From: Steve Behnke
To: Clerks Office
Subject: Comments on Visitor Industry Task Force draft recommendations
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To: Visitor Industry Task Force members

From: Steve Behnke

Thank you for your work. Your recommendations include worthwhile ideas, but I believe they focus on the trees and miss the forest. The report focuses on ways to pack in more visitors, while ignoring the biggest policy questions facing Juneau's visitor industry.

The Mayor specifically charged the Task Force with following up from the 2020 VITF effort and with setting a broad 10-year direction for Juneau. Those assignments called for addressing these fundamental questions, not simply finding ways to accommodate the continued growth of visitor traffic.

I've divided my comments into 2 parts – the first focusing on the larger policy issues, and the second addressing specific impacts to me and my neighbors in Thane.

Big picture. Missing the forest for the trees:

- **Wrong focus.** The report looks for ways to pack in more visitors and skips the core questions: how many visitors can Juneau reasonably accommodate, and what investments are needed to reduce the industry's impacts?
- **Ignores its mandate.** The Mayor charged the Task Force with setting a 10-year direction and managing impacts, not just accommodating growth.
- **Putting off the question of limits reduces our options for solutions** In 2020 the VITF was talking about impacts from a million visitors. Now you're talking about a near doubling of that. The industry and community need action and predictability.
- **Enforceable limits are missing.** Make the five-ship limit mandatory through a borough-wide ordinance, and keep the 16,000-passenger daily cap. Bigger ships mean five ships carry more people than when the voluntary agreement was made, and the recent federal court decision supports local authority to enforce a cap.

- **Expansion must be judged borough-wide.** Goldbelt's proposed Douglas Island facilities will send passengers downtown, to the glacier and to Eaglecrest, so dock capacity alone is the wrong measure.

- **Shore power is missing.** Electrification was central to both Blueprint Downtown and the 2020 VITF, and the Assembly's own policy objectives call for it. Treat it as essential infrastructure: fast-track planning and financing for the two City-owned docks.

- **Emissions are ignored, and need action now.** 4-5 cruise ships operating their generators while at dock create massive emissions – equivalent to half of the vehicles in Juneau all driving at once in the small downtown port area. On top of these are the concentrations of emissions from tourism-related vehicles. These are unhealthy for residents, visitors and workers, and add substantially to climate pollution.

- **Nothing on clean transportation loan program.** The report omits this potential solution, which was included in the Mayor's charge.

Specific Impacts. From a Thane resident's perspective:

- **The daily reality.** Getting to and from the rest of Juneau means passing through the South Franklin and downtown corridors, where the congestion of tour buses, vans and pedestrians cause unhealthy air, delays, aggravation, hazards, and life-threatening risks to emergency access for ambulance, fire, and police services.

- **Oppose the Heritage Way–Marine Park crosswalk (#13).** It would sit only about 200 feet from the Main Street signal and about 425 feet from the library crossing, and it was a problem even when pedestrian numbers were lower. Use bollards, chains or landscaping to steer people to the existing crossings.

- **Ban left turns by northbound tourism vehicles** from South Franklin. One waiting bus or van stalls the whole line.

- **Spread out ship arrivals.** On Mondays, four ships can arrive between about 12:30 and 1:30 p.m., causing jams of 20 minutes or more. CBJ should require cruiselines to spread arrivals and passenger movements through the day.

- **Add streetlights** from just beyond Dock B to Mill Street. This would help visitors from the AJ Dock as the season runs later into October, and local pedestrians and people reaching the warming shelter in winter.

- **Look at cumulative impacts.** Rental cars, tour buses and other transport on the south end of the docks add traffic even under the passenger cap, so rethink downtown rental car locations and evaluate these impacts together.

- **What's working.** The chains along South Franklin sidewalks and the crossing guards. Keep supporting and improving the crossing guard program (#17).

Juneau needs a visitor industry that works for residents as well as visitors, with strong, reasonable limits that give all parties predictability and investment in solutions like shore power and clean transportation.

Thank you for considering these comments and recommendations.