

## M/V Tustumena Delayed Indefinitely

Friday, 26 July 2013

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

The ferry Tustumena's return to service has been delayed yet again, this time AT LEAST until the fall.

"The Tusty will be out of service until perhaps the first week of October."

That's Kodiak City Mayor Pat Branson reading a message from Marine Highway System General Manager Captain John Falvey during last night's regular city council meeting.

The ship has been in Seward Ships Dry Dock since November, but delays due to inadequate welding have left much of Southwest Alaska without regular ferry service all year. Poor welds and inferior materials have also caused the latest delay when they failed to pass Coast Guard inspection.

The bad news was nevertheless rather timely, as one of the items on the agenda was a resolution requesting the governor and legislature develop a long-term solution to ensure full and uninterrupted ferry service to Kodiak.

City Manager Aimee Kniazowski said the resolution is an opportunity for the community to make a formal statement to the state about the big impacts reduced ferry service has had on Kodiak.

"The resolution tries to emphasize what those impacts are and how important long term planning is to the community. And I think that it really, the loss of the Tustumena, reminds us of how limited our transportation options are. I mean, everybody knows that. But it's really very obvious that we are off the road system and when the marine road system goes away it's a big impact to everybody."

Kniazowski acknowledged the fact that the legislature did set aside funding for the design of a new ferry, but the actual construction and use of it is still many years away.

Meanwhile, the Tustumena's most recent delay in service means that, once again, the ferry Kennicott will have to take on additional runs if and when possible. Mayor Branson said the message from Captain Falvey confirmed the Kennicott will be servicing Kodiak at least five days in September, starting on the 19th.

But Councilman Terry Haines said the delay is especially troublesome for the smaller communities that the Kennicott can't access.

"I just wanted to point out that even under the best of circumstances the Kennicott can't serve all of our communities because some of them don't have docks large enough for the Kennicott to park there. The Tustumena is really a unique vessel and I think that's really a shame. This has I think shown the need for Southwest Alaska for more of these Tustumena type vessels that are ocean-going and can still service communities with smaller docks."

Councilman Rich Walker said he fully supports the resolution.

"A lot of construction projects are waiting for equipment to come over. Things have been delayed. Going into the school year, now the costs for travel are going to go sky high and we have to figure out a way to pay for it to get the kids out to where they need to go. It's really, really devastating actually to our community and we need to do what we can."

Those comments were echoed by other council members and the resolution was unanimously passed.