

1/24/13

Madame Chair Rep. Wilson, Senators and Representatives, thank you for this opportunity to speak today. My name is Mim McConnell and I humbly serve as mayor of the City and Borough of Sitka.

First, I would like to thank Captain Mike Neussl for his time of service at the helm of the Alaska Marine Highway System while Deputy Commissioner of marine operations. I never had the opportunity to meet this gentleman but have heard nothing but good reports concerning his time of service.

Now for the matter at hand, the Alaska Class Ferry Project.

The City and Borough of Sitka and citizens of Sitka have many questions concerning the Governor's decision to abandon the Alaska Class Ferry Project. As one of the many communities whose economy is heavily reliant on Alaska Marine Highway service, Sitka has strongly supported the efforts of the Marine Transportation Advisory Board and many Alaskans who have advocated for getting the Alaska Class ferry on line as a start to replacing Alaska's aging fleet of mainline vessels.

The sudden change in the State's direction to proactively develop a new generation mainline vessel and replace it with three smaller shuttle ferries does not appear to achieve this mission. Shuttle ferries will not be able to serve Sitka, do not achieve the intent of the Alaska Class ferry project, and were committed to without any Marine Transportation Advisory Board or public input. We've received some information about how the proposed shuttle ferries will be used and why the Alaska Class ferry project was canceled. What all communities using the Alaska Marine Highway System would appreciate is learning is how the mission for the Alaska Class ferry will be met, and having the opportunity to comment before such important decisions are finalized.

I hope that the Marine Transportation Advisory Board will be allowed to thoughtfully consider this issue and comment, and that this proposal will be opened up to public involvement before the decision to abandon the Alaska Class ferry project is finalized. Alaska Marine Highway's future could be enormously disadvantaged by not developing an Alaska Class mainline vessel to transition to a more reliable future mainline system. Thank you for listening.

*Mim McConnell, Mayor
City and Borough of Sitka
100 Lincoln St, Sitka, AK 99835*