

Dear Mayor and Assembly Members,

Today, I wish to address Item H, which proposes significant restrictions on the number of commercial buses operating within Sitka's road system. The ordinance outlines five main goals: improving air quality, enhancing road safety, reducing road wear and tear, preserving Sitka's rural character, and maintaining its appeal to visitors.

One might infer from these objectives that commercial buses are major contributors to Sitka's roadway issues. However, data from the Alaska Department of Transportation at the Halibut Point Road and Katlian Street intersection suggests otherwise. Between May 1 and September 30, 2023, total traffic volume was 1,430,124 vehicles, with commercial shuttle buses from the Sitka Sound Cruise Terminal shuttle accounting for approximately 23,500 trips, or 1.6% of traffic during the cruise season, and less than 0.5% annually. (See state of Alaska DOT Traffic Data at this site: dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/sis/traffic.shtml)

These figures challenge the notion that reducing the number of large commercial buses will significantly impact the proposed goals. Limiting buses, in fact, may lead to increased air pollution, traffic congestion, and roadway wear due to the necessity of additional smaller vehicles to meet tourism transportation needs.

As a member of the Tourism Task Force and a stakeholder in the local tourism industry, I am keenly aware of the community's concerns regarding bus traffic. In response, we are updating our fleet to smaller buses with updated emission controls, replacing half this season and the remainder over the next two years. Additionally, we are expanding our facilities at the cruise terminal and investing in tour vessels to better accommodate visitors and alleviate local traffic concerns with the goal of reducing the number of shuttles buses required on a daily basis.

I urge you to consider the broader implications of this ordinance and its potential to inadvertently exacerbate the issues it aims to address. I advocate for continued collaboration between the city and industry stakeholders to find balanced solutions, such as the Tourism Best Management Practices program, which offers a more nuanced approach to managing bus traffic in neighborhoods and its impacts on the community.

Please vote against this ordinance. The tourism industry was hit hard from the financial impacts of COVID-19, the current level of cruise tourism is allowing for substantial investments to be made for the upgrade facilities and the purchase of

new equipment to meet the demands of our visitor numbers. Let's work together to implement effective management strategies that address community concerns without hindering the economic recovery and growth of Sitka's tourism sector.

Thank you for considering my perspective on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Chris McGraw
Sitka Sound Cruise Terminal