

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 16, 2024

1:02 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Kevin McCabe, Chair
Representative Sarah Vance, Vice Chair
Representative Tom McKay
Representative Jesse Sumner
Representative Louise Stutes
Representative Genevieve Mina
Representative Craig Johnson

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

Board of Marine Pilots

Andrew Mew - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

PRESENTATION(S) : ALASKA MARINE HIGHWAY SYSTEM

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

ANDREW MEW, Appointee
Board of Marine Pilots
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Board of Marine Pilots.

CRAIG TORNGA, Marine Director
Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS)

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave the Alaska Marine Highway System presentation.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:02:54 PM](#)

CHAIR KEVIN MCCABE called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Representatives C. Johnson, McKay, Vance, Stutes, Mina, and McCabe were present at the call to order. Representative Sumner arrived as the meeting was in progress.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :
BOARD OF MARINE PILOTS

[1:03:49 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE announced that the first order of business would be the consideration of the governor's appointee to the Board of Marine Pilots.

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ANDREW MEW, Appointee, Board of Marine Pilots, testified as appointee to the Board of Marine Pilots and provided a personal and professional background. He highlighted his work throughout the state but that he had limited experience in matters pertaining to the Southeast. He explained that his interest in serving on the board stems from his experiences the past decade, which have prepared him for what is appropriate, as well as to balance the business and economic interests of the state.

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CHAIR MCCABE invited questions from committee members.

[1:07:19 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked Mr. Mew whether he was a marine pilot of any kind.

MR. MEW responded that he was not, but he is a vessel agent who worked with pilots in coordination with the arrival of vessels.

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CHAIR MCCABE inquired whether Mr. Mew was related to a former Anchorage Police Department officer.

MR. MEW confirmed the officer was his father.

CHAIR MCCABE stated that the House Transportation Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointee and recommends that the following name be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Andrew Mew, Board of Marine Pilots. He said that signing the report regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects an individual member's approval or disapproval of the appointee, and the nomination is merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[1:09:15 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:09 p.m. to 1:11 p.m.

PRESENTATION(S): Alaska Marine Highway System

[1:11:35 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE announced that the final order of business would be the Alaska Marine Highway System presentation.

[1:12:14 PM](#)

CRAIG TORNGA, Marine Director, Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS), Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), began the Alaska Marine Highway System presentation via a PowerPoint, titled "Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. He moved to slide 2, titled "Operating Schedule, FY 2023-2024," and he briefly summarized sailing schedules.

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The committee took a brief at-ease at 1:13 p.m.

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MR. TORNGA continued to summarize the chart on slide 2. The slide featured various marine vessels, and he gave examples of

their current status in relation to repairs and AMHS work with partners.

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MR. TORNGA moved to slide 3, titled "Operating Schedule, FY 2024-2025." The slide featured additional vessels, and he expanded on the repairs needed and timeframes when the vessels would be ready. He proceeded to slide 4, titled "Crew Status," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- **First Quarter 2024 Recruitment Statistics**
 - First quarter of 2024, we hired 35 and 21 left
- **Breaking the first quarter down by position:**
 - minus two Master, Mates and Pilots (MM&P), hired one mate and three mates left
 - minus one Marine Engineer Beneficial Association (MEBA), hired zero and one left
 - plus two Total Inland Boatman Union (IBU), hired five and three left
 - minus four IBU Engine, hired zero and lost four
 - plus 19 IBU Stewards, hired 29 and 10 left
- **Losing ground with licensed positions. Total count last 4 quarters:**
 - minus five MM&P, hired nine and 14 left
 - New hire mates lack local pilotage - It takes a few years to acquire pilotage
 - minus three MEBA, hired four and seven left

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked whether a new program was being instituted where younger people have an opportunity to work themselves all the way up to captain of a vessel.

MR. TORNGA replied that entry level positions are being hired and those employees can work themselves all the way up. He added that there would be more information on the following slides.

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REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked about employees who worked for AMHS and left.

MR. TORNGA responded that he could not relate the reasons for every employee who left, but some of them left due to payroll

issues. He noted that slide 5, titled "Crew Status," featured a chart of AMHS crewing operations based on seven crewing ships. He summarized the numbers on the slide that pertained to positions filled through positions needed.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES observed that although the slide stated seven ships, six were running, and she sought clarification how many people were needed for the six.

MR. TORNGA stated that except for engineering, AMHS was close but still with a deficit of approximately 24 people.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked whether any of the engineers ever come back.

MR. TORNGA confirmed not yet.

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MR. TORNGA proceeded to slide 6, titled "Workforce Development Goals and Initiatives." The slide featured current initiatives relating to recruitment and retention. He noted that there are in-state and out-of-state wages and AMHS does not pay for travel to come in; therefore, recruitment is challenging. He said new hires who are Alaska residents are retained at a much higher percentage and he stressed that AMHS wanted to focus on [hiring] Alaskans. He further illustrated the various recruitment strategies of AMHS.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked Mr. Tornga whether there were exit surveys for employees.

MR. TORNGA answered that AMHS [does not use exit surveys] but tries to discuss with exiting employees the reasons they are leaving.

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REPRESENTATIVE MINA referred to the recruitment of high school students and where the geographical focus may be throughout the state.

MR. TORNGA indicated that AMHS has [reached out to] Fairbanks and Anchorage but is focused on coastal populations that ride the ferry more often.

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CHAIR MCCABE asked for a brief oversight of how negotiations with unions work.

MR. TORNGA explained that there are no issues with unions or moving people up. There are biweekly meetings with the three unions, and they are very collaborative, he said.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked what the pay comparison was to the private industry for the same position.

MR. TORNGA said that for in-state, AMHS was competitive and similar to the State of Washington. It is out-of-state where the wages are not competitive.

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MR. TORNGA returned to the presentation and moved to slide 7, titled "Reliability," featuring systems and processes at AMHS, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- New Safety Management System (SMS) completed and ABS and USCG approved
- Vessel Management System with a Computer Maintenance Management System (CMMS) Installed
 - Starlink - Vessels needed connectivity
 - Installed servers on each vessel for Vessel Management software
 - Vessel Management System
 - ♣ AMOS - Implementation of one module at a time
 1. Preventative Maintenance Module installed
 2. Compliance Module for all documentation
 3. Project Management Module for dry-dockings
- Shipyard Pre-Planning Processes
 - Written Detailed Shipyard Specifications

- Allows for planning and prefabrication prior to shipyard
- Goal: shorter overhauls, lower cost, and more in service days

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CHAIR MCCABE asked about preventative maintenance and whether it interfaced with engines. He gave an example of preventative maintenance in Healy, Alaska, on the life of an engine.

MR. TORNGA replied that there was potential, and it was called "predictive maintenance" that focused on something before it might happen. He noted sensors on vessels to detect things such as excess vibrations, and monitoring the weather and stresses the ship may have endured.

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The committee took a brief at-ease at 1:43 p.m. [during which Chair McCabe passed the gavel to Vice Chair Vance.]

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VICE CHAIR VANCE referred to the last slide and Starlink's ability to give reports in real time. She inquired whether more pieces of a fuller system were added to have everything digitized.

MR. TORNGA replied yes, that was the goal.

VICE CHAIR VANCE expressed her excitement toward the project.

MR. TORNGA noted that some vessels showed a lot of fatigue and are far past their prime.

VICE CHAIR VANCE offered her belief that last session, there was a request for a plan for maintenance and replacement of vessels.

MR. TORNGA noted it is part of the long-term plan; each issue is looked at from a standpoint of how it fits into a long-term plan.

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MR. TORNGA advanced through slides 8 through 10, titled "Reliability - AMOS Preventative Maintenance Module," which

featured lists of maintenance in progress, systems, and processes.

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MR. TORNGA moved to slide 11, titled "Systems and Processes," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- New vessel scheduling program
 - Nine months of designing and beta testing now
- Carus - Reservations System
 - Focusing on improving the customer's experience
 - Implementing use of scanners at the load berth
 - This requires connectivity which we now have with Starlink

Excellent support from DOT IT with the implementation of all our new systems

New Item

- Federal Maritime Administration (MARAD) Sexual Assault Sexual Harassment (SASH) Requirement. Part of EMBARC
 - USCG issued AMHS an 835 (non-conformity) for SASH required controlled lock system
 - Requires new locks on all crew and passenger doors
 - New control procedures of keys and the key system
 - Inventorying number of doors, type of doors, thickness of doors, setback of locks, left-hand right-hand opening, etc.
 - May require card key locks like hotels

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES commented that as a regular ferry user, the reservation system was not user-friendly.

MR. TORNGA agreed there have been issues with the AMHS reservation system and said he sought an audit of the system and what the best industry practice would be.

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VICE CHAIR VANCE handed the gavel back to Chair McCabe.

MR. TORNGA continued to expound on the contents featured on slide 11. He proceeded to slide 12, titled "Lookback of Traffic," which featured a line graph of passengers, vehicles, and vessels operating.

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REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER asked to what AMHS attributed the long-term decline.

MR. TORNGA replied that much of that relates to reliability and when he spoke to passengers and businesses, they said they could not count on it. He further noted the decline in the numbers of passengers.

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CHAIR MCCABE inquired about the vessels' operating line on slide 12 and whether it was inventory only.

MR. TORNGA confirmed it was vessels operating.

CHAIR MCCABE noted the number of passengers per vehicle and that in 2014, the vehicle line declined. He questioned whether it was actually unreliability as claimed previously or whether people did not like the time it took to travel by ferry.

MR. TORNGA recounted what he had heard from people and it could be a combination of the two, as well as pressure on the market.

CHAIR MCCABE shared that he created a spreadsheet on the communities that use the ferries versus communities on the water. He ultimately questioned where the balance was.

MR. TORNGA offered his understanding that Chair McCabe referred to the barge lines. He expounded on where the barges traveled and what they carried and the costs involved.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES mentioned longevity in communities that rely on AMHS, and she confirmed that in the last couple of years, the issue was dependability.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether the state had looked at an overall transportation report of finding a balance. She noted AMHS being extremely important to Kodiak, and she asked for a big picture of how different means of transportation are being considered.

MR. TORNGA responded that that is the process of the AMHS long-range plan. He added that a design the state can afford needed to be considered, and part of that may be roads.

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REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER asked whether AMHS had ever looked into zeppelins.

MR. TORNGA answered that he was familiar with the mode of transportation but had not seen it operating on a standard business modeling.

CHAIR MCCABE commented on smaller commuter ferries that could be based in Kodiak which could increase service and free up the larger vessels. He further noted the issues that could arise with contracting.

MR. TORNGA replied that one of the limitations on that was open water and the vessels that act as smaller commuter ferries being substantial enough to handle challenging weather.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES related a story of Cascade Point providing a commuter ferry that can make a one-day out and back trip; therefore, the larger vessels are freed up. She offered her support for this plan.

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MR. TORNGA proceeded to slide 13, titled "Fleet Capital Projects," which featured the following vessels: the Motor Vessel (M/V) Tazlina, the M/V Kennicott, the M/V Columbia, and the M/V Matanuska, and what kind of upgrades each needed. He continued to slide 14, titled "Planned Terminal Projects," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Cordova Terminal Upgrade - 2026
- Tatitlik Terminal Upgrade - 2026
- Chenega Terminal Upgrade - 2026

- Auke Bay East Berth Upgrade - 2025
- Pelican New Terminal - 2026
- Angoon Terminal Upgrade - 2026
- Kake Terminal Upgrade - 2026
- Saxman New Terminal for Annette Island - TBD

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES pointed out that the state is not paying Kodiak for its terminal project; therefore, maintaining it is going to cease.

MR. TORNGA replied that he was going to meet with officials and get it resolved.

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MR. TORNGA moved to slide 15, titled "New Vessel Plans," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Tustumena Replacement Vessel

- FTA Construction RFP
- Submitted the Buy America Plan To FTA in January. Recently held our first review meeting last Friday, April 5th
- FTA is scheduling a follow up meeting for us with their legal
- Working FTA required Project Construction Management Plan
- Working FTA Project Oversight Plan

Mainliner Replacement Vessel

- 2024 Design RFP

Hybrid No-Low Emissions Ferry

- 2024 Design RFP

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MR. TORNGA continued to slide 16, titled "Tustumena versus TRV Changes," which showed a chart synopsising the changes. He moved to slide 17, titled "Tustumena Replacement Vessel (TRV) Design and Construction Team," which featured a team involved in the project. He advanced to slide 18, titled "Siemens Power and Propulsion Scope," which featured a visual of the components from a power propulsion standpoint. He concluded on slide 19, titled "TRV - Future Proofing," that pointed out those components and the design goal being to have a safe, reliable

vessel. He noted that slide 20 featured his e-mail address and a link to the whole long-range plan.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES pointed out that there is a celebration for the Tustumena in Kodiak in the summer, and she encouraged committee members to attend.

[2:24:11 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE thanked Mr. Tornga for the presentation and taking AMHS in a positive direction.

[2:25:00 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:25 p.m.