

CITY OF UNALASKA
UNALASKA, ALASKA

RESOLUTION 2020-24

A RESOLUTION OF THE UNALASKA CITY COUNCIL REQUESTING THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUBSIDY TO AN AIR CARRIER TO PROVIDE ESSENTIAL AIR SERVICE TO UNALASKA (DUTCH HARBOR), ALASKA BY MEANS OF THE STANDARD REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL PROCESS

WHEREAS, the City of Unalaska (“City”) was with without regularly scheduled commercial air service for a month in the fall of 2019 following the crash of PenAir 3296, operated under RavnAir; and

WHEREAS, the City is again without critical regularly scheduled passenger air service because RavnAir stopped all service to Unalaska in the first week in April 2020; and

WHEREAS, the City is located on an island approximately 800 miles southwest of Anchorage, Alaska and is home to the International Port of Dutch Harbor, the largest commercial fishing port in the nation; and

WHEREAS, as a practical matter, air service is the only means of passenger transportation to or from our diverse island community; and

WHEREAS, the City is home to over 4,500 year-round residents and roughly 6,500 members of our seasonal workforce; and

WHEREAS, air transportation between Unalaska (Dutch Harbor) and Anchorage is essential to have crews in place to fish and to process seafood, a commodity which contributes millions of dollars to our local and state economy; and

WHEREAS, air transportation between Unalaska (which has limited health and emergency medical services) and Anchorage is essential for public health and safety and welfare of our community; and

WHEREAS, the Unalaska City Council recognizes that the future of Unalaska’s residents and commerce is at risk without stable commercial air passenger services; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Aviation Administration are mandated to regulate and fund safe and efficient public transportation; and

WHEREAS, the Essential Air Service program is key to ensuring the long term viability of safe, reliable, year-round air service to and from Unalaska; and

WHEREAS, the “Essential Air Service Determinations for Alaska Communities” report indicates Unalaska (Dutch Harbor) is entitled to 6 weekly departures during peak season and 5 weekly departures during off-season with a maximum of 3 enroute stops. The report indicates Unalaska (Dutch Harbor) is to be serviced from Anchorage with at least an “Intermediate Aircraft” that has 30-60 seats; and

WHEREAS, while Unalaska (Dutch Harbor) is entitled to 6 subsidized departures, the air carrier could also provide additional non-subsidized departures to meet demand; and

WHEREAS, the City is open to other solutions that meet the air travel needs of our community.


NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the City of Unalaska requests the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide financial subsidy to an air carrier to provide Essential Air Service to Unalaska (Dutch Harbor), Alaska by means of the standard Request for Proposal process.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by a duly constituted quorum of the Unalaska City Council on April 28, 2020.



Vincent M. Tutiakoff, Sr.
Mayor

ATTEST:



Marjie Veeder, CMC
City Clerk



MEMORANDUM TO COUNCIL

To: Mayor and City Council Members
From: Erin Reinders, City Manager
Date: April 28, 2020
Re: Resolution 2020-24: Requesting the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide financial subsidy to an air carrier to provide essential air service to Unalaska (Dutch Harbor), Alaska by means of the standard request for proposal process

The City of Unalaska finds itself again without critical regularly scheduled passenger air service. A long-term approach is needed to address the future of transportation to Unalaska and our region. The Essential Air Service (EAS) program is crucial to ensuring the long term viability of air travel to and from Unalaska.

I worked with staff from the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to determine what we are eligible for in the EAS program. The “Essential Air Service Determinations for Alaska Communities” report indicates Unalaska is entitled to 6 weekly departures during peak season and 5 weekly departures during off-season with a maximum of 3 enroute stops. The report indicates Unalaska is to be serviced from Anchorage with at least an “Intermediate Aircraft” that has 30-60 seats. Our demand may very well be higher nowadays, but this is the amount that may be subsidized.

The EAS program has not been triggered even though Ravn is not flying in and out of Unalaska, because Ravn technically “paused” service and has not formally “stopped” service. Ravn has not provided formal notice that they will no longer serve Unalaska (Dutch Harbor). Regardless, I have been pushing hard to get DOT to trigger EAS for Unalaska. I enlisted the assistance of our lobbyists and have had several conversations with both State and Federal DOT representatives. Because EAS is a federal program, I sent a letter to our federal delegation, with copies to the Governor’s office, the Alaska State Legislature, and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. Yet, EAS has not been triggered.

Now is the time for the Mayor and City Council to formally request that the U.S. DOT issue a request for proposals for Essential Air Service.

You see before you tonight a letter and resolution formally requesting the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide financial subsidy to an air carrier to provide Essential Air Service to Unalaska (Dutch Harbor), Alaska by means of their Request for Proposal process.

If triggered, the community and Council will have the opportunity to provide valuable feedback on the proposals and we will be able to have a say in which proposal best meets our community’s needs.

I recommend approval of Resolution 2020-24.

CITY OF UNALASKA
43 Raven Way - P.O. Box 610
Unalaska, Alaska 99685
TEL (907) 581-1251 FAX (907) 581-4469



VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

April 29, 2020

Kevin Schlemmer
Office of Aviation Analysis
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Mr. Schlemmer:

The City of Unalaska, Alaska, by this letter and enclosed Resolution 2020-24, formally requests the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide financial subsidy to an air carrier to provide Essential Air Service to Unalaska (Dutch Harbor), Alaska by means of your standard Request for Proposal process.

The City of Unalaska finds itself again without critical regularly scheduled passenger air service. Our diverse island community depends on air service to meet the numerous travel needs of residents, businesses and visitors. Located 800 miles southwest of Anchorage, Unalaska is home to the International Port of Dutch Harbor, the largest commercial fishing port in the nation. The City of Unalaska and Port of Dutch Harbor is a vital transportation and economic hub in our state. There is simply no other way for our year-round residents and seasonal workforce to reasonably access our island.

When a Saab 2000 ran off the runway in October of 2019 causing a fatality, all regularly scheduled passenger air service was immediately ceased. The abrupt exodus created serious health and safety concerns for our residents, resulting in the City declaring a state of emergency. With limited options for the wellbeing of our residents, the City of Unalaska took a proactive approach and operated public charters for three weeks with the approval of the U.S. DOT. However, chartering flights is not a long term sustainable option for individuals, for small business, or for the City.

In the wake of Ravn's recent announcements and actions on April 5, 2020, we are entirely without regularly scheduled passenger air service for the second time in less than seven months. Normal travel disruptions create significant risk and costs to the residents and the businesses of Unalaska. Having no flight service at all can prove deadly and economically crippling. Safe, reliable, year-round service is essential to the survival of our people and our community.

A long-term approach is desperately needed to address the future of transportation to Unalaska and our region. The Essential Air Service program is crucial to ensuring the long term viability of air travel to and from Unalaska. We very much appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

CITY OF UNALASKA

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "ERIN REINDERS".

Erin Reinders
City Manager

cc: John MacKinnon, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
John Binder, Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities