

# *Alaska Marine Highway Reform*

Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference    March 2020



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**3,500 miles of marine transportation networking coastal Alaska to the state and international highway system**



# Alaska Ferry Transportation Act

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The first Alaska Legislature approved the Alaska Ferry Transportation Act in 1959, authorizing the new Department of Public Works to acquire ferry terminals and regulate ferry operators. In 1960, Alaska voters statewide approved a bond proposition to invest in a marine highway system, with additional ferries and docking facilities.

Operations of the Alaska Marine Highway began in 1963 with four vessels. It has been a critical component of the state's transportation system ever since.



# AMHS: A System in Crisis

- **Funding and schedule uncertainty**
  - State funding cut by 30 percent over five years
  - FY20 funding cut nearly 50% (\$43M)
  - Northern Economics model proposed another additional 50% budget cut
  - No long-range plan in place

## Late state budget delays fall-winter-spring ferry schedule

By Ed Schoenfeld, CoastAlaska - Juneau - July 26, 2017

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*The ferry Malaspina is shown in drydock and the Columbia is tied up at the Ketchikan Shipyard in February 2012. Damage to the Columbia is delaying its return to service this fall and the Malaspina will help fill in. (Photo by Ed Schoenfeld/CoastAlaska News)*

Alaskans have until the end of the month to tell the Marine Highway System what they think of its fall, winter and spring sailing plans.

# AMHS: A System in Decline

- **Aging fleet**

- Kennicott - 1998
- Columbia - 1973
- Tustumena - 1964
- Matanuska – 1963

## Half the fleet sidelined

- Malaspina, Fast Vehicle ferries in layup status, Aurora uncertain
- Hubbard not scheduled for summer service

### Alaska ferry malfunction leaves passengers scrambling

Sunday, April 8th 2018, 7:06 pm AKDT by Liz Raines  
Updated: Monday, April 9th 2018, 4:46 pm AKDT



The Alaska Marine Highway system is working to clear a backlog of passengers and vehicles trying to get to from Homer to Kodiak following an electrical problem on the Kennicott ferry in Kodiak Friday.



# An Aging Fleet



*Most fleets retire their ships at 30-35 years.*

# Statewide AMHS Reform Multi-Phase Project

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- ✓ Mission, Goals, and Governance

*Completed May 2017*

- ✓ Strategic Operational and Business Plan

*Completed November 2017*

- ✓ Legislation

*HB 412 introduced April 2018*

*HB 249 introduced February 2020*

- ✓ Interim Measures Identified

*Could be implemented now*

- ✓ Fleet/Terminal Standardization, and  
Continued Outreach



# Phase 1

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- Examined mission, goals, and governance
  - Statewide summit
  - Stakeholder interviews
  - Case studies of other ferry systems
  - Mission statement refinement
  - Analysis of alternative governance models
- Recommended further exploration of public corporation





# Purpose

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*Deliver safe, reliable, and sustainable marine transportation for Alaska residents, visitors, and our commercial customers.*



# Phase 2

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- Created long-term operating and business strategy
  - Revenue analysis
  - Operations analysis
  - Operations financial model
  - Structure and benefits of public corporation
  - Public and stakeholder engagement





# Revenue and Traffic Analysis

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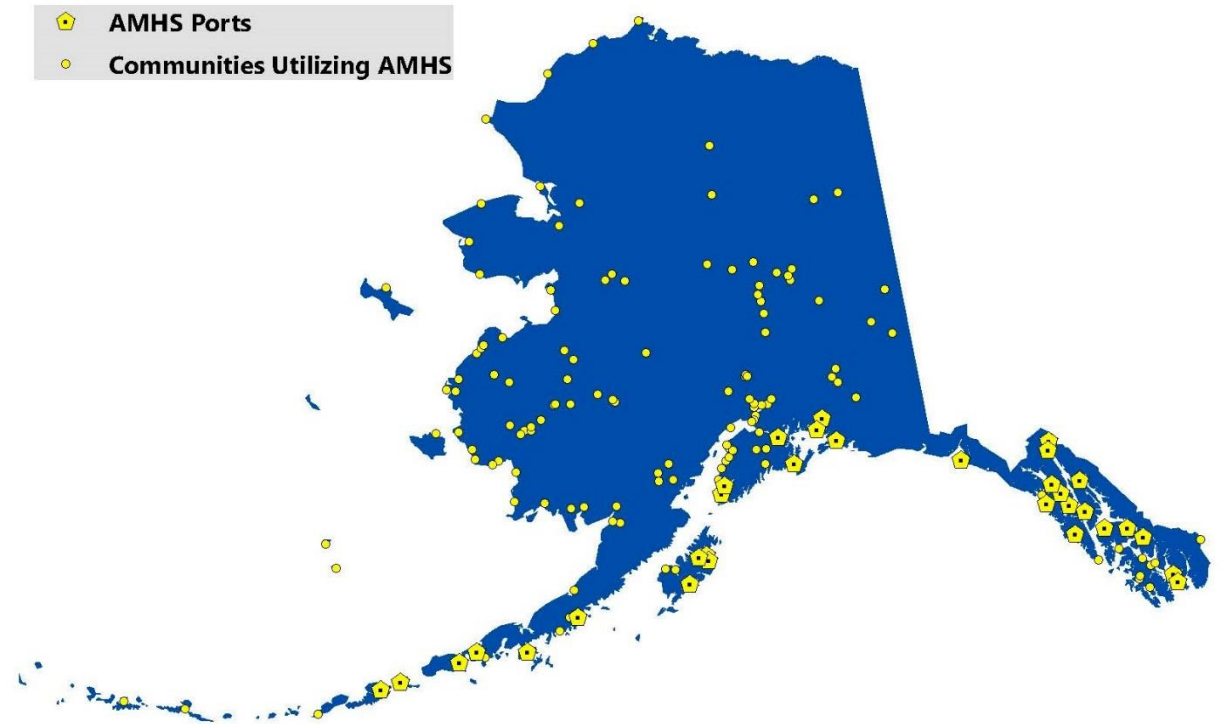
- AMHS carried Alaskans from 175 communities

- Fairbanks North Star Borough

- 3,316 passengers, 1,409 vehicles
    - Fairbanks, Ft. Wainwright, North Pole, Eielson, Salcha, and more

- Bethel Census Area

- 218 passengers, 52 vehicles
    - Aniak, Kipnuk, Kwethluk, Sleetmute, and more





# Revenue and Traffic Analysis

- Visitors using AMHS also travel Alaska's road system
  - 51% visit Anchorage
  - 36% visit Denali
  - 26% visit Seward
  - 25% visit Fairbanks
  - 23% visit Homer
  - 22% visit Valdez

Top 10 Destinations of Visitors using Using AMHS  
Summer 2016



# Public Corporation Analysis

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- Maintains existing benefits
  - Inter-departmental coordination
  - Public purpose of system
  - Access to federal funding
- Addresses limitations
  - Frequent turnover in senior leadership
  - Indirect labor negotiations
  - Short-term planning horizon
- Additional benefits
  - Incorporate board expertise
  - Operate in business-like manner
  - Align labor and management interests
  - Reduce labor costs strategically

# Additional Findings

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- AMHS will always require public funds to provide safe and reliable transportation
  - Personnel and travel account for 69% of operating budget
  - Explore opportunities for revenue growth
  - Transition plan needed toward a modern and standardized fleet to achieve critical cost savings
- Use revenue and market analysis to guide actions
  - Non-residents account for 42% of revenue





# Interim Measures

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- Actions that can be taken now
  - Work toward a sustainable, business-like organization
  - Empower management to control costs, create new revenue streams
  - Align with longer-term objectives
- *1: Stabilize Funding*
  - Increase revenues and align with seasonality
  - Establish partnerships and non-operating revenue opportunities
- *2: Fleet and Terminal Standardization*
  - Financial and operational efficiencies
- *3: Robust Market and Revenue Analysis*
  - Allows AMHS to deploy resources effectively

# Interim Measures cont.

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- *4: Address Labor Relations*
  - Negotiate directly; reduce labor costs strategically
- *5: Board Development*
  - Phase 2 recommended 7-member board
  - 5 with needed business/transportation expertise AND 1 representative of union employees
  - Seated as soon as possible to assure a smooth transition to the public corporation

# Interim Measures cont.

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- *6: Corporation Development*
  - Advance preparation needed for smooth transition
- *7: Employee Communications*
  - Improved, but further face-to-face meetings needed
- *8: Explore New Revenue Sources*
  - Non-operating revenues, partnerships, concessions, and shoreside potential
- *9: Maintain Public Support*
  - Continue project momentum



# Project Sponsors

*Platinum Top Contributor: Ketchikan Gateway Borough*

## LEGACY CONTRIBUTORS

- City & Borough of Juneau
- City of Ketchikan
- City of Valdez
- First Bank
- Haines Borough
- State of Alaska

## BRONZE SPONSORS

- Central Council Tlingit Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
- City and Borough of Wrangell
- City of Cordova
- City of Craig
- City of Pelican
- City of Thorne Bay
- City of Unalaska
- Cordova Chamber

## BENEFACTORS

- Alaska Committee
- City and Borough of Sitka
- Lynden Inc.

## BRONZE SPONSORS cont.

- Greater Sitka Chamber
- The Landing Hotel Ketchikan
- Huna Totem
- Hyder Community Association
- Inter-Island Ferry Authority
- Madison Lumber & Hardware
- Marine Engineers
- Masters Mates and Pilots Union
- Petersburg Chamber of Commerce

## SILVER SPONSORS

- City of Kodiak
- Ketchikan Marine Industry Council
- Municipality of Skagway
- Prince William Sound Economic Development District
- Vigor, Ketchikan Alaska

## BRONZE SPONSORS cont.

- Petersburg Economic Development Council
- Sitka Economic Development Association
- Sitka Tribes of Alaska
- SouthWest Alaska Municipal Conference (SWAMC)
- Travel Juneau
- Wrangell Convention and Visitors Bureau

# AMHS Reform Continues

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- **Statewide Steering Committee**
  - Working to create more efficient, sustainable organization
- **Governor's Reshaping Working Group**
- **Legislation for Public Corporation**
  - Incorporate private sector expertise
  - Longer planning horizon and stability in key leadership positions
  - Align management and labor interests
  - Strategically reduce operating costs
  - Grow revenues and public-private partnerships
  - Preserve access to federal capital funds

# AMHS Role in Communities

## Short-term to mid-term “triage”



# AMHS Plays Critical Role

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- AMHS provides local employment and wages
- Makes purchases from wide variety of local businesses
- Brings visitors; enhances visitor experience
- Provides affordable transport of seafood
- Encourages local purchase of goods and services; lowers cost of living
- Ships time-sensitive equipment, materials, and perishable goods



# AMHS Plays Critical Role

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- Connects residents with jet service
- Provides essential access to health care services
- Plays critical role in special events
- Provides affordable school-related travel



# Quotes

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- *The ferry is threaded into everything we do...You book your whole life around the ferry schedule.*
- *We have been building our economy around the marine highway, especially the fast ferry, for over 10 years.*
- *This community will not survive without the ferry.*
- *If we lost ferry service our business would likely go bankrupt.*
- *If ferry services were limited, this would have a huge impact on our local workforce.*
- *If AMHS stopped service, the population would drop substantially.*
- *AMHS is absolutely critical to recruitment and retention of employees.*
- *The ferry is a critical part of our success or failure...This is our road system. It just happens to be on the water.*

# Next Phase: Essential Transportation Service and Community Adjustment Analysis

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- Community Economic Adjustment Planning

- Develop plans to mitigate economic dislocation cause by reduces AMHS service
- Identify communities most at risk/with greatest need
- Consider private sector technical assistance, identify alternative passenger, freight, vehicles

# Next Phase: Essential Transportation Service and Community Adjustment Analysis

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- Community Transportation Needs Assessment
- Community Asset and Capital Needs Assessment
- Community Economic Adjustment Planning
- Inform/Assist Governor's AMHS Reshaping Work Group



# Next Phase: Essential Transportation Service and Community Adjustment Analysis

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- Inform/Assist Governor's AMHS Reshaping Work Group
  - Provide the community-level AMHS impact and needs information so far absent from ferry system planning/reshaping

# Next Phase: Essential Transportation Service and Community Adjustment Analysis

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- **Community Transportation Needs Assessment**
  - Assess historical economic and socioeconomic reliance on AMHS
  - Consider capacity and seasonality needs
  - Inventory available/potential service alternatives (air, marine, road)

# Next Phase: Essential Transportation Service and Community Adjustment Analysis

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## • Community Asset and Capital Needs Assessment

- Assess AMHS and other marine terminal assets
- Identify infrastructure gaps/deficiencies
- Propose modifications/investments to support service alternatives

# Next Phase: Essential Transportation Service and Community Adjustment Analysis

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## •AMHS Fleet Capital Plan

- Reassess fleet condition and vessel replacement plans
- Define future fleet configuration based on operating environment and community need



# *Thank you!*

*Robert Venables, Executive Director  
Southeast Conference*

## Help us build support

- Stay informed
- Financial
- Legislative outreach
- Public outreach

**[www.amhsreform.com](http://www.amhsreform.com)**

