

Alaska Aerospace Seeks Barge Landing Site in Pasagshak

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

The Kodiak Launch Complex isn't located in the most accessible part of the island. It's more than 35 miles of winding, two-lane highway from the nearest shipping port in Women's Bay, and another five miles from the Kodiak Benny Benson State Airport. When equipment comes in, especially large equipment for a launch, the road is often completely shut down for many hours to allow safe transport. This is why Alaska Aerospace Corporation, which operates the state-owned launch complex, is looking to build a barge landing site at the head of Ugak Bay in Pasagshak.

The launch complex has been operating for about 16 years and Alaska Aerospace's Chief Operating Officer, Mark Greby, said they expect to do more launches in the future. He said the plan to build a barge landing will make operations much simpler, and safer for both AAC and the general public.

"It helps us offload and transfer large equipment from the Kodiak port and harbor, including the equipment and the launch vehicles themselves. By making the move simpler we block the road less, we expose fewer people to the transportation risk caused by blocking the roadway during the long transit to Kodiak Launch Complex. We actually fill the road, you can't even get off on the shoulder some of the transporters are so big."

Greby said it's also a significant cost reduction for AAC and its customers.

"And whenever we can reduce cost, the more attractive we are to our customers, the more business you get. The cost of a move today, from the port all the way to Kodiak, per trip, is about \$100,000 with all equipment, permits, notifications, closings, road guards, etc."

He said the proposed landing, which is currently being reviewed by the Army Corps of Engineers, would cater to standard barges, so goods could be delivered right to the head of the bay, less than four miles from the complex. It wouldn't be a dock, which Greby said is significantly more difficult to build.

"It's a rock pier with a roadway put on top of it. That's all we're talking about here."

Greby said the plans to build a barge landing have actually been in the works since 2007, but became more of a reality this year as different funding options became available.

"Late April of this year we ramped up the detailed design and permit processes, simply because we looked at our potential schedule and the benefits that would mean for what I would call for the extended Kodiak community. And we also have the possibility of getting a federal government; it's called a TIGER grant from the Federal Department of Transportation. TIGER is this long, ugly acronym for transportation investment generating economic recovery funds. So we would use federal funds, and hopefully get federal funds, to benefit the state of Alaska."

Greby said it's hard to say for certain what a landing area would cost, after all, public comments and environmental assessments could change any current design. He said a rough estimate would be anywhere in the \$2.5 to \$3 million range.

In addition to the landing area, Greby said they will build a small boat launch so boats could be sent out to aid barges or tug boats waiting out in the bay. The launch will more than likely be available to the public when not being used by AAC.

"That's our plan, it will be property of the State of Alaska but as far as we're concerned the barge landing would be available for public access when it's not being used for mission support."

The Army Corps of Engineers is accepting public comments on the proposed barge landing site until September 16.

The Kodiak Launch Complex is currently scheduling with MilTech for a possible launch next summer, but even under the best circumstances Greby doesn't expect the landing area to be completed in time for that launch.