

# MTAB Talks Tustumena Replacement

Thursday, 16 May 2013

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

After almost 50 years in service, Alaska will say "goodbye" to the M/V Tustumena. But frequent farers of the Alaska Marine Highway System ferry won't have to say those goodbyes just yet. KMXT's Brianna Gibbs has more.

During the Marine Transportation Advisory Board meeting on Tuesday in Juneau, board members discussed the lengthy process of replacing the ship. AMHS General Manager Captain John Falvey said a new ferry is still five years out.

"September of 2015 hopefully we're building, if everything is perfect. And we talk about how long it takes to construct a ship, probably 2-3 years to construct a 325-foot ship. This is a ship now, this isn't a day boat. So, five years from now. And we've got to keep Tusty going for five years," Falvey said.

Only the Tustumena and the M/V Kennicott are rated as ocean-going ferries, capable of sailing in open seas like the Gulf of Alaska. All others are designed for "inside waters" like Southeast and Prince William Sound.

The Tustumena, which is often referred to as the Trusty Tusty, has a long history of serving Southcentral Alaska, including Kodiak, Port Lions, Homer and Seldovia. In recent years however, the Tusty took a turn toward the rusty and started showing her age. This winter the ship went in for repairs at the Seward Ship's Drydock. The work was supposed to be completed before the 2013 sailing season, but new problems were discovered and now the Tustumena isn't expected to sail until July.

The Alaska Legislature moved \$10 million into the active working account for AMHS, which the advisory board decided to put toward designing the Tustumena's replacement. Falvey said the design process will hopefully start in July, and he expects it to take about two years.

The Alaska Marine Highway is facing a \$3.5-million spending cut, so financing the rest of the ferry replacement won't be easy. Advisory Board Chair Robert Venables (Ven-ah-bulls) said there is money, but the \$10 million should be good for now.

"There's \$40 million more available for the project. The \$10 million should get them through the next year plus, but we're going to have to identify the rest of the

funding.&rdquo;

Department of Transportation Deputy Commissioner Reuben Yost said the funding could come from a mix of state and federal sources, and might even qualify for the State Transportation Improvement Program, or STIP.

&ldquo;Once we know a general idea of the cost, there will be a decision made whether it&rsquo;s going to be state funds, or a combination of state and federal funds. And if it&rsquo;s federal funds it will go through the STIP process, yes.&rdquo;

Yost said the design of the new vessel will be done to meet federal standards to ensure it could qualify for federal funding down the road.

Falvey said some preliminary design discussions have already taken place. In general, the hope is to make the Tusty&rsquo;s replacement a little bigger.

&ldquo;But not too much bigger, because we&rsquo;ve got to get into all the ports in the chain. And, that&rsquo;s a pretty ideal size, it&rsquo;s a pretty nice ship for what it&rsquo;s trying to do. So a little bit bigger, a little bit wider, I mean we&rsquo;ve done some preliminary looking at that," he said. "We&rsquo;re not sitting idle with it. We&rsquo;re looking and working on it, and we&rsquo;ll get really working on it now.&rdquo;

Falvey said the replacement is very high on the state&rsquo;s priority list. In the meantime, repairs continue on the Tusty with the hopes that will indeed be trusty for another five years.