# Dock, Not Ferry, Raises Concerns in Tustumena Replacement

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

While a new ferry is still a solid five or seven years out, plans are already well underway to replace the aging vessel Tustumena. The replacement was one of many topics of conversation for members of the Marine Transportation Advisory Board, or MTAB, who were in Kodiak for a quarterly meeting on Tuesday.

The proposed new ferry is expected to be about 34 feet longer, 11 feet wider and almost 2 feet deeper with the capacity to carry about 76 more passengers and 16 additional vehicles.

A handful of Kodiak residents were present at Tuesday’s meeting, and few took issue with the actual proposed ferry design. However, many questioned whether a larger ferry could fit at Pier I, where the Tustumena traditionally docks. Kodiak Harbormaster Lon White said he didn’t believe could.

“The dock will handle that load capacity, but the oversized vessel, which is roughly 50 foot longer than the Tustumena, will severely impact the adjacent properties.”

Trident Seafoods is one of those adjacent properties and Plant Manager Paul Lumsden said they already have space conflicts when the Tustumena is in port.

“And having fishing vessels dock with the ferry there is already extremely difficult and dangerous. And if a larger vessel is docked there, you know an additional 25 split on either end of the dock, or 50 feet, would cause major, major, major conflicts to my operation.”

Many folks also expressed frustration with the fact that drive on and drive off service isn’t offered in Kodiak. While the proposed new ferry, and even the Tustumena, allow for that, Kodiak’s infrastructure doesn’t. Floating docks are required for drive on and drive off, which is much more efficient than the current elevator system used to load and unload cars on the ferry.

Improvements are set to begin on Pier I this fall, but a floating system won’t be a part of that because of the location of the terminal and Kodiak’s tidal patterns. White said the issue of drive on and off capabilities is the same dilemma the city faced in 2007, when federal dollars were given to Kodiak for a new dock.

“You just

couldn’t find a suitable site. That was the goal of the Alaska Marine Highway System, was to have a dedicated ferry dock site with a drive on, drive off ramp for loading and unloading very efficiently. It’s very efficient for the Alaska Marine Highway System and very convenient for the passengers. That’s a win win.”

He said the downside to that type of facility is that it is single use, and in small communities like Kodiak, the docks are needed and used when the ferry isn’t in port.

Because of that, White said the federal funding given to Kodiak seven years ago went toward improving the current dock – though those improvements are just now being made.

“Rebuilding the existing ferry dock was very beneficial to the community. We had an old dock that needed to be replaced anyway. It fit. The Tustumena’s been there for many, many, many years. It’s worked. Where the problem lies now is moving to a bigger ferry.”

Kodiak’s Representative Alan Austerman was also at Tuesday’s meeting and said a separate ferry facility may be in order.

“Seems to me that the recommendation coming out of this marine board should be that the State of Alaska put the funding in for Homer and Kodiak to put in the pier planning and stuff like that, that would allow for drive on and drive off.”

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities Deputy Commissioner Reuben Yost echoed those sentiments

“But ultimately I agree that for optimum systems we want floating docks both in Homer and in Kodiak, and that would be a stand alone facility.”

White said he hoped that could be possible, but wasn’t entirely optimistic on the matter.

“But you’re going to come up against the same site selection issues. There’s only so many sites unless you want to spend a lot of money to develop.”

For now, the planning process for the Tustumena’s replacement will continue, with the hopes of deciding on a final design next summer.