

4/3/24

To: Mayor Morphett and Haines Borough Assembly Members

From: Gershon Cohen

Re: Proposed Cascade Point Ferry Terminal

Dear Mayor Morphett and Haines Borough Assembly Members,

The Dunleavy administration appears to be positioning itself again to approve the construction of a new ferry terminal at Cascade Point (CP). Having an affordable, reliable transportation link to the world outside Haines is vital to our community's survival. We need a ferry system that facilitates our ability to come and go, as do the visitors on which so much of our local economy and culture depend. A ferry terminal at Cascade Point would fail to provide such a viable transportation link in numerous ways:

1. The majority of ferry traffic in and out of Haines are walk-ons. The ferry ride may be shorter with the CP terminal plan, but the trip to Juneau will be as long or longer. Walk-ons will have to transfer with their belongings to shuttle busses: loading and transportation to downtown could easily take 1-2 additional hours depending on weather and road conditions.
2. The cost of a trip to Juneau will likely increase because Goldbelt Inc. will be able to charge exorbitant fees for the only shuttle bus service to and from the terminal. Very few cabs meet the ferry now, and with the terminal 43 miles from town the number of cabs will likely decrease. A cab ride from downtown Juneau to Auke Bay today costs ~\$45. If you can get a cab, the fee could be as much as \$150: the distance will have tripled and the cost will likely be tripled as well. Since the cab company will want to cover the costs of getting back to town without a guaranteed return fare, the cost may be even higher.
3. If there is a problem with the shuttle bus or the road is closed for any reason, hundreds of people could be stranded more than 40 miles from Juneau, possibly overnight. Where will they stay? What will they eat? What will the impacts be on the elderly or infirm, or families traveling with small children?
4. If more walk-on passengers arrive at Cascade Point than Goldbelt anticipates, there may not be enough seats on the shuttle bus. Walk-ons might have to wait for hours for a bus to return from Juneau, just to begin the long trip to town.
5. Everyone taking a bus to Cascade Point from Juneau or the Valley will have to queue at a depot hours before the ferry leaves, again adding a significant amount of time to the total trip. What if too many people show up to take the shuttle? Will another bus and driver be standing by? Having friends or family members drive you to or from the terminal will be much more challenging since it will be an almost 90-mile round trip from downtown.
6. The ferry won't adjust its departure time to accommodate the shuttle bus arrival. If there is a bus delay or a second bus is needed, walk-ons will miss the sailing. Their ferry ticket will then be forfeited and it will require spending at least one if not several nights in Juneau, which could result in significant additional hotel and food costs, lost time at work in Haines, etc.
7. The current shuttle service to and from the hotels near the airport to the ferry terminal will almost certainly be discontinued.

This is not an exhaustive list of likely problems and impacts, but it should suffice to demonstrate that this "plan" was not conceived with the users of the ferry in mind, or vetted with the public it is supposed to serve. It will not make the ferry cheaper to operate when all facility, utilities, and staffing costs are factored in, and it is very likely to significantly increase the costs and inconvenience to riders. Ridership will likely decrease so revenues to the State will decrease, and DOT will have "justification" for spending even less on the entire system in the future.

A Cascade Point terminal may be good for Goldbelt Inc., a few construction companies and the Kensington mine, but it is a terrible idea for everyone else, especially the residents of Haines and Skagway who depend on the ferry system. I urge you to pass a resolution opposing this idea. Here's a modest sample resolution to consider:

Haines Borough Resolution re: Proposed Cascade Point Ferry Terminal

Whereas the Haines Borough Assembly has a fundamental responsibility to support the interests and welfare of the residents of the Haines Borough;

Whereas the interests and welfare of Haines Borough residents are intimately tied to the need for affordable and convenient transportation in and out of the Haines Borough; and

Whereas building a ferry terminal at Cascade Point would result in significantly increasing the costs of transportation to and from Haines while significantly decreasing the convenience and efficiency of such travel;

Therefore, be it resolved:

The Haines Borough strongly opposes the construction of a new ferry terminal at Cascade Point and urges the Alaska Department of Transportation to use available State and federal marine transportation funds to improve ferry service in the Upper Lynn Canal by repairing and upgrading the existing Alaska Marine Highway fleet and related infrastructure.

Sincerely,

Gershon Cohen Ph.D.

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