

## MV Susitna Unsuitable for Kodiak Run

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

Here's the situation: The Alaska State Ferry Tustumena has been in dry dock all year, with delay after delay keeping it laid up. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has a ferry it can't use and wants to sell or give away. Can one dilemma be the solution to the other?

No, says Jeremy Woodrow of the Alaska Department of Transportation:

"The legislature actually asked the marine highway system to look into the possibility of acquiring the MV Susitna as an additional ferry to the Marine Highway's operations. When they asked the system to look at the ferry, the system looked at the operation characteristics of the ferry and the limitations of how it can be used, specifically in Southwest Alaska. It was determined there was three areas it could provide service, however service from Homer to Kodiak was not one of them."

He said there are several reasons why the Susitna, a 194-foot landing craft that converts from a barge to a catamaran, is not suitable for the Kodiak run.

"The distance, demand, as well as the characteristics of the vessel itself. It doesn't really fit into the system at all. It's a vessel that was built to run up on the beach and provide load and unloading operations via beach ramp, which doesn't exist right now in the marine highway system. And that presents a lot of logistical hurdles in it self right there. There's also no passenger accommodations or crew accommodations, so it has to be limited to a 12-hour, day-boat status."

The Susitna has a capacity of 20 cars and 129 passengers, which is a little more than half the Tustumena's maximum load. Woodrow said the same study had other ideas for serving Kodiak and Southwest Alaska.

"It was also determined that it would not be financially feasible to take the Susitna into AMHS operations. And it would be more advantageous for the ferry system if it were to increase its routes in Southwest Alaska to construct another ferry specific for those runs."

As for the Tustumena itself, Woodrow says its repairs are still underway.

"Right now it's still in dry dock at Seward Shipyard we're hoping those repairs are completed on time and that the vessel will be back on line as announced for August 20th."

The Tusty was scheduled &ndash; during its second delay &ndash; to have returned to service this week, but welds done to watertight spaces in the hull failed inspection by the U.S. Coast Guard, and the ship's return was pushed back another month.

Meanwhile, the Susitna has two offers that the Mat-Su Borough will be considering next month.