



City and Borough of Sitka

100 Lincoln Street • Sitka, Alaska 99835

Coast Guard City, USA

August 6, 2020

Admiral Tom Barrett, Chair
Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Work Group
dot.amh-reshaping@alaska.gov

AMHS Reshaping Survey

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

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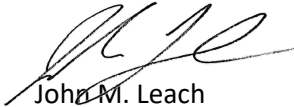
consumer goods to other smaller communities that do not have barge service. Alternating passenger and vehicle service is a good stop-gap measure for our community; however, that alternative reduces overall access to the road system.

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

Cc: Senator Bert Stedman
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins
CBS Assembly