



MEMORANDUM

Date: October 12, 2023

To: Borough Assembly

From: Alexandra Pierce, Tourism Manager

Re: General Direction on Tourism Management

This memo provides a snapshot of Juneau’s current big-picture cruise volume situation and asks the Assembly to provide staff with high-level direction with the promise of more detail, analysis, and nuanced discussion in the near future. As a reminder, and for the new members, Mayor Weldon convened the Visitor Industry Task Force (VITF) in 2019, which built on our numerous tourism management plans, studies, and efforts in the early 2000’s and set over 60 recommendations for management. This includes the recommendation for a negotiated five ship limit, which is complete and will be in place for 2024. The VITF’s work was based on 1.3 million visitors. We are expecting to end the season with about 1.66 million visitors in 2023, representing 30% growth. Visitation is projected to remain flat for 2024 and 2025.

Staff is currently working with other Alaska ports to formalize a regional organization that will have the ability to hold contracts and could negotiate regional agreements in the future. Currently, ports are working individually while communicating frequently and being mindful of our neighbors.

We received many public comments on visitor industry impacts this summer. The below chart shows the year-over-year TBMP comments from 2019-2023. Typically, we see more repeat callers on aircraft impacts than other issues, and that tracks this year. The number of calls in call categories except ship noise increased significantly between 2022 and 2023. The “other” category includes things like busyness, internet speed, and this year, concerns about raft tours operating on the Mendenhall River after the flood.

Concern Type	2019	2022	2023
Other	12	12	40
Aircraft	17	20	57
Vehicle: Bus/Shuttle	33	48	65
Vessel: Whale Watch	15	15	29
Vessel: Other	0	0	4
Cruise: Noise	12	26	19
Cruise: Emissions	3	6	15
Cruise: Visual	0	0	5
Total Calls	92	127	234

Current efforts will result in management improvements next season. The whale watch group continues to work on more stringent operational guidelines. The USFS, CBJ and glacier tour operators are meeting to develop solutions for the glacier transport issues we experienced this summer. At a minimum, operators will manage their permits to ensure they last the entire season. These items and other tourism management issues will be discussed in greater detail in the coming months, informed by economic impact analysis and public survey results that should be available in December. This request for preliminary Assembly direction on whether to begin negotiations to grow, maintain or reduce helps staff to fully develop our tourism strategy in a timely manner.

Recommended Assembly action: provide generalized guidance on whether staff should work to increase, maintain, or decrease cruise tourism visitation based on the 2023-2025 lower berth capacity of approximately 1.6 million.