

www.cityofseldovia.com

P.O. Drawer B Seldovia, Alaska 99663 Phone: (907) 234-7643, Fax: (907) 234-7430

February 9, 2021

State of Alaska

Alaska Marine Highway System

Electronically submitted: dot.amhs.comments@alaska.gov

Subject: City of Seldovia comments concerning the proposed summer 2021 AMHS schedule

Commissioner MacKinnon, Captain Falvey, Members of the Alaska State Legislature, and Team Members of the Alaska Marine Highway System,

Seldovia City Council appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed summer 2021 AMHS schedule. We are also grateful for the time Commissioner MacKinnon and Captain Falvey took to meet and answer questions posed at Seldovia's January 25th work session and look forward to more conversations with AMHS leadership in the future.

Thank you for improving the AMHS ferry schedule comment period from one week to two. Through confirmation given by DOT&PF Legislative Liaison Mike Lesmann, we appreciate AMHS receiving and considering our comments after the February 7th comment deadline regarding the proposed schedule.

Enclosed please find the August 10, 2020 letter submitted by Seldovia's former city manager, which outlines some of the City's overall perspectives of the transportation service the State provides through the Alaska Marine Highway System. To reiterate some of the key takeaways:

- Seldovia would appreciate consistent, reliable ferry service to and from Seldovia as it is a lifeline to the road system.
 - **Regarding the proposed 2021 schedule:** In 2019 and 2020, the Governor vetoed millions of dollars from vessel operations that would have reduced gaps in ferry service. The FY2022 budget as proposed by the Governor reduces the Marine Vessel Operations budget by \$2,469.7M or -5.4%. It appears however for the summer, Seldovia is sustaining 3 times a week service. The City of Seldovia would like to work with the Governor's Office to ensure a sustainably run ferry system that accounts for budget constraints while also balancing out the need for year-round service. Would reducing Seldovia's service to two times a week provide more available budget for year-round service? We support ferry service that allows our residents to go over and come back to Seldovia; perhaps this

could be accomplished with the schedule when the ferry travels to and from Kodiak to make Seldovia a part of that trip.

- Seldovia would appreciate ferry service that occurs twice a week on a year-round basis.
 - **Regarding the proposed 2021 schedule from May - September:** For Week 1 of each month, Seldovia has 3 ferry trips scheduled. For week 2, Seldovia has 2 ferry trips scheduled. For week 3, Seldovia has 3 ferry trips scheduled. For week 4, Seldovia has 3 ferry trips scheduled. Seldovia is grateful for service occurring three times a week, however there is a willingness to work with the State in order to reduce service to twice a week throughout the summer to ensure sustainable service year-round.
- The basic structure of the AMHS is to provide essential transportation needs to communities not on the road system.
 - **Regarding the proposed 2021 schedule:** Thank you for ensuring both the M/V Tustumena and the M/V Kennicott are operating and providing service to rural communities like Seldovia.

Additionally, community events in Seldovia have not been included for consideration. While the City of Seldovia explores how it will address community events on City property in regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, there many community events hosted in Seldovia that would be great for AMHS to keep in mind when developing its ferry schedules including:

Annual Seldovia Summer Solstice Music Festival & Higgy's En Plein Air, Saturday June 19, 2021 and Sunday June 20, 2021- Seldovia Arts Council

Independence Day Parade and Celebration, July 4, 2021- Seldovia Chamber of Commerce

The Seldovia Fly In- a three-day event in July

Labor Day Celebration - Seldovia Chamber of Commerce

The City of Seldovia will request tentative dates from organizations including the Seldovia Chamber of Commerce concerning community events and provide them to AMHS for consideration when they are received. The City's response to and mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic makes this planning initiative difficult and we appreciate DOT&PF's consideration of these dates given how quickly event planning can change in order to ensure public health and safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on behalf of the citizens of the City of Seldovia.

Respectfully submitted,
Seldovia City Council



Mayor Campbell



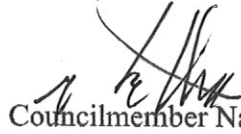
Councilmember Sweatt



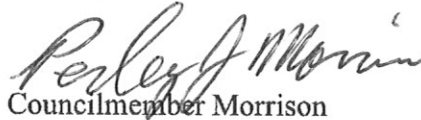
Councilmember Rojas



Councilmember Colberg



Councilmember Nathan



Councilmember Morrison



Councilmember Payton

CC:

Commissioner MacKinnon

Captain Falvey Jr.

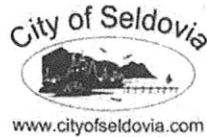
Rep. Stutes

Sen. Stevens

Enclosures:

February 2, 2021 Email from DOT&PF Legislative Liaison

August 10, 2020 Letter from CM Cameron concerning AMHS Winter Schedule



P.O. Drawer B Seldovia, Alaska 99663 Phone: (907) 234-7643, Fax: (907) 234-7430 email: citymanager@cityofseldovia.com

State of Alaska
Department of Transportation
Alaska Marine Highway System
2021 Winter Ferry Service – Seldovia
(transmitted electronically)

August 10, 2020

The City of Seldovia and its residents consider the Alaska Marine Highway System a vital component of its quality of life and economic success. While there may be alternate modes of transportation in and out of our community, those do not necessarily equate to affordable, reliable or ideal, given the need of transportation.

Our community would appreciate consistent, reliable ferry service to and from Seldovia as it is a lifeline to the road system that allows individuals to travel to and from their medical appointments, dental appointments, take care of other forms of domestic business, grocery shop, and other daily living activities. The Alaska Marine Highway and its service to Seldovia allows the business sector to transport their goods and services at a more affordable rate than using alternate modes of transportation. By being able to decrease their operating costs for transportation, they in turn can sell their goods and services at a lower cost to their customers, thus decreasing our cost of living. Our community relies on the ferry to provide affordable transportation of machinery, construction materials, and supplies that are used for capital improvement projects and to be able stay within the budgetary constraints. To know that the ferry is operating on a dependable consistent basis, project planners and contractors can schedule their operations around the ferry schedule and complete projects in a more manageable way. Our year around residents' struggle to be able to travel consistently throughout the year; we are willing to compromise and be understandable to spread out the total number of sailings throughout the year, not concentrate it to three months out of the year.

The City of Seldovia would be appreciative of twice weekly service, year around. We have been afforded service three times per week, which we are grateful for, but only for 25% of the year. While we do not necessarily require three ferries per week three months out of the year - as we have it now, ***we do require service 100% of the year.***

We request revisiting the schedule for the entire Alaska Marine Highway until the feedback and plan from the Alaska Marine Highway Working Group is considered. Specifically, the consideration of the reshaping report released earlier this year and how it relates to scheduling.

The reshaping of AMHS is a long debated challenge; the release of the most recent report from Northern Economics highlights these challenges and makes some astute observations of the state's ferry system, it also reiterates some of the challenges and issues that lawmakers have been facing in similar reports from the past including the 2016 McDowell group Report – Transportation AMHS Reform Project, the creation of MTAB, Southeast Conference as well as several years' worth of testimony, input and information sharing.

One of the key findings in the 2016 McDowell Group report was that "for every dollar of General Fund money not budgeted to AMHS, there will be \$2.30 less economic activity." - if this is accurate, then the recent \$5 million veto equates to 11.5 million in lost economic revenue to our state. The Northern

Economics states that reducing the AMHS operating subsidy to \$24 million will be extremely difficult if there is also a desire to provide minimum levels of service to existing AMHS communities.

The McDowell Group Study states that AMHS is not and will not be a profit generating operation – yet the Northern Economic study mentions profitable routes throughout the document. It is known that there is a money problem, but the basic structure of the AMHS is to provide essential transportation needs to communities not on the road system.

Making AMHS cost effective, bridging the huge gap between expenses and revenues, providing adequate service to rural Alaskans and making sure that Alaskans can continue their way of life, without having to endure high living expenses and unreliable or non-existent ferry service is a multi-layered, complex issue.

Communities are struggling and need a short-term solution, right now. The definition of minimum service levels varies from community to community, please consider what this means when developing the schedules; please take more than a 7-day window for comments on said schedule. There also needs to be the long-term solution that needs to be developed and implemented, but for now, Seldovia would like to know that ferry service will be reinstated in the winter months at a basic level.

We support the efforts of the AMHS Working Group and want to be engaged in the continued pursuit of finding a fiscally responsible solution while continuing to provide reliable, affordable, consistent transportation service for all of us that depend on it.

We thank you for the opportunity to share our perspectives and participation in this process. By finding a viable solution to a long-established challenge will enrich the economies, quality of life and create sustainability of all communities in Alaska – , not just coastal communities.

Respectfully,



Cassidi Cameron
City Manager
City of Seldovia

From: Doug Letch <Doug.Letch@akleg.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, February 2, 2021 1:03 PM
To: Rachel Friedlander <citymanager@cityofseldovia.com>
Subject: FW: Request to extend comment period for AMHS 2021 summer ferry schedule

From: Lesmann, Mike (DOT) <mike.lesmann@alaska.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, February 2, 2021 12:50 PM
To: Doug Letch <Doug.Letch@akleg.gov>
Subject: FW: Request to extend comment period for AMHS 2021 summer ferry schedule

Good afternoon Doug,

We unfortunately won't be publically extending the deadline, since the longer we wait to post a schedule for bookings the greater the chances we are missing out on revenue. *However*, we will accept and consider comments from City of Seldovia leadership after February 7th . Those comments can be sent via email to dot.amhs.comments@alaska.gov and by fax to (907) 228-6874. As you probably know, we have the usual southeast and southwest system teleconferences scheduled for the 8th, and we plan to work quickly to finalize and post the schedule as soon as is possible after that.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Mike Lesmann
Legislative Liaison
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
907.465.4772 (desk)
907.957.2321 (cell)

From: Rachel Friedlander <citymanager@cityofseldovia.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 2, 2021 8:34 AM
To: dot.amhs.comments@alaska.gov
Cc: Jeremiah Campbell <campbell@cityofseldovia.com>; Heidi Geagel <cityclerk@cityofseldovia.com>; Matt Gruening <Matt.Gruening@akleg.gov>; Katrina Matheny <Katrina.Matheny@akleg.gov>
Subject: Request to extend comment period for AMHS 2021 summer ferry schedule

Good morning AMHS team,

On Jan. 25th, DOT announced it was seeking comments concerning the proposed summer ferry schedule from community leaders and the public. Unfortunately, the two week window provided by the state does not allow me time to follow up with Mayor Campbell and Seldovia Council to receive their comments.

We had a council meeting on Jan. 25th and our next one is not until February 8th. I know the City of Seldovia is not the only municipality in this scheduling conundrum, and I believe it is imperative local elected officials/community leaders be given a reasonable window to provide thorough comments to

the state, especially rural communities that depend on the ferry system as a lifeline. I would ask that DOT consider extending the deadline by at minimum one more week. I know you need to get this schedule set asap to get operations in order, however I appreciate the time in allowing communities like Seldovia to complete due diligence with Mayor Campbell and Seldovia City Council concerning this important topic.

Best regards,
Rachel

Rachel Friedlander
City Manager

City of Seldovia
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Seldovia Chamber of Commerce

Drawer F

Seldovia AK 99663

907-234-7612

Portal Website: www.seldoviachamber.org

www.YouOtterBeHere.com

2020-2021 Officers

Crystal Collier, Pres.

Jen Swick, Vice Pres.

Jen Swick, Secretary

Darlene Crawford, Treas.

Board of Directors:

Angela Campbell, Jenny

Chissus, Darlene Crawford,

Kris Lethin, Suzie Stranik,

MaryAnne Wilson

Seldovia Chamber of Commerce 2021 Events

- Memorial Day Weekend – Human-Powered Fishing Derby
- Solstice Weekend – Seldovia Summer Solstice Music Festival (Abbreviated)
- Independence Day – 4th of July Festivities and 5K Salmon Shuffle
- Seldovia Fly-In – I believe it will be the third weekend of July (double check with Steph)
- Labor Day Weekend – events to be determined