found out last winter, lack of ferry service leads to disruptions in food supplies to both businesses and residents. Hoonah got to this point last February and March that donated food had to be brought in from Sitka and Juneau on fishing boats. And when it comes to health and safety, ferry service is even more vital in the winter, when the weather can be un-flyable for many days.

I cannot emphasize enough that a reliable ferry is a State service that is absolutely essential to the well-being of coastal communities such as Hoonah. In many parts of our country, people pay taxes to their government and the government provides essential services. My husband and I support a tax that would help maintain such an essential service for the coastal communities of Alaska.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to give input.

9/2/2020

My name is Nancy Bird and I live in Cordova. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the critical importance of the Alaska Marine Highway System. This government service is our highway and is as important as any highway is to Alaska residents. It serves as many or more communities than the paved highway system and, based on mileage, runs many more miles than the hardtop surfaces cars use.

I'm a big proponent of basing public decisions on good data and am happy that your committee has taken time to thoroughly review the numerous studies and reports about the ferry system, its weaknesses, its challenges and its economic importance to so much of Alaska. A key point I see in these recent studies is that they are consistent in recognizing the marine highway system cannot be transferred to the private sector. Development of a public corporation does seem to have merit, though it can't directly copy the Alaska Railroad.

In my use of the ferry system for 45 years, I've noticed increases and decreases in passenger usage but noticed a dramatic increase in Cordova's usage when the fast ferry Chenega offered a reliable schedule. There were local businesses that ramped up their operations based on that schedule. When it was pulled out suddenly, it was no surprise that businesses pulled back and some stopped altogether.

I strongly support new ferry construction being done with federal highway monies. It's what makes financial sense for the marine highway system; it's not there to support a state shipyard.

I'll close by reiterating what so many have stated, consistency of service is critical! I can live with less service so long as it makes sense for business and medical travel needs, meaning round-trips from Cordova to Whittier with 2 or 3 business days in-between, not 12 days like the current schedule provides. I also endorse the white paper points submitted by Cordova Mayor Clay Koplin!

Thank you.

Nancy Bird - Cordova, AK

9/2/2020

Greetings, I am the caregiver of two disabled, my 35 year old son and 89 year young mom. We were stuck in Juneau last winter. First, the shutdown then the lockdown of Hoonah at the beginning of the pandemic. Hotel was and is expensive. We totally rely on our Marine highway as we require a lot of needed supplies.

Lilly James – Hoonah, AK

9/2/2020

I am pleased with the Fall/Winter schedule so far, but feel the fare schedules are unwarranted. The fares are set up much like the airlines are, with cancellation fees and costs going up according to capacity availability. Fine...ok.... but the excuse given for lack of fare revenue is Covid-19. Ok Fine again. But the Current rates for Sept. have a passenger fare (one way from Haines to Juneau) at \$75. The Senior rate at \$57. This is true for the whole month of Sept. Then in Oct. the rates go DOWN to passenger at \$58, and Senior at \$44. Since there haven't been any "tourist" traffic this season, the revenues are way down. We all know that. So it appears that DOT is trying to re-coop revenue losses now and discount the rates for the fall. Ok fine again. If one adds a vehicle from Haines to Juneau, say a 15ft SUV The rate is \$123 one way. But if you have a truck (19ft) it's only \$4 more! This seems awry, since everyone knows, hauling freight, and vehicles is what pays the bills. So that fare rate is way off! Everyone knows local airlines, make more money if they haul freight and mail, cause that's where the money is. It's not in hauling people. As a senior citizen, and as a retiree, I feel it is unjust that I have to pay more now (Sept) to go to Juneau. But I if wait till Oct. get a 23% discount off the senior rate. I'll still be a senior then too, but a month older! The senior rates should be the same all year long! I know of no other business or organization that has this discrimination policy, not even in Disneyland! Thank you for your time. P.S. I have been riding the ferry since the maiden voyage of the Malispina. Sincerely, Norm Smith, Haines, Alaska

9/2/2020

I think many of us remember the wonderful experiences we had on our ferry trips from Bellingham to the far reaches of the chain. The prices were not cheap but reasonable. The vessels ran at or near capacity on most trips. Then AMS decided to call in a consulting firm to help figure out how to generate more revenue. Well that was easy, just raise the prices. Oh that wasn't enough, we'll raise it more.... our last trip from Bellingham with a pickup truck and a 24' trailer was near 6000\$ including a cabin and a family of three. So the next time the pickup went on AML and the family on Alaska Airlines for about 1/2 as much.

Now I am not real smart but wouldn't we be better off to fill the vessels with reasonably priced fares than run it mostly empty?

Also sending multiple empty ferries to Haines and Skagway when folks in Hoonah and Gustavus can't even buy a slot for the foreseeable future on the car deck does make much sense does it?

I'm pretty sure you all know what needs to be done.

Sincerely,

Ken Marchbanks

Gustavus, AK

9/2/2020

Hello. I am a resident of Gustavus, Alaska and a crewmember working for AMHS. I have a couple of suggestions.

1. Provide 2 trips weekly for Gustavus/Hoonah run. Both of these growing communities need more regular service to meet their supply and demand needs. Currently the LeConte is only going to Gustavus/Hoonah every other week. The boat is full to capacity and people and freight are being turned away. AMHS is losing money because of this. The LeConte is currently going north to Haines and Skagway 4 to 5 times a week nearly empty while the Gustavus/Hoonah LeConte run is jammed packed.

2. Provide year round service to south central/Prince William Sound. These communities are suffering because of your cutbacks and need regular service. These communities have Alaskan residents that count on ferry service for their survival. You can't just leave Alaskan citizens sitting out in the cold without any affordable means to obtain food and supplies.

3. Number one priority should be to research ideas to get AMHS the funding they need to provide full year round service to AMHS serviced communities like they have for over 50 years. AMHS is an iconic Alaskan treasure. It is a historic Alaskan landmark that lures people to our state that benefits many. It is part of our National Scenic Byway system and part of our National Highway System. It should be maintained the same as our roads and highways. With full funding and proper management AMHS can be successful and be something Alaskans can be proud of long into the future.

Thank you.

Larry Platt

Gustavus, AK

9/3/2020

Hello,

My name is Alicia Maryott and I'm a lifelong resident of Juneau. My father's side of the family is Tlingit (Raven/Sockeye) from the Haines area. We've been here for at least five generations (that I can trace back through). These are the ancestral homelands and waters of the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian people, who've suffered grave losses over the years since the westernization of these sacred lands. Our people cannot afford to experience another public health crisis because of lack of access to medical, food and other supplies and specialists not available in their communities.

Juneau is a hub town. It is a border town for 13 communities in Southeast Alaska. Our connection to these communities via AMHS is vital and our people cannot afford to take another loss of resources because they can't get to Juneau and vice versa. People come here to shop for essentials, visit family, attend doctor's appointments and in general maintain their health and well-being. We owe it to them to keep the ferries operating, affordable, and owned by the State. Selling them off to private owners/companies, would only make the situation worse. Colonizers came to Alaska to take the land and resources of Indigenous peoples and now they are after one of their few remaining avenues connecting them to their most vital needs. We have put folks in these 13 communities at risk already by cutting service. Our Indigenous People are being disconnected from each other, so many of our Elders, children, women and men are suffering in conditions brought upon by the failure of the AMHS and these conditions are unacceptable.

I believe there is a way to prioritize state and federal funding to maintain affordable transportation via our ancestral waters and lands. We owe it to Alaskans to take care of each other, and putting another vital form of transportation into the hands of private companies does us a disservice, and will likely make the situation worse as we would have no public control over schedule, fare, employee rights and in general how to meet the needs of our coastal communities and not private business owners who are only out for profit. I know that is what Dunleavy intends to do, to sell off our ferries.

I sincerely hope you take our people into consideration as we are going to create a food desert, cut off healthcare and familial connections that will cost people not only their health, but ultimately people's lives. This is a humanitarian crisis and we cannot sit back and watch the State cut another public service because it doesn't generate enough money or isn't a priority.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my words and the livelihood of our coastal neighbors and family.

Gunalchéesh, ha'waa, n'toyaxsn.

Alicia Maryott

9/3/2020

Living in southeast Alaska can be challenging. Especially for elders who need to use the ferries for doctor appointments & grocery shopping. Outlying villages are desperate for ferry services to transport them to doctor appointments & grocery shopping. It is essential we keep the ferry system running. Alaskans depend on the ferry. Thank you for your time.

Barbara Anderson

9/3/2020

First Things First Alaska Foundation (FTFAF) presentation to the Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Work Group, September 3, 2020.

Good Afternoon,

We appreciate the opportunity to address you concerning an integrated transportation plan in Southeast Alaska.

I am Denny DeWitt, a member of the FTFAF Board. With me are Frank Bergstrom also a member of the Board and Don Habeger our Executive Director. FTFAF is dedicated to preserving the economic viability and future of Alaska through education. FTFAF works to educate the public by monitoring and researching natural resource management issues and by highlighting reasonable use, access, economic opportunities and development, all of which can be done while protecting the environment. FTFAF promotes public understanding of the facts regarding resource issues, whether they be mining, timber, fishing, or tourism, and encourages the public to participate in the decision-making process.

Let me begin by saying the notion that roads, planes and ferries are independent or mutually exclusive is not supported by FTFAF nor the reality in Southeast Alaska. We believe that the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) is an important part of a comprehensive, integrated transportation system, including marine, road, air, public, and private components. As your group moves toward a final report, it is important that you consider how the AMHS can function as a part of that system, rather than simply looking at it in isolation.

In May 2016, FTFAF published a report, "Southeast Alaska Transportation Network." We mailed it to every mailbox in Southeast Alaska. We hoped it would begin an understanding of how roads could relieve demand for limited AMHS capacity and the belief that the future funding would not increase. We highlighted Juneau Access (aka Highway 7 extension), a road from Juneau ultimately connecting with Haines, Skagway, and the continental highway system, Sitka access with a road to Warm Springs Bay, and the Kake Access project with a road and shuttle ferry to Petersburg. These projects would improve transportation access for communities and allow deployment of AMHS resources through the balance of the system. We have provided copies of the report for your review.

In April 2019, FTFAF sent a letter to Governor Dunleavy encouraging extending Highway 7 to Cascade point and building a ferry terminal:

"The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is proposing to use the funding to extend the road to Cascade Point and build a ferry terminal to efficiently operate the Alaska Class Ferry (ACF) as a day boat between Juneau, Haines, and Skagway. This will allow the ACF to complete a round-trip connecting all three communities under 11 hours a day. It also eliminates running the ACF ferries parallel to a road."

In January 2020, FTFAF sent a second letter to Governor Dunleavy supporting the Northern Economics report concerning a terminal at Cascade Point:

"There are many suggestions for improving the operation of the Alaska Marine Highway System, including structure, operations, financing, and terminals. We would highlight option 11A:

"Option 11A: Development of a ferry terminal at Cascade Point on Berners Bay at the northern end of the Glacier Highway approximately 30 miles north of the current Auke Bay Terminal in Juneau. The Cascade Point terminal would serve the base for dedicated ferry runs in Lynn Canal and reduce Juneau–Haines, and Juneau–Skagway one-way sailing times by approximately 2.1 hours." (Page 110)

Based on the assessment conducted, the study team provided the following recommendation:

"7. Consider additional infrastructure to reduce operational costs. State investments in infrastructure are typically able to leverage much larger levels of federal funding. Examples include a) development of the terminal at Cascade Point; b) development of the road to Warm Spring Bay with a terminal; c) development of the road between Kake and Wrangell Narrows." (Page 121) "

Cascade Point terminal improves efficiency of ferry operation freeing vessel(s) for use on other southeast routes.

In the early Spring of 2020, FTFAF aired the following message on radio throughout Southeast Alaska:

“Southeast Alaska is hurting by the decline of the ferry system. We urgently need remedies. The governor appointed a new committee to devise solutions. However, to avoid the same problems in future, we need a fully integrated regional transportation plan that includes the most efficient combination of roads, ferries, barges and air services. Let’s encourage leaders to view a bigger picture of transportation needs in Southeast Alaska. First Things First Alaska Foundation—educating Alaskans for a brighter future.”

We believe FTFAF has demonstrated its support for integrating our transportation system. We do feel that we are often alone in many discussions. Transportation has changed since the AMHS was established in 1962. Air transportation is radically different from what we saw in 1962. The ability to construct roads has improved, the potential for use of barges has changed. Marine navigational aids and tracking have improved substantially. Yet, we continue to plan our ferry system’s future as an independent transportation entity in Alaska.

The Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Work Group has an opportunity to begin to look at the future of the AMHS in the context of an integrated transportation plan. With the aging of the fleet, serious consideration must be given to the type and cost of replacement vessels. You could be thinking of how AMHS can integrate with airplanes, roads, and private barges to maximize the transportation options in coastal Alaska. It is unlikely there will be future funding to replace and operate larger vessels with similar, costly vessels. This may lead to considering smaller shuttle type vessels focused on moving cars with limited amenities and forgoing barge type services. Changing the planning paradigm now may offer a realistic future for AMHS.

The AMHS should recommend a plan for the integration of the system as means to provide maximum service within the limited operational resources that will be available to the system. That recommendation might consider the state’s cost of providing ferry transportation service against the cost to the state of providing transportation using other modes of services and combinations of service types through contracts. If the state will be subsidizing services, you should be asking if there are opportunities to subsidize more efficient or effective modes of transportation that can deliver services to a community.

In the duties of the Work Group is the following:

“The Work Group will define the future needs and purpose of the AMHS, with the goal to ensure residents have access to essential transportation services among Alaskan coastal communities.”

We hope this will lead you to consider how the AMHS can begin to integrate into a transportation system by looking at improving infrastructure that will save long term operating costs.

We have spoken of the savings possible by moving a terminal to Cascade Point. The Northern Economics report suggests the move could save over a million dollars a year. The funds are available to make this move possible.

Another easy savings is to finish the road connection between Hoonah and Tenakee Springs. According to the Northern Economics report this could offer almost \$500,000 annual savings in operations.

These are just two examples of easy opportunities available for your support. We hope you will seriously look at other innovative opportunities. Opportunities can be found in the Northern Economics report and plans put forward for many years by the Southeast Conference.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective and hope that you will consider how the AMHS can fit into an integrated transportation plan. We believe it is the only path to long term sustainability for AMHS. As the past is often prologue, continued focus on ferry scheduling as the only transportation option will continue to be met with erosion of state funding. Innovation and integration are the options that will lead to a long-term future for AMHS.

Thank you for this opportunity. We would be happy to respond to any questions.

Denny DeWitt

9/3/2020

I am writing to you regarding the ferry schedule.

I have also written to Deputy Commissioner Rob Carpenter, and Captain John Falvey.

Please consider this email my comments regarding the schedule for the ferry this fall/winter, and forward on to the ferry working group. I realize I am just one Southeast Alaskan voice, but I promise you I represent thousands of voices from this region who are too tired and burnt out from constantly trying to advocate for the ferry system year after year after year after year. You get the idea.

I am a Sitka resident, born and raised. My brother now lives in Hoonah and has recently bought property and is trying to build a house. He was relying on getting some equipment (nail gun, big stuff like that) from my parent's house in Sitka to Hoonah on the ferry, and the ferry schedule is showing literally ZERO sailings from Sitka to Hoonah between now and January. This is how it has been all summer, (again, ZERO sailings from Sitka to Hoonah or vice versa) but we were hoping the fall schedule would be better. The only way I can go to Hoonah on the ferry right now this fall is to take the ferry on October 29 to Juneau, and then hang out in Juneau until November 26. ONE MONTH. You read that right: if I want to go to Hoonah from Sitka I have to stop in Juneau for ONE MONTH. I think that is absurd and I am hoping you can look into this and move some things around.

There has always been ferry service between Sitka and Hoonah until this spring/summer. The ferry would stop in Hoonah on its way between Sitka and Juneau at least once a month, but typically every 2 weeks at the most. I am hoping you can do something to change this schedule.

This summer, service was terrible and unreliable. I can understand partially how this happened due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and am trying to cut the state a little slack on this. However, this trend is getting worse and worse and I am trying to advocate for the lifeline of transportation in Southeast Alaska.

I just represent someone trying to get from Sitka to Hoonah, but if you really look at the schedule you'll find that you can't get between other communities either. How is that a transportation system? How is that a highway?

As I said, I was born and raised here. My mother was a naturalist on the ferry back in the 1970s. I left for 8 or 10 years when I went to college and grad school, and lived elsewhere in the US and abroad, but I've been back in Sitka for the past 5 or 6 years and really want to be able to afford to live in this region. Over my lifetime I've seen the ferry service decline so incredibly it is really disheartening.

What I am seeing is a catch 22 situation. The continued decline in state funding for the ferry in the budget has caused the ferry system to decrease sailings, become unreliable, and raise their rates. This has, in turn, caused residents like me to be unable to rely on the service to get places, and travel by ferry less and less, which then justifies the anti-ferry folks in decreasing the budget even further. It's a death spiral that's been going on for a decade (maybe more).

By now you all know how important the ferry is for Southeast Alaskans, but we're being worn down year after year and having to write letters and make phone calls multiple times a year when services keep getting cut. We're tired. We have other things on our plate. Maybe that is what the anti-ferry folks are counting on. But we NEED this service. It is our highway. Highways don't make money, they cost money, no matter where they are!

Thank you for your time, and please consider a few sailings between Sitka and Hoonah. Please also consider that even if you don't personally think the ferry needs funding, thousands of people in this state use it, and need it, and our coastal communities rely on it.

Lauren Wild, PhD

Research Biologist

Fisheries & Marine Mammalogy

9/4/2020

Dear committee:

I wish to thank you for all your work on this critical issue. I have been a resident of Alaska since August 1973 (pre-pipeline!). When I first moved to Fairbanks I regularly used the AMHS for travels to Seldovia, Cordova, Seward and elsewhere in the PWS region. I was awestruck by the "Blue Canoes" and the service they provided to AK coastal communities. I moved to Juneau in 1984 and have used the ferry system even more extensively for travel and field work. I developed deep connections with the communities of Haines, Skagway, Hoonah, Petersburg, Gustavus, and Sitka. Pelican is dear to my heart, having traveled there by ferry regularly since 1984. The AMHS is the life blood of these coastal AK communities, which rely heavily on the ferry service for transportation and shipping. Unfortunately, service has already been deeply cut, effectively strangling the economy of these communities. Juneau and Sitka are also hubs for these outlying communities. They depend on ferry service to travel to JNU and Sitka for health services and supplies. Deterioration of the fleet has been ongoing for several years, with DOTPF and the state cutting the ferry budget and schedules, which causes a reduction in ridership, which in turn is then used as a justification for further reducing budgets!

Solutions:

1. First and foremost: Take AMHS out of DOTPF and fully fund it as its own department. Fully funding the ferry system is critical for coastal communities. AMHS has no advocacy in DOTPF. It needs to be its own entity. DOTPF builds land roads and has no concept of how important the marine highway is to coastal communities. These marine highways have been used for millennia!
 2. I suggest we install toll booths on all the interior highways to help pay for maintenance of these roads and use revenue to help subsidize the ferry system. Payment of tolls would wake up Mat-Su and interior communities to the fact of just how much their road systems are subsidized.
 3. Cap the PFD at \$1000, or even better, do away with it altogether, to help pay for essential services including the ferry system.
 4. Reinststitute the state income tax. It is time we as citizens begin paying for our services. It worked prior to 1980.
 5. Cancel the \$ 1 billion per annum subsidy being given to the oil industry. I can't believe we are doing this!
- Please do whatever can be done to preserve our unique ferry system and improve it. It is extremely vital to SE AK coastal communities.

Sincerely,

Roman J Motyka

9/4/2020

Dear DOT,

I am writing to share my views on our ferry system. I moved to Alaska in 1965 from Seattle and took the Matanuska from Prince Rupert. Then there were waiters in the dining room and linen tablecloths. Those wonderful days are over. On the other hand, without those amenities for the travelers in past, the ferries are life's blood to SE Alaska. As a former teacher/consultant, now retired, ferries were my only way to travel to towns where I was working for Head Start and UAS, and took them home when a plane I was to fly on could not fly. Ferries bring us our mail, food, parts for broken machinery, basketball, football and cross-country teams and our ferries are a vital connection for families, and all people in Southeast. Life without ferries is significantly diminished.

It is clear that our current Governor has dealt a near fatal blow to our ferry system. A carpet bagger he is unable to understand the dire necessity that ferries are to small and large communities in SE Alaska. It does not appear that he is opposed to building roads, which like our marine highway continually need maintenance and up grading. Unlike a paved road he sees our ferries as non-essential. Citizens of Southeast Alaska know they are essential. I am one of those people. Privatizing our ferries makes about as much sense as privatizing our highways. Thus I hope you will add my comments to others you are collecting to plan for a well-run, viable ferry system.

Sincerely,

Kathrin McCarthy, Juneau, AK

9/4/2020

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the future of the Alaska Marine Highway System. I am submitting comments on behalf of Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC), which represents the communities of Southeast Alaska. SEACC is concerned with the social and economic wellbeing and sustainability of Southeast Alaskan communities, for which safe, reliable, regularly scheduled ferry service is essential.

“The mission of the Alaska Marine Highway System is to provide safe, reliable, and efficient transportation of people, goods, and vehicles among Alaskan communities, Canada, and the Lower 48, while providing opportunities to develop and maintain a reasonable standard of living and high quality of life, including social, education, and health needs.” The mission of AMHS is to “provide safe, reliable, and efficient transportation...among Alaskan communities, Canada, and the Lower 48” and to provide “opportunities to maintain a reasonable standard of living and high quality of life, including social, education, and health needs.” Coastal Alaskan communities historically served by the historic Marine Highway System depend on regular, reliable, frequent (in many cases daily, or several sailings per week) transportation service. Our economies and lifestyles have been designed and built around the guarantee of regular, reliable service for essential travel, commerce, reasonably priced transport of goods, vehicles, mail, items that cannot be flown, school-related travel, community events, and tourism. The Alaska Marine Highway System is not an expendable luxury, but an essential service for travel and commerce between communities, and a link to Canada and the Lower 48. As such, ADOT has a responsibility to provide the regular, reliable, reasonably priced service our coastal communities have historically experienced before the extreme budget and service cuts of the last two years, and must continue to do so in the future. In recent years, we have seen increasingly infrequent sailings, service gaps, and elimination of service to several coastal communities, some without road access, as well as southern Canada. Regardless of future governance and management structure, the top priority of the AMHS Reshaping Work Group should be to prioritize restoring service to historic levels equivalent to that offered before the Dunleavy administration drastically cut service. Communities that have been historically served by AMHS should never experience service gaps, whether a matter of weeks, months, or an entire season. Our paved federal highways do not operate that way, and neither should our Marine Highway.

Coastal communities rely on AMHS for mail delivery, especially in winter. While the majority of US mail is delivered to coastal communities by plane, communities such as Haines normally receive mail by ferry if weather prevents planes from delivering it for two or more consecutive days. Coastal communities depend on regular ferry service to receive mail when planes don't fly. Reduced flight schedules due to the pandemic and associated economic downturn result in fewer opportunities for mail delivery, making regular, frequent AMHS service of multiple sailings per week even more important.

Coastal Alaskans depend on AMHS for health care travel. Frequent, reliable ferry service allows coastal Alaskans an affordable way to travel to communities with hospitals and other health resources not available in their home communities for necessary health care. Ferries offer a more accessible and dignified travel option for many coastal Alaskans experiencing limited mobility, disabilities, and health conditions that can make air travel difficult, uncomfortable, dangerous, or even impossible. Ferries also allow Alaskans to transport vehicles to access their health care appointments upon arrival. In the winter of 2019-2020, severely reduced ferry service and long gaps in service made health-related travel more difficult for rural coastal Alaskans. Southeast Alaska Independent Living drew attention to numerous cases where AMHS service gaps created unreasonable barriers for coastal Alaskans to access necessary health care, or forced Alaskans experiencing disabilities to travel in an undignified manner. Reduced and eliminated service disproportionately affects Alaskans experiencing limited mobility, disabilities, and certain health concerns. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when small plane travel places people in confined space with poor ventilation and passengers are not necessarily wearing masks, the AMHS allows Alaskans to travel more safely with less risk of COVID-19 transmission, because passengers can be socially distanced, with better ventilation, and most ferries offer outdoor space that can further reduce risk. The pandemic increases the need for safe, regularly scheduled surface travel and the economic benefits of ferry service.

The economies of coastal Alaskan communities, the regional economy of Southeast Alaska, and the statewide economy depend on the historic levels of frequent, reliable ferry service with multiple sailings each week for the transport of wholesale and retail goods, vehicles and machinery, and travel between communities. Goods that cannot be flown on small planes because of size, pressurized contents, or other physical restrictions must be transported by boat, and our economies have been built around the availability of frequent, reliable, reasonably priced service for commerce.

The economic benefits of regular, reliable ferry service stretch beyond coastal communities to the rest of the state. A 2016 McDowell Group report found that “the State of Alaska’s General Fund investment of \$117 million resulted in a total return on investment of \$273 million, a return of more than 2-to-1.” Frequent, reliable ferry service benefits the entire state economically. The reduced service coastal Alaska has experienced in recent years, and especially since 2019 diminishes the ferry system’s statewide economic contribution. When AMHS offers frequent, regular service comparable to historic service levels, it creates good, stable jobs that help to drive Alaska’s economy. According to the McDowell Group Study, AMHS employees brought home over \$100 million in total wages and benefits to 44 Alaskan communities in 2014. The drastically reduced service of the last two years has resulted in job losses across Alaska.

Schools depend on regular, dependable ferry service for sports, activities, special events, field trips, and social opportunities that benefit the education and social development of our youth. Service gaps in 2019-2020 forced school districts to charter private boat transportation or book flights for students, faculty, and chaperones, adding to schools’ expenses and potentially increasing safety risks. Travel funds that would have gone to AMHS instead went to private transportation, reducing AMHS revenues. Students faced travel delays, and Wrangell and Skagway students were stranded, requiring ADOT to charter a private boat, which the Skagway students were unable to take advantage of because high winds increased travel risk to an unacceptable level.

Coastal Alaskans off the terrestrial road system rely on AMHS to transport vehicles for use in travel and commerce, specialized services, sale of vehicles between communities, and repairs and inspections that cannot be completed locally. Reduced, and in some cases eliminated service places an odious burden on Alaskans needing to transport vehicles, often requiring a stay of a week or more to complete roundtrip transport, if it is even possible. This creates an unreasonable financial burden and disrupts business and services. Service levels should be returned to historic, pre-2018 levels. It is impossible to increase fare box revenues with drastically reduced service.

All communities historically served should have uninterrupted ferry service. The Alaska Marine Highway System is a federally funded component of the National Highway System. As such, communities that have historically been served by AMHS must continue to receive historic levels of service. Cutting that service, by reducing schedules, creating service gaps, or removing service from historically served communities altogether denies residents and those doing business with communities on historically served routes reasonable access to the National Highway System. Communities off the road terrestrial system are disproportionately affected.

Restoration of service to Prince Rupert, British Columbia must be prioritized. The AMHS identifies providing transportation between Alaska and Canada as part of its mission. While passengers can access Canada at the northern terminus through Haines, omitting service to Prince Rupert denies passengers a reasonable transportation route to southern Canada and impedes travel and commerce. While current pandemic-related border restrictions may merit temporarily reduced service to Canada, travelers may still enter Canada from Alaska for essential travel on a case-by-case basis, and AMHS should provide service to Prince Rupert for essential travel. The Reshaping Work Group should recommend to increasing service to Canada if border restrictions are relaxed or lifted in the coming months.

Service should not be tied to revenues—traditional highways are not maintained based on the revenue they generated, and AMHS should be held to the same standard. Service levels must be determined by need, not by the fare box.

With reduced service of recent years, AMHS no longer meets the needs of coastal Alaskan communities, undermining local, regional, and statewide economies, and reducing quality of life for coastal Alaskans. AMHS no longer fulfills its mission “to provide safe, reliable, and efficient transportation of people, goods, and vehicles among Alaskan communities, Canada, and the Lower 48, while providing opportunities to develop and maintain a reasonable standard of living and high quality of life, including social, education, and health needs.” Please recommend restoring full service to communities whose service has been cut or eliminated, and providing frequent, reliable, safe transportation at a reasonable price, comparable to historic service before the Dunleavy administration’s extreme budget cuts that undermine Alaska’s economy and the health, safety, wellbeing and quality of life of coastal Alaskans. Rather than accepting a “new normal” of reduced service, the Work Group should recommend that the State of Alaska explore options to diversify and develop new sources of revenue.

As the Reshaping Work Group considers recommendations for changes to governance structure, management, and possibly ownership of the Alaska Marine Highway System, please prioritize transparency, accountability, and public input both in the future structure, management, and ownership of the system, and in the planning process and transition. A public, state-owned corporation runs the risk of denying Alaskans the transparency, accountability, and public input we deserve for the management and ownership of our Marine Highway. Fully privatizing the ferry system is not economically feasible, and removes transparency, accountability, and public process, as would a public-private partnership. Moving forward, please work to ensure transparency, accountability, and full public process in any recommendations the Work Group makes to the governor.

Thank you for considering SEACC’s comments on the future of the Alaska Marine Highway System.

Shannon Donahue

<p>9/6/2020 Get rid of the union...that'll cut costs and improve customer service. Val Henning</p>
<p>9/6/2020 Go to chapter 5 In this link and read the comparison between the Washington Ferry System & AMHS. https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/research/reports/fullreports/750.1.pdf Gordon Hammons</p>
<p>9/6/2020 Dear Sirs, Here is my idea for a short and long term solution to the AMHS issue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build the proposed ferry terminal at the end of the Juneau road to shorten the length of the upper Lynn Canal runs and reduce cost to AMHS. • Build the proposed ferry terminal such that it fits into a longer term plan to complete the West Side Road for Juneau Access. <p>The completion of the West Side Road will significantly reduce costs for the AMHS, provide frequent and reliable transportation to and from Juneau, and provide a foundation for a greater regional transportation system that could include roads to Excursion Inlet/ Couverden, short ferry hops to Hoonah and other communities in Icy Strait. The project would provide economic stimulus to the whole region during construction and open up areas new areas for recreation and development.</p> <p>I believe this solutions can benefit all communities in Southeast, some directly (Juneau, Haines, Skagway, Icy Straits communities) and others because this will free up funds for use elsewhere.</p> <p>Thanks for your consideration. Darsie Culbeck, Haines</p>
<p>9/6/2020 After 25 years of leading small group trips in Alaska from the lower 48, keep the ferry system and keep it affordable - Alaskans deserve it. With all the government waste that prevails, this is chump change! Joel Zachry</p>
<p>9/6/2020 To say this is a complicated topic is an understatement, but having run the AMHS for over 50 years, there must be significant data to help the powers that be put together a system that serves its' clients. The Ferry System has been inefficiently & politically run for so long that it's a wonder it has managed to hold on for as long as it has. No one in the upper echelons is thinking long term and figuring out how to efficiently run the system. This lack of foresight and the State's wild spending habits have cost the coastal residents and the State of Alaska dearly. We who patronize the ferry get blamed for not using it enough, not paying enough and expecting too much. With half a century of "experiments" it would seem like the DOT and State could figure things out, but that never happened. Extravagance and poor decisions ruled the AMHS with the result being that the people who depended on these ferries have been all but completely abandoned.</p> <p>Dependable transportation is an identified need in any community – the ferry is critical infrastructure and much needed if outlying coastal areas are going to continue to exist. Its one thing to go joy-riding around on a fun little ferry trip and entirely anther story to talk about the loss of entire communities because of the inability to have their very basic transportation needs met. The Ferry is a required for stability and growth. Without a Ferry some communities might learn how to survive in some manner, but they certainly cannot thrive.</p> <p>Like many other coastal communities, we in Cordova have grappled with this issue for years. There have been countless gatherings and hours of testimony. In the 45 years that I've been in attendance, I find there's nothing really new that "we the people" can offer. It is the State of Alaska that has to change its priorities and recognize the AMHS as an important service to not just us, but to all Alaskans. The ferries ran throughout coastal communities decades before oil ran down the pipeline so obviously there is a way to make this work. It would be refreshing if the State could take this issue on and make long term, sensible decisions that would serve the people of this great State.</p> <p>Thank You, Becky Chapek Cordova, AK</p>

<p>9/6/2020 Mismanagement from the top down is responsible for the present status of AMHS The aluminum fast ferries didn't work in Puget sound or Canada but that didn't stop us The new dayboats with their incompatible clamshell bow (now welded shut), and 12 hour range, and thanks uncle Sam but we'll just pay for them out of pocket to the tune of 112+++millions. Deferred maintenance, did anyone think that wasn't going to bite us The bars made money but AMHS didn't get to keep it so close them and save whatever a bartender makes in a year Literally hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on a new menu program that food service of America already had (only better) A bicycle chain fix that cost the state hundreds of thousands I'm just getting started but you get the idea What's next? Jon Campbell</p>
<p>9/7/2020 I lived in Juneau for 15 years before retiring and living and traveling the other 49 states. During my post Juneau time I've used buses and the metro extensively which are heavily subsidized. These forms of transportation also serve a relatively small percentage of the population but are a vital service for people some of who are essential workers, low income, older and disabled. Other environmental concerns and recreation should also be considered when determining their value. Paula Recchia</p>
<p>9/7/2020 I have no doubt you are liberal. It seeps from every word I read. That's all I need to know to decide my thoughts on your article. Electric cars? Get real! Teresa Cox</p>
<p>9/7/2020 Dear AMH Reshaping Working Group, Thank you for your critical work in designing a solution to our ferry service needs. I once heard that in Norway, a great deal of emphasis and infrastructural support is given to rural communities because they value people living in rural areas. They see it to be healthy and the preferable choice for many, raising families or continuing in centuries-long traditions. I hope we also recognize, that for many people, living in our small Southeast towns and villages is healthy and is home. Many Tlingit and Haida clans and families have lived in these communities for centuries and pulling needed infrastructure and regular transportation seems simply like displacement to me. I also believe that the lifestyle living in rural places is physically and mentally healthy, providing access to subsistence foods and other outdoor activities for all southeast residents who chose this. For families growing up in our rural communities we want access to quality education, affordable services, health options and more, for them to have equitable opportunities and futures. Providing well maintained highways and roads (in this case via our unique and necessary marine highway) is just as much our obligation as in our larger communities. It's not inexpensive to provide regular sustaining affordable transportation via the ferries around our waterways but it's simply necessary and aligns with our values to support traditional and rural communities. Thank you for placing value on this important service. --Nancy Lehnhart Juneau, AK</p>
<p>9/7/2020 Hello. After reading the issue, will ferry service from Bellingham to Anchorage be eliminated? We're planning our trip for June 2021. Thanks, Liz Ellis</p>

9/7/2020

Although I have always felt that the Chenega and her sister ship was a waste of fuel, maintenance and money, I do favor the monohulls.

I have lived in Cordova and Seldovia, traveling on the ferries when needed for medical needs. I also feel that the ferries came to those villages way too often and virtually not one of them sometimes. This, suggesting that once a week for both places. Granted, that Cordova has Alaska Airlines, I still haven't found a good way to put my truck on board, so that is why I look at once a week. I would also state that I have warm, fuzzy feelings for their respective crews, to whom of which have been wonderful on board as well as in their communities. I would miss them very much, sort of like the passing of friends.

I have lived in Alaska for 69 years. I truly love this state. I am not at all happy about "The Empire" that the State of Alaska" legislators have built. This includes University and teachers as well as many other divisions. Although the ferry system needs to be modified, I think there are many other areas that need to be very seriously looked at as well.

Enough said,

Jeffery Craig

Wasilla, AK

9/7/2020

Dear AML,

I think your financial analysis needs a second look. You are not taking into consideration the fact that the numerous highways in central Alaska are highly subsidized by the federal government. Alaska marine highway ferries are our highways. They should also be subsidized by the federal government in some manner. If they are not, then we have a situation where the people in anchorage Fairbanks and the Kenai are being subsidized by the federal government and the people in southeast Alaska are not. You do not seem to take this issue in the consideration and our shirt changing all of the residents of southeast Alaska. So I asked you to employ a managerial accountant who has significant training and identifying all relative cost factors that need to be considered before the state decides it can no longer afford Alaska marine highway. Thank you.

Van Abbott, Ketchikan, Alaska

9/7/2020

Dear Alaska Marine highways,

In my previous note to you of today, I failed to mention the fact that Anchorage and Fairbanks do not have any sales tax. Whereas, most communities in Southeast Alaska have a pretty hefty sales tax of six and a half percent or more. Any analysis of subsidies, needs to take into consideration all forms of subsidy before you are able to make a statement that residents in central Alaska are subsidizing people in Southeast Alaska or more specifically subsidizing the ferry system in Southeast Alaska.

Another consideration is the docking fees for all the cruise ships that come in to Ketchikan and other Southeast Alaska ports. In Ketchikan, we have approximately nine hundred ship callings each year. Each passenger pays a fee of I believe \$8 or more for the privilege of disembarking in Ketchikan. I believe the state gets a hefty piece of this payment if not the majority of it. It is another area that needs to be examined quite closely in order to determine who is subsidizing who in Alaska.

In order to really make a determination that will be used politically and possibly to the detriment I'm seventy thousand Alaskan residents, I urge you to actually fund an appropriate study by professional accountants who can present a full picture of the economic flows of the Alaska economy.

For over half my working career, I was an accountant who actually participated in sophisticated cost accounting studies. I can assure you that taking such an elementary and unsophisticated approach to determining that Southeast Alaska is being subsidized by residents of central Alaska amounts to propaganda at best.

Please do your homework. Thank you again. Van Abbott

9/7/2020

I just read an article about the AMHS and it sparked a thought and reminded me of a question I've always had about the way they have it setup. Were hovercraft ever considered? I realize that it might strike a person as sounding ridiculous but I think they may missing some key benefits and advantages that they lose with ships. I'm reminded of see the Mountbatten class hovercraft that were used to cross the English Channel and had the thought that between technology improvements and better understanding of the needs of the communities that are serve, by utilizing hovercraft that are able to travel significantly faster, carry vehicles and could be used across most seasons that it would be a way of making that system work better and provide it at a far cheaper price. Maybe it was considered but whatever it lost in capacity for transport could be compensated with speed. I'm not sure what the cruising speed for those vessels are but I'm guessing it's nowhere near the 60 knots cruise and top speed of 83 knots. I don't expect a response but maybe someone will see my question and run with the idea. Daniel Hostetler

<p>9/7/2020 Best 2 trips we ever made in 20 yrs of travel. We have spent 13 summers on the kenai. William Sargent</p>
<p>9/7/2020 Poor management is what the article says. Resident since 1958. Connie Douglas</p>
<p>9/7/2020 Good afternoon: I think you need a new version of the Matanuska actually two for the main north/south run from Bellingham to Juneau with stops in Ketchikan and Petersburg and shuttle ferry's from Ketchikan to the smaller cities like Sitka and Haines and a shuttle to Skagway; take out the stop in Prince Rupert. General Electric makes very good fuel sipping engines that are low maintenance and hardly burn any lube oil. You could run them with a 3 man Engine room crew. I have over 43 years as a licensed Engineer in Alaska. Thank you Bill Mertz</p>
<p>9/7/2020 Group members, I want to comment on your daunting task of finding a way out of the current crisis that has befallen our ferry system. As a 38-year resident of Juneau I've had time to observe the politics and the reality of how we reached this point. It's important to state at the outset that much of the existing problem is the result of problems created by major shifts in the political and economic landscape of Alaska. The current DOT schedule and plan does not meet the needs of communities at all. There aren't nearly enough visits to remote communities and the large gaps in service leave people without reasonable options for transport. The revenue shortfalls are real but they are partly to be blamed on political decisions that were not in the interest of constituents. Decisions by Knowles to try out fast ferries, and Parnell to ditch mainline ferries for short-haul boats were ill-advised. Lack of ridership is not a reason to cut service when this lack is due to many reasons, COVID being one of them, poor operations and marketing being another, unreliability another, and lastly, the shift in tourist ridership toward cruise lines being very significant (until 2020).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please abandon plans to build roads across every island with short ferry connectors; it's time to change that strategy. We are not Puget Sound and won't have short-hop ferries in our lifetime. Instead we need to find ways to work within realistic constraints of opposition to extensive road networks in SE Alaska. Mainline ferries will continue to be needed. • Why not combine the cargo and passenger functions of our ferries and barges into one service? This is done in other countries quite successfully. Wouldn't this be a real public/private partnership? • How about cutting the queue lines during loading and unloading through more efficient designs of ships that don't require us to arrive two hours in advance? Loading from the rear and unloading from the front should be possible, or something similar that achieves the same objective of saving time and labor costs. • Marketing needs to be privatized in order to reach independent travelers that want an alternative to cruise ships. Marketing needs to be much more effective, and scheduling needs to be in the interest of the passenger, not the crew. • Pricing needs to be sensitive to the competition, i.e. Cruise lines and airlines. Some subsidies from the State of AK will continue to be needed in the long run, which is in keeping with the costs of maintaining and rebuilding asphalt roads and other transit infrastructure. <p>I don't envy your job as this conundrum has been studied by too many taskforces. Each has made their recommendations only to be overridden by political forces. That has to change if we are to find a way out of this mess. cheers John Neary</p>

9/8/2020

Dear Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Work Group,

We are residents of Gustavus and have just a few general comments to offer.

The Alaska Marine Highway System vessels and port facilities were constructed in the 1960's and early 1970's, before oil revenue from the Trans-Alaska pipeline. How could the AMHS be successfully established before the State received oil money and then left to slowly fall into disrepair and mismanagement when the state had oil money?

The AMHS vessels are in generally poor condition and have become unreliable. It was only a few years ago that the vessels were operating with reasonable reliability. Aging vessels are most of the reliability problem. The replacement vessels added to the fleet over the last twenty years have proven to be poor performers, while the older vessels keep sailing. Is federal transportation money available to the AMHS for vessel replacement?

AMHS fares have risen to the point where people are seeking alternatives to the ferry, particularly the route from Bellingham to Southeast. The cost of transporting a vehicle is prohibitive. Dynamic pricing is unpopular.

AMHS schedule reliability has become so poor that people cannot make long or intermediate term travel plans. Even short term travel plans are risky. The possibility that one would become stranded has to be considered.

Weather in Southeast, especially in winter, is not favorable for flying and the ferry is even more important to residents of remote towns during winter.

The remote towns in Southeast Alaska very much need a dependable, economic ferry system for access to simple things such as medical care and groceries. Northern Southeast ports of Hoonah and Gustavus need twice per week service throughout the year. The current schedule of every other week with sailings only two days apart is not sufficient for residents to travel to Juneau for their needs.

Politics plays too much of a role in the AMHS operation, particularly by the governor, legislators and senators from parts of Alaska that don't rely on and have no interest in ferries. The idea of converting the AMHS to a corporation similar to the Alaska railroad should be considered. I don't know if that would be the answer and hopefully the Reshaping Group will take a close look at this.

The labor strike in 2019 was completely inappropriate. It is true that there is a problem with labor agreements and this should be addressed.

Alaskans have been proud of the AMHS for many years until its recent collapse and I hope that this pride can be reestablished very soon.

Sincerely

John F. Barry

Sharon K. Barry

Gustavus, AK

9/8/2020

Please tell me, what is an environmentally friendly covid -free electric car? That sounds like an unrealistic greenie mentality type thinking. A covid-free car??? Cars don't get the flu, pneumonia, colds, stomach flu, mumps, measles, chicken box, etc.

Also for all people who want electric cars. This is unrealistic and where do you think your electricity comes from? To keep your electric car going, you still need gas and oil and/or their byproducts.

Also, I would hate to be driving across Canada, BC, the Yukon, MT, TX or Alaska in an electric car. They better be able to go at least 400 miles before needing a charge. There are times some of us have driven 900 miles in a day, and you can't do that in an electric car.

Just food for thought.

Konnie Shuey

9/8/2020

The state needs to lease the ferry routes, boat not included, to floating ferry casinos, with an area designated for non-gamblers. They could be required to provide the same level of service they do today. Alaskan residence charged the same to ride as today, no extra subsidies given to the boat. The state would collect a gambling tax, a liquor tax, the route lease, and not have to pay to maintain the boat or any of the employees on the boat. The day trip ferries could dock all night at whatever dock they are at and pay a gambling tax from the dock time to departure time to the town where they are docked. If the state follow Illinois riverboats or Mo river boat gaming laws and tax structure, the state will make money, the towns that have ferry service will make money and everyone will have better ferry service that draws in more tourism. Carrie Harris

<p>9/8/2020</p> <p>I live in Fairbanks so I don't regularly use the AMH, in fact I haven't been on the ferries in many years. To me that does not matter. I have lived in Alaska for 70 years. My first trip was on the Matanuska in 1963. There was no oil boom, but yet we were able to provide Ferries to the major communities in South East. Those folks depend on this transportation network just as we do with our highway system. We are all equal in our need to live and work within the communities that we reside. The ferry system communities share of State revenues, help support transportation networks within in Alaska, many of which they may never use. Many State government functions would also fall under this same scenario. The system may need to be streamlined and differently upgraded. What other major piece of equipment in DOT's entire fleet is as old as the States Ferry System?</p> <p>I don't envy the working group's task, but I believe all Alaska should support the Ferry system.</p> <p>Thanks and have a good day,</p> <p>Lee Hazen</p>
<p>9/9/2020</p> <p>DON'T GET RID OF THE ALASKA MARINE HIGHWAY YOU IDIOTS! Nancy Passage</p>
<p>9/9/2020</p> <p>We have rode the ferries for 20 years and enjoyed every trip. Please help save the system</p>
<p>9/9/2020</p> <p>Southeast Alaska needs a publicly funded marine highway transportation system to support the health and wellbeing of the residents, and connection with the rest of the state. The marine highway supplies critical connections between communities for medical, goods and services, and our education system. Without the marine highway our students will fall behind in ability to compete in sports, music, and the arts. Additionally, air flights are expensive and dependent on favorable weather conditions. And transport of vehicles is possible only by ferry.</p> <p>That said, could the marine highway have been better managed over the past 20 years? YES! Management spends way too much money on failed management decisions in building the wrong boats to support the needs of southeast. We need smaller day boats, and all Marine Highway employees should live in Alaska. The Marine highway needs to put Prince Rupert back on the system. It is the only way for Southeast residents to affordably travel south or for that matter, to travel to the interior of our great state.</p> <p>As forty year residents, we have regularly depended on the AMHS for transportation to the lower forty eight and many times for travel from Haines and Skagway to Anchorage and Fairbanks. We have lived in Ketchikan, Sitka, Juneau and, now as retirees, in Thorne Bay on Prince of Wales Island. The IFA ferry is a great day boat connection, allowing us to take our vehicle, but then we are trapped into using only Alaska Air to go beyond. The AMHS must solve its problems with decent management adopting functional business practices that meet the needs of the communities they serve.</p> <p>The use of the system or lack thereof at this time is a poor judge of needed ridership, The Pandemic, depressed economy, and lack of tourism have all adversely affected demand. Is now the appropriate time to be making long term decisions for our state ferry system?</p> <p>Ron and Patricia Skillings</p>
<p>9/9/2020</p> <p>I think you guys should lower the prices, advertise, bring back the bars and gift shops. Make it enjoyable for people and reasonably priced. Kristina Markovic</p>
<p>9/10/2020</p> <p>We are elderly summer residents of Tenakee Springs. We count on the ferry to bring in food, supplies -- and grandchildren. All necessary to our ability to live on Chichagof Island. The floatplane is not a substitute at all, for several reasons; it doesn't seem safe, it is limited to clear weather, it can't carry our food, and WE CAN'T BEGIN TO AFFORD IT. Like any highway, the marine highway has so far been safe, dependable, adaptable, and affordable. Please keep it that way. We believe that the ferry is part of every person's right to go home. Thank you, Kathleen and Frank Moore, PO Box 37, Tenakee Springs, AK 99841</p>
<p>9/10/2020</p> <p>I've spent over 3 grand since October for necessary medical travel. That doesn't include car rental, etc. If the ferries had been running, it would cost me 42 dollars one way from Tenakee to Juneau. Its 158 dollars one way on Alaska seaplanes. Get us back to full service asap. Daniel Martin</p>

9/10/2020

Please fully fund the ferry 🚢 system. Leon Jaimes

9/10/2020

My apologies if this is a duplicate.

I recently came back from TKE by floatplane.

I also left my passport there - I cannot afford to spend \$400.00 to go back.

Having only floatplane services makes it impossible to easily go and come from Tenakee.

Please make the schedule with the ability to come and go from Juneau in 2-3 days.

No one can afford to come to Juneau for medical etc. and not go back to Tenakee for 10 days.

Thank you.

Ann K. Symons

Tenakee

9/10/2020

Hello, I am a company based in Wrangell Alaska, actually two companies.

1) Breakaway Adventures llc, a company I started years ago. I have been providing sightseeing tours based in Wrangell for 30 plus years.. I also have been providing school transportation for sports and other activities year around since 2000. Yes a small company that has moved hundreds of kids each school year for 20 years (Wrangell, Petersburg, and POW Island systems). Occasionally other systems in their efforts to minimalize lay over time, etc. Also occasionally rescuing Alaska Airline Travelers when the jet overheads either Wrangell or Petersburg due to weather etc.

2) Breakaway Ferry and Freight llc, a company I started this year 2020, yes in the mist of this pandemic... 75' catamaran landing craft. I ran steady, late winter / early spring cleaning up the vehicles and other freight that had been stranded in towns due to the ferry system being shut down. Ketchikan thru Wrangell, Petersburg, to Juneau, for a month and a half. Also made a trip to Hyder, and one to Kake. There was several more opportunities but do to my sightseeing company was unable to run them both full time.

As you can see I am a great asset to this area of South East Alaska, have been for years and look forward to in the years to come. Also good to understand this was all been done with no public funding. Where many have failed I am succeeding.

Please keep me in the loop as the ferry system struggles to see what I can do to help / assist? Perhaps fill in on a regular bases? Might be interesting to talk about it.

907. [REDACTED] is my cell.

Thanks for your interest in our great tours based in Wrangell Alaska. We look forward to working with and meeting you. We offer great tours to the Stikine River, Southeast Alaska largest river with great views of mountains waterfalls and Shakes Lake / Glacier. Harbor Seals, Bears and Moose are the main wildlife on this trip. Anan Bear Observatory is another great tour that operates late June through early September, Permits are required July 5th - August 25th, so you need to plan early for this tour, 60 daily permits only during the permit time. Bears, Bald Eagles and Harbor Seals are among the action you will witness here. LeConte Glacier is the Southern Most Saltwater Terminating Glacier in North America! Golf Ball to Titanic class icebergs await you plus other great Alaska scenery such as tall mountains, waterfalls and Harbor Seals that take a break from swimming. If Sea Otters / Sea Lions are your thing we can get you out on that tour also, maybe even more marine life! If you are interested in some self-guided Adventures we also rent 16' Lund Skiffs, Canoes and Kayaks. Great for use around Wrangell or if you plan on renting USFS Cabins.

Lots of great options for you and your family/group. Be sure to follow us on our Facebook page, (search for BreakawayAdventures.com on Facebook). Please contact us if you need some special timing or require help on making your Breakaway Adventures / Wrangell Alaska visit as memorable as you deserve.

Breakaway Adventures llc offers jet boat tours in the Tongass National Forest and Stikine / LeConte Wilderness. We are a permit holder on the Tongass National Forest. We are an equal opportunity provider.

Thank you, Eric Yancey

9/14/2020

Dear Vice Admiral Barrett,

Thank you for the opportunity to present to the Alaska Marine Highway (AMHS) Reshaping Work Group. We were excited to share the Municipality of Skagway's (MOS) research of cost-effective options for continued ferry service in north Lynn Canal.

We believe the secret to success lies in the concept of strong community partnerships with AMHS, no matter what direction the reshaping process takes the system. Your discussions have often emphasized the need for reliable service. Community involvement in the effort to reduce state subsidy will only succeed if the AMHS can make long-term commitments to consistent route scheduling.

As an example, the 15-vehicle shuttle ferry concept developed by Elliott Bay Design Group for the Haines/Skagway route will only work if the state can guarantee reliable connectivity between Juneau and Haines and Juneau and Skagway. The shuttle would solve many problems for AMHS by allowing the Alaska Class Ferries (ACF) to operate as built, without crew quarters. This would achieve the cost savings envisioned in the original ACF design through reduced crew costs, single port loading and roll on/roll off capability. The shuttle's benefit to Skagway is that it would secure the proven high volume, high revenue summer Haines/Skagway route segment, which depends heavily on consistent daily service.

Over the last year, the MOS has also been working with the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) on a memorandum of understanding regarding acquisition of the Skagway ferry terminal and peninsula. We have worked diligently together to develop this relationship, and we are eager to continue to work with the State of Alaska on long-term transportation solutions.

Please consider including this letter and our presentation in your final report as an example of the partnership opportunities that can be achieved going forward not only with Skagway, but potentially other communities around the state.

Thank you for your efforts to preserve consistent and reliable ferry service to coastal Alaska.

Andrew Cremata, Mayor of Skagway

9/15/2020

Dear Adm. Tom Barrett, Wanetta Ayers, Ben Goldrich, Tony Johansen, Lee Ryan, Sen. Bert Stadman, Rep. Louise Stutes, John Torgerson, and Robert Venables:

I want to thank you all and the administrative staff for the work you are doing as part of the Reshaping Group. While I am not a resident, I have traveled in Alaska on the ferry system a number of times in the past five years and see how essential it is to the entire state. I have been following the fate of the AMHS with great interest and appreciate the insightful discussions and informative guest speakers that have been a part of your online meetings.

I would like to add my support for reshaping the governance structure as an independent entity. I believe this is the most important change and could be a means to resolve many of the other issues confronting the AMHS. As a separate entity it could focus on reliable, efficient service relatively free of political pressures and, importantly, with forward funding so medium and long-term planning can happen. Issues such as efficient maintenance schedules, regional planning/scheduling, transitioning to standardization in the vessels, skilled crew retention, and seeking additional revenue could be managed more effectively.

Further, this independent entity should include a means for employees and crews of the AMHS to freely give input on how to improve the system, perhaps an advisory board or a voting position with a real say. Also, an effort to educate the public to the state-wide benefits should be undertaken to help residents who don't ride the ferries see that they still benefit from them. This may help increase citizen support for state funding.

Finally, the entity can give some thought and planning to how the ferries might be needed or used in emergency situations. I know this suggestion may seem out of left field but Alaska has its fair share of emergency situations between earthquakes, volcanoes, blizzards, tsunamis, and fires, to name the obvious. Land and air routes of transportation are not disaster-proof or even weather-proof. The ferries may be needed at some point, in some way to evacuate people and/or bring supplies or heavy machinery into a community or city that is hard hit by some disaster or weather event.

The following comments stem from my last ferry trip from Kodiak to Dutch Harbor and back in August/September 2019 on the Tustumena. I feel privileged to have had the chance to take that glorious and memorable trip. I saw how the ferry tied all those coastal communities together by providing needed goods and transportation, moving fish processing crews from one port to another, and as a social and dining event for the communities. Also, I got to see a professional and friendly crew doing great work and meet some warm and opinionated Alaskans! It is from this experience that I make these two suggestions.

First, the run from Homer out the Aleutian Chain needs to have dedicated car deck space for vehicles destined for ports beyond Kodiak. At an appropriate time, the spaces not reserved for western ports can be released to a wait-list for the Kodiak destination. People who need to only go between Homer and Kodiak have ample opportunity to make that run, but the trip out to the western ports is limited due to seasonal weather, schedule/budget cut backs, and maintenance issues. A fellow passenger I spoke with had to go through convoluted efforts to get her vehicle to Sand Point, first taking the vehicle from Homer to Kodiak on a short run then staying in Kodiak until the run out to Sand Point. The extra expense was truly unwarranted when special consideration and planning would be reasonable and eliminate this problem.

Second, I want to support the concept of keeping skilled crews together as much as possible. Crews learn to work as an effective team on various runs when they repeatedly confront unique weather or port/ship situations together. This point was impressed upon me when I was on the Tustumena and we were approaching Akutan in the early part of a storm in late August 2019. In the darkness of the early morning with strong winds and driving sideways rain, the crew carefully controlled the Tustumena in a small area for an extended period of time until she could be docked safely. Passengers and vehicles were quickly and safely loaded off and on, all the while keeping the Tustumena under control at the dock. Once done, she headed for Dutch Harbor, where she waited out the rest of the storm for the following two days. I was so impressed by how the crew worked together and safely managed such a challenge in the dark stormy wind and rain. They handled all the calmer tasks expertly as well, especially the “dance” of loading and unloading cars with the spinning, elevator car deck. I understand all the crew members of the AMHS are skilled and interchangeable (to some degree) but there are runs with unique demands and keeping those crews together increases the success and safety of each trip.

Finally, as an out of state visitor, I would not object to paying more on my passenger fare and think a surcharge should be implemented. Regarding other passenger considerations, I would heartily agree with someone’s suggestion to have a Wi-Fi connection for a fee onboard the ferries. For the longer, main line runs, some sort of basic laundry facility or service for a fee would be great. It may not generate a lot of additional revenue, but it should be considered for possibilities.

From my point of view, the AMHS is the jewel in the crown of Alaska. Of all the great features of the state, the AMHS is the greatest because it allows people of all ages to see so much of the grandeur of the state and meet the people of Alaska. But more importantly, it ties the state together culturally, economically, socially, and benefits ALL the people of Alaska and fortunate visitors like me.

Again, thank you for your hard work on this important, complex, issue. I look forward to reading the results of your efforts and, hopefully, traveling on the ferries in the near future. Best regards to you all and stay well.

Beth Lynk, Virginia Beach, VA

9/15/2020

I hope the main focus is on getting the ferries OUT of the political scene and running them like the Alaska Railroad.
 We do not need any more dollars spent at the whim of politicians Please eliminate all the inefficiencies and plan Long Tern.
 Thank you,
 Eva LoForte
 Cordova, Alaska

9/17/2020

Hello AMHS Reshaping Group members,
 I was able to listen in on most of yesterday's meeting regarding recommendations for reconfiguring the AMHS system, and thought it was a good discussion.

I'd like to concur with Robert, Rep. Stutes (I think), and a couple of others who stated that the status quo isn't acceptable. I don't think that's a surprise, because that's why this group has put in so much time and effort (change is needed), but it seemed worth reinforcing as the justification for making hard, far-reaching changes for the future.

A few points/questions I'd like to pass on to the group as you move through your discussions:

- public corporation: both the reports conducted by the McDowell Group and Northern Economics concluded that a public corporation would be a better fit for managing a system that needs the ability to make longer-term decisions (rather than year-to-year) for the sake of managing a vessel fleet, labor, marketing, and the like. We know this will take time, seems like there's a need for mapping out a timeline to get there, is it a five year transition, longer? What legislative changes have to happen, what is the sequence and possible timing for those changes, etc.
- There was lots of discussion about which vessels are appropriate, and the likely need for new, different vessels going forward. Yes, agreed, one of the main points about managing labor costs effectively is offering day-trip service rather than overnight for some routes. But again, this transition will take time, so what is the transition sequence -- say over 10 years? From the vessels available now to vessels that are suitable for the sea conditions of the areas they will serve? This probably means some route plans that would be good for, say, 5 - 7 years, and then would be modified as vessels are phased out and newer ones come on-line.
- I really, really liked Admiral Barrett's suggestion of a dedicated team of staff to help with researching and planning the transition, is that a group that could be supervised by MTAB? I tried looking up the current composition of MTAB on alaska.gov but the Board Roster posted there looks pretty dated. Mostly I was looking to see what involvement ADOT has on the MTAB, if it agreed to this idea of a dedicated team it would certainly want to have some oversight on the effort. I'm wondering if this idea of a dedicated team could be a shared expense between the State and the communities looking to be more involved in ferry system management (ultimately possibly through regional ferry authorities) (so everyone has skin in the game).

Thanks for considering, I plan on listening in again this afternoon,
 Kristin Carpenter
 Executive Director
 PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT
 Cordova, AK 99574

9/17/2020

To whom it may concern,

Having worked in public sectors and being involved with many such initiatives abroad, I question why the State has not looked at privatizing the network? A similar yet different model can be compared to British rail and the introduction of Virgin.

I am able to work on such a feasibility study and make contact with (x vendor) to explore an interest of the state feels there could be value?

Best regards,

Haydn Price-Morris

Juneau, Alaska

9/19/2020

The party is over and as Alaskans we must be practical and responsible to the real needs of Alaskan residents.

I do not believe the Alaska Marine Ferry System is fiscally responsible by exorbitantly subsidizing passenger and freight costs to all communities in Southeast Alaska.

The Alaska Marine Ferry Service is stifling the transportation business in Southeast Alaska and keelhauling Alaskans who do not live and work in communities on the Ferry routes.

I believe the Alaska Marine Ferry System should only provide passenger service to Juneau from communities connected to the mainland by road, including Anchorage or Seward and Haines to allow Alaskans access to our State Capitol in Juneau.

Ronald Brooks, Fairbanks, Alaska

9/20/2020

Dear Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Work Group,

During the meeting on Wednesday, September 16 there was a good discussion about the need for ferry service between Alaska and Bellingham so there would be a surface transportation link that did not depend on travel through Canada. This is necessary considering the current travel restrictions through Canada. During the meeting on Thursday, September 17 there was discussion about eliminating the cross gulf ferry route. The cross gulf ferry is necessary to provide the surface transportation link from the rail belt communities through Whittier to Juneau and then to Bellingham, including service to Yakutat.

Also consider the current situation in the isolated community of Hyder where the residents are trapped by the closed Canadian border and only have a mail plane twice per week.

Sincerely,

John F. Barry

Sharon K. Barry

Gustavus, AK

9/22/2020

Good morning, AK Marine Highway Planning Staff.

I just have a couple of quick comments:

1) The AK Marine Highway is a lifeline to many communities and it is inexcusable not to keep the ferries going, through thick and thin under all circumstances, even if it requires some sort of subsidies and creative measures.

2) David Morris, an acquaintance of mine who worked for the ferry system for many years, has a lot of insight and he was overlooked for the Marine Transportation Advisory Board. It seems those who were chosen on the board were politically-motivated decisions and have little knowledge or passion for the AK Marine Highway system. We need to get our system back to what it used to be and have the insight of people who CARE about the system.

Thanks.

Justine Bishop

9/22/2020

To the Reshaping Board of the AMHS,

I'm David Morris I would be happy to have a conversation or have input in the future of the AMHS.

I have seen it from 2 views.

1. As an employee that worked in all the different departments deck engineer, purser, cook steward Piswic and all the ships.
2. I was vice chairman, board member, contract Negotiator, international delegate for the IBU over a 12 year span.

I believe I could help shape the new direction and purpose of the AMHS.

I retired after 29 years.

The people of southeast need their highway back.

It ran just fine before the oil money and it can again.

Sincerely yours,

David Morris

9/23/2020

Hello, please, PLEASE do what you can to save the Alaska Ferry system that helps both the people who depend on it for work, food, medicine and supply delivery and medical appointments.

Living in remote towns does not give you all the supply, medical or veterinary help needed. I have watched friends needing the ferry for the simplest to the most severe situations.

My biggest issue is that I require hospital setting MS infusions, and also that there is only so much you can bring on a small aircraft

Personally I drive from NY to Alaska often and would not thrive if I couldn't bring my SUV packed with supplies.

Even during a pandemic chemo therapy, radiation treatments and births are still hospital setting required.

My company invests a lot of money in Alaskan transport, mainly by Ferry because of the heavy research equipment.

Not all work stops because of Covid-19 and Alaska is one of the few safe places to hunker down until the lower 48 is under control.

Kindest regards,

Kim Carra

9/26/2020

To Reshaping Work Group members:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the AMHS Reshaping Group. I have followed most of your meetings and have learned much about challenges of operating the system. I am well aware of the State's financial straits. Given that and the prospect of eliminating ferry service at Valdez, I offer information to advocate continuing that service based on my experience riding the Valdez/Tatitlek route.

My family has used this route since at least 2005 to get to our home at Ellamar AK, approximately 2 miles north of Tatitlek. My family splits residence between PWS and Interior Alaska. We have used ferry service all four seasons—if and when there has been a scheduled stop.

We have shared ASMH ferries with Alaskan residents who have funneled through Valdez from points north, primarily from the Interior, because it is the shortest distance to their coastal destination. This includes school groups, families, state and school employees with freight and vehicles. My point is that that service is not just and probably not primarily used by Valdez residents.

Our ridership shrunk and finally zeroed because the ferry service did the same—especially in the winter when private boats cannot handle the majority of weather and waves. There is a reason for a diminishing farebox.

This summer, passengers and vehicles from this region were forced to charter from Valdez heading south and back again frequently. Smaller charter boats carried passengers and personal goods and landing crafts transported private vehicles. The need to charter, rather than using AMHS, disproportionately taxes the resources of PWS residents. This alternate transportation is comparatively very costly.

Besides the need for a whistle-stop or scheduled stop at Tatitlek for residents/visitors—even once a month—the Reshaping Group might consider the advantage of another way out of a “rabbit hole”. Should any obstruction occur between Whittier and Anchorage, that destination for a ferry would fail to exist.

There are cultural, commercial and geographical reasons for keeping a route open between Valdez, Tatitlek, Chenega and Cordova. Alaskans deserve this opportunity even if it consisted of a hybrid. Freight and vehicle service could be achieved by periodic stops by the State Ferry. Passenger service could be by contracted water taxi. The bottom line is that people traveling to and from coastal areas deserve services on the Marine Highway as much as those who use other State maintained road systems.

I sincerely appreciate your Group's hard work and thank you for considering my perspective.

Mary Corcoran

Ellamar AK

Delta Junction AK

9/27/2020

Coastal Alaska has a sustainable transportation system in the form of commercial air transport, commercial marine freight transport, and local road systems. Comparatively, commercial fares and tariffs are generally higher than the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) over short and moderate distances because commercial fares and tariffs must recover total costs including not only regular operations and maintenance but major periodic refurbishment and maintenance costs, amortized capital investment including a reasonable return on investment, insurance, all overhead costs, and a reasonable profit. However, over long distance high traffic routes the fares and tariffs of commercial airlines and barge lines are consistently lower or in the case of barge lines lower or similar between Southeast Alaska and either Seattle/Bellingham or Anchorage/Whittier, respectively commercial/AMHS. This is impressive when you consider that the commercial fares and tariffs must recover all – total costs and the AMHS fares and tariffs do not even recover regular operations and maintenance costs. A calculation of the total AMHS cost over each route versus commercial cost to move passengers by air and vehicles/vans by barge or small landing craft to small communities will demonstrate that the commercial carriers can transport the existing traffic demands throughout coastal Alaska at the lowest total cost.

AMHS is a very costly mode of transportation because the vessels are too large to cost effectively serve the comparatively low to very-low traffic demand routes. They are too large because AMHS placed a priority on designing vessels to deliver a comfortable ride over the route's most adverse sea state and to address the route forecast peak summer traffic demand. They overlooked the importance of frequency of service that a small fleet of ferries could provide year-round and that passengers will not and cannot afford to wait a week in Juneau or Ketchikan before returning to their community. In the case of passenger travel air carriers have always provided the essential service. The ferry system has always provided supplemental service to those who could afford to wait and to those who wish to travel with their car. Weekly ferry service between the region's commercial centers has provided a cost benefit to outlying communities but a huge cost to the state and at the expense of maintaining small commercial freight transport.

The primary reason for launching the AMHS was to provide reliable, comfortable transport of passengers and vehicles between coastal communities at lower cost. In the 1960's air travel was unreliable and costly. A lot has changed since then. Alaska should evaluate and compare the level of service provided by commercial airlines and barge lines. Today, commercial transportation is superior to AMHS by all measures of transport comparison. A Boeing 737 cruises at 400 mph. When it comes to speed commercial passenger service is a few hours versus days by ferry. Frequency of service comparison of airline and AMHS schedules this past February to Bellingham/Seattle showed 42 daily flights from Anchorage, 5 from Juneau, 3 from Sitka, and 4 from Ketchikan; versus a ferry twice a month from Whittier, 3 ferry trips every two weeks from Juneau and Ketchikan, and 1 ferry per week from Sitka. Summer service schedule in February displayed 5 ferry trips from Juneau and Ketchikan. Capacity utilization is more closely matched to demand by the airlines 70-85% and barge lines versus AMHS which averages about 28% passenger and 56% vehicle capacity utilization. And, this past February, a comparison of fares, tariffs, and rental car rates reveal that lower air fares can save a passenger up to \$500 and depending on the capacity of the ferry at the time of booking the savings to put a car on the barge can save \$489 savings out Whittier southbound. An overall round trip can represent a net savings to near break-even for Anchorage and Juneau. Ketchikan and Sitka may be 17% more costly compared to putting 19' car on barge versus a ferry at base fares. However, if you choose to fly and leave your car at home, you can apply the savings of a AMHS car fare towards a rental car, room, and eats at your destination amounting to \$3,762, \$2,695, and \$1,736, respectively from Anchorage, Juneau, and Ketchikan. In 2011 92% - 99% of passenger's travel by airline between Alaska and the lower 48 states from Southeast and Interior Alaska, Respectively. I imagine it similar today.

So why is Bellingham and Cross Gulf service considered essential? I can only guess because some people want to use the ferry to combine a cruise with the convenience of traveling with their car. I have been told to accommodate the transport of less than 10% of the armed forces and their families transferring to and from Alaska? Or is it just because these routes may lose the least money? In any event we are providing a service that by and large does not save the user money but when the total cost including periodic major vessel maintenance and capital replacement is considered it can cost the state up to several thousand dollars per passenger on top of additional cost incurred by each passenger who chooses not to fly. COVID-19, an air borne pathogen, has made long multi-day trips by boat hazardous to both crew and passengers and increased cost. The overall expense of the ferry cannot justify the opportunity cost to the state in forgoing funding other state priorities in support of a public ferry service that is inferior to existing commercial service. Ferry service to Bellingham and Cross Gulf is not essential. It is not sustainable or needed.

Recommend discontinuing service to Bellingham and Cross Gulf and focus limited ferry resources on utilization of serving route connections connecting communities within

Southeast Alaska, Prince William Sound and Kodiak. Improving service that ties communities together is a better use of AMHS service subsidies verses subsidizing service to Bellingham and Cross Gulf when both connections are clearly non-essential and cost the user more in time and out-of-pocket funds than flying and renting a car or putting their car on a barge.

The State should step back from its narrow focus on saving AMHS and evaluate the cost effectiveness of subsidizing commercial air, marine, and land carriers in movement of people, goods, and service throughout coastal Alaska. If some commercial fares are too high, the state should support and subsidize commercial carriers. It can save money all around. It can provide a sustainable higher level of service. The State no longer can afford subsidize the costliest mode of transportation.

Sincerely,
Andy Hughes

9/28/2020

Hello, I am a 72 year resident of Ketchikan Alaska, I've also been using the AMHS since it began, and have family members who worked and work for the system. My uncle was one of the original engineers, and my father soon after went to work for the AMHS as an engineer, and retired from the system, late 80's early 90's, I am unsure of the exact date.

I have put input and made suggestions quite a few times, to officials of the AMHS, especially since 2003 when we began using the AMHS even more than we had previously, even then we used it a lot, going from Ketchikan to Prince Rupert and driving south to access the lower 48 area almost every year. For the most part I feel my suggestions and input have been ignored, and I feel that the management of the AMHS did not really want to change or make changes that would lower costs, just wanted to look like they were trying. I feel they deliberately just ignored suggestions from citizens AND CREW, and had no intention of trying things different to improve the system and reduce costs, just continue to blame the crews and cost of labor, (costs they negotiated to and agreed to) rather than attempt to do things like REDUCE FARES in the winter to increase ridership during the off season. Instead, WE the citizens of Alaska paid to run these ships mostly empty because the RESIDENTS, who were already paying the costs of these ships to run, were unable to pay the charges to ride them, or if they did need to travel, flew because it was only slightly more money and took an hour and a half instead of 40 hours, and went to Seattle rather than Bellingham. YOU CAN NOT HAVE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION PRICED THIS HIGH AND EXPECT PEOPLE TO USE IT! Public transportation MUST be affordable. If the percentage of cost required of the AMHS was applied to our highways all over Alaska, you would see a lot less driving on the state highways! As you would see a lot more use of the AMHS if it were FREE, like the road system in the interior!

The AMHS is not some discretionary service to the residents of the coastal communities, it is a CRITICAL AND ESSENTIAL service, just like the roads are in the interior! It is also one of the only reasons why the extremely expensive air travel, and barge service are not even more expensive, because of the competition of the AMHS. If the AMHS were to shut down, you would immediately see raised fares to use the airlines and barge lines.

What I see as one of the main problems with the AMHS was sometime in the 80's it was hijacked from being our "highway" into being a cruise lines for tourists. That is, its mission as being AFFORDABLE transportation between the coastal communities and the mainland was diverted to catering to tourists and making money off the tourists and RV's. For at least the last two decades the management of the AMHS has viewed this tourist traffic to be the main mission of the AMHS, not for it to be the affordable public transportation serving the needs of the coastal communities. In fact for many years on October 1st, they have basically shut down the AMHS and tied the vessels up, laid the crews off, because the tourism has ended and with them the massive demand they place on the AMHS.

This mentality of the management, viewing system as a way to pick tourist up in Bellingham, load the vessel with a shoehorn, so these RV's don't have to get off until Haines or Skagway, and can go straight into the interior of Alaska to spend those tourist dollars, has seriously harmed this system, and I think it is the reason this system is in the trouble it is today!

The needs/desires of the tourists, is different from those of the local residents traveling, and also, while the tourists don't like the high costs, they pay whatever is demanded for their "ONCE in a lifetime" trip to Alaska, while the residents who rely on this system cannot pay a once in a lifetime cost every trip! We must go back to the original business plan of the AMHS, this is a HIGHWAY for the coastal communities, and base the operations and mentality to that mission.

I believe the AMHS needs to be taken out from under the D.O.T., and treated similar to the Alaska Railroad. It needs to be run by a board of citizens drawn from the communities it serves, and set up to be responsive to the needs of the ALASKAN COMMUNITIES, not to a bunch of nonresident tourists making a onetime trip to Alaska! I don't think we need reservations for our highway, the ships need to unload all on board in every port, and if they want to go on, they get in line behind the vehicles lined up to get on and go on to the next port. This system works very well on all other ferry system's I have rode on. This would be a start to streamlining the AMHS. Another "reservation" system could be the pick a ticket/number like they do in businesses, where you pick a ticket and get in line, when the driver of a vehicle gets to the port, they drive to the terminal and pull a ticket, and this is their lineup number. At a minimum the reservation system needs to be trimmed to the bone, and we don't need private travel agents getting commissions to make reservations! A HIGHWAY doesn't need reservations when it has a reliable schedule that the riders can count on!

Next, when this system started, it didn't have a Port Captain and Port Engineer in every port. As I recall it had ONE of each for the entire system. This is a lot of extra cost and as I view, extra dead weight that could also be reduced, as the administration costs have been said to be what was needed to be reduced in EVERY study that has been done to improve the efficiency and lessen costs, which suggestions NEVER WERE followed by the bloated and costly administration, this management is what I view as totally responsible for the problem of this system, and have run it into the ground while protecting "their" wages, conditions, and big retirements.

I favor replacing the entire management with new, different attitude, different mission, management committed to seeing that this AMHS system redesigned to serve the coastal communities years into the future!

For years I have questioned this management's commitment to making the AMHS viable, and thought they were deliberately running it into the ground. Their actions and lack of business sense, just didn't make sense to me. Why would a management not have a "sale" in the winter to increase ridership? Why did they keep the fares so high, when if they would have cut them by 50% they would likely have increased the use of the Alaska residents significantly? We used to see many families traveling before these increases in the rates, and after we didn't see many. Not many families can afford to go on a vacation where it costs \$5000, for that family to go from Ketchikan to Bellingham to access the lower 48 states just for transportation! After all it wasn't like the AMHS couldn't afford to reduce winter rates by 50% so the Alaska residents who would be the main users in the winter could afford to use it, as ALASKA RESIDENTS WERE ALREADY PAYING THE COST OF THESE SHIPS TO RUN MOSTLY EMPTY, which is outrageous when you think about it! Any sensible business which was empty all winter would HAVE A SALE, to bring in customers/users.

{In fairness, there was ONE attempt to reduce rates that I know of, they reduced the rates 15%, but you had to purchase a round trip ticket. My wife and I took advantage of it, was the only time we rode the Columbia, (beautiful ship, most enjoyable ship in the fleet), first time to go to Bellingham instead of Prince Rupert. Was a very nice ride south, coming home wasn't as nice, for some reason they substituted the Matanuska for the Columbia, then even though we were at the front of the lineup coming home from Bellingham, we got loaded last, even though we had made reservations and paid for tickets months in advance, since we were the last loaded, when we got our stateroom, was the last one left, worse stateroom on the ship directly under the galley, no ventilation and was probably 100 degrees most the time and no way to cool down except leave and go upstairs. Miserable trip home, and the downside was that even with the 15% discount it was still far more expensive than driving from Prince Rupert!}

My suspicions of deliberate mismanagement were confirmed by an article I read authored by Capt. Sande, (a retired long time employee of the AMHS) about problems with the AMHS, I will attach a link to this article, it is very enlightening, and after reading it, prompted me to write a letter to our congressional delegation asking them for a federal investigation into this matter. I will also attach this letter to this email.

Captain Sande article found here: https://www.anchoragepress.com/news/alaska-marine-highway-system-s-demise-the-fault-of-years/article_6d61755c-55c8-11ea-8406-0734b4f15d78.html

My letter to our congressional delegation here:

http://www.sitnews.us/0420Viewpoints/042720_byron_whitesides.html

I am attaching some other letters and comments I have made over the years to this as well as a comparison of fares or COSTS to the residents who would like AFFORDABLE AND RELIABLE AMHS scheduling, that can be counted on so they can trust and use this PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION!

I have a few other comments I haven't made yet,

1. Running these vessels "until something breaks" instead of identifying and fixing problems before they break is not a sustainable system of maintaining these very expensive vessels! When "something breaks" it usually takes out other parts of the machinery making the repairs MUCH more costly! This method of maintenance is deliberately making needed repairs unaffordable and actually one of the reasons this system is in the bad shape it is now. Whoever thought up and approved this system should be fired IMMEDIATELY, this is not a RESPONSIBLE method of maintaining our fleet!
2. I feel the AMHS should be treated very similar to the Alaska Railroad. Do the revenues produced by the railroad go back into the general fund, or are they retained in the system to help fund it?? I think any revenues produced by the AMHS should be retained in the system to help reduce costs and stabilize funding, and we have a board of private citizens from the communities served by the AMHS in charge and making policy decisions, we have pissed millions away by allowing bureaucrats to sell our assets, (vessels) for much less than we should have gotten from them. WE the citizens served by this system MUST make the decisions!

3. When we fund studies that show that to reduce the costs of the AMHS, a reduction of ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF is needed, THIS NEEDS TO BE DONE! This over bloated administration is who is really responsible for the condition of the system today. I think they ALL need to be fired and replaced!

4. I do not think the AMHS has been treated fairly by the legislature, residents in the Anchorage/Matsu area, or the DOT management. I think the Alaska Railroad is treated a lot more "favorably" than the AMHS. When the AMHS was getting cut \$50 million, I heard on the radio, the Alaska Railroad was getting a \$50 million grant. I don't think this is fair treatment!

I have read that the AMHS has a marine highway that is about 3500 miles, and the DOT has about 4500 miles of roads they service. This administration wants to run the AMHS with \$25 million of subsidies, but they have no problem with \$500 million for the DOT! They shut down the AMHS in the winter, but regularly plow and maintain the Dalton Highway! How many residents live in the communities served by the AMHS compared to residents who live along the Dalton Highway? Just would like to know those figures! This \$25 million to fund the AMHS is an outrageous insult to the residents of coastal Alaska and our rural areas that depend on this system! Especially since I heard that the Prince of Wales system is subsidized to \$16 million a year for a much smaller and shorter route than the AMHS, and serving a much smaller population! I would like to see tolls put on all the highways in the interior that go between the cities there. I would like to see them "recover" the same percentage of cost that are required of the users of the AMHS! I'm sure in this time of financial need we the residents of the state of Alaska could use another \$100 million or more revenue from these roads most of the residents of our coastal communities get to help pay for but never use. I am also outraged and disappointed that our legislature continued to steal from the PFD's to continue to support the bloated government in the interior, forcing the poorest citizens and CHILDREN to pay for the government they grew with out of control spending binge from 2007 to 2014 when the price of oil increased drastically, and then refused to roll back this spending and cut the government, employees they hired in this binge, and roll back programs expanded or added when the price returned to historic levels, instead cutting the AMHS an essential service to rural and coastal Alaska! The FAIR way to make the cuts needed, would have been to take the 2006 budget compare it to the 2014 budget, then cut back every employee added since 2007, every program added or expanded, with inflation proofing the 2006 budget. Then the cuts would have been WHERE THEY WERE ADDED OR EXPANDED, not to cut what is not popular in the Anchorage/Matsu area while protecting their economies and jobs from cuts!

These cuts in the PFD's are a double whammy to those relying on the service of the AMHS, as it passed too much of the costs of government on to the residents who rely on this system, who now not only don't receive their fair share of the oil, but are forced to pay much higher costs passed on to them by a reduction of affordable transportation to the mainland and affordable costs of supplying their communities with food and supplies!

I could go on and on, but I need to stop and reiterate: THE AMHS IS OUR HIGHWAY, PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, AND IT NEEDS TO BE RUN FOR THE NEEDS OF THE RESIDENTS OF THE COASTAL COMMUNITIES, NOT TO TRANSPORT SEASONAL TOURISTS TO THE INTERIOR, AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION NEEDS TO BE AFFORDABLE AND RELIABLE SO THE RESIDENTS WILL USE IT. And unfortunately, it has not been affordable for at least a decade, or closer to two, and since Governor Dunleavy has been in office and made the cuts, it's no longer reliable! Feel free to contact me anytime,

Byron Whitesides

Ketchikan Alaska

CC Dan Ortiz

Bert Stedman

ps: compare the costs Ketchikan to Bellingham in 2014 to 2019, the cost has almost DOUBLED in five years! No wonder a lack of riders!

Cost 2014, 2 seniors, vehicle, 4 berth stateroom = \$1160. Cost 2019 = \$2078!!

9/28/2020

I have been tracking and listening to some of your planning sessions and pleased to see the direction the Reshaping Group heading.

I offer up the following:

1. It is apparent the Reshaping Work Group (RWG) is adopting the concept the Alaska Marine Highway System is not solely comprised of the AMHS ferries, but a suite of maritime operators that transport people, vehicles and materials around the State. It is evident the RWG recognizes AMHS is one of several entities that fulfill the State's marine transportation needs.
 2. I submit a Public Private Partnership (P3) is the best hybrid solution to fulfill most, but not all, of the services AMHS has been providing. In some cases the State may need to provide some subsidy to commercial vessels to make their participation financially viable, with the ultimate goal of the commercial solution still costing less than an AMHS ferry to perform the same.
 3. In some cases we need to adopt a similar solution airlines do.....transport people and luggage but not vehicles. It is far less expensive to operate passenger vessels than car/vehicle ferries. Allen Marine has in the past "pinch hit" for AMHS and can do so more frequently in the future, especially for port calls to Tenakee, Angoon, Kake, Hoonah, Gustavus, and Pelican. Smaller, less costly vessels, lower operating costs (fuel, maintenance and labor). There should be no need to have vehicle ferries routinely call on Angoon, Kake, Gustavus, Pelican, Sitka and other communities as the option to rent cars in Juneau exists. There may be occasions where vehicles can be transported to and from these small communities on AML or Samson barges. However, not every visit by a AMHS vessel will have the capability to move vehicles. Commercial landing craft can be used to transport vehicles.
 4. I've talked to several friends who have lived in Kodiak and Dutch Harbor for years and never traveled by ferry to Anchorage. They flew! Their vehicles and goods were shipped to and from the islands on barges or via the container ships that call on these ports. The cost of the Southwest Alaska ferry runs are simply too high to absorb. There are other options commercial options; airlines and cargo ships.
 5. The Cascade Point ferry terminal option for Juneau appears to be a good option as it will support a day boat operation. A shuttle from the terminal to the Juneau airport should be considered as passengers can board a bus or plane or rent a car at the airport.
 6. I suggest the RWG also consider using the non-profit Marine Exchange of Alaska (MXAK) to serve as the 24 hour coordination center for all of the maritime transport activities, schedules, locations of vessels, updates, etc. This information can be posted on a dynamically updated web site. MXAK currently operates a 24 hour operations center that tracks all commercial vessels operating in Alaska, including ferries, tugs, landing craft, container ships, etc. through MXAK's AIS (Automatic Identification System). MXAK has built and operates 130 AIS stations MXAK has built and operates in Alaska and actively monitors and communicates with vessels from Seattle north, throughout Alaska waters.
- In summary I am optimistic the RWG will develop a viable course to pursue solutions for the AMHS.

Regards,
Ed Page

9/29/2020

Obviously the Southwest Alaska communities serviced by the M/V Tustumena will push back against the idea by Tony Johansen today on the AMH Reshaping Workgroup meeting, that the Southwest Alaska ferry should be eliminated.

We have previously recited the reasons that the ferry, however often it come to our communities, is critical to Southwest Alaska. That a member of this work group would openly suggest we choose one region of the State over another is enraging.

Thank you to member Lee Ryan for his vision for the future opportunity that Southwest Alaska holds.

Ernie Weiss