Outlook

Public comment on VITF 2.0 preliminary recommendations

From: Megan Behnke
Sent: Monday, November 2, 2026 11:42 AM
To: Clerks Office <Clerks.Office@juneau.gov>
Subject: Public comment on VITF 2.0 preliminary recommendations

Dear Members of the Visitor Industry Task Force,

Thank you for your time over the past ten months. I'm writing to comment on the preliminary recommendations released October 26. I have serious concerns about the overall direction of the draft, and especially about two things: the lack of any recommendation to limit ships and passengers, and the possibility of a heliport near Thane (#18).

Overall: the draft misses Juneau's own tourism vision

The vision in CBJ Resolution 2170 (2002) says the city seeks "a healthy and vibrant tourism sector [that makes] a positive contribution to the community's quality of life." That should be the test for every recommendation, and the draft does not meet it. Most of these recommendations manage the symptoms of overcrowding so the current volume can continue, which protects the cruise industry's bottom line at the community's expense; very little in the draft is aimed at making Juneau better for the people who live here. The Mayor charged the VITF with, amongst other things, "identify[ing] ways to manage impacts," and to "set a broad 10-year tourism direction for Juneau." This draft does not do these things, and does nothing to ease a feeling that I and many other Juneauites share, that the cruise industry runs our town. I ask the task force to reexamine and rethink this draft to make sure that it out the guidance of the vision statement--to ensure that the tourism sector makes a positive contribution to our community's quality of life, NOT simply a positive contribution to the cruise industry's income.

1. Missing: limits on ships and passengers (Mayor's charge items 2 and 4)

The only way to meaningfully address the impacts the task force has spent months analyzing is to reduce the number of cruise passengers in the CBJ each day. Crowding, congestion, noise, and strain on emergency services all scale with the number of people ashore. Fewer passengers means fewer impacts. The current five-ship daily limit is a voluntary agreement with the cruise lines. Because ships keep getting larger, five ships bring more people every year, so the limit means less and less. This May, a federal judge ruled that Bar Harbor, Maine, can enforce its daily cap of 1,000 cruise passengers during July and August. That ruling shows communities have real legal room to set limits. I urge the task force to recommend ship and passenger limits that bring daily visitor numbers to a level that works for residents and gives visitors a better experience. At minimum, please recommend that the Assembly adopt an ordinance making the five-ship daily limit mandatory and enforceable, and that includes a conservative passenger limit per day.

2. Recommendation #18: Take Thane off the table as a heliport site

I understand why the noise study might look at alternative heliport locations, but any site in or near Thane should be ruled out from the start.

- **Residents have already said no.** When alternative sites were considered in 2001–2002, the Thane Neighborhood Association surveyed residents. The response rate was 80%, and opposition to a Thane-area heliport was overwhelming. The reasons have only grown stronger as cruise tourism has expanded.
- **Thane Road can't handle it.** The road is narrow and winding with no shoulders, and it is in poor condition. Adding heliport buses and vans to it would be unsafe.
- **Emergency access.** Emergency vehicles already struggle to get through summer downtown crowds to reach Thane and the southern docks. Heliport traffic on Thane Road would slow response even more for a sick passenger or a serious accident.
- **Wind and avalanches.** This end of the channel gets strong winds, and avalanche season, when Thane Road is often closed, overlaps with the spring cruise season.
- **Fairness.** Thane already carries a heavy share of the summer downtown congestion. Adding helicopter noise and more tour traffic would put an unfair burden on one neighborhood.
- **Echoing noise in the channel**. Currently, helicopter (and other flightseeing) noise pollution echoes horrifically in the channel, especially on overcast days (which are most days). I live in Downtown Douglas, and fear that a heliport anywhere near Thane would add an extensive noise pollution burden to Douglas, as well, adding to our already constantly too-loud soundscape of float planes and cruise ships themselves. The entire channel amplifies sounds, making the channel a very bad place to think of building another heliport.

3. Recommendation #4: Replace the periodic task force with a standing citizen board

Neither the 2020 process nor this one has been an adequate way to deal with the scale of cruise tourism's impacts. Recommendation #4 would continue having the Mayor hand-pick a task force every three to five years, and that model is flawed--citizens should be able to apply through an open application process open to all Juneauites so that recommendations come from a representative body of concerned locals. Given how complex and ongoing these impacts are, CBJ should instead create a standing board or committee of residents.

4. Recommendation #17: Support the crossing guard program--YES!

I support continuing and growing the crossing guard program. Since JEDC took over management, crossing guards have made getting through downtown in the summer noticeably easier and safer (and have helped with my fears about emergency services to my older family members on Thane Road.

5. Recommendation #13: Oppose reinstating the Heritage Way–Marine Park crosswalk

This crosswalk would sit only about 200 feet from the signal crosswalk at Main Street and about 425 feet from the crosswalk by the library. Packing that many crossings into a short stretch would slow traffic in an already congested corridor. When a crosswalk existed there years ago, with far fewer pedestrians, it was still difficult. Instead, I suggest blocking crossings between Heritage Way and Marine Park in both directions, using bollards and chains or landscaping--this would streamline traffic without putting a burden on visitors (since there are still plenty of cross walks to choose from).

6. Addition: Prohibit left turns by tour vehicles from the town-bound lane on Franklin

Northbound tour buses and vans that turn left hold up the whole lane while they wait for a gap in oncoming traffic. Please recommend prohibiting tourism-related vehicles from making these turns. This would fit with the left-turn prohibition out of the Red Dog lot already proposed in #1, and again would limit impacts to emergency services vehicles and thus make both cruise ship visitors and locals

safer with faster transit times for ambulances and fire trucks.

7. Addition: Streetlights from Dock B to Mill Street

Please recommend streetlights from just past the South Franklin Street Dock (Dock B) to Mill Street. With the season now running into October, visitors from the AJ Dock walk this stretch at dusk and after dark. Lighting would also improve safety for residents all winter, including people walking to the warming shelter off Mill Street, and locals driving to the climbing gym.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,
Megan Behnke