

Tustumena Out 'Indefinitely' Says Ferry Spokesman

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

Poor workmanship and subpar materials being used in the repair of the Alaska State Ferry Tustumena have once again delayed its return to service. At this point, according to Marine Highway spokesman Jeremy Woodrow, there's no telling how long this latest delay will keep the Tusty from going back in the water:

"Right now we don't have a timeline for exactly how long it will take them to do those repairs. So at this time we've cancelled sailings for the Tustumena through September. It's on hold indefinitely until we have a better idea when it will be available."

The Tustumena had entered the Seward Ship's Dry Dock in November for scheduled maintenance, and was originally set to return to service in April. After several delays, it was to sail this month, but shoddy welds did not pass U.S. Coast Guard inspection. Poor welds and inferior materials caused the latest inspection failure.

"This has been just a bungled mess," said Kodiak Mayor Pat Branson. "We're being underserved and it's affected our community greatly. So, enough is enough."

Major work to the Tustumena hasn't been done at Seward Ships Dry Dock since 1999, and Woodrow said the state will keep the latest Tusty experience in mind in the future.

"When the marine highway puts out a vessel for bid with work of this magnitude it certainly will be considered moving forward."

Woodrow says the Marine Highway System has received numerous comments from communities about the lack of service. While Homer and Kodiak have been getting limited calls from the ferry Kennicott, it is too large to serve smaller towns, such as Port Lions, Ouzinkie and Old Harbor. Meanwhile, the communities on the Alaska Peninsula haven't seen a ferry since May.

Branson promised state officials will be hearing from her and Kodiak Island Borough Mayor Jerome Selby about the lack of service.

"We're on the marine highway system and our highway has been closed for several months, and we are going to make some calls to the Governor and Pat Kemp, the commissioner of Department of Transportation. They need to hear it from us. And I'm sure that SWAMC, and I know AML has a specific task force devoted to the marine highway system and what's going on with it."

Woodrow says system managers are hoping to release a revised schedule for Homer, Kodiak, Alaska Peninsula communities and Unalaska soon. In the meantime, he says the delays are costing Seward Ships Dry Dock \$20,000 a day.