

The Marine Highway System

Jobs and ridership on Alaska's ferries

Alaska purchased its first ferry, the Chilkat, in 1959 after the Alaska Ferry Transportation Act established state operation of terminals and regulation of ferry operators. Four years later, the state formed the Division of Marine Transportation and added three mainline ferries — the Taku, the Matanuska, and the Malaspina — which began service throughout Southeast Alaska and Canada.

As the system celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, these three boats still operate on expanded routes along with a larger fleet. Today, 11 vessels travel a combination of routes stretching from the Aleutians to Bellingham, Wash.

Mainly used by residents

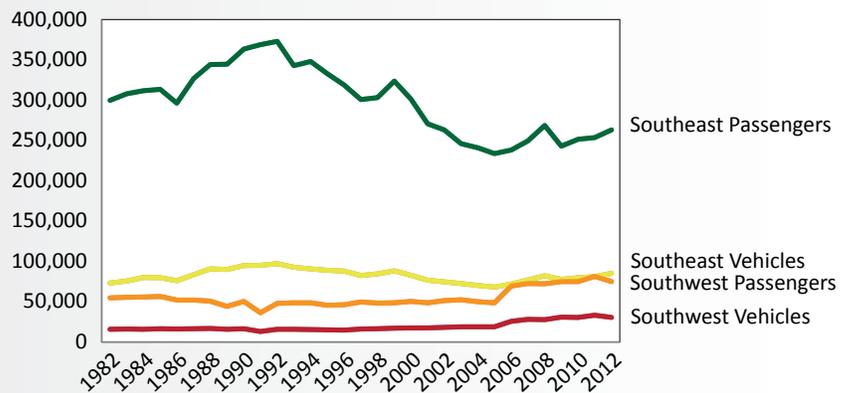
Originally conceived as public transportation for the large portions of Alaska's population living in roadless river, island, and coastal communities, the ferries' appeal to recreational motorists was soon realized.

Like a terrestrial highway, Alaska's ferries serve both visitors and residents, including resident tourists. A recent system analysis estimated that two-thirds of ferry users are Alaska residents, and 20 percent of resident users live more than 50 miles from a ferry-serviced community.

Ridership has grown along the southwest route over the past decade (see Exhibit 1), with about 30 percent of southwest traffic going in and out of Whittier, the closest port to Anchorage. On the southeast route, the largest percentage of traffic goes in and out of Juneau. (See Exhibits 2 and 3.)

Shippers of refrigerated cargo vans also use the ferries regularly because the schedules and regularity

1 Ferry Traffic by Area Alaska, 1982 to 2012



Source: Annual Traffic Volume Report, Alaska Marine Highway System. Published for the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

of service provide a cheap, reliable alternative to transporting perishables by air.

Who runs the ferries

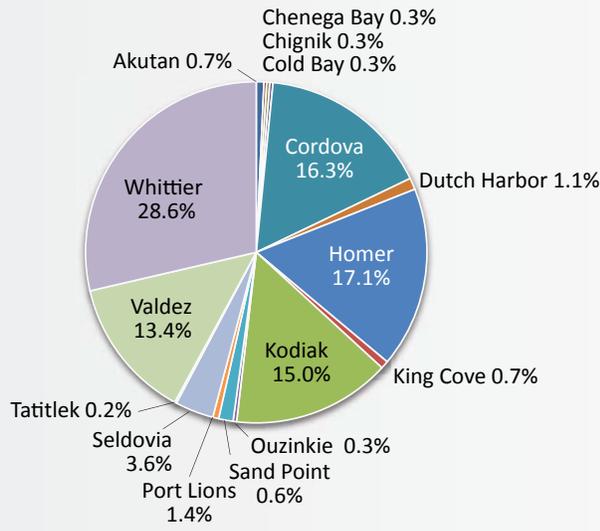
Vessel operations is the largest of the system's five components, both in budget and employment. (See Exhibit 4.) The Alaska budget calls for 724 full-time positions and 128 part-time and nonpermanent positions for vessel operations. However, there are generally more workers than positions due to seasonality, turnover, and workers on leave without pay.

Vessel operations has several departments: command, deck, stewards, and engineering. These workers are state employees covered under three different bargaining units, and each position requires special skills and certifications.

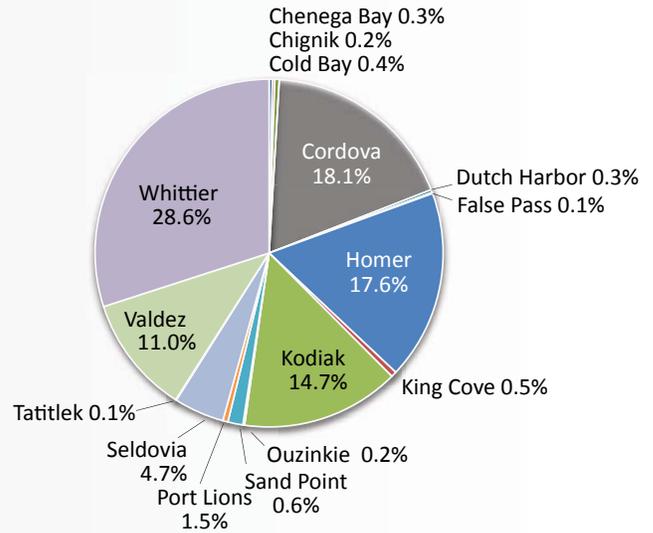
Masters and mates command the vessels and are subject to the highest level of Coast Guard certi-

2 Southwest Passengers and Vehicles

Ferry traffic by community, 2012



Passengers

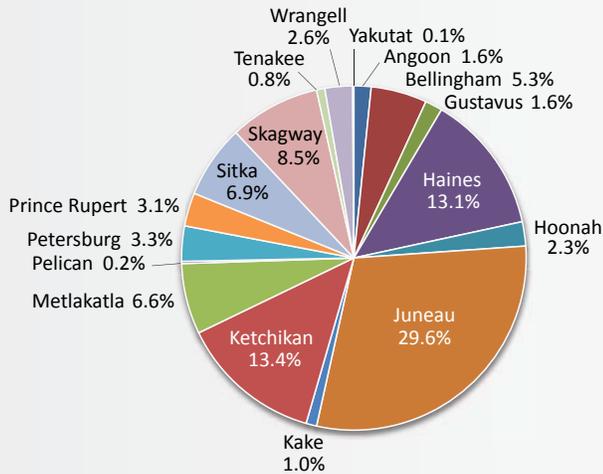


Vehicles

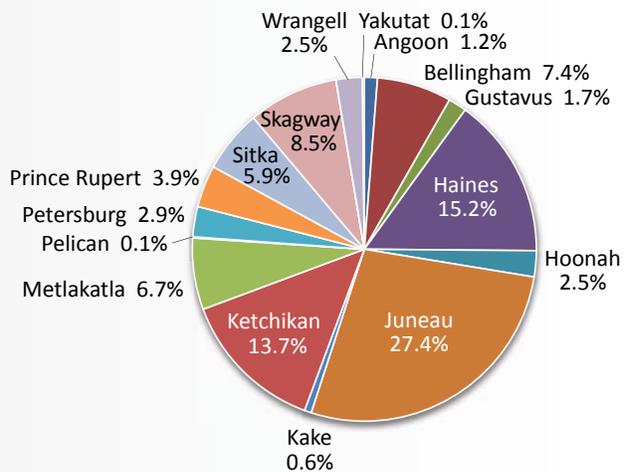
Source: Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Alaska Marine Highway System

3 Southeast Passengers and Vehicles

Ferry traffic by community, 2012



Passengers



Vehicles

Source: Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Alaska Marine Highway System

4 Components of the Marine Highway System

Positions and location, Fiscal Year 2012

	Positions	Location
Vessel Operations	852	On the boats
Reservations and Marketing	26	Juneau, Ketchikan
Marine Shore Operations	87	Statewide ports
Marine Engineering	24	Ketchikan, Juneau, Bellingham
Vessel Operations Management	42	Ketchikan

Source: State of Alaska Office of the Governor, Office of Management and Budget

fication and training. The State of Alaska personnel directory lists 100 masters, mates, and pilot workers as well as 125 engineers, 55 wipers and oilers, and 165 able seamen, porters, and boatswains. (See Exhibit 5.)

Also on board are service workers, whose tasks include everything from cleaning staterooms to overseeing passengers and cargo. The workers in the stewards department, purser's office, and galley also require additional Coast Guard certification and marine safety training, unlike their land-based counterparts.

Some routes include naturalists who serve as informal tour guides. The ferry system also hosts cadets from maritime academies who get sea time and training aboard these large vessels through summer internships.

On-shore jobs

The other four system components are on shore, with vessel operations management located at system headquarters in Ketchikan. Vessel operations includes dispatchers, accountants, computer programmers, safety managers, port captains, and other office and administrative workers.

The marine engineering component is responsible for keeping the fleet in good condition with maintenance and repairs, requiring vessel construction managers and journeymen. Marine shore operations are mainly terminal operations, with positions at all ports to welcome and send off the vessels.

The reservations and marketing component is responsible for the Alaska Marine Highway System Web site, reservations, and ticketing while working with chambers of commerce, economic development, the visitor industry, and local government groups to market the ferries to both residents and visitors. Reservations and marketing also coordinated the 50th birthday festivities this year at ports of call.

5 On-Board Jobs

Alaska ferries

	Workers
Third Mate	30
Master	27
Second Mate	24
Chief Mate	17
Pilot	2
Oiler	38
Third Assistant Engineer	34
Chief Engineer	27
First Assistant Engineer	24
Junior Engineer	19
Second Assistant Engineer	18
Wiper	17
Port Engineer	3
Able Seaman	65
Ordinary Seaman	51
Watchman Porter	18
A/B Boatswain	15
Ordinary Seaman Porter	13
FVF Deck Rating	3
Steward	247
Chief Purser	16
Chief Steward	11
Senior Assistant Purser	10
Head Bedroom Steward	8
Second Steward	7
FVF Passenger Service Worker	7
Junior Assistant Purser	6
FVF Passenger Svc Wkr-In-Chg	3
Deck/Steward Utility, Lituya	2
Second Cook	20
Chief Cook	17
Mess Steward	14
Assistant Second Cook	13
Bartender	7
Head Waiter	3
Cashier/Gift Shop Operator	24
Storekeeper	4

Source: Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities employee directory