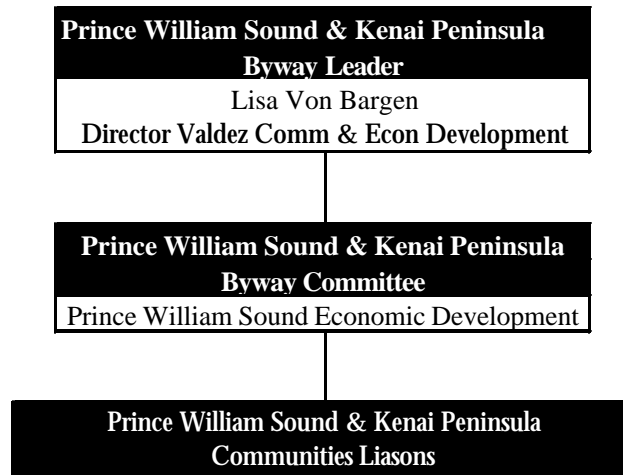


REGION'S CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES



3

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND & KENAI PENINSULA SEGMENT COMMITTEE



3

REGION'S CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Representatives from the various communities along this segment of the byway gathered together for a three-day byway summit to discuss directions for the *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula* segment. The following are key ideas generated by the group regarding how their area and the byway as a whole should proceed and function. These ideas form the foundation for many of the recommendations that follow in Chapter 4.

Tidal glaciers reach the Gulf of Alaska and are the source of icebergs found floating along this route.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

A central challenge for this segment — and for the others — is how to organize the byway effort in an efficient way and recruit volunteers with time to implement the byway program. Most of the individuals that participate in the byway committee are already members of many other organizations and have many other commitments. Their work plates are often full to overflowing. How then should the byway - which everyone acknowledged is an important effort - be wedged into people's schedules? How should it be managed and pushed forward without overburdening participants?

Workshop attendees agreed that an organization representing the entire byway and an organization representing this segment of the byway is needed. The approach should be one that overlays existing organizations and meetings as much as possible. An umbrella organization, such as a Regional Development Organization, could be used to provide an organizational structure that assures participation in the program by area communities, Native corporations and other stakeholders.

Currently, the *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula* relies upon a single individual to be the segment coordinator and to solicit input and involvement by the communities in the region. This places a greater burden on the segment coordinator than perhaps the other two segments to take the initiative to reach out to the member communities, stakeholders and lead the project for this area. Flexibility and the recruitment of volunteers will be essential to delegate work and see that priorities are completed in a timely manner.

An important organizational issue noted by the workshop participants was to have at least one local spokesperson identified for each community to help spread the word and explain the program to residents and business people. In addition, the group emphasized that byway discussion needs to avoid Marine Highway scheduling issues, which is often a topic of concern in communities. The byway is unrelated to scheduling decisions and that fact should be made clear.

Another important issue discussed by workshop participants was the need to link each region of the byway with other more traditional economic development organizations. Unless outreach and awareness building are done, these other groups may not see the byway as a natural partner. This issue could be resolved through the recruitment and designation of individuals who represent both a byway partner and a traditional economic development entity. These individuals will then act as the conduit of information between the byway and other agencies and political groups.

The original 2002 Corridor Partnership Plan laid out an organizational chart that was discussed by this group. The Scenic Byway Summit participants developed a new organization structure that follows and was endorsed by those attending.

Passengers are surrounded by spectacular scenery including fjords, snow capped mountains, glaciers and marine wildlife.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: MARKETING

Marketing was a major topic of discussion with the *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula* workshop participants. The challenges cited range from how Alaska's Marine Highway System is perceived by travelers to the details on the need for schedule changes. Generally speaking, there were two primary objectives that drove the discussions:

1. Travelers must be encouraged to get on and off the ships more frequently and stay longer in communities.
2. Travelers must be encouraged to return to visit in the future.

The sign says it all and provides a wonderful marketing opportunity.



Marketing the Communities

The general consensus among participants is that most travelers spend little time exploring the port communities and their surroundings for the following reasons: awkward times of arrival and departure, short time in port for some communities, lack of information on what one can do in many communities, and lack of transportation between the terminal and town. These issues limit the potential appeal of Alaska's Marine Highway as a way to 'see the real Alaska' and the economic benefits to port communities.

With the fast ferry *M/V Chenega* coming on line in the summer of 2005, marketing of some of the communities in the *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula* segment will be much easier. The ship will make daily trips from Cordova to Whittier and Valdez and back to Cordova and allow passengers to disembark one day and, if desired, catch the ship to another community the next day. The *Chenega* will reduce travel times by 50% allowing passengers to visit more communities in a single day or spend a day in the community of their choice. The challenge will remain for the other communities that will not see daily port calls as they are served by the slower mainline ships, the *M/V Tustumena* and *M/V Kennicott*.

The lack of consistent organized information about the port communities was the largest challenge identified by workshop participants for marketing the communities. Information on itineraries, local attractions, methods to conveniently explore the communities, transportation and all other travel related issues must be more accessible to the traveler. This begins with a schedule that makes ship-side and land-side travel planning easier and continues with the provision of more information on communities to travelers at both terminals and on-board the ships. The details of how this might be accomplished are presented in *Section 4, Actions*.

The Marine Highway provides an important alternative to air transportation and road access and is utilized by both residents and visitors alike. Although many more port communities along this segment are connected to the road system there are also just as many that are not, making the only access by air or water. For some communities such as Valdez, it will likely be quicker to take the Marine Highway to Whittier and then drive north to Anchorage rather than drive all the way from Valdez. In some locations with road access, the Marine Highway will be a more efficient mode of transportation than road travel.

Marketing Return Trips

Encouraging travelers to return for another trip can be accomplished during the sailing or by post-trip marketing activity. Obviously, the State and all destination-marketing organizations encourage people to return to Alaska in the future, but there are opportunities for Alaska's Marine Highway to be seen by the traveler as a preferred mode for seeing the various regions of the state. First, the three region breakdown of the system — the *Inside Passage*, *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula and Kodiak and the Aleutians*— lends itself to encouraging return trips; for example, “*You haven't seen Alaska until you've seen all of Alaska's Marine Highway*”. Defining itineraries at the regional level then becomes a way to both encourage people to stay longer within a given region as well as sending the message that one must return another time to sample another part of Alaska's Marine Highway system.

With great scenery like this, marketing return trips should be straight forward.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

This section reviews the basic Marine Highway terminals and ships, as well as landside transportation and port community facility challenges and opportunities. Improvements are suggested for the region in general and then for each terminal and community in Chapter 4, *Actions*.

GENERAL CHALLENGES FOR TERMINALS AND PORT COMMUNITIES

For passengers, the terminal is their first stop and opportunity to get local information about the community they are visiting. As a result, some terminals have evolved beyond waiting rooms and a place to purchase tickets into welcome centers, interpretive centers, event spaces, shelters from inclement weather and community centers. On the other hand, some communities along this segment are so small they have very limited facilities. For many smaller coastal communities without road access, the Alaska's Marine Highway facility is the primary gateway to their community. For other port communities, the terminals are located just outside the community. Thus the following section describing the terminals is critical.

The Alaska's Marine Highway terminal facilities vary greatly from community to community from no terminal building with only a marine ramp to access the ships, to large terminals with visitor centers, internet kiosks and surrounded by a pleasant park setting. Typically, the larger the port community, the larger the terminal and the amount of visitor services provided at the terminal. Each terminal has its own manager and is independently responsible for providing visitor services for the terminal. As a result, each terminal is unique and throughout the system there is a lack of visitor service consistency between terminals. This creates local flare and color but results in some information services not being provided, others duplicated and some of the potential 'corridor stories' not being told.

Most visitor services at the terminals are the result of partnerships with local visitor and convention bureaus, state and federal agencies and local organizations. Typically, larger communities with more partnership opportunities have more interpretation and visitor information in the terminals. Visitor services in smaller terminals may be as simple as paper maps taped to the walls while larger terminals may have interactive touch screen information kiosks and visitor information staff to meet the ships while in port. In all terminals, the Marine Highway staff fills the role of providing outstanding visitor information to its passengers, when time is available outside of selling tickets or loading the ships.

The Homer terminal is located on the Homer Spit and the end of the Sterling State Scenic Byway.



The *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula* segment has nine ports serving a variety of communities. The following outlines general challenges for the terminals.

- Some of the smallest communities have no terminal or even a sheltered waiting area. The Marine Highway should provide basic shore side shelter in each community. Many of these smaller communities have no or very little visitor information for passengers once they arrive.
- Some terminals/dock facilities are located just out of the town center. Some of these terminals have no visitor services in close proximity to the terminals and require transportation into the community to meet passenger needs including food, lodging, or visitor information.
- Most terminals have an interpretation area ranging from paper maps to interactive kiosks that discusses the port communities serviced by the Marine Highway and the areas traversed by the ships. This information varies from terminal to terminal and needs to be expanded, updated and unified.
- Many travelers who use the Marine Highway travel by foot, while some bring kayaks, or bicycles on the ships. The ships accommodate these alternative modes of travel, however many port communities do not provide services for them at the terminal.
- Reliable transportation from the terminal to the community by bus, taxi or van varies from port to port and can often depend on when the ship is in port. Transportation can be non-existent

when it is needed the most (ie, in the middle of the night).

- People that have a vehicle on board are reluctant to disembark with their vehicle and explore the community while the ship is in port and then re-board due to fear of missing the ship or simply not knowing it can be done. As a result passengers with vehicles often stay on board while in port until they reach their final destination.
- Most terminals are purely functional with a terminal surrounded by a large parking lot sometimes in an industrial area. The terminal is the gateway to port communities and should provide a pleasant and welcoming atmosphere that provides information about the AMHS and local visitor services and attractions.
- Almost all terminals are only open two hours prior and up to two hours after a ship is in port. This can sometimes result in difficulty in getting information on sailings, purchasing tickets and learning about other port communities.

Acting on the above issues will do much to move the Marine Highway system toward being more unified and visitor-oriented.

All ships and terminals are accessible.



TERMINAL SPECIFIC OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The following describes the challenges and opportunities presented by the terminals and other port facilities in each community. It is assumed that communities with terminal buildings provide a ticket counter, restrooms, public telephone, seating, pamphlet racks for local tours and attractions and a map of the community, unless otherwise noted. Section 4, *Action* provides a detailed set of recommendations for terminal and related physical improvements.

Yakutat

This small community does not have a terminal building and is limited to a marine ramp to access the ships. The terminal area is located on the outskirts of town and the nearest visitor services are approximately one half a mile away. There are no sidewalks and access to town is by a gravel road. Many of the aforementioned general terminal improvements are not realistic for this facility.



Yakutat and Cordova provides record runs of salmon each year and is a haven for sportfishing. An angler shows off a silver salmon caught on a fly rod.

Cordova

This community has a mid sized terminal that was constructed in 1998 and provides great views of the surrounding landscape. The terminal seats approximately 25 passengers. The terminal is decorated by local artwork of Cordova and brings in artwork from the State of Alaska art collection. There is limited interpretation of this artwork and this should be expanded. A good interpretive panel on the ecosystems of the Copper River Flats is found at the terminal and is a partnership effort with the USDA Forest Service. Several charts, maps, recreation opportunities of the Chugach National Forest, and marine mammal identification posters are found throughout the terminal and could be expanded upon or made to be a consistent display. The terminal also has a display case that holds historic artifacts from the *M/V Bartlett* that was the original Marine Highway ship that serviced Prince William Sound. The display includes several engineering drawings of the ship, pictures and memorabilia from the *Bartlett*. This is a good display that could be improved upon. The terminal is just over a mile from the community center with adequate visitor services. Private transportation usually meets the ships but can be intermittent in the winter.

Valdez

Valdez is a gateway terminal that connects the Alaska Marine Highway to the Richardson Highway. This is a brand new terminal that opened in January of 2005. The terminal accommodates approximately 50 passengers and has large glass windows with impressive views of the surrounding landscape. The interior of the building includes a vendor area for coffee and light snacks, a large digital sign board that shows ship schedules and other Marine Highway information, and a variety of seating throughout the terminal. The terminal has not been decorated and currently has no displays, interpretive signs or artwork. The terminal is in the process of purchasing artwork such as baskets and masks for a cultural display and indicated that these will include interpretive signs. There is a desire by terminal staff to include interpretive panels on the exterior of the building but the subject matter has not been selected. The terminal includes a drive-up ticket window and large roof overhangs to protect from the heavy snowfall and provide covered seating outdoors. The terminal is located approximately one mile from the city center and visitor services. Valdez provides all the needed visitor amenities. Private transportation typically meets the ships.

Chenega Bay

This small Native community does not have a terminal building and the ship calls in at the old City dock. There are no upland facilities. There are very limited services in Chenega Bay and many of the aforementioned general terminal improvements are not realistic for this facility. Service to this community is reduced to monthly port calls in the winter.

Tatitlek

Another small Native community that does not have a terminal or upland facilities. A new dock and ramp was installed in 1995. There are very limited visitor services in this community and many of the aforementioned general terminal improvements are not realistic for this facility. Service to this community is reduced to monthly port calls in the winter.

The new Valdez terminal provides great views of the surrounding landscape.



Whittier

The Marine Highway is currently constructing a new dock and terminal in Whittier to replace the small old modular building that provided minimal services. The new dock is slated to be completed in the spring of 2005 with construction on the terminal beginning in the summer and being completed in the winter of 2006. The new terminal will be significantly larger. Design for this terminal is currently underway but it is likely that the terminal will provide only basic services despite being a gateway terminal connected by the railroad and highway system. A detailed inventory should be carried out for this terminal when completed. An effort should be made to ensure this terminal receives adequate interpretive and visitor service information for a gateway terminal. The terminal facility will be located near the edge of the community with visitor services in the immediate area. The terminal in Whittier is closed in the winter with no ships calling to port from October to April.

Seward

Seward is a major gateway terminal that connects the the Marine Highway to the Seward Highway and the Alaska Railroad. Both the Seward Highway and the Alaska Railroad provide direct access to Anchorage. The ferry terminal in Seward is located in a multi purpose transportation and tour facility in the Alaska Railroad terminal building and was updated in 2004. The facility is shared by the Alaska Railroad, the cruiseship industry and the Marine Highway making it an outstanding tourism transportation terminal. Passengers can purchase tickets for the Marine Highway or the Alaska Railroad in this terminal as well as purchase tickets for tours to local points of interest. Thousands of cruiseship passengers also use this terminal in the summer and can create a frenzy of activity. Numerous private vendors line the terminal and sell tickets for a variety of tours including trips to the SeaLife Center, salmon bakes, charter fishing trips, guided hikes, and tours of the Kenai Fjords National Park. This is an outstanding opportunity for Marine Highway passengers but only operates in the summer tourism season. During the winter months when the vendors are not operating, there is no interpretation in the terminal. If passengers do not want to join the tour frenzy in the summer or arrive during the non-peak season, there is little opportunity to learn about Seward, its culture or history. Marine Highway staff at this terminal does provide exceptional visitor information when they are not selling tickets or loading the ships. Both private and public transportation typically meet all port calls.

The Alaska Railroad is a key partner to transport out-of-state visitors from Anchorage to Seward and Whittier and the Marine Highway.



Homer

The new terminal located at the end of Sterling Highway serves as the gateway to the both the *Prince William Sound & Kenai Peninsula* and *Kodiak and the Aleutians* portions of the Marine Highway. The terminal has all the necessary facilities including a small visitor center, brochures and maps, waiting area and restrooms. The terminal is located 5 miles from town on the Homer Spit with many services located within 1 mile of the terminal. All visitor services are located in Homer. Camping, accommodations, shopping (except groceries), food, recreation and charter services (fishing, sight seeing, flying) are available on the Homer Spit within 1 mile of the terminal. A non-motorized transportation route links the community to majority of the Homer Spit but ends ½ mile from the terminal.

The new Homer terminal is well laid out and provides many visitor services, making it a great 'gateway' terminal to the Marine Highway.



ALASKA'S MARINE HIGHWAY SHIP OPPORTUNITIES

This section reviews the status and potential improvement challenges for the ships that serve this region. Currently two ships serve *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula*, the *M/V Tustumena* and the *M/V Kennicott*. Starting in the summer of 2005, a third ship will be added to this segment, the *M/V Chenega*. This is the newest class of ship in the Marine Highway fleet, a high speed catamaran that reduces travel time by 50%. The *M/V Chenega* will offer daily service to the three major port communities in Prince William Sound. This could allow the *M/V Tustumena* to provide improved service to the remaining port communities and to Kodiak. All ships have the capacity to carry walk-on passengers and vehicles including kayaks, bicycles, motorcycles and larger vehicles including RVs, tour buses and trucks carrying freight. All ships provide a variety of services including food service, restrooms, a variety of seating opportunities, vending machines, information

services (purser's desk), and have ADA facilities including restrooms, public showers, seating and dining areas. The larger mainline ships provide more services and include observation areas, free public showers, towel and linen service, a lounge (bar), children play areas, quiet areas, TV lounges, and private stateroom for an additional fee. All ships with staterooms have rooms that meet ADA requirements. Elevators and stairs provide access the various deck levels on the ships. The *Kennicott* and, it is assumed, the *Chenega* meets a majority of the needs of passengers due to being newer ships in the Marine Highway fleet with adequate services that reflect their routing and duration of sailing. The *Tustumena* on the other hand is one of the oldest and smallest ships in the fleet and typically sails long distances as part of its routing and often does not meet the needs of long haul passengers and is discussed below. The following information analyzes the individual ships while section 4, *Action* provides a detailed set of recommendations for the fleet and related physical improvements.

The 'Tusty' will continue to provide service for this segment. It will be joined by the fleet's newest ship, the M/V Chenega, and together they will provide improved service to this route.



M/V Chenega

This high speed catamaran will be the newest vessel in the fleet in the summer of 2005 and will serve as a day boat making single trips from Cordova to Valdez and Whittier. This ship is nearing completion and is not yet in Alaskan waters. Therefore a detailed inventory has not been performed. According to Marine Highway staff it will be almost identical to the *M/V Fairweather* currently sailing the *Inside Passage* segment and will have the same facilities on board. Since it does not travel at night there are no staterooms on board and will have limited food service. It will likely be well laid out with very few interior walls creating an open well lit space with good viewing in all areas. The *M/V Chenega* will cut travel time in half compared to the rest of the fleet, and will likely be very popular. The boat will have the following capacity:

Passengers: 250

Vehicles: 36

Other facilities include:



The *M/V Chenega* will be almost identical to the *M/V Fairweather*. This high speed catamaran keeps the Marine Highway at the forefront of providing exceptional service.

Cafeteria: It will have a small self service cafeteria with limited hot food and no kitchen. There will be no designated cafeteria seating and people will be welcome to eat throughout the ship.

Forward Lounge: It will have a mid sized recliner lounge with great viewing. It will seat approximately 70 people and will also be where the USDA Forest Service does its interpretation presentations. The interpretation area will likely be to the rear of the ship and limits the program as the interpreter will operate out of the front of the ship. Several TVs will be located in this area for showing interpretation videos.

Central Lounge: This will be the largest space on the ship and will include the cafeteria in the central portion. The lounge will have a variety of seating ranging from small café style tables and chairs, to tables and benches for groups and families. Approximately 120 people will be able to utilize this area. Amenities will likely also include Alaskan artwork on the walls, a display area with original art, TV monitors to show videos, a small interpretation area to the aft and a purser area. To the rear of the lounge will be a small play area.

Solarium: The ship will have a small solarium with limited fixed seating. Limited deck chairs will likely also be available. Camping will not be permitted on this ship.

Purser Area: This area will be small but should meet the needs of passengers. The purser area will be able to run the state of the art sound and video system that controls each of the dozen TV monitors. This area will also likely have a satellite phone and baggage storage area.

Interpretive Area: The ship will likely have one of the few dedicated interpretive areas that will not serve as a Forest Service storage/presentation area. The area will likely provide a pamphlet area, maps, and charts. Maps will likely be displayed based on sailing routes. This area will not be a manned station and should provide one location for a majority of material on board making it convenient.

Interpretation: This ship will likely be well set up for providing outstanding interpretation with its numerous monitors throughout the ship and state of the art audio and visual system. Numerous videos should be able to be played simultaneously but shown on individual monitors allowing several controlled presentations to occur at the same time. The sound system will likely be very good and should be individually controlled throughout the ship. When presentations are not being shown the location of the ship will probably be shown via the ship's GPS. It is likely that storage space for the Forest Service Interpreter presentations will be limited and interpretation of artwork on the ship will be minimal. A detailed analysis should be completed and priorities included as part of this work once the ship enters regular service.

The M/V Chenega will also be outfitted with high quality artwork similar to the M/V Fairweather. Additional interpretation of the artwork would be beneficial.



M/V Kennicott

This is the newest mainline ship and was brought into service in 2001. It has many modern conveniences and facilities. The *Kennicott* makes monthly Cross Gulf sailings from Juneau to Kodiak calling in at several ports in the *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula* segment.

Passengers: 748

Vehicles: 80

Four berth cabins: 51

Three berth cabins: 34

Two berth cabins: 59

Other facilities include:

Cafeteria: The ship has a large cafeteria with modern kitchen facilities providing a good variety of food including a salad bar, sandwich bar, hot foods and daily specials. The seating area provides adequate viewing from the ship and seats approximately 120 passengers. The seating area is divided into two sections, one with cafeteria style seating with fixed tables and swivel seats, and the second area being diner style with comfortable benches and tables.

Forward Observation Lounge: This is a large area with great viewing and a variety of seating. The area includes individual seating as well as ample bench and table seating for groups and families. The middle portion of the lounge is raised providing improved viewing for this area. Several small monitors are located here and show interpretation videos and other ship information. The lounge also has several large well lit display cases with Alaskan art and Native art of very high quality. There is no information on these pieces. The Forest Service has a very small interpretative desk/storage area that is undersized for the ship.

Theater: This is the only ship with an enclosed theatre with large screen projection system, good sound system and theater style seating as opposed to a TV lounge. The theatre seats approximately 100 people.

Solarium: The solarium is mid sized and located on the sides of the ship as opposed to the rear as one large space. This configuration reduces its capacity and ease of use. Heating is provided, as well as lockers, deck chairs and lounge chairs. The solarium is undersized for the peak season. Camping is allowed on the lower deck and space is also limited.

Lounge (bar): This is a large lounge that accommodates approximately 75 people and has a variety of seating. It is spacious and popular with music, video games and bar food.

Punser Area: This is a large and well organized area providing a good range of services including satellite phone, mail service, pamphlet racks, Alaskan art work, and a separate interpretive area. This area is not manned but has numerous maps, charts, pamphlets and books available in an area with seating and tables. The area also has a large TV that is hooked up to the ship's GPS and also shows telex news, weather, sports and events on the ship.

Gift Shop: This is a well stocked gift shop with many items including books, games, souvenirs and toiletries.

Interpretation: Numerous high quality art, displays and pictures are found throughout the ship but with little information provided on them. The interpretive area and monitors on the ship provide great opportunities to further expand services to passengers.

The M/V Kennicott during one of its monthly sailings to the area after sailing across the Gulf of Alaska from Juneau.



M/V Tustumena

This is one of the fleet's oldest ships and was commissioned in 1964. The *Tustumena* will start serving only the western portion of this segment starting in 2005 with the addition of the *Chenega*. This will reduce its current route for *Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula* however it will also be responsible for monthly sailings to *Kodiak and the Aleutians* in the summer.

Passengers: 196

Vehicles: 25

Four berth cabins: 8

Two berth cabins: 18

Other facilities include:

Cafeteria: The ship has a small dining area at the rear of the ship that accommodates approximately 60 passengers. This is a full service dining experience. Meals include typical cafeteria food but also include good daily specials. Seating is a combination of booths and individual tables and chairs. During the peak summer months, this area can be crowded. The dining area has adequate views. The dining area is closed when not serving meals and increases boat congestion by reducing available seating on the ship.

Forward Observation Lounge: This is a mid sized area with good viewing and a variety of seating that includes booths and tables for groups and is very popular. Seating also includes recliner chairs. The lounge includes one TV for interpretive programs. High quality artwork is found in this area but without interpretation. This is a popular space to sleep due to a lack of state rooms.

TV Lounge: This small lounge area is located off the observation lounge and accommodates 25 people. It is also used by the on-board interpreter and is a very popular space to enjoy movies or interpretive programs. It is significantly undersized.

Solarium: The solarium is small sized and located on the upper deck facing the front of the ship. It is also too small for demand with tents and people sleeping on deck often crowding this space due to a lack of staterooms. Heating is provided, as well as lockers, and fixed chairs.

Lounge (bar): The *Tustumena* has a very small bar that accommodates a dozen people making it very cozy. It has bench seating and tables as well as a bar with seating. Hours are limited and opening this area more often would reduce congestion.

Purser Area: This is a small area located at the center of the ship. Numerous posters, charts and maps are taped to the walls in this area and also includes pamphlet racks and bench seating. Much of the information was created by the USF&WS interpreter and provides adequate information. Wall space is limited.

Port Lounge: This area is extremely popular as it has booth seating with tables and good views. There are five booths that are always occupied. Limited artwork line the walls but without interpretation.

Interpretation: Wall space on the ship is extremely limited and all walls are covered with a variety of documents from pictures of the crew to maps, charts and certificates for the ship. Many of these are poorly lit, out of date or provide little interest. All material needs to be reviewed, updated and consolidated as space is at a premium. The most limiting factor for providing an effective program is the cramped TV Lounge and lack of storage space for the interpreter. This could be an outstanding service that matches the outstanding scenery the ship passes through.

The M/V Tustumena.



Relative to size and its long routes typically sailed, the *M/V Tustumena* is too small in many respects for its long distance sailings. These issues include the following:

- Seating areas with good opportunities for watching the scenery or that allow group seating is limited and are typically very crowded during a sail and this decreases rider satisfaction. An example of a simple accommodation would be to allow seating in the dining area during non-dining hours to increase the amount of comfortable table seating for all passengers.
- The 26 cabins on the ship are far too few for all sailings. Much of the floor space on the ship is taken up by sleeping bags and tents on the decks thus making the deck space less usable for all passengers.
- The TV lounge is too small for the number of passengers and is also where interpretive talks and videos are presented. The area has a capacity for 25 people, but it should be expanded to a minimum of 40 persons. This area is always overflowing due to interest in interpretive programs and watching movies to help pass the time.
- Booths are very popular seating areas for groups in the reclining area, but there are too few to accommodate the typical number of groups on board.
- The on-board interpreter has too little space to perform his/her duty and this limits interpretive opportunities. For example, interpretive materials are kept in a broom closet with cleaning supplies.

Even with these issues, the *Tustumena* (fondly called the *Tusty* by locals) is one of the most loved ships in the fleet.

Passengers enjoy the sunshine and passing scenery aboard the *Tusty*.



CHALLENGES: INTERPRETATION

Since a major goal of this byway is to make travelers more aware of the special qualities that this segment of the byway offers, interpretation plays an important role and is needed. The Marine Highway has partnered with the USDA Forest Service for over 20 years providing outstanding interpretive programs on many of the ships in the summer. On-board interpretive specialists sail with the ships and provide numerous interpretive programs throughout the sailing in the forward lounge of the ships. This is a great program not found on any other byway and has the potential to be a world class interpretive program. If the program could be expanded to more months of the year and be provided on more ships, the benefits could be substantial. This program is limited only by the very small interpretive spaces, storage and existing audio and video systems which could be improved upon on most all ships. Better planned interpretive spaces could go a long way to improve on board interpretive services and make them equal to the landscape/seascape that the passengers came to see. There is some desire to expand this program to include other federal partners, Native Corporations, Alaska Railroad, and the communities to make this program even more successful.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game also plays an important interpretive role with the Marine Highway. Alaska Fish and Game manages the *Watchable Wildlife Program* throughout the state and the goal of this program is to create opportunities for viewing wildlife. Although wildlife can be found throughout the state, this program identifies accessible sites with outstanding wildlife viewing opportunities and establishes the facilities such as viewing blinds, shelters and interpretive stations to safely watch Alaska's wildlife. In many cases local interpreters are on site during the peak season. *Watchable Wildlife* sites can be found in many of the port communities and also includes the Alaska's Marine Highway ships and the routes sailed by them due to the abundant wildlife viewed from the ships and availability of on-board interpreters. The success of this program is from the partnership with other government agencies such as the USDA Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Marine Highway. This program is in the process of updating its older interpretive material on the Marine Highway ships and is looking for new opportunities to expand interpretation aboard them and in the communities served by the Marine Highway.

The vast majority of the lands viewed from the Marine Highway routes are public lands managed by the USDA Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal and state agencies. Many of the port communities are surrounded by these lands and contain recreation opportunities, visitor centers and interpretive facilities that are attractive to Marine Highway passengers visiting these communities. Partnerships should continue with these agencies who manage these lands and the facilities on them.

A Forest Service interpreter leads a workshop on eagles by dressing up a passenger to discuss the flight and vision capabilities of eagles.



The terminals serve as gateways to the communities and are the first opportunity to interact with locals and learn more about the community. This segment of the Marine Highway has the most terminals with road and railway access and therefore become important gateways to the entire Marine Highway system. Many of the terminals in this segment are very new or will be improved in the near future. It is essential that interpretation is included in the planning and design of these facilities. Additional these new terminals will be furnished in the near future and should include the services of an interpretive planner who looks at both the individual terminal and all the terminals collectively for this segment.

Some terminals are old and outdated while others are very effective due to partnerships with local, state or federal government agencies. There needs to be clear, consistent and well planned interpretive information at each terminal. These must be terminal specific but have a consistent look through the system and ensure that all byway stories and being told and local information provided.

Similarly, the ships also contain a variety of interpretive information on them and vary greatly from ship to ship. This segment is served by two new ships, the *Kennicott* and *Chenega*, and one of the oldest, the *Tustumena*. For the *Tustumena*, much of the interpretive information requires updating and organizing. For the newest ship, the *Chenega*, there is an opportunity to provide detailed information on Prince William Sound as this will be the area it will be serving. It may be advantageous to hire an interpretive planner to ensure this ship will provide outstanding interpretive opportunities before it goes into service in the summer of 2005. Much of the information provided on the existing ships are not

displayed in an organized fashion and result in a 'treasure hunt' atmosphere to find information. Much of this information is not specific for use on the ships but is generic information from a variety of sources. There needs to be clear, consistent and well planned interpretive information on each ship.

For this segment of the byway, additional interpretation is needed for many of the communities. This segment of the Marine Highway has world-class scenery and wildlife viewing as well as rich cultural, historic and natural qualities. Given the size of the byway, the numerous land management agencies, and the numerous opportunities along this segment, more information is needed to clarify for the traveler what is available and how to access these opportunities. Travelers should have easy access to information; this will make their trip planning more efficient and encourage lengthier stays. This is especially true with the addition of the *Chenega* to this segment that will greatly enhance the ability to spend a day or two in a community and catch the next sailing to other communities. Generally speaking, there is a great need for an interpretive plan that looks at the entire region, its communities and the ship servicing the area and pulls all of this together into an effective, integrated strategy.

Other interpretive challenges and opportunities include the need for a consistent look to all materials along the byway, the need for information and materials to be consolidated into efficient packages, and the need to work cooperatively with all existing museums and other attractions so that resulting interpretation builds upon, rather than repeats, existing exhibits and information.

Professional interpretive displays are needed on all ships and partnerships should be established with organizations such as the Alaska State Museum who has created successful displays for other entities.



SUMMARY

These challenges and opportunities form the basis for Chapter 4, *Actions*. The central theme emerging from Chapter 3 is the need for facility and interpretive investments that will enhance many aspects of the travel experience. In addition, marketing is needed to get the message to travelers that the system offers a unique way to see a unique part of America. The central themes emerging from this section are the following:

- Segment participation in the full byway effort must be efficient and not overburden existing volunteers and staff.
- Marketing efforts must strike a balance between the full byway marketing programs that are funded and controlled by the Alaska Marine Highway staff and the cooperative efforts between the Marine Highway staff and local tourism organizations. Together, these professionals must seek cooperative programs that promote both the full byway and the distinct experiences of each segment.
- Homer, Seward, Whittier and Valdez are major gateways to the Marine Highway system in this segment due to their access to major highways and/or the Alaska Railroad. These gateway terminals need to provide the highest level of visitor information and interpretation.
- Existing interpretation is good but could be improved to equal the opportunities present along this segment. Partnerships with the Forest Service have provided outstanding on-board interpretation. Enhancements are required on both the ships and terminals. Additional interpretation is required for the byway communities, cultures and the landscapes.
- This segment is currently undergoing many major capital improvements including new terminals and a new fast ferry. The Marine Highway should ensure that professional interpretation is included in the planning, designing, funding and furnishing of these facilities.

The numerous islands and rocky shoals along this segment provides habitat for a wide variety of birds and mammals including comerants that can be seen from the ships.



