

## Reduced Ferry Service Puts Strain On Kodiak Athletics

Thursday, 29 August 2013

{audio}/images/stories/mp3/ferry\_travel\_package.mp3{/audio}

Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

For almost a year the ferry Tustumena has been out of service for repairs, leaving much of Southwest Alaska accessible only by air. The Kennicott picked up additional sailings between Kodiak and Homer, but the impacts from reduced ferry service were still felt throughout the island. Now, as summer quickly fades into fall, classes are resuming at Kodiak High School and young athletes are starting to feel the impact as well. KMXT's Brianna Gibbs has more.

Unlike high school sports teams on the mainland, Kodiak athletes can't just hop on a bus to see competition. Instead, they must either take the ferry or fly. For years the Alaska Marine Highway System has cut the district a deal and made ferry-going a financially feasible and preferred method of travel. But with fewer regular sailings, teams now have to look to the sky if they hope to compete off island.

Air travel means less athletes can go, not to mention it's more expensive. A lot more expensive.

Take for instance the football team. There are eight weeks in Kodiak's regular season, and seven of those were slated for ferry travel. But the Kennicott's schedule doesn't match all of those dates, so now three weeks will have to be flown. That may not sound like a huge difference, until you look at the price tag. Sixty players could ride the ferry for about \$4,000, but flying will now run the program more than \$13,000. That's a \$9,000 difference just for one team, on one trip.

"Cost to the district and to these clubs and booster club is astronomical not having the ferry in line."

That's Kodiak High School Athletic Director Bryan Ferris, who estimates an additional \$27,000 being spent on football travel alone this year. And if the team makes it to the playoffs, that's another three weeks of travel the program will have to find funding for.

The impacts are fairly across the board for other fall sports. The cross country team was forced to cancel its annual week-long ferry trip, which gave runners of all skill levels a chance to compete off island. In fact, the entire cross country schedule was rearranged.

"Took out a trip, took another trip, Kenai had to back out of coming over because the ferry wasn't running, they just didn't have the funds to pay their way."

The high cost means other schools won't bring as many athletes to Kodiak.

“West Anchorage was going to come down on the ferry, they’re going to still come down by flying, but instead of bringing 60 kids for about \$4,000 they’re going to bring 15 kids for about \$4,600.”

And it’s a two-way street. Now, fewer Kodiak athletes will get to compete off island.

“It’s great when we can send a whole team, you know, even kids that might not be your starting five your best seven varsity runners, but you’re sending 30 kids to race in a community race. We won’t have those opportunities as we would have if the ferry was running.”

Ferris said that’s most evident on the swim team, which will cut 50 percent of its travelers this year, but increase its travel costs by almost 100 percent.

Ferris said the Booster Club has already budgeted for its annual contribution, which averages about \$85,000 toward Kodiak athletics each year. The school district has locked in its athletic funding for the year, which means all these additional costs are falling on individual sports teams to fundraise locally.

“We have a wonderful community, they step up and support our groups, but, it’s taxing on them. To have one group after another come asking them for money to help send kids to travel or bring kids here.”

And while everyone hopes the Tustumena will be up and running again in October, Ferris said more delays could mean financial burdens for winter sports teams as well.

“Traditionally in the winter we travel a few less times on the ferry, you know the basketball team could take one trip. Usually the peninsula teams if the ferry is running, they’ll always take the ferry to cut their costs. Wrestling usually makes a couple trips. So I hope they align with either the Kennicott or whatever’s running at that time, but I couldn’t tell you if they will lose any of their weekends of activity yet.”

Ferris said they’re making the best of things this fall and he’s keeping his fingers crossed that the Tustumena comes back online as soon as possible.