

CITY OF UNALASKA
UNALASKA, ALASKA

RESOLUTION 2026-54

A RESOLUTION OF THE UNALASKA CITY COUNCIL SUPPORTING A FEASIBILITY EVALUATION BY THE ALASKA MARINE HIGHWAY SYSTEM FOR POTENTIAL SEASONAL PASSENGER TRANSPORTATION BETWEEN COLD BAY AND UNALASKA DURING COMMERCIAL FISHING A-SEASON

WHEREAS, Unalaska's Port of Dutch Harbor is the leading commercial fishing port in the United States based on volume of seafood landed, and commercial fisheries are a vital component of Unalaska's economy, supporting businesses, employment, and significant revenue to the City of Unalaska; and

WHEREAS, the commercial fishing industry depends upon the timely movement of fishermen, seafood processing workers, other industry employees, contractors, service providers, and residents to and from Unalaska; and

WHEREAS, because Unalaska is located on an island, access to the community is dependent upon air and marine transportation; and

WHEREAS, commercial fishing A-Season creates a period of particularly high demand for transportation to Unalaska; and

WHEREAS, commercial air transportation to Unalaska is regularly affected by weather and other operational limitations, which can result in delayed, canceled, or rescheduled flights; and

WHEREAS, during periods of significant air transportation disruption, passengers may experience extended delays and passenger backlogs in Anchorage and other communities, creating significant costs and hardships for travelers and employers and affecting local businesses and the broader community; and

WHEREAS, Cold Bay is served by commercial air transportation and may provide an alternative transportation gateway to Unalaska when direct air transportation from Anchorage to Unalaska is significantly disrupted; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Marine Highway System operates a ferry system in Alaska; and

WHEREAS, Unisea, Inc. has proposed exploring whether temporary marine transportation between Cold Bay and Unalaska could help address a portion of the recurring transportation challenges experienced during commercial fishing A-Season; and

WHEREAS, the Unalaska City Council recognizes that any transportation option that may result from further evaluation should be considered in the context of the broader transportation needs of the Unalaska community and the traveling public, including employees of local industries and businesses, commercial fishermen, seafood processing workers, contractors, service providers, residents, and other passengers; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Marine Highway System and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities have the operational expertise to evaluate the feasibility and potential

structure of a seasonal or temporary marine passenger transportation option between Cold Bay and Unalaska.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE UNALASKA CITY COUNCIL that:

1. The Unalaska City Council supports and requests that the Alaska Marine Highway System, in coordination with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, evaluate the feasibility of potential seasonal or temporary passenger transportation between Cold Bay and Unalaska during periods of high transportation demand associated with the commercial fishing A-Season.
2. In evaluating the concept, the Alaska Marine Highway System and Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities are encouraged to consider the operational, regulatory, financial, scheduling, staffing, vessel, infrastructure, safety, weather, passenger demand, and other factors they determine relevant to assessing feasibility.
3. The evaluation may also consider whether and how potential marine transportation could complement existing commercial air transportation, including whether Cold Bay could serve as an alternative gateway to Unalaska during significant disruptions to direct air service.
4. The Unalaska City Council requests that, as appropriate, the Alaska Marine Highway System and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities engage with the City of Unalaska, local employers and industries, commercial fishing and seafood processing stakeholders, transportation providers, and other interested stakeholders as the concept is evaluated.
5. The Unalaska City Council recognizes that this resolution is intended to support consideration and evaluation of the concept and does not represent a request that the Alaska Marine Highway System or Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities adopt a particular vessel, schedule, duration, service model, funding arrangement, or operational approach.
6. The City Clerk is directed to transmit a copy of this resolution to the Governor of Alaska, the Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, the Director of the Alaska Marine Highway System, the City's State legislative delegation, and other appropriate State and regional stakeholders.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by a duly constituted quorum of the Unalaska City Council on September 8, 2026.


Vincent M. Tutiakoff, Sr.
Mayor

ATTEST:


Estkarien P. Magdaong, CMC
City Clerk



MEMORANDUM TO COUNCIL

To: Mayor and City Council Members
From: Marjie Veeder, Acting City Manager
Date: September 8, 2026
Re: Resolution 2026-54: Supporting a feasibility evaluation by the Alaska Marine Highway System for potential seasonal passenger transportation between Cold Bay and Unalaska during commercial fishing A-Season

SUMMARY: This item is on the agenda at the request of Council Members Coleman and Schasteen, who requested a proposed resolution for consideration by City Council.

Resolution 2026-54 expresses the City Council's support for and request that the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS), in coordination with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), evaluate whether seasonal or temporary passenger transportation between Cold Bay and Unalaska could provide an additional transportation option during periods of high transportation demand associated with commercial fishing A-Season.

The proposed resolution is intentionally framed as a request for AMHS and DOT&PF to evaluate the concept based on their operational expertise and existing service obligations. It does not prescribe a particular vessel, schedule, duration, service model, funding arrangement, or other operational approach, and it does not commit AMHS, the State of Alaska, or the City to implement or fund any future service.

The resolution does not commit AMHS, the State of Alaska, or the City to implement the service, fund the service, or utilize a particular vessel. Rather, it requests that AMHS evaluate the operational, financial, regulatory, scheduling, staffing, infrastructure, and other considerations necessary to determine whether the concept is feasible.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION: None.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION: The Port of Dutch Harbor is the leading commercial fishing port in the United States based on volume of seafood landed. Commercial fisheries are critically important to the Unalaska community, supporting local businesses and employment and generating significant tax revenue for the City.

Commercial fishing A-Season is also a period of particularly high demand for transportation to Unalaska. Fishermen, seafood processing workers, employees of other local businesses, contractors, and residents travel to the community during this period, with most passengers arriving by commercial aircraft.

Because Unalaska is located on an island, transportation access is limited to air and marine transportation. Commercial air service is frequently affected by weather and other operational limitations. During periods of significant disruption, flights may be delayed, canceled, or rescheduled, resulting in substantial passenger backlogs. Passengers can be stranded in Anchorage for extended periods while waiting for flights to Unalaska. These disruptions create

significant costs for both travelers and employers and can affect the operations of local businesses and the broader community.

Unisea, Inc. has proposed exploring whether temporary marine transportation could help address a portion of this recurring transportation challenge. The concept generally contemplates passengers traveling commercially by air to Cold Bay and then continuing to Unalaska by marine transportation during a period of high transportation demand associated with A-Season. Unisea has identified a number of operational, regulatory, labor, scheduling, passenger capacity, cost, infrastructure, weather, and vessel considerations that would likely need to be evaluated.

The proposed resolution recognizes Unisea's role in bringing the concept forward but intentionally frames the issue as a community-wide transportation matter. If a seasonal or temporary transportation option were determined to be feasible, the Council's position is that it should be considered as a potential transportation resource for the broader traveling public, including workers from all local industries and businesses, commercial fishermen, seafood processing workers, contractors, service providers, residents, and other passengers.

Rather than proposing a specific operating plan, the resolution asks AMHS and DOT&PF to determine whether the concept is feasible and, if so, what type of service or approach might be appropriate. This leaves questions regarding vessel availability, scheduling, duration, passenger capacity, cost, funding, staffing, infrastructure, regulatory requirements, coordination with commercial air service, and other operational matters to the agencies with the appropriate expertise and responsibility to evaluate them.

Staff believes that supporting a feasibility evaluation is an appropriate first step. The recurring transportation challenges experienced during A-Season affect not only the seafood industry but also the community as a whole. An evaluation by AMHS and DOT&PF would provide an opportunity to determine whether a Cold Bay–Unalaska marine transportation option could be practical and whether it could improve the reliability and resilience of transportation access to Unalaska.

ALTERNATIVES: The Council may

1. Adopt the resolution as presented;
2. Amend the resolution and adopt it as amended; or
3. Take no action.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: Adoption of the resolution has no direct fiscal impact on the City. The resolution does not commit the City to fund a feasibility evaluation or any future transportation service. If the State determines that the concept is feasible and a future service proposal is developed, potential funding, cost-sharing, or other financial considerations could be evaluated at that time.

LEGAL: Unnecessary at this time.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the City Council adopt the attached resolution supporting and requesting a feasibility evaluation by the Alaska Marine Highway System and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities of potential seasonal

or temporary passenger transportation between Cold Bay and Unalaska during the commercial fishing A-Season.

PROPOSED MOTION: I move to adopt Resolution 2026-54.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Letter from Unisea to the Director of the Alaska Marine Highway System dated July 22, 2026
2. Proposed Cover Letter to Director Turnga

July 22, 2026

Director Craig Turnga,

My name is Peggy McLaughlin; I am with the Unisea Administration Department in Unalaska/Dutch Harbor. I am writing to explore the feasibility of using the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) to help address a long-standing public transportation bottleneck that occurs each January during the start of Pollock A Season.

For decades, public transportation into Unalaska/Dutch Harbor has been constrained by weather, aircraft maintenance, pilot duty-hour limitations, daylight restrictions, and the limited runway capacity at Dutch Harbor. As a result, hundreds of passengers, including seafood processors, industry professionals, health care providers and local residents, become stranded in Anchorage each January. The resulting backlog can take weeks to clear, despite the airlines' best efforts to add capacity within operational limitations.

While the seafood industry experiences significant financial impacts from delayed operations, employee lodging, meals, and charter flights, the effects extend well beyond industry. Residents attempting to return home, educators returning to classrooms, and workers who support the community and fishing fleet all compete for the same limited transportation. This has become a recurring public transportation challenge that affects the economic vitality of the region and the daily functioning of the community.

We believe there may be an opportunity to explore whether AMHS could help relieve a portion of this annual bottleneck while improving transportation access for all travelers. Specifically, we would like to understand the feasibility of staging the M/V Kennicott in Cold Bay for approximately 7–10 days during the peak transportation period and partnering with Alaska Airlines to fly passengers directly to Cold Bay, where they could continue by ferry to Unalaska/Dutch Harbor.

We recognize that the *Kennicott* has existing service commitments and that the *Tustumena* may not be well suited for winter operations of this nature. At this stage, we are simply seeking to understand whether such an operation could be a viable public transportation partnership.

We would appreciate your guidance on the following questions:

1. Could the *Kennicott* be temporarily reassigned to support this operation?

2. What operational, regulatory, labor, or scheduling considerations would need to be evaluated?
3. What level of passenger capacity and trips could realistically be provided during a 7–10-day deployment?
4. What would be the estimated cost of operating this service?
5. What lead time would AMHS require to evaluate and, if feasible, implement such an operation?
6. Are there infrastructure, port, weather, or vessel limitations that would make this concept impractical?
7. Has AMHS previously evaluated similar seasonal transportation partnerships, or are there alternative approaches that you believe should be considered?

We recognize this proposal would require careful planning and coordination. However, because this transportation bottleneck recurs every year and affects both the traveling public and one of Alaska's most important industries, we believe it is worth exploring whether a collaborative solution exists.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this idea further and appreciate any guidance you can provide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ron Kjorsvik", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Administration, Unisea Dutch Harbor

Cc: Dustin Hamilton C.O.O. Unisea Inc.
Ron Kjorsvik, Senior Director of Alaska Operations Unisea Inc.
Mayor Vincent Tutiakoff
Unalaska City Council Members
Honorable Lymon Hoffman, Alaska State Senate
Honorable Bryce Edgmon, Alaska House of Representatives

CITY OF UNALASKA
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September 9, 2026

Craig Tornga, Director
Alaska Marine Highway System
7037 N. Tongass Highway
Ketchikan, Alaska 99901

Re: Request for Feasibility Evaluation

Dear Director Tornga:

Enclosed for your consideration is Resolution 2026-54, adopted by the Unalaska City Council on September 8, 2026, supporting and requesting a feasibility evaluation by the Alaska Marine Highway System, in coordination with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, of potential seasonal passenger transportation between Cold Bay and Unalaska during the commercial fishing A-Season.

As you know, Unalaska's geographic isolation and reliance on air and marine transportation create significant challenges when commercial air service is disrupted. These challenges are particularly acute during preparation for and the beginning of A-Season, when there is a substantial increase in the number of fishermen, seafood processing workers, other employees, contractors, and residents traveling to Unalaska. Weather and other operational factors can result in significant flight delays and cancellations, creating passenger backlogs and, at times, leaving individuals stranded in Anchorage for extended periods. The resulting impacts extend beyond the seafood industry and affect the broader Unalaska community and economy.

The concept of utilizing Cold Bay as an alternative transportation gateway to Unalaska was initially brought forward by Unisea, Inc. The City Council believes, however, that if a temporary or seasonal marine transportation option is determined to be feasible, it should be considered as a potential resource for the broader traveling public, including employees of all local industries and businesses, commercial fishermen, seafood processing workers, contractors, service providers, residents, and other travelers.

The City recognizes that there are numerous operational, financial, regulatory, scheduling, vessel, staffing, infrastructure, and other considerations that must be evaluated before determining whether such a service is practical. The enclosed resolution does not request that AMHS commit to a particular vessel, schedule, service model, or operational approach. Rather, the City Council respectfully requests an evaluation of the concept and the factors that would need to be addressed for a temporary or seasonal service to be considered.

Craig Tornga, Director
Alaska Marine Highway System
September 9, 2026
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The City of Unalaska would welcome the opportunity to work with AMHS, DOT&PF, local employers, transportation providers, and other appropriate stakeholders as this concept is evaluated. We appreciate your consideration of this request and your willingness to explore potential solutions that could improve transportation reliability and resilience for our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

CITY OF UNALASKA

Marjie Veeder
Acting City Manager

cc: Commissioner Ryan Anderson, ADOT
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Senator Lisa Murkowski
Senator Dan Sullivan
Congressman Nick Begich