

**FY 25 KENAI PENINSULA  
COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT  
HUMAN SERVICES  
TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

JUNE 2024

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## 1. INTRODUCTION/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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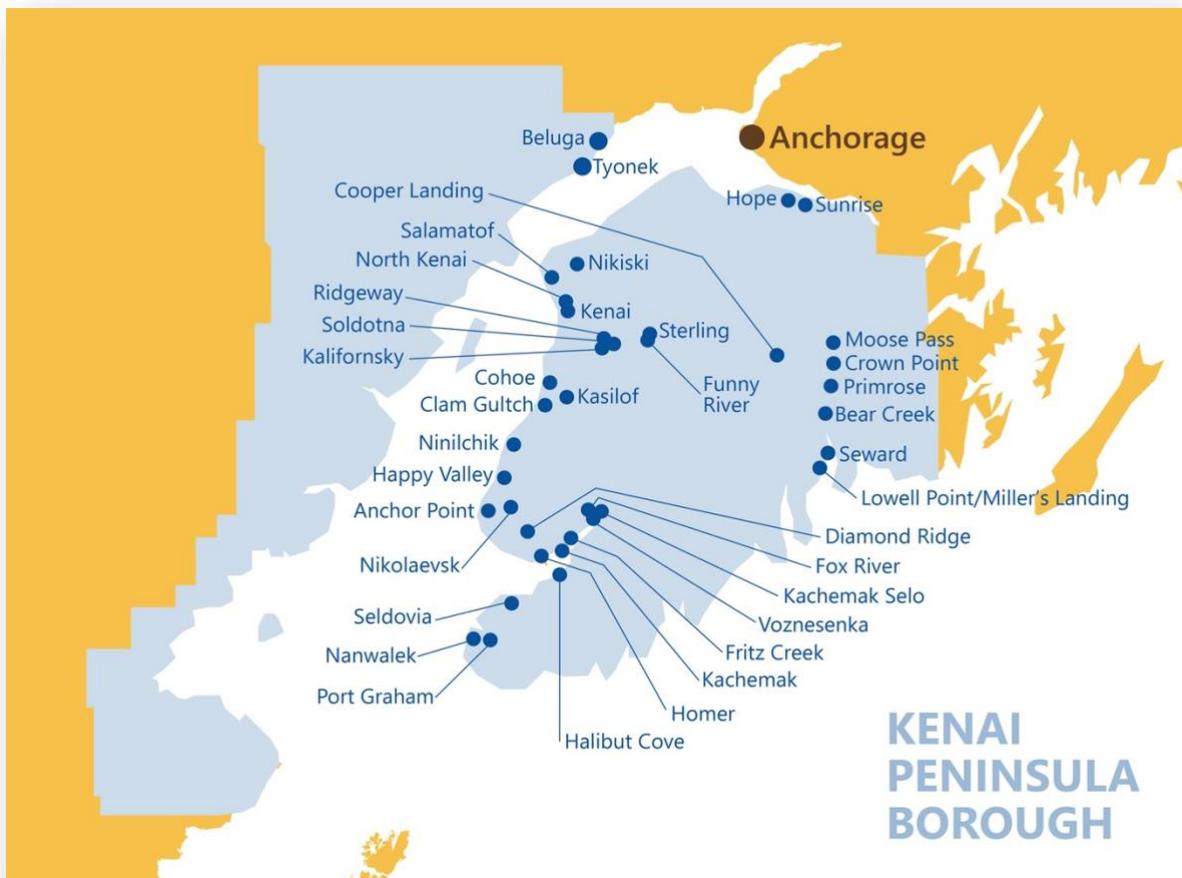
The Federal Transit Administration defines a “coordinated public transit-human service transportation plan” as a plan that identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes, that provide strategies for meeting those local needs, and prioritizes transportation services for funding and implementation.” The *FY 2025 Kenai Peninsula Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan (Plan)* is a community-driven initiative aimed at assessing existing transportation services and unmet needs within all regions of the Kenai Peninsula. This updated report focuses on the needs of vulnerable and older residents, which is crucial for qualifying for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Alaska Mental Health Trust funding facilitated through the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) Alaska Community Transit Office (ACT).

By outlining existing transportation services, providing context by explaining the demographic profile of the region, and taking a deep dive into the shared gaps, this report can start to address some of these deficiencies. The report identifies some viable transportation solutions in the “GOALS” section and can serve as a roadmap for improvement across the Kenai Peninsula. The development of this plan involved widespread community engagement and outreach, including two well-attended public meetings and a region-wide transportation survey, as well as cooperation between a diverse set of agencies and organizations. This plan emphasizes collaboration as a cornerstone strategy to facilitate accessible, user-friendly, and efficient transportation services across the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

## 2. COMMUNITY INFORMATION

### A. LOCATION

The Kenai Peninsula Borough (or Borough) is a vast and geographically varied region with communities both small and large located throughout. The Borough encompasses approximately 16,000 square miles in Southcentral Alaska and includes the Kenai Peninsula, Cook Inlet, and an area northeast of the Alaska Peninsula on the west side of the Cook Inlet.



The Municipality of Anchorage is approximately 65 air miles north of the Borough and is connected via the Sterling and Seward Highways. The portion of the Borough on the western side of the Cook Inlet and the eastern side of Kachemak Bay are not connected to

the road system and must be reached by boat or aircraft. The Kenai Peninsula is in the maritime and transitional climate zone of Alaska. Winters are relatively mild compared to other regions of the state. The western part of the Borough has a colder and drier transitional climate than the maritime climate of the eastern part of the Borough.

This Plan covers three areas of the Borough. The Seward area covers the City of Seward and surrounding communities. The Central Kenai Peninsula covers the City of Soldotna, City of Kenai, and surrounding communities. The Southern Kenai Peninsula covers the City of Homer and surrounding communities. Section 2.C. contains maps of communities included in this plan.

### **SEWARD REGION**

The Seward Highway connects Seward to Anchorage with approximately 125 miles of road. The Alaska Railroad also connects Seward to Anchorage seasonally. The Seward Boat Harbor also seasonally attracts cruise ships.

Seward is within the gulf coast maritime climate zone, with high levels of precipitation, frequent fog and clouds, long and cold winters, and mild summers. The average maximum temperature for Seward is 31 degrees Fahrenheit (F) in January and 62 degrees F in July. The average minimum temperature is 21 degrees F in January and 50 degrees F in July. Average total precipitation is 68.2 inches of rainfall and 83.4 inches of snowfall. Daylight varies greatly by season. The shortest day of daylight on December 21 has 5 hours and 49 minutes of daylight. The longest day of daylight on June 21 has 18 hours and 56 minutes of daylight.

### **CENTRAL KENAI PENINSULA REGION**

The Central Kenai Peninsula includes the City of Soldotna and the City of Kenai, the population centers of the Borough. The Seward Highway connects with the Sterling Highway at Mile 38 of the Seward Highway and passes through the Central Kenai Peninsula and to the Southern Kenai Peninsula. The Kenai Spur Highway connects Kenai with Soldotna. Other major roads in the area include Kalifornsky Beach Road and Bridge

Access Road. The cities of Kenai and Soldotna are approximately 150 road miles from Anchorage.

The Central Kenai Peninsula is within the gulf coast transitional climate zone, which is semi-arid with long and cold winters and mild summers. The average maximum temperature for the Central Kenai Peninsula is 21 degrees F in January and 65 degrees F in July. The average minimum temperature is 9 degrees F in January and 52 degrees F in July. Average total precipitation is 18.9 inches, with 67.5 inches of snowfall. Daylight varies greatly by season. The shortest day of daylight on December 21 has 6 hours and 7 minutes of daylight. The longest day of daylight on June 21 has 19 hours and 5 minutes of daylight.

### **SOUTHERN KENAI PENINSULA REGION**

The City of Homer is on the shore of Kachemak Bay and is connected to Anchorage by the Seward Highway and Sterling Highway. The City of Homer is approximately 221 road miles from Anchorage. Residents access Homer via public ferries and private boats as well. With the arrival of seasonal residents and visitors during the summer tourist season, the community also experiences significant increases in vehicular traffic. Homer is the southernmost community connected to the contiguous Alaska Highway system and part of the Alaska Marine Highway.

Homer is within the gulf coast maritime climate zone, with high levels of precipitation, frequent fog and clouds, long and cold winters, and mild summers. The average maximum temperature is 29.2 degrees F in January and 60.9 degrees F in July. The average minimum temperature is 16.7 degrees F in January and 46.3 degrees F in July. Average total annual precipitation is 24.4 inches, with 54.9 inches of snowfall. Daylight varies greatly by season. The shortest day of daylight on December 21 has 5 hours and 41 minutes of daylight. The longest day of daylight on June 21 has 18 hours and 37 minutes of daylight.

## **B. POPULATION**

Population of Area of Service included in the Plan: 54,252 (Seward Region, Central Kenai Peninsula Region, and Southern Kenai Peninsula Region)

- The Seward Region includes the communities of Seward, Lowell Point, Bear Creek, and Primrose.
- The Central Kenai Peninsula Region includes the communities of Kenai, Soldotna, Funny River, Kalifornsky, Kasilof, Nikiski, Ridgeway, Salamatof, Sterling, Cohoe, and Clam Gulch.
- The Southern Kenai Peninsula Region includes the communities of Homer, Ninilchik, Anchor Point, Diamond Ridge, Happy Valley, Nikolaevsk, and Kachemak City. Kenai, Soldotna, Homer, Seward, and Kachemak City are incorporated cities.
- The other communities are unincorporated census-designated places.

## **D. MAPS**

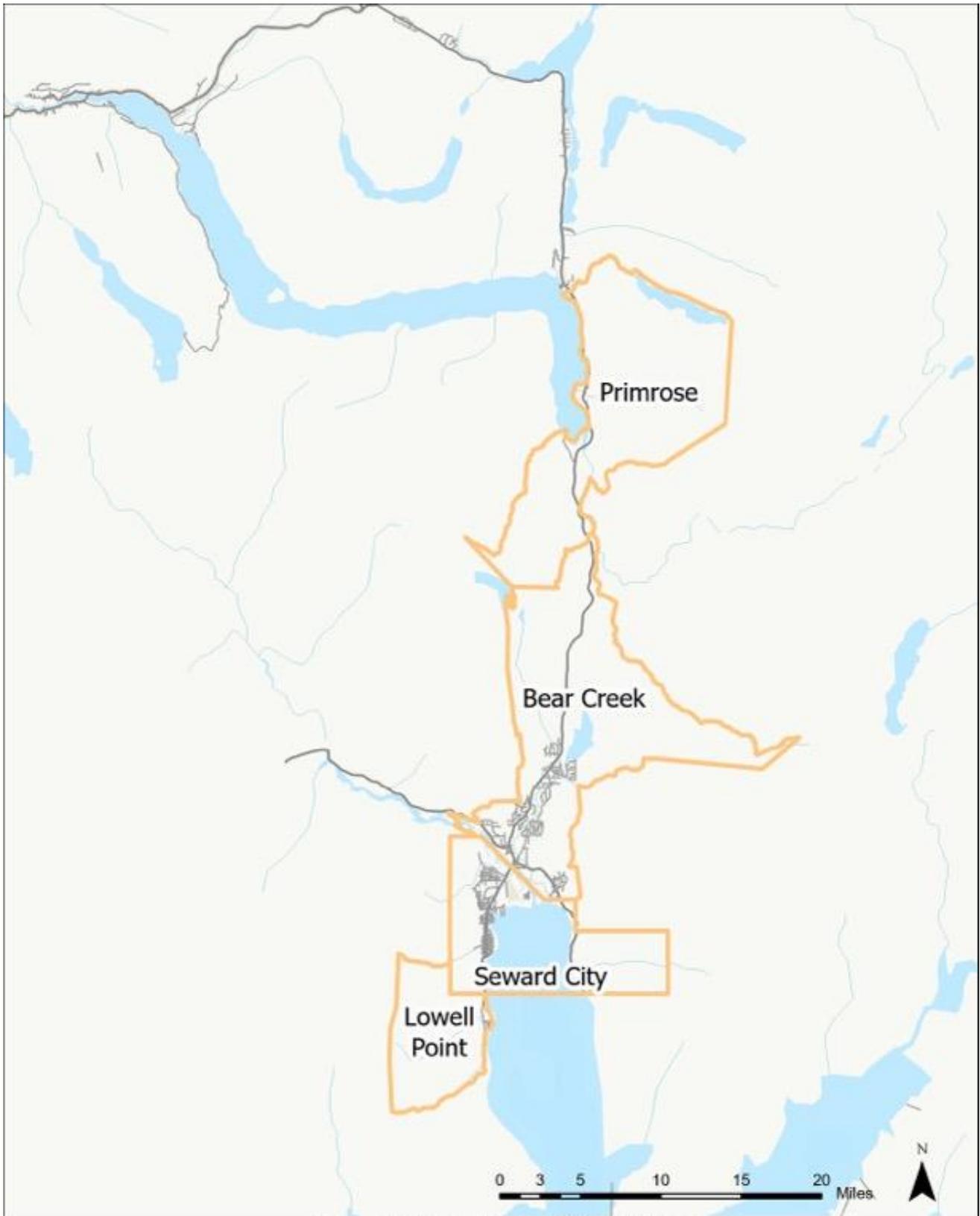
The following maps show the transportation area. Map 1 shows all communities included in this Plan. Map 2 shows the communities of the Central and Southern Kenai Peninsula regions. Map 3 shows the communities of the Seward Region.



Selected Census Designated and Incorporated Places on the Kenai Peninsula



Census Designated and Incorporated Places within Central and Southern Kenai Peninsula



Census Designated and Incorporated Places  
in the Seward Vicinity

### 3. ASSESSMENT OF RESOURCES AND SERVICES

#### C. CURRENT TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

##### CENTRAL KENAI PENINSULA REGION

The Sterling Highway traverses from Sterling south through the City Soldotna and several census-designated places and unincorporated places before reaching the City of Homer. The Kenai Spur Highway turns off the Sterling Highway in Soldotna and goes through the City of Kenai and the community of Nikiski. Bridge Access Road also connects the City of Kenai to other communities. Kalifornsky Beach Road is an alternate connection running north-south through the area.

" Transportation infrastructure is a vulnerability for the Kenai Peninsula. The Seward and Sterling Highways connect the Borough communities to each other and to Anchorage and suffer frequent shutdowns due to fatal traffic accidents and, periodically, avalanches. Poor maintenance conditions in the winter can also sever this key artery. The Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS), which has suffered from budget cuts, is another area of transportation concern. AMHS serves Homer and Seldovia but has been forced to reduce the frequency of sailings, disrupting an affordable means to moving people and goods. Seldovia is particularly dependent on AMHS, as it lacks highway access. KPEDD advocates for ongoing support for highway maintenance and safety improvements, and continuing state funding for AMHS. Furthermore, residents needing transportation assistance to and from work and critical services has been limited and reportedly unreliable. This is a key element in workforce development efforts across the Peninsula."

*Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District 2024  
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*

Kenai Municipal Airport is a City-owned airport and is the largest airport in the Kenai Peninsula. The Kenai Municipal Airport has two runways –1L/19R with a 7,830 X 150 feet asphalt pavement and 1R/19L with a 2,000 X 60 feet gravel surface. It also has a float plane basin and two helipads.

The Soldotna Airport is also a City-owned airport. It has a runway designated 7/25 with an asphalt surface. Both airports are easily accessed on the road system. The top flight routes out of the Kenai airport are Anchorage and Kodiak.

Transit options include CARTS, Ninilchik Traditional Council's Basic Unified Multi-Path Service (BUMPS), and several taxi service providers. Kenaitze Indian Tribe is launching the

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Kahtnu Area Transit fixed route bus service for the Central Kenai Peninsula to include a transportation hub/facility, 65 vehicles and transportation support staff. In addition, there are numerous human service agencies, including local Senior Centers and disability service providers located in the Central Peninsula region. Additional transportation providers include the school district, and private providers that provide transportation within the Central Peninsula communities to their clientele. Most of these human service agencies are either private nonprofit agencies or government human service agencies. Many of these agencies do not own vehicles but do offer transportation for their clientele through other providers. Examples of government agencies include the Department of Labor and Division of Public Assistance.

The Independent Living Center's (ILC) voucher program is operational in the Central Peninsula communities for eligible individuals who experience a disability and have a barrier to transportation. ILC contracts with Alaska Cab, who has a fleet of approximately 20 vehicles, three of which are accessible for wheelchair users and others with mobility issues.

### **SOUTHERN KENAI PENINSULA REGION**

The Homer Airport Terminal & Cargo Facility is a State-owned airport. It has one runway designated 3/21 with a 6,701 X 150 feet asphalt pavement and a facility for float planes on nearby Beluga Lake. Homer also has a ferry terminal that connects to the Alaska Marine Highway System.

Transit options include Ninilchik Traditional Council's Basic Unified Multi-Path Service (BUMPS), and several taxi service providers. In addition, there are numerous human service agencies, including local Senior Centers and disability service providers. Additional transportation providers include the school district, and private providers that provide transportation within the Southern Peninsula communities to their clientele. Most of these human service agencies are either private nonprofit agencies or government human service agencies. Many of these agencies do not own vehicles but do offer transportation for their clientele through other providers. Examples of

government agencies include the Department of Labor and Division of Public Assistance.

The Independent Living Centers (ILC) voucher program is operational in the Southern Kenai Peninsula communities for eligible individuals who experience a disability and have a barrier to transportation. ILC contracts with Ryder Transport, who has a fleet of approximately 10 vehicles, two of which are accessible for wheelchair users and others with mobility issues.

In 2024, Homer has no year-round, easily accessible form of public transit that meets community transportation needs. Homer's only connection to a year-round public transit system is the Ninilchik-based Basic Unified Multi-Path Service (BUMPS) bus, which serves Homer 3 days per week. The BUMPS bus travels roundtrip connecting Homer to Ninilchik, Soldotna, and Kenai, and communities along the route. The service stops at major retail outlets in each community. BUMPS is operated by the Ninilchik Traditional Council.

## **SEWARD REGION**

The Seward City Tours operates a 5-month (mid-April to mid-September) fixed route shuttle that brings passengers from cruise ship areas to downtown. The service is wholly funded through the use of passenger ("head") tax. This impacts routing of shuttle (e.g., must serve destinations of use to cruise ship passengers). Local residents are also able to use the shuttle for free during the summer months. The shuttle runs from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. when there is a cruise ship in port and from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. when there is not a cruise ship in port.

The Seward Senior Center has a voucher program that supports members to get to and from the Center and around town for local needs. Seward Senior Center contracts with a local cab company.

ILC's voucher program is operational in the Seward area for eligible individuals who experience a disability and have a barrier to transportation. ILC contracts with Aunt May's Taxi and Tours and Seward Independent Taxi. Both are owner operated companies with

1-2 vehicles each, none of which are accessible for wheelchair users and others with mobility issues.

In addition, there are numerous human service agencies e.g. SeaView and several tribal organizations that provide some transportation to their clientele. The school district has vehicles and there are private providers that provide transportation within and around Seward to their clientele. Most of these human service agencies are either private nonprofit agencies or government human service agencies. Many of these agencies do not own vehicles but do offer transportation for their clientele through other providers. Examples of government agencies include the Department of Labor and Division of Public Assistance.

Seward Bus Lines and Red Eye Rides, LLC are based out of Seward. They provide rides to and from Anchorage. Red Eye lines has a wheelchair lift-equipped vehicle and is a Medicaid transportation provider. The schedules for both vary according to the season.

## **B. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

### **KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH TRANSPORTATION “GAPS AND SOLUTIONS” COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS**

The improvement, development, and coordination of transportation projects and initiatives on the Kenai Peninsula requires a strategic and coordinated effort. In 2023 and 2024, representatives from various agencies and organizations, as well as members of the general public, gathered for two meetings to discuss transportation “Gaps and Solutions.” The attendees focused on identifying the needs and developing solutions to address enhanced mobility for the Boroughs seniors and individuals with disabilities and the general public. The results of the two meetings are summarized below.

On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 and April 16, 2024, a total of 106 community members came together and discussed transportation gaps and solutions within the area. Those who attended represented transportation service providers, community support organizations, Tribal entities, Borough government officials, and residents of the Kenai Peninsula. Both

## FY 2025 UPDATED HUMAN SERVICES COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION PLAN

meetings were hybrid meetings, with people participating in person and over Zoom. Participants collaborated on information about current status and possible solutions to address the needs of their communities regarding transportation. Both events were hosted by the Kenai Peninsula Borough, sponsored by the Kenai Peninsula



Community Foundation, and Bridges Community Resource Network, facilitated by Denali Daniels + Associates. The final reports from both of the meetings are located in the Appendices.

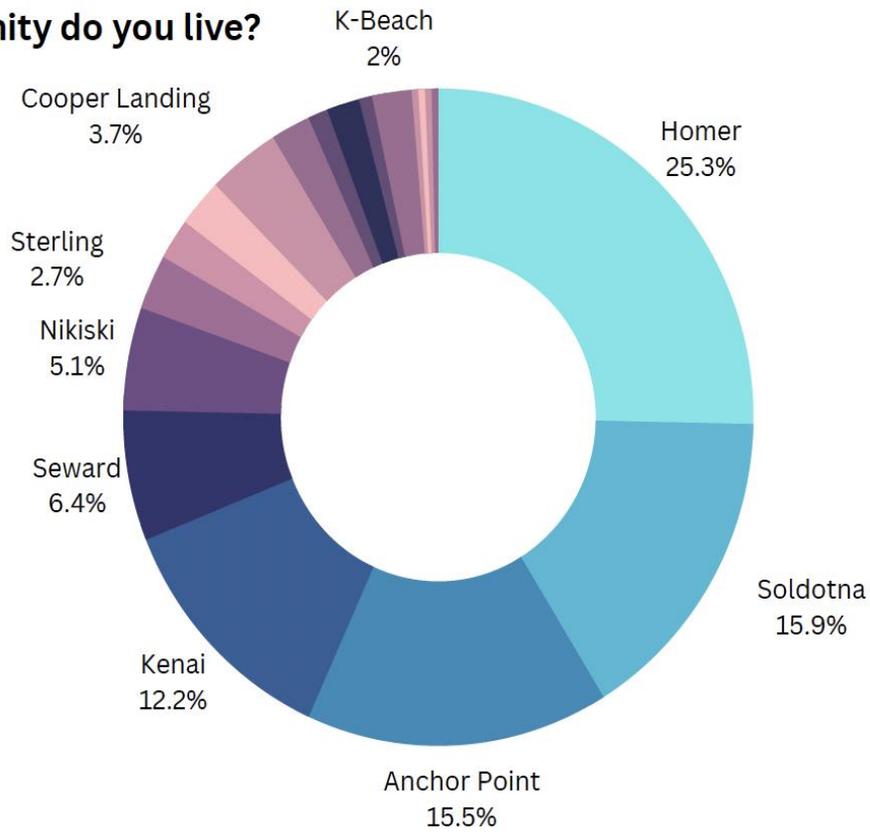
In addition to representatives from the Kenai Peninsula Borough, City of Homer, City of Kenai, City of Soldotna, the 1st and 2nd Transportation Gaps and Solutions discussions brought together the following Kenai Peninsula entities involved in transportation: 100% Alaska, Alaska Bus Company, Alaska Cab, Alaska Mobility Coalition, Anchor Of Hope Church, Bridges Community Resource Network, Central Area Rural Transit System, Cook Inlet Counseling, Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, Independent Living Center, Kenai Adult Probation, Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District, Kenai Peninsula Food Bank, Kenai Peninsula Love INC, Kenai Peninsula Reentry Coalition, Kenai Peninsula Foundation, Kenai Public Health Center, Kenai Senior Center, Kenaitze Indian Tribe , Kenai Peninsula School District-First Student/Apple Bus, LeeShore Center, Nikiski Senior Center, Nikiski Shelter of Hope , Ninilchik Senior Center, Ninilchik Traditional Council, Office of the Governor, Red Eye Rides, Soldotna Senior Center, South Peninsula Behavioral Health , Southcentral Alliance for Family Resilience, Southern Kenai Peninsula Transit Coalition, State of Alaska Department of Labor, Salvation Army, TNT Transportation.

### **KENAI PENINSULA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT TRANSPORTATION SURVEY RESULTS**

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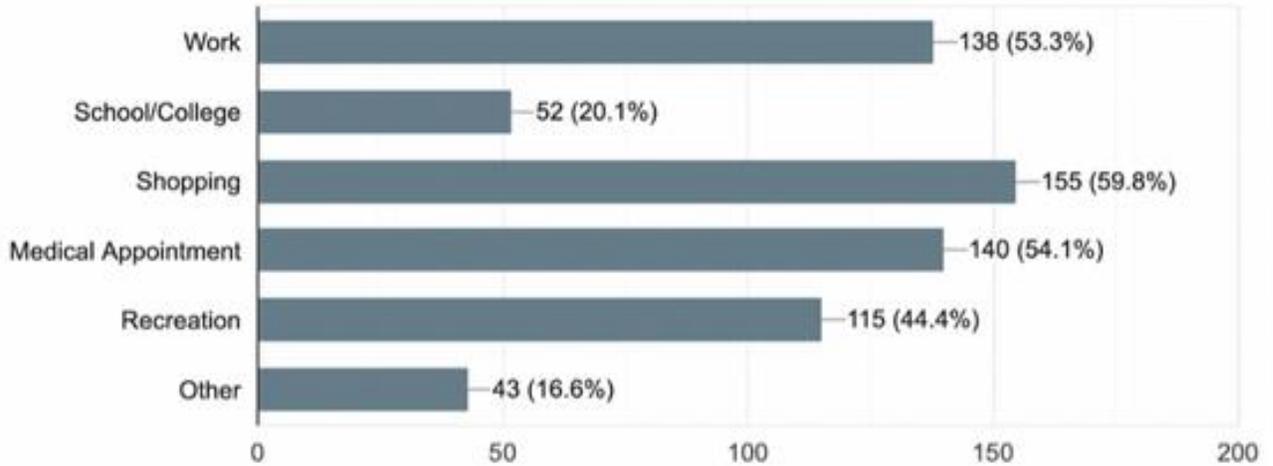
KPEDD, in partnership with the Kenai Peninsula Transportation Committee, created a survey to identify regional public transportation needs throughout the Peninsula. The survey gathered responses to questions from over 300 residents, who lived in communities across the Borough. Several of the responses are represented in the following graphics.

**In what community do you live?**

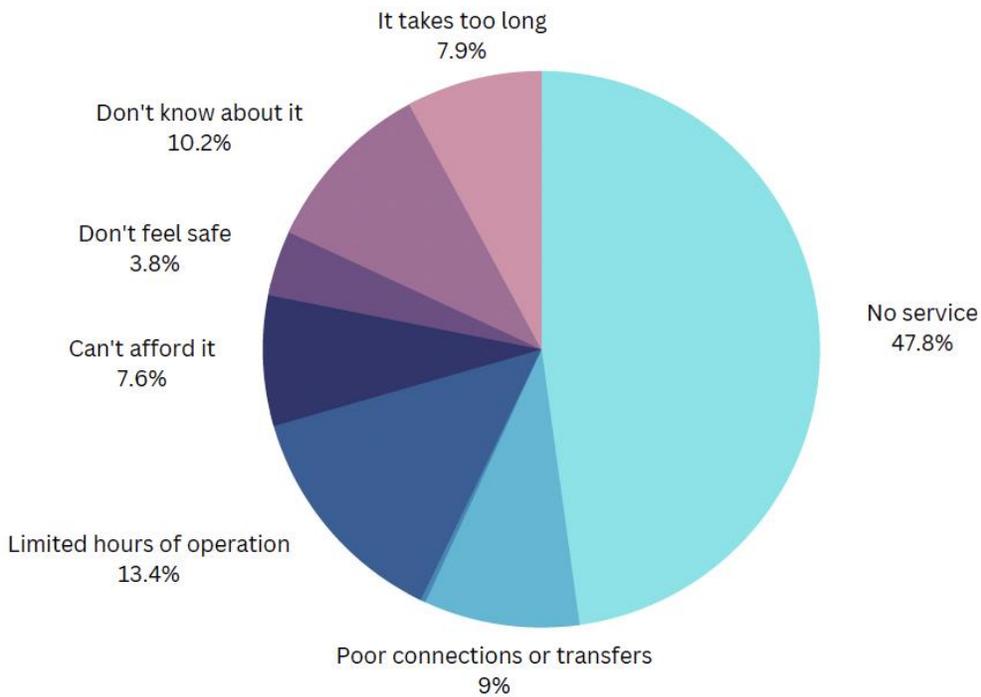


**13. If available, what would you use public transportation for?**

259 responses



**If you do not use public transportation regularly, why not?**



### C. INVENTORY OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES AND SERVICES

CARTS Vehicle #	Vehicle	Passengers		Wheelchair Positions	Odometer Readings as of May 2024	Vehicle Condition	Agency
Van 14	Ford Passenger Van	12	2009	No	295,294	Poor	CARTS
Bus 16 4X4	Cutaway	12	2009	Yes 2	151,612	Poor	CARTS
Bus 17	Cutaway	12	2009	Yes 2	127,307	Poor	CARTS
Van 31	Ford Transit Van	7	2017	Yes 2	298,069	Fair	CARTS
Van 32	Ford Transit Van	7	2017	Yes 2	268,109	Fair	CARTS
Van 33	Ford Transit Van	7	2017	Yes 2	136,276	Good	CARTS
Van 34	Ford Transit Van	7	2022	Yes 2	54,866	Excellent	CARTS
Van 35	Ford Transit Van	7	2023	Yes 2	45,592	Excellent	CARTS

Vehicle	Passengers		Wheelchair Positions	Odometer Readings	Vehicle Condition	Agency
Ford Shuttle Bus	24	2008	Yes 2		Good	BUMPS
Ford Shuttle Bus	16	2011	Yes 2		Good	BUMPS
Ford E-450	10	2012	Yes 2		Good	BUMPS

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<b>Central Peninsula Region Services Inventory</b>				
<b>AGENCY</b>	<b>PASSENGERS</b>	<b>OPERATING DAYS</b>	<b>OPERATING HRS.</b>	<b>DESTINATIONS</b>
Alaska Christian College	Only for clientele	No designation	9 am – 5 pm	Central Kenai Peninsula. Any transportation needed by students 1-2x/week
Freedom House	Only for residents	Monday-Friday	9 am – 5 pm	Central Kenai Peninsula. Prioritized by specific need and urgency.
Frontier Community Services	Only for clientele	Scheduled Appointments	9 am – 5 pm	Central Kenai Peninsula. Only for in house appointments
Heritage Place	Only for residents	7 days/week	24 hours	Medical appointments
Kenai Senior Center	Only for clientele	Monday-Friday	24 hours	Central Kenai Peninsula. Personal, medical, shopping, work
Kenaitze Indian Tribe	Tribal members, employees and clientele	Monday-Friday	8 am – 5 pm	Central Kenai Peninsula, primarily within the City of Kenai. Personal, medical, work, shopping, recreational, physical therapy, mental health, and childcare.
Nikiski Senior Center	55+ years or Medicaid Waiver recipients	Monday-Friday	10 am – 2 pm	Nikiski, Kenai and Soldotna. Personal, medical, work, shopping, recreational, physical therapy, mental health. Wheelchair accessible.
Nikiski Shelter of Hope	Only for residents	7 days/week with qualified driver	24 hours	Central Kenai Peninsula and Clam Gulch Appointments, group shopping trips, and shelter connections.
Serenity House	Only for clientele	7 days/week	24 hours	Central Kenai Peninsula. Meetings medical, activities, court, shopping and pharmacy
Soldotna ILC	Individuals with disabilities and IL Intake	Used with contracted tax cab company	Used with contracted taxi cab company	Vouchers to be used with contracted cab company up to a \$15 fare
Soldotna Senior Center	Only for clientele	Monday-Friday	8 am – 4 pm	Soldotna area
Sterling Silver Assisted Living	Clientele who cannot access other transportation	Monday-Friday	By appointment	Central Kenai Peninsula. Appointments and shopping

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Central Peninsula Region Services Inventory, continued				
AGENCY	PASSENGERS	OPERATING DAYS	OPERATING HRS.	DESTINATIONS
AK Bus Shuttle	All	Varies by season	Varies by season	Soldotna, Cooper Landing, Girdwood, Anchorage. Contact <a href="mailto:info@alaskabuscompany.com">info@alaskabuscompany.com</a> or 907-299-6806
BUMPS	All	M,W,F	8:30 am-5 pm	Homer, Anchor Point, Ninilchik, Clam Gulch, Soldotna Kenai and return. Wheelchair accessible. Contact 907-567-3313 or 907-394-8866 or <a href="mailto:bumps@niniilchiktribe-nsn.gov">bumps@niniilchiktribe-nsn.gov</a>
CARTS	All, Medicaid and Medicaid Waiver	Monday-Friday	24 hours	Central Kenai Peninsula. Personal, medical, work, shopping, recreational, physical therapy, mental health. Wheelchair accessible. Contact 907-262-8900

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Southern Peninsula Region Services Inventory				
AGENCY	PASSENGERS	OPERATING DAYS	OPERATING HRS.	DESTINATIONS
Homer Senior Center	Only members and residents	Varies upon request	Varies upon request	Field trips, outings, resident requests. Medicaid transportation provider. One vehicle with wheelchair access
South Peninsula Behavioral Health	Only for clientele	Varies upon request	Varies upon request	Field trips, outings, resident requests. Medicaid transportation provider.
Homer ILC	Individuals with disabilities and an IL Intake	Used with contracted taxi cab company	Used with contracted taxi cab company	Vouchers to be used with contracted cab company within 4 miles of pick up or for individuals living 15 miles from Homer
South Peninsula Hospital	LTC residents	Varies upon request	Varies upon request	Field trips, outings, resident requests. Medicaid transportation provider
AK Bus Shuttle	All	Varies by season	Varies by season	Homer, Soldotna, Cooper Landing, Girdwood, Anchorage. Contact <a href="mailto:info@alaskabuscompany.com">info@alaskabuscompany.com</a> or 907-299-6806
BUMPS	All	M,W,F	8:30 am-5 pm	Homer, Anchor Pt, Ninilchik, Clam Gulch, Soldotna Kenai and return. Wheelchair accessible Contact 907-567-3313 or 907-394-8866 or <a href="mailto:bumps@ninilchiktribe-nsn.gov">bumps@ninilchiktribe-nsn.gov</a>

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<b>Seward Region Services Inventory</b>				
<b>AGENCY</b>	<b>PASSENGERS</b>	<b>OPERATING DAYS</b>	<b>OPERATING HRS.</b>	<b>DESTINATIONS</b>
Seaview	Only clientele	7 days/week	As needed	Medicaid trips and other appointments as requested
Seward Senior Center	Senior Center members	Used with contracted taxi cab company	Used with contracted taxi cab company	Vouchers to be used with contracted cab company, using the Senior Center as a hub.
Seward ILC	Individuals with disabilities and IL Intake	Used with contracted taxi cab company	Used with contracted taxi cab company	Vouchers to be used with contracted cab company within 4 miles of pick up
Mountain Haven	Only residents	7 days/week	As needed	Medicaid Transportation provider. To and from appointments and shopping
AVTEC	Only students	7 days/week	As needed	Around Seward upon request
Qutekcak Native Tribe	Only Tribal Members	7 days/week	As needed	Around Seward upon request
Seward Bus Lines	<b>All</b>	Varies by season	Varies by season	Seward, Whittier, Anchorage. Contact 1-888-420-7788 or <a href="mailto:sewardbuslines@acsalaska.net">sewardbuslines@acsalaska.net</a>
Red Eye Rides	<b>All (up to 10 passenger capacity)</b>	7 days/week	6 a.m. to 7 p.m.	From Seward to Moose Pass/The Y, Cooper Landing, Hope Cut-off, Girdwood, Anchorage and returns. Prices/times vary based on age and season. Medicaid provider and wheelchair accessible. Contact <a href="https://akredeyerides.com/">https://akredeyerides.com/</a> or 907-769-1818

## 4. ASSESSMENT OF TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

### A. DEMOGRAPHICS

#### GENERAL COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

Population of the Area of Service included in the Plan: 54,252 (Seward Region, Central Kenai Peninsula Region, and Southern Kenai Peninsula Region)

- The Seward Region includes the communities of Seward, Lowell Point, Bear Creek, and Primrose.
- The Central Kenai Peninsula Region includes the communities of Kenai, Soldotna, Funny River, Kalifornsky, Kasilof, Nikiski, Ridgeway, Salamatof, Sterling, Cohoe, and Clam Gulch.
- The Southern Kenai Peninsula Region includes the communities of Homer, Ninilchik, Anchor Point, Diamond Ridge, Happy Valley, Nikolaevsk, and Kachemak City. Kenai, Soldotna, Homer, Seward, and Kachemak City are incorporated cities.
- The other communities are unincorporated census-designated places.

According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) Demographic and Housing Estimates 2022 Five-Year Estimates, the Kenai Peninsula Borough (Borough) has a population of 59,235. The Seward Region is estimated to have a population of 5,021, the Central Kenai Peninsula Region has a population of 38,051, and the Southern Kenai Peninsula Region has a population of 11,983. This gives a total population of 54,252 people for the area of service.

The median household income in Kenai Peninsula Borough, Alaska was \$76,254 in 2022, up from \$71,111 in 2021. The average salary for employees in the borough is estimated to be around \$76,611 per year, or \$37 per hour. The largest share of households in the borough have an income between \$75,000 and \$100,000.

In 2022, Kenai Peninsula Borough was more diverse than it was in 2010. In 2022, the white (non-Hispanic) group made up 78.8% of the population compared with 82.9% in 2010.

Between 2010 and 2022, the share of the population that is Hispanic/Latino grew the most, increasing 1.6 percentage points to 4.6%. The white (non-Hispanic) population had the largest decrease dropping 4.1 percentage points to 78.8%.<sup>1</sup>

### DEMOGRAPHICS OF THOSE IN NEED

Those in need of increased and improved transportation resources on the Kenai Peninsula include older adults/elderly adults, persons with disabilities, low-income populations, and zero vehicle households.

The borough has a median age of 41.4 years. The age distribution of the borough is as follows:

- 12% 0–9 years old
- 13% 10–19 years old
- 11% 20–29 years old
- 13% 30–39 years old
- 12% 40–49 years old
- 13% 50–59 years old
- 15% 60–69 years old
- 9% 70–79 years old<sup>2</sup>

According to the American Community Survey and the Alaska Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, the percentage of the Kenai Peninsula Borough aged 18-64 that reported having a disability was 12%.

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<sup>1</sup> American Community Survey, 2010 - 2023

<sup>2</sup> US Census. <http://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US02122-kenai-peninsula-borough-ak/>

## B. GAPS IN SERVICE

The need for transportation services crosses all geographic areas within the area of service. Those in need of increased consideration on the Kenai Peninsula include older adults/elderly adults, persons with disabilities, low-income populations, and

*“If our community had more and better public transportation for those in need, I think we would see more success in medical outcomes, people having better access to food and to gainful employment, and children's attendance to school and recreation.”*

*Comment, Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District Transportation Survey Results*

zero vehicle households. However, there are significant gaps throughout the Borough, which were identified during the two “Gaps and Solutions” meeting held in 2023 and in 2024, as well as learned through the results of the *Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District Transportation Survey*.

Through these discussions and outreach efforts, several critical gaps have been identified, demonstrating where the current system falls short of meeting the needs of the community.

**UPDATE PLANNING PRIORITIES:** First, there is a pressing need to routinely update the transportation planning priorities. This involves aligning transportation initiatives with other strategic planning efforts by local and regional entities. There is a disconnect between the various planning efforts and regional committees, which leads to the duplication of efforts, a lack of coordination, and a gap in the leveraging of resources to strengthen priority projects.

**ACCESSIBILITY:** Another gap strategically is accessibility. In the Kenaitze Tribe’s development of a fixed route system there is discussion with not locating bus stops near essential community destinations such as food banks, job services, stores, Love Inc., the airport, hospitals, and senior centers. Additionally, establishing Park N Ride facilities and implementing services akin to "Anchor Rides" could improve and enhance accessibility. As of this writing, none of Kenaitze Tribe’s sixty five vehicles are wheelchair accessible. They will need to purchase accessible vehicles or contract with others for the required paratransit service.

**RELIABILITY:** Reliability remains another gap on the Kenai Peninsula, particularly regarding pickup/drop-off times and achieving full route coverage, especially in rural areas. Meeting individual needs and fully addressing these service gaps requires a tailored and strategic approach to ensure complete coverage of main roads and highways. The lack of a centralized information system is a gap, as it would be useful for timely updates and facilitating travel

planning.

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:** While workforce development is a priority for the Borough, there is a gap when it comes to linking these efforts with available transportation options. Some solutions would include subsidized transit options, and more affordable transportation for various demographics, including minimum wage workers, teen workers, seniors, and individuals seeking employment opportunities. Moreover, streamlining policies and procedures, such as DOT reporting and addressing Medicaid payment issues, could be crucial in addressing gaps in knowledge and paperwork burdens.

**FUNDING:** Funding poses a significant challenge for transportation efforts on the Peninsula, requiring a concerted effort to identify, allocate, and leverage resources. For vulnerable populations there could be additional considerations or options such as low-income, disability, and other funding sources, yet there is a gap in coordinating efforts with service providers. Coordinating efforts across different service providers, agencies, regions and communities is essential to minimize duplication, enhance collaboration, and streamline services. Solutions to these gaps could include appointing coordinators for each community, fostering communication among key stakeholders, and creating better communication channels or forums to discuss emerging gaps.

**COMMUNICATION + OUTREACH:** Communication and outreach are vital for ensuring that transportation services are accessible and well-utilized. Utilizing platforms like social media, newspapers, and apps can enhance outreach efforts, while user-friendly online resources and transportation apps can facilitate navigation and connection to vital services. Often there is an unnecessary gap between what is available to users and what is utilized by transportation providers, especially within governmental agencies.

## 5. GOALS AND STRATEGIES

For the 2024 Kenai Peninsula Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan, the Transportation GAPS & Solutions Lead Partner Group to include: LOVE, Inc, Bridges, KPEDD, ILC, CARTS, 100% Community, Kenai Peninsula Foundation and Kenai Peninsula Borough representative and other partner volunteers.

### **Goal 1 – STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION:**

**Ensure continuous, community-wide engagement, understanding, commitment and accountability to implement and fund an evolving Coordinated Plan.**

**Strategy 1.** Continue annual convening of agencies, partners, and Kenai Peninsula residents to discuss GAPS AND SOLUTIONS as well as annual priorities.

**Leads:** Transportation GAPS & Solutions Lead Partner Group

**Timeline:** By April 30, 2025 and on-going annually

**Strategy 1.2** Develop new and/or revise existing Memorandum of Understanding or contracts to include recent partnerships and updated methods for local and regional coordination.

**Leads:** Transportation GAPS & Solutions transportation providers

**Timeline:** By September 30, 2024 and on-going annually

**Goal 2 – REGIONAL COORDINATION AND STREAMLINING:**

**Develop and sustain transportation services within the Coordinated Plan by effectively identifying, understanding, collaborating, and advocating among state, local, federal, tribal and public funding sources.**

**Strategy 2.1** Investigate the hiring of a Transportation Coordinator to lead the efforts to increase transportation options and funding Borough-wide and to implement and update plans.

**Leads:** Transportation GAPS & SOLUTIONS Lead Partner Group

**Timeline:** By June 30, 2025

**Strategy 2.2** Establish a subset of the regional transportation workgroup to represent partners and serve in an ongoing decision-making role for coordination.

**Leads:** Transportation GAPS & SOLUTIONS Lead Partner Group and other volunteers representing community local voices

**Timeline:** By September 30, 2024 and on-going quarterly

**Strategy 2.3** Update Coordinated Plan every five years

**Leads:** Transportation Coordinator, if hired, and Transportation GAPS & SOLUTIONS Lead Partner Group and other volunteers

**Timeline:** FY 25, FY 30, FY 35, FY40, FY 45

**Goal 3 – ROUTINELY UPDATE SYSTEM PROJECT PLANNING PRIORITIES AND NECESSARY SUPPORTS**

**Provide sustainable and flexible public transportation systems that are affordable, reliable, and accessible and meet the needs of the service areas within the region.**

**Strategy 3.1** Maintain current or improve existing transportation services by continuing and increasing Federal Transit Administration and Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities funded projects.

**Leads:** Borough-wide Transportation Providers

**Timeline:** On-going

**Strategy 3.2** Strategically make system improvements to reliably and affordably serve the identified underserved populations and those most in need with necessary transportation services.

**Lead:** Borough-wide Transportation Providers

**Timeline:** On-going

**Strategy 3.3** Identify funding opportunities to support this work to include public and private partnerships.

**Lead:** Transportation Coordinator, if hired and Transportation GAPS & SOLUTIONS Lead Partners and other volunteers

**Timeline:** On-going



## 6. PRIORITY OF PROJECTS

Project priorities for the next five years will be selected based upon the goals and strategies of this Plan, submitted applications, funding availability and Prioritization of Human Service project applicants. Prioritization meetings to be held annually in the fall, with the Kenai Peninsula Borough as the Lead Agency.

### **Other General Priorities identified at the two Transportation Gaps and Solutions events**

- Door to door service models maintained and replicated
- Collaboration and partnerships between State and Local funders, human service providers and transportation providers on the Kenai Peninsula
- Hire a Transportation Coordinator to lead the efforts of communities, to include grant writing, coordinating community efforts and updating the various Plans that include transportation
- Increase affordable and accessible transportation options Borough-wide
- Increase funding opportunities for transportation providers, Borough-wide

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION AND APPENDICES

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**2024 Kenai Peninsula Transportation Gaps and Solutions Meeting Report**

**2023 Kenai Peninsula Transportation Gaps and Solutions Meeting Report**

**Community Transportation Needs Assessment: Homer, Alaska and Surrounding Communities**



# KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH TRANSPORTATION GAPS AND SOLUTIONS

APRIL 16, 2024

Prepared by: Denali Daniels + Associates



## INTRODUCTION

On April 16th, 2024, 53 community members came together and discussed transportation gaps and solutions within the Kenai Peninsula. Those who attended represented transportation service providers, community support organizations, Tribal entities, Borough government officials, and individuals representing themselves. This was a hybrid meeting, with people participating in person and over Zoom. Participants collaborated on information about the current status and possible solutions to address the needs of the community regarding transportation. This event was hosted by the Kenai Peninsula Borough, sponsored by the Kenai Peninsula Community Foundation, and Bridges Community Resource Network, facilitated by Denali Daniels + Associates.

## PARTICIPANTS:

Many representatives from community organizations and members of the public attended. A list of participants is displayed below.

- Bieber, Sara – State of Alaska Department of Labor
- Bouasri, Samantha – State of Alaska Department of Corrections
- Bunch, Julie – Kenai Public Health Center
- Cameron, Cassidi – Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District
- Cannava, Dana – Kenai Peninsula Borough Mayor Office
- Carbone, Tyler – State of Alaska Department of Corrections - Reentry
- Ciapponi, Chiara – Kenai Public Health
- Cochran, Taylor – Alaska Cab
- Cook, Sheryl - Soldotna Senior Center
- Coreson, Caitlin – Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District
- Dillon, Tim – The Jotimaz Group
- Dye, Jacob – Peninsula Clarion
- Einerson, Lynn – State of Alaska Department of Corrections, Wildwood Correctional Center
- Engebretsen, Julie – City of Homer
- Fallon, Sasha – Nikiski Senior Center
- Geisler, Joyanna – Peninsula Independent Living Center
- Gensel, Kathy – Kenai Peninsula Homelessness Coalition and Bridges Community Resource Network, Inc.
- Gottlob, Alecia – Cook Inlet Counseling
- Hall, Laura – Anchor of Hope Church
- Hunter, Susan – State of Alaska Labor & Workforce Development Alaska Workforce Investment Board
- Kimberlin, Kathryn – State of Alaska Department of

- Corrections with Medical Social Work
- Kyle, Brandon – The Salvation Army
- Lautaret, Tanya – Kenai Peninsula Office of US Senator Lisa Murkowski
- Lipps, Renee – The LeeShore Center
- Lyon, Kevin – Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
- Marks, Karin – Homer Economic Development Advisory Commission / Board of Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District
- Martin Tichenor, Karen – Kenai Peninsula Homelessness Coalition
- McKinley, Amanda – State of Alaska Public Health
- Mctrusty, Nicole – The LeeShore Center
- Medcoff, Wyatt – Kenai Peninsula Borough
- Meyer, Greg – Kenai Peninsula Food Bank
- Micciche, Peter – Kenai Peninsula Borough Mayor
- Murray, Lilly – Kenai Peninsula Food Bank
- Navarre, Tim – Kenai Peninsula Foundation and Kenai Peninsula Homelessness Coalition
- Norris, Natalie – Red Eye Rides
- Parker, Lisa – City of Soldotna Vice Mayor
- Parsons, Bradley – Southern Kenai Peninsula Transit Coalition & Peninsula Independent Living Center, Homer
- Patterson-Moe, Angel – Red Eye Rides
- Piersee, Astrea – Kenai Senior Center
- Piltz, Beth – BUMPS, Ninilchik Traditional Council
- Pree, Jon – State of Alaska Department of Corrections, Wildwood Correctional Center
- Rangel, Levi – Red Eye Rides
- Reid, Brian – Alaska Bus Company
- Reinhart, Lisa – Alaska Mobility Coalition
- Rohr, Leslie – Love INC
- Romain, Kathy – City of Kenai / Kenai Senior Center
- Schaefer, Jill – Office of the Governor
- Schultz, Jessica – Central Area Rural Transit System, Inc.
- Shaw, Casey – State of Alaska Department of Corrections – Reentry
- Sison, Natasha – Kenai Peninsula College
- Smith, Cheri – The LeeShore Center
- Struffert, Abby, Southcentral Alliance for Family Resilience, 100% Alaska
- Stuart, Jodi – Kenai Adult Probation
- Taylor, Eric – State of Alaska Department of Transportation
- Vines, Leslie – State of Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Alaska Workforce Investment Board
- Wiste, Gina – BUMPS, Ninilchik Traditional Council

# PROGRAM

## 10:00 AM: Welcome Comments

Denali Daniels welcomed participants and invited Kenai Peninsula Borough Mayor Peter Micciche to provide opening comments.



## 10:30 AM: Introductions & Accomplishments

Participants were given instructions to introduce themselves to their tables and choose a scribe/speaker to introduce their table to the room. While the groups were introducing themselves, they also shared accomplishments which were recorded on a flip chart. The following accomplishments were shared by each group:

**Group One:** Dana Cannava, Wyatt Medcoff, Levi Rangel, Natalie Norris, Angel Patterson-Moe, and Tim Navarre.

### Accomplishments

- Kenai Peninsula Borough Working Group
- “We Move People”
- Anchorage – Seward
- 7 days a week 3x a day
- 907-769-1818 RT - \$175
- April 28<sup>th</sup> 2 year anniversary

**Group Two:** Renee Lipps, Abby Struffert, Alecia Gottlob, Julie Bunch, Chiara Ciapponi, and Kathy Romain.

### Accomplishments

- 100% Alaska
- 100% Alaska, Levering Partners
- Strike Consortium
- Collaboration with Community Partners
- New to the community
- 5-day Transportation, Highest level of service in 52 years

### Group Three:

- Beth Piltz, Gina Wiste, Jill Schaefer, Tanya Lautaret, Karen Martin-Tichenor, and Sasha Fallon.

## Accomplishments

- Double ridership in the past year
- Seeking viable grants – 5311 judging (+)
- Bringing awareness to the Pen.
- Awareness, resources needed, sharing info from DC
- Continuing to push awareness + cooperative efforts to meet the Kenai’s transportation needs.
- Purchased transit van with Department of Transportation grant funding 5310
- Launched in-house transportation program

## Group Four:

- Karin Marks, Julie Engebretsen, Tim Dillon, Leslie Rohr, Caitlin Coreson, and Cassidi Cameron.

## Accomplishments

- BUMPS: Homer Communications Facebook Page
- Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District transportation planning EFFORTS – Regional Planning Organization Pilot Program
- Homer Transportation Study
- Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District Survey – Workforce Development Focus
- Central Area Rural Transit System, Inc. Transition
- Kenai Peninsula Borough Safety Action Plan
- Who is in this room! Participation, Engagement, Recognition of transportation as a key complement to social fabric
- GIS Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District – ARC Programs – Mapping Resources

## Group Five:

- Jodi Stuart, Joyanna Geisler, Brad Parsons, Lilly Murray, Greg Meyer, Taylor Cochran, and Jessica Schultz.

## Accomplishments

- Happy to see everyone.
- \$3.5M grant ADA, Hiring Brad! Work with city of homer.
- 30 stakeholder interviews, community needs assessment/needs identified homer/anchor point.
- Brochure for transit, comprehensive map (Bus ride)
- Going out monthly/weekly to meet folks as needed, increase in awareness to communities.
- Getting to know everyone, veterans grant \$75,000.
- Staffing – new drivers, on-time performance

- Going after new \$\$\$

### Group Six:

- Lisa Parker, Kathy Gensel, Natasha Sison, Sheryl Cook, Jon Pree, Lisa Reinhart, and Linnie Einerson.

### Accomplishments

- Key Place for Destination
- City funding coming for Central Area Rural Transit System, Inc.
- Through Hospital connections get local group support to help
- ACC Collaboration
- 100% Alaska (10 Vital things needed)
- 16-24% caseload
- Barriers – Transportation use Central Area Rural Transit System, Inc. Gas Cards ACC - ?'s being asked beyond ride.
- SR 55+ Reentry
- Use Central Area Rural Transit System, Inc. & Cabs & \$\$
- Need Trans – Distance – Challenges
- Various APPTS – Need
- Now Here!
- Transportation needs for clients
- Assist

### Online Group:

- Tyler Carbone, Amanda McKinley, Kevin Lyon, Kathryn Kimberlin, Casey Shaw, Cheri Smith, Samantha Bouasri, Leslie Vines, Astrea Piersee, Sara Bieber, Nicole McTrusty, Brian Reid, Eric Taylor, and Susan Hunter.

### Accomplishments

- Kenai Senior Center is providing transportation to people 60+ and caregivers 9:15 to 3:30PM M-F
- Department of Labor supporting youth with cost of bus passes, gas, etc. for employment and training
- Alaska Bus purchased 3 new 23 passenger buses last week.

### 11:00 AM: Guest Speakers

- Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District (KPEDD) – Cassidi Cameron,
- City of Homer – Julie Engebretsen
- Red Eye Rides – Angel Patterson-Moe and Natalie Norris

- Alaska Cab – Taylor Cochran
- Alaska Bus Company – Brian Reid
- Peninsula Independent Living Center – Joyanna Geister
- Central Area Rural Transit System, Inc. – Jessica Schultz
- Alaska Mobility Coalition – Lisa Reinhart
- 100% Community – Abby Struffert



To watch a recording of these presentations, or to view the slides provided by the presenters, please click [HERE](#).

### 12:00 PM: Lunch & Workshop Questions

During lunch, facilitators shared the following workshop questions for groups:

- What are the gaps for future discussion?
- What Ideas do we have for solutions?
- Next Steps!

The table below represents what was shared. As is often the case in planning discussions, there tends to be a large overlap when discussing gaps and solutions. At the conclusion of the workshop participants were asked to prioritize their top three priorities.

GAPS, SOLUTIONS, & NEXT STEPS
Group One

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Getting info to community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ FB</li> <li>○ Newspaper</li> <li>○ Internet</li> <li>○ Apps</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Bus Stops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Food Bank</li> <li>○ Job services</li> <li>○ Stores</li> <li>○ Love Inc.</li> <li>○ Airport</li> <li>○ Hospital</li> <li>○ Senior Centers</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Park N Ride <b>(1)</b></li> <li>● Something Like “Anchor Rides”</li> <li>● Money <b>(3)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Get all players to the table. <b>(2)</b></li> </ul>
<b>Group Two</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of action <b>(1)</b></li> <li>● Amount of duplication</li> <li>● Location, Location, Location <b>(1)</b></li> <li>● Southern VS Central VS Eastern</li> <li>● DOT Reporting</li> <li>● Low-income VS Disability VS Other funding</li> <li>● Medicaid rules/difficulties in getting \$\$</li> <li>● Drug testing costs/processes.</li> <li>● Training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Coordinator/coordinator for each community <b>(5)</b></li> <li>● Connect key people</li> <li>● Let transit systems do the work</li> <li>● Address Medicaid payment issues</li> <li>● Create smaller groups to focus on unique issues.</li> <li>● Door to Door services replicated. <b>(11)</b></li> <li>● Subsidized transit/improve access to \$\$ <b>(1)</b></li> </ul>
<b>Group Three</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Door to fix routes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Last mile rural transportation to services</li> <li>○ Connecting riders to resource providers</li> <li>○ Reliability for pick up/drop off times <b>(3)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Workforce related</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collaboration partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Compliment services</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Identify \$\$</li> <li>● Continuous Communication</li> <li>● Information sharing</li> <li>● Collaboration</li> </ul>
<b>Group Four</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cost (rider)</li> <li>● Full route coverage <b>(4)</b></li> <li>● Individual needs for individuals</li> <li>● Knowing resources (transportation) to collaborate + Coordinate complete rides.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Finding a coordinator that can sift through the needs. <b>(11)</b></li> <li>● Hubs <b>(1)</b></li> <li>● Dedicated stops/routes</li> <li>● Complete coverage of the main roads/hwy</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Funding (6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Central info system</li> </ul>
<b>Group Five</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Homer to Seward Route</li> <li>● Seward public transportation</li> <li>● Affordable transit for employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Minimum wage (2)</li> <li>○ Teen workers</li> <li>○ Seniors</li> </ul> </li> <li>● School activity busses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ workforce issues</li> </ul> </li> <li>● CDL drivers – workforce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Can't compete wage wise</li> <li>○ What are requirements? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Class B W/passenger endorsement</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collaboration – partnerships (11) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “No Wrong Door”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Group Six</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Affordable transportation – public year round (7)</li> <li>● Centralized access (2)</li> <li>● Coordinator - transportation (5)</li> <li>● Where is Kenaitze?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Is there an agency among us who could act as a clearing house?</li> <li>● Online resources (user-friendly) navigation</li> <li>● App for transportation</li> <li>● Human services strategic plan (3)</li> </ul>

### 1:45 PM: Sticker Activity: Priorities & Next Steps

GAPS, SOLUTIONS AND NEXT STEPS	VOTES
Door to Door services replicated	11
Collaboration – partnerships	11
Finding a coordinator that can sift through the needs	11
Affordable transportation	7
Funding	6
Alaska Cab Dispatch system (centralized)	6
Coordinator - transportation	5
Coordinator/coordinator for each community	5
Full route coverage	4
Money	3
Reliability for pick up/drop off times	3
Pass – Peninsula pass	3
Human services strategic plan	3
Get all players to the table	2
Affordable transit for employment	2
Centralized access	2

Coordination amongst service providers	2
Collaborative Media Campaign	2
Park N Ride	1
Lack of action	1
Location, Location, Location	1
Subsidized transit/improve access to \$\$	1
Utilize resource/organizations for information dissemination	1
Hubs	1

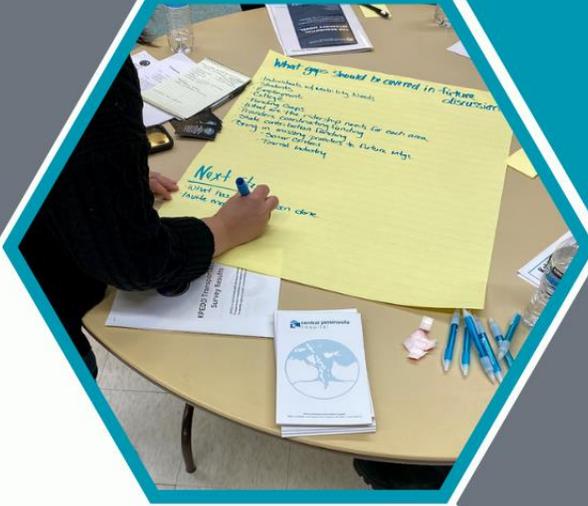
As with the 2023 event, the 2024 voting activity came with a lot of excitement. In conclusion, there were gaps, solutions, and next steps that overlapped. These are color coded above and in summary, include:

1. Door to door services replicated
2. The need for a coordinator
3. Funding

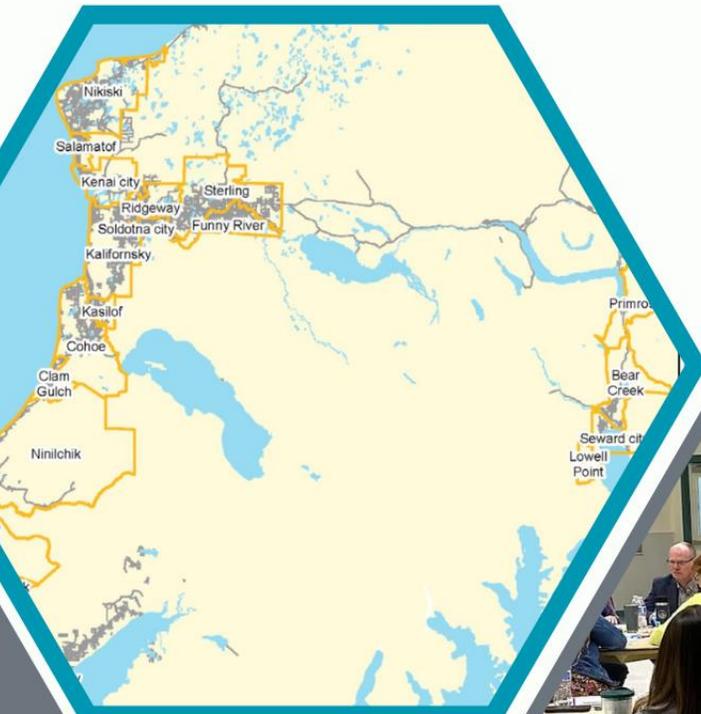
The work during this session recognized that much has been accomplished since 2023, and many of the same priorities continue to be important to key players. There was an interest in scheduling follow up discussions about how to take action on this work in the short term.



Participants were eager to continue the conversation and set intentions to follow up with a transportation planning group that would work toward addressing gaps through identified solutions.



# KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH TRANSPORTATION GAPS AND SOLUTIONS



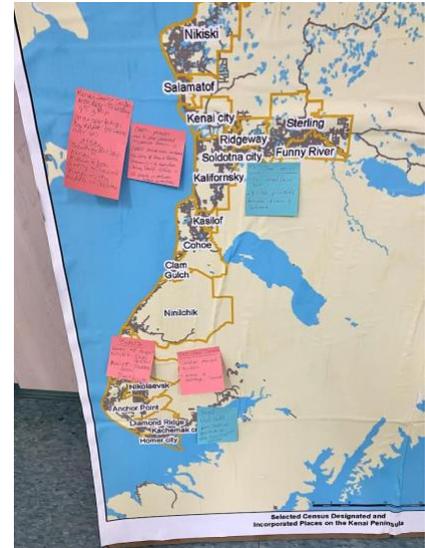
MARCH 23, 2023

Prepared by: Denali Daniels + Associates



## INTRODUCTION

On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, 53 community members came together and discussed transportation gaps and solutions within the area. Those who attended represented transportation service providers, community support organizations, Tribal entities, Borough government officials, and individuals representing themselves. This was a hybrid meeting, with people participating in person and over Zoom. Participants collaborated on information about current status and possible solutions to address the needs of the community regarding transportation. This event was hosted by the Kenai Peninsula Borough, sponsored by the Kenai Peninsula Community Foundation, and Bridges Community Resource Network, facilitated by Denali Daniels + Associates.



## PARTICIPANTS

Many representatives from community organizations and members of the public attended. A list of participants is displayed below.

### Participants (alphabetical):

- Beckmann, Jennifer (Central Area Rural Transit System, Inc. aka CARTS)
- Bell, Brandi (Kenaitze Indian Tribe)
- Best, Melody (KPBSD)
- Bishop, Nancy
- Blakeslee, Rachel (Executive Director - Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area)
- Blatchford, Ashley (The LeeShore Center)
- Board, Riley (KDLL Kenai Public Radio)
- Bunch, Julie (Kenai Public Health Center)
- Cameron, Cassidi (Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District)
- Coleman, Benjamin (R&M Consultants, Inc.)
- Cook, Sheryl (Soldotna Senior Center)
- Cox, Tyson
- Croft, Lisa (Alaska Department of Labor - Homer Job Center)
- Denton, Deb
- Ehret, Megan (Soldotna Senior Center)
- Ferrer, Abby (South Peninsula Behavioral Health)
- Gabriel, Brian (Mayor of Kenai)
- Geisler, Joyanna (ILC)
- Gensel, Kathy (Bridges Community Resource Network, Inc)
- Gottlob, Alecia
- Guttin, Frani
- Habighorst, Krystin
- Hendriks, Chelsea (Kenaitze Indian Tribe)
- Hibbert, Brent (Alaska Cab)
- Holliday, Sarah
- Kebschull, Dani (Access Alaska)
- Knudsen, Jamie (Section of Public Health Nursing - Kenai)
- Lyon, Kevin (KPBSD)
- Madison, Jennifer (Change 4 the Kenai & Kenai Peninsula Reentry Coalition)

- Marks, Karin (Homer Economic Dev. Advisory Comm./Board of KPEDD)
- Martin Tichenor, Karen (Soldotna UMC)
- McKinley, Amanda (Kenai Public Health)
- Meyer, Greg (Kenai Peninsula Food Bank)
- Micciche, Peter (Kenai Peninsula Borough Mayor)
- Moskios, Sierra (REC Room & Kachemak Bay Family Planning Clinic)
- Navarre, Tim (Kenai Peninsula Foundation)
- Netherland, Lucas
- Parsons, Bradley (Southern Kenai Peninsula Transit Coalition & Independent Living Center, Homer)
- Piersee, Astrea (Kenai Senior Center)
- Piltz, Beth (BUMPS)
- Randleas, Jennifer
- Reinhart, Lisa (Alaska Mobility Coalition)
- Reinhart, Patrick (Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education & the Alaska Mobility Coalition)
- Rohr, Leslie (Kenai Peninsula Love INC)
- Romain, Kathy (Kenai Senior Center)
- Schultz, Jessica (Central Area Rural Transit System, Inc.)
- Silk, Tonya (Nikiski Shelter of Hope)
- Smith, Cheri (The LeeShore Center)
- Struffert, Abby (Alaska Breast and Cervical Screening Assistance Program, Southcentral Consulting)
- Stuart, Jodi (CARTS Board President)
- Swazer, Kenneth (Community Outreach Coordinator for Ideal Option, a Kenai MAT clinic)
- Taylor, Eric (Alaska Dept. of Transportation & Public Facilities - Division of Planning & Program Development)
- Williams, Darrel (Ninilchik Village Tribe)
- Wiste, Gina (Ninilchik Village Tribe)



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## PROGRAM

### 10:00 AM: Welcome Comments & Introductions

Denali Daniels welcomed participants, and invited Kenai Peninsula Borough Mayor Peter Micciche to provide opening remarks.

Peter Micciche, Borough Mayor, shared opening comments. Mayor Micciche discussed the challenges community members face that come

from a lack of transportation services. He expressed his support in identifying these obstacles and implementing creative solutions to overcome them.

### **10:30 AM: Transportation Speakers**

There were several speakers from Kenai Peninsula organizations and funding agencies who shared ideas and current operations regarding transportation opportunities. A summary of each speaker's presentation is included below.

- **Cassidi Cameron, Special Projects Manager - KPEDD Transportation Survey**
- Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District (KPEDD) is a private, non-government resource focused on responsible and sustainable economic development for the Kenai Peninsula region. Cassidi shared KPEDD's 5-year strategic plan goals, and within those were specific focus areas of housing, transportation, and childcare. Additionally, Cassidi shared the survey results from 308 respondents. The biggest transportation barriers that were indicated were the price of gas and car insurance, the cost of a vehicle, being without a driver's license, and a medical or physical condition. 29.6% of respondents stated they would use or do currently use public transportation daily, with another 29.6% of respondents indicating they would use transportation weekly.
- **Darrel Williams, Resource and Environment Director - Ninilchik Village Tribe (BUMPS)**
- The Ninilchik Traditional Council operates Basic Unified Multi-Path Service, or BUMPS, which is a fixed-route transportation option from Homer to Kenai that is open to the public and offered three days per week. The cost is \$10.00 per round trip, and \$7.00 per one way trip. BUMPS' goals for transit transportation are increasing access to commerce, increasing access to health care and education, and increasing public safety

by providing an alternative transportation option.

- **Chelsea Hendriks, Tribal Programs Director & Brandi Bell, Elders and Transportation Manager, Kenaitze Indian Tribe**
- The Kenaitze Indian Tribe is planning to start a fixed route transit system, the Kahtnu Area Transit. Kahtnu is the Dena'ina word for the Kenai River. Kenaitze Indian Tribe has contracted with R&M Consultants to assist with the planning of Kahtnu Area Transit Route. R&M will assist in planning the following areas: developing route schedules, recommending bus stops and locations based on public and stakeholder input, rider fees, identifying transit software for payment, and preparing an expansion plan.
- **Joyanna Geisler, Executive Director - Independent Living Center**
- ILC coordinates and provides services for people and families with disabilities. Back in 1997, Brent and Joyanna started a supportive transportation program using vouchers, which has since been replicated in Homer and Seward. Individuals who are eligible for services can purchase vouchers for a certain amount of money, depending on the community the cost and limit that the voucher is good for varies. In Seward we contract with two cab companies. This is funded by the Alaska Mental Health Trust and those funds run through the DOT; they are called "purchase of service" dollars. They are part of the community services grant program that comes out every October. Funds are available to nonprofits, Tribes, and public transit. For many years, ILC has been the only entity that has applied for these grants - It is a lengthy and onerous application process. For the current year, FY23, the central peninsula was granted \$90K, Seward was granted \$25K, and Homer was granted \$60K. The funding has a match requirement of 20% match, which can be acquired from the purchase-for-service dollars. The program cost is significantly

more than the grants. Riders July through February: Central Peninsula had 194 registered, Homer had 150, and Seward had 76 people. 5183 one-way rides for the Central Peninsula, Homer had 3212, and Seward had 3050 rides. It's not the answer for everyone, it works well for the folks that need it. The four cab companies we contract with are community minded. People can go anywhere they want to go - medical or otherwise. Vouchers roll over month to month but expire at the end of the fiscal year. An individual is limited to purchasing 25 vouchers per month, i.e. 12 round trips. It isn't enough but it is a band-aid.

- **Brent Hibbert – Alaska Cab, member of Borough Assembly**

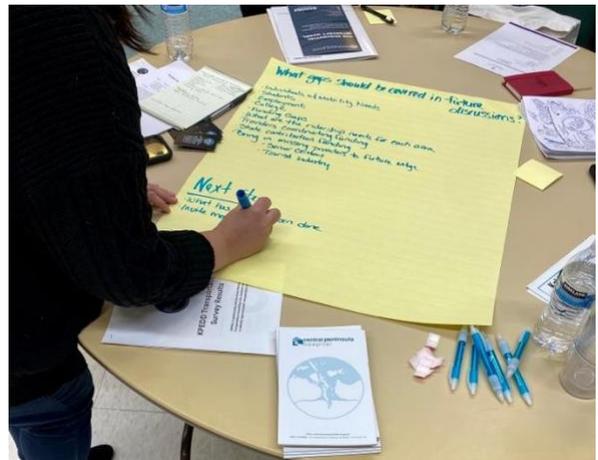
- Generally serve the central peninsula, do get to Seward. Received grant for wheelchair accessible van. We have 26 drivers, 6 dispatchers, 2 office staff. Will drive 200 miles this year, 180 tires, 80 break jobs. Average 400 trips per day, 144,000 per year. Drivers will do 7,300 shifts, use 93,000 gallons of fuel. Of those 400 trips, 100 will be medical, 16 wheelchair accessible. Vehicles don't cover all the need. We have been providing transportation for CARTS since they started in 2000. 40% of our rides are "accounts" including Medicaid/Medicare, vouchers, VA, etc., the rest is cash. We have a computerized, GPS-enabled dispatching software that can dispatch other entities.

- **Kevin Lyon, Director of Planning & Operations – KPBSD**

- District operates two transportation operations, one is home to school and school to home, operated by First Student. We transport approximately 3849 students per day, approximately 3310 miles. Provide transportation from Nikiski to Homer, from Kenai to Sterling, and Moose Pass to Seward. Some of our smaller communities that don't have transportation in, some roads are not conducive to buses. 63 buses doing this, down from 67 routes - slightly longer ride times. We have a fixed amount from the

state of Alaska \$1011 per student who is not enrolled in connections. With rising fuel costs we have needed to supplement from our general fund. On that general fund we also run 45 general education buses and 16 special education buses that go door to door. Also covers students in transition and OCS shuttles

- Our 2nd operation is activity travel - 22 drivers, 5 of whom are part time. Like others, we have had a difficult time staffing. Need folks to pass CDL requirements and routine testing. Employment costs rising with inflation has meant consolidated routes. Longer ride times have more frequent student trouble on the ride



as well as on arrival. These activity travel covers Homer to Fairbanks and everywhere in between. We are the first vehicles on the road other than DOT plowing at 3AM - they know our routes. It would help if they had 50 more plow trucks.

- **Frani Guttin – Southern Kenai Peninsula Transit Coalition**

- The survey was put together by a group of us, the results are awesome to see. There is a lot of talk about the survey because we showcased the survey in a lot of places, like Rotary Health Fair, Anchor Point and Homer Community Resource Connect events. Frani worked with youth at Nine Star, ages 16-24, on education and employment. One of the dilemmas we'd have is, how does

someone work at Land's End at the end of the spit for \$14/hour with a \$15 cab ride there. Talked to Joyanna, who has a lot of history about transportation in the Homer area. Our group formed and determined that we needed more people and needed to hear from the whole borough - hence the survey. Focused on the southern Kenai Peninsula. BUMPS is a huge asset for us down here, though it is limited to 3 days per week, and only 9AM-3PM, so not a full shift. 479 jobs were left open in Homer last summer. People are out of work for lack of transportation - but this is for everyone. People who are elderly, disabled, have a DUI, a seizure disorder, etc.

- Our coalition is applying for a grant on Friday for up to \$10K from the American Public Transportation Association. With that, we would be able to host a community forum in our local community of Homer. We'll continue surveys, collect 30 informant interviews, and we are hopeful that this continued information gathered will together be a complete statement of need for DOT planning funds.
- **Eric Taylor – State of Alaska, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities**
- Presentation on Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, One Year In Transit. Opportunity for communities to expand their funding base. DOT has partnered with the Alaska Municipal League to connect with various opportunities for federal funding. The Hub can be used to find funding:  
<https://www.transportation.gov/bipartisan->

#### *Current Activities & Routes:*

- CARTS: Provides door to door demand responsive service in CARTS service area including the cities of Kenai & Soldotna, communities of Funny River, Sterling, Kasilof, Nikiski & all points in between. This is 5 days a week and 24 hours a day.

#### [infrastructure-law/key-notices-funding-opportunity](#)

- FTA Apportioned Programs: 5311 Rural formula had a 30% state apportionment increase over FAST, and in FY23 there is \$10.9M available for subrecipient grants. The 5310 Enhanced Mobility formula also had a 30% increase over FAST, and has \$270K available for non-MPO subrecipient grants. The 5339 Bus and Bus facilities formula had an apportionment increase from \$3.5M (FAST) to
- Multimodal statewide long range transportation plan (LRTP) is being finalized. Also looking at regional, area, and corridor plans. Goals of LRTP include: Safety, mobility and access, economic vitality, state of good repair, resiliency, sustainability, strategic partners, stewardship of the transportation system, performance-based management, and transportation innovation.
- Working with regional planning organizations. Primary contact for division of planning and program development is Joselyn Bilon, Kenai Area Planner: 269-0508

#### **12:00 PM: Networking & Map Project**

Participants were shown a map that was broken down by geographic and census area and they were invited to share ideas regarding transportation options. Participants used coral-colored sticky notes for "Current Routes and Activities" and blue-colored sticky notes for "Gaps". Participants wrote down their ideas, then posted the sticky notes along the map. The following responses were given:

- Kenai Senior Center: Monday-Thursday 9:15 AM-3:30 PM, transportation by appointment for seniors over 60. The area for this includes South Miller Loop in Nikiski to Kenai, K-Beach from Cannery to Gaswell, and Kenai to the middle of Soldotna.

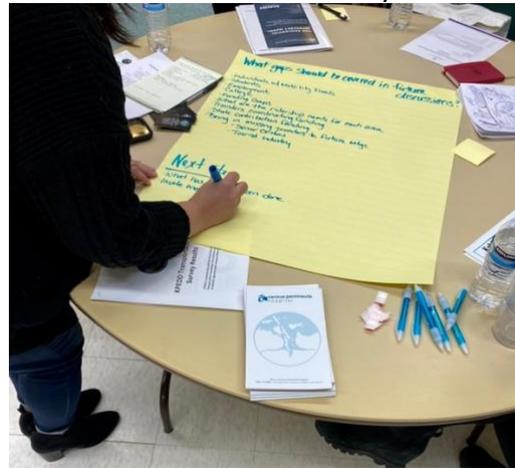
- TNT Taxi Service is a certified Medicaid provider, and offers transportation serving from Homer to Anchorage, and Seward.
- BUMPS transportation serves Homer, Anchor Point, Happy Valley, Ninilchik, Clam Gulch, Kasilof, Soldotna, Kenai, on a direct route.

*Map Gaps & Needs:*

- A fixed route is needed from the Central Peninsula to the East End of Homer.
- TNT Taxi Service shared that they do not have access to a wheelchair van, and that there are limited providers between Homer and Soldotna.
- Can we all use the same bus stops?
- Central Dispatch
- Kenaitze’s transportation program needs a 12-15 passenger van.
- DOT maintenance for roads and sidewalks
- Funny River, Kasilof, and K-Beach are without transportation options.

**12:30PM: TABLE DISCUSSIONS: SOLUTIONS & NEXT STEPS**

One important activity of the day was the discussion that occurred in table groups and Zoom breakout rooms regarding gaps and solutions. Participants were asked to discuss, write down, and share their thoughts in response to the following questions, “What gaps should we cover in future discussions?” and “Next Steps”. Participants had the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas transparently, while collaborating with one another to create authentic and creative solutions for their community.



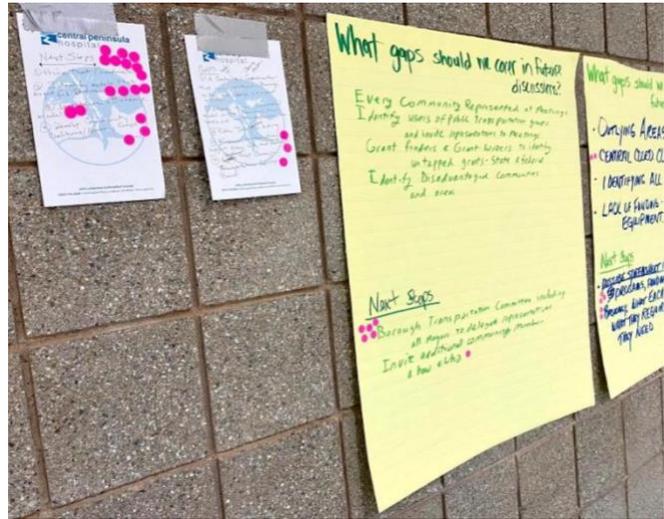
GROUP	GAPS TO COVER	NEXT STEPS
<p><b>Group One</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A centralized coordinator that could coordinate Borough-wide and serve as a grant writer</li> <li>● There is no successful model on the Peninsula that can work and can be duplicated</li> <li>● Public input forum is lacking</li> <li>● Financial contribution/support from the City and Borough</li> <li>● Implement a Borough Transportation Advisory Board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hire that coordinator</li> <li>● Identify models that might fit the Kenai Peninsula</li> <li>● Investigate a brokerage model</li> <li>● Develop community coalitions/advisory groups</li> </ul>

<b>Group Two</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Every community represented at meetings</li> <li>● Identify users of public transportation groups and invite representatives to meetings</li> <li>● Grant finders &amp; grant writers to identify untapped state and federal grants</li> <li>● Identify disadvantaged communities and areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Borough Transportation Committee including all Mayors to delegate representatives</li> <li>● Invite additional community members and identify “how” and “who”</li> </ul>
<b>Group Three</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Outlying areas</li> <li>● Central coordinator clearing house</li> <li>● Identifying all players</li> <li>● Lack of funding</li> <li>● Lack of equipment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Describe spreadsheet idea: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Programs, funding, and restrictions</li> <li>○ What each does, what they require, and what they need</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Group Four</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consolidate agency locations</li> <li>● K-Beach road</li> <li>● Coordinated funding requests</li> <li>● Communication between transportation providers</li> <li>● Bus stops – where and who could provide a “hub”?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Change tax codes</li> <li>● Additional meetings – divide into groups with different perspectives</li> <li>● Central dispatch</li> </ul>
<b>Group Five</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Individuals with mobility needs</li> <li>● Students</li> <li>● Employment</li> <li>● College</li> <li>● Funding gaps</li> <li>● What are the ridership needs for each area?</li> <li>● Providers coordinating funding</li> <li>● State contribution funding</li> <li>● Bring in missing providers to future meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Senior Centers</li> <li>○ Tourist Industry</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What has already been done?</li> <li>● Invite more community members to the discussion</li> <li>● User/Rider involvement</li> <li>● Sales tax?</li> </ul>
<b>Group Six: Online Breakout</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● We see low to mid-level workers unable to afford cab rides to work. It is especially hard to find workers on the Homer Spit.</li> <li>● Seward not mentioned</li> <li>● Teenagers who want to stay in town can’t because there is only their school bus as transportation, leaving after school. Unable to keep jobs or</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I never imagined one thing would cover all needs but interconnected programs</li> <li>● Local transit operators, then connect them with something like BUMPs</li> <li>● tie in more local groups like Talkeetna sunshine transit - Kim Schlosser</li> <li>● Small fuel tax, toll bridge</li> <li>● Alaska bus line or other private entities could ask for a portion of 5311 funding (Formula</li> </ul>

	<p>participate in afterschool activities that increase protective factors - even though they would like to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Homer is treated like the end of the line with no options other than taxi vouchers. Which are important but don't solve</li> <li>● CARTS availability is limited - no same day rides</li> <li>● hitchhiking is a common mode of transportation - people walking on unsafe roads</li> <li>● not very many applicants for the Human Services Grant transportation grant program this last go around. Lost opportunity for projects, especially gap fillers</li> </ul>	<p>Grants for Rural Areas), IF they expanded beyond the summer months to year-round service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Resource regarding braiding funds: <a href="https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2021-04/ccam-federal-fund-braiding-guide-june-2020.pdf">https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2021-04/ccam-federal-fund-braiding-guide-june-2020.pdf</a></li> <li>● a borough based fuel tax, with a percentage dedicated to roads and to transit systems</li> <li>● National RTAP has resources for planning: <a href="https://www.nationalrtap.org/">https://www.nationalrtap.org/</a></li> </ul>
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**1:45PM: WRAP UP: VOTING ACTIVITY**

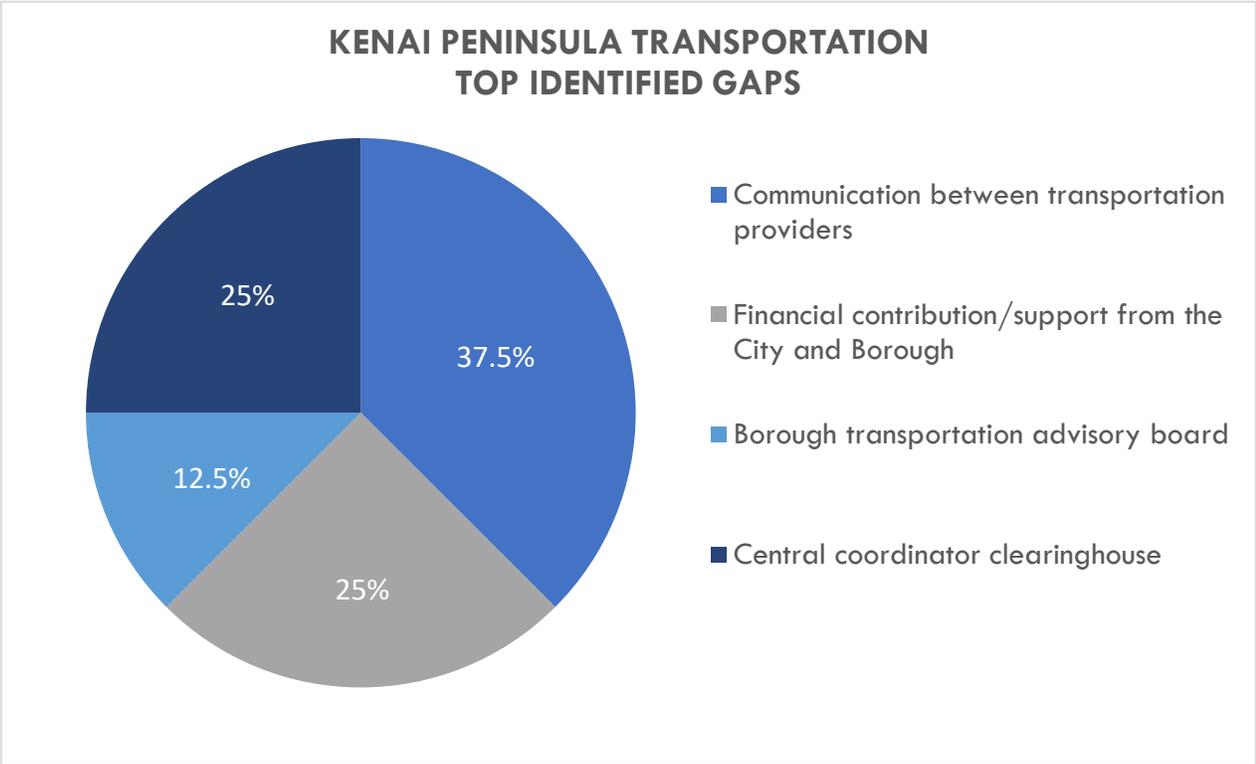
Participants were invited to use sticky dots to place next to their top three ideas they resonated with. Zoom participants were able to vote through the chat. This activity provided a space for people to share what they think is helpful, or common needs they see. This gives us a “pulse” regarding how people are feeling and provides valuable qualitative data to use when moving forward. Based on the amount of sticky dot votes by each idea, the top ideas and themes are displayed below. In total, there were 76 sticky dot votes, including votes from people attending via Zoom.



**VOTE TALLY ON GAPS AND NEXT STEPS:**

<b><i>What gaps should we cover in future discussions?</i></b>
Financial contribution/support from the City and Borough 2
Implement a Borough Transportation Advisory Board 1
Central coordinator clearing house 2
Communication between transportation providers 3
<b><i>Next Steps:</i></b>
Hire that coordinator 8
Identify models that might fit the Kenai Peninsula 4
Investigate a brokerage model 2
Develop community coalitions/advisory groups 3
Borough Transportation Committee including all Mayors to delegate representatives 5
Invite additional community members and identify “how” and “who” 1
Spreadsheet idea: Programs, funding, and restrictions 3
What each does, what they require, and what they need 2
Change tax codes 4
Additional meetings – divide into groups with different perspectives 3
Central dispatch 10
What has already been done? 1
Invite more community members to the discussion 12
User/Rider involvement 5
Sales tax? 5
Identify models that might fit the Kenai Peninsula (3 of 4 who voted noted this)
<b>Zoom additions</b> (did not get voted on in the room):
-Boroughwide transportation committee/planning
-Help find public and private grants, and tax support of community transit
-Document what has been done

The following percentages were calculated based on total number of dots. This is one indicator of what was important in the room and virtually at this discussion.





# Community Transportation Needs Assessment Homer, Alaska and Surrounding Communities

Prepared by: Southern Kenai Peninsula Transit Coalition  
August 2023



## Acknowledgments

The Southern Kenai Peninsula Transit Coalition (SKPTC), Independent Living Center (ILC), and Alaska Mobility Coalition (AMC) thank the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) for their support in making this study possible. SKPTC particularly thanks the community of Homer and surrounding communities for contributing to this Community Transportation Needs Assessment. Numerous area individuals, businesses, and organizations devoted considerable time to this effort.

## **Introduction**

The City of Homer is the largest city on the southern Kenai Peninsula and serves nearby communities as a central hub for goods and services. While within city limits, Homer has a population of about 5,700, an estimated 12,200 individuals reside within a 15-mile radius of downtown Homer. Nearby communities connected by the Sterling Highway and East End Road include Anchor Point, Diamond Ridge, Ninilchik, Happy Valley, Kachemak City, Kachemak Selo, Voznesenka, Razdolna, Nikolaevsk, and Fritz Creek. Homer also provides goods and services to communities across Kachemak Bay, including Halibut Cove, Seldovia, Nanwalek, and Port Graham. Residents access Homer via public ferries and private boats as well. With the arrival of seasonal residents and visitors during the summer tourist season, the community also experiences significant increases in vehicular traffic. Homer is the southernmost community connected to the contiguous Alaska highway system and part of the Alaska Marine Highway (AMH).

Currently, Homer has no year-round, accessible public transit that meets community transportation needs. Homer's lone connection to a year-round public transit system is the Ninilchik-based Basic Unified Multi-Path Service (BUMPS) bus, which serves Homer 3 days per week. The BUMPS bus travels roundtrip connecting Homer to Ninilchik, Soldotna, and Kenai, and communities along the route. The service stops at major retail outlets in each community. BUMPS is operated by the Ninilchik Traditional Council.

## **Project Background**

Area transit advocates have been meeting since September of 2022 with a common goal to mitigate barriers created by limited transportation options for area residents. Their concerns centered on workforce transportation options, individuals experiencing transportation barriers, younger residents gaining access to local programming and job training, and developing strategies for an area transit system. This Community Transportation Needs Assessment is a foundational document to capture community transportation needs and recommend potential future pathways and transit options.

## **Project Team**

The Southern Kenai Peninsula Transit Coalition (SKPTC) grew out of early area-related conversations surrounding the realities of transportation barriers within the community. Often those initial discussions focused on the Kenai Peninsula, while a subset of local advocates remained focused on Homer and its surrounding communities. Our assessment is focused on communities south of Ninilchik, Alaska with a particular focus on the Homer area. Individuals from the Independent Living Center (ILC) and Alaska Mobility Coalition (AMC) were tasked with conducting stakeholder and community outreach to determine community transportation needs and perspectives, with future transit possibilities in mind.

## **Purpose of Report**

We will detail the steps we took to assess needs, summarize key findings, and share lessons learned. The aim is to develop a sustainable, affordable, accessible, environmentally friendly, and inclusive community transit system in the Southern Kenai Peninsula region of Alaska.

## **Methods**

The primary methodology utilized for this project included in-person interviews and written correspondence with 30 significant stakeholders in the region. Common questions for each stakeholder focused on their past and current transportation issues, plans to address emerging concerns, and potential solutions from their perspective. In addition, SKPTC facilitated a community forum to gather additional information regarding transportation needs and potential solutions. We distributed individual surveys to learn more about current transportation choices and potential transit ridership and engaged in ongoing community discussions with public transit in mind.

## **Timeline**

- Late May to Early-June, 2023
  - SKPTC APTA grant subcommittee meetings.
  - Identified Community Stakeholders and defined the Scope of the Project.
  - Representatives include members from ILC, Alaska Mobility Coalition, SKPTC, and the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education.
- Mid-June to Early-August, 2023
  - SKPTC APTA grant researchers began outreach and information gathering with community stakeholders.
  - Listened and surveyed individual patrons of the Homer Food Pantry.
  - Analyzed early information and adjusted.
- Mid-August, 2023
  - Continued outreach and information gathering with stakeholders.
  - Planned for upcoming community forum.
- Drafted initial Needs Assessment.
- Late-August, 2023
  - SKPTC partnered with Homer's "Project Drawdown" for a community transportation needs and solutions event with twenty-five (25) attendees.
  - SKPTC hosted a coalition meeting with long-term Transit Working Group members with seven (7) attendees.
    - Outcomes included reinstating monthly SKPTC meetings and committing to search for transit planning grant opportunities.
  - Completed draft of Needs Assessment.

## **Stakeholder Interviews and Feedback**

SKPTC researchers gathered feedback from 30 community stakeholders during the summer of 2023. Stakeholders were initially contacted by phone, introduced to the project, and offered avenues for participation. Feedback was collected through in-person, phone, or written communication when requested. Common questions for each stakeholder included current transportation issues they experience or observe, plans to address transportation-related issues, and what an effective transportation solution might look like from their perspective.

### *APTA Stakeholder Participant List*

- Homer Public Library
- Homer Food Pantry
- Seldovia Village Tribe
- East End Cottages
- Hospice of Homer
- South Peninsula Behavioral Health Services
- City of Homer Port and Harbor
- Anchor Point Senior Center
- Kachemak Bay Family Planning Clinic's The REC Room
- SMLS Restaurants Inc dba Kenai Peninsula McDonald's
- Save-U-More
- South Peninsula Athletic and Recreational Committee (SPARC)
- Homer Aspen Suites Hotel
- Anchor Point Food Pantry
- City of Homer City Manager
- Homer Flex High School
- Homer Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center
- Kenai Peninsula Housing Initiative
- City of Homer Economic Development Director
- City of Homer Public Works
- City of Homer Planning Commission Member
- Small Business Owner and Economic Development Commission Member
- Land's End Resort
- South Peninsula Hospital
- Land's End Acquisition Corporation
- South Peninsula Hospital Home Health
- Finn's Pizza - Homer Spit Boardwalk
- KOA Campground and former Homer Trolley
- Safeway
- Small Business Owner, LoopERide e-Bikes and Loopy Lupine paper products

## **Outreach and Events**

### *Transportation Issues and Solutions Community Event*

SKPTC, along with local non-profit Project Drawdown, helped host a community gathering focused on community transportation issues and solutions. The event was hosted from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Kachemak Bay Campus on August 23rd. SKPTC member was a featured speaker at the event and presented the current transit-related findings, led a group discussion and Q&A session, and oversaw a break-out group.

25 attendees participated in the event, including representatives from:

- Small Businesses,
- City of Homer Staff: Economic Development, Public Works, Parks & Recreation,
- Project Drawdown Steering Committee Members (local non-profit),
- City Council Member,
- Bicycle Advocates,
- Alaska Commission on Aging,
- The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education,
- Kenai Peninsula School District Staff,
- Local Residents.

### *Homer Food Pantry Listening Session*

The Homer Food Pantry invited SKPTC to join regular programming on August 7th, from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. SKPTC members conducted, listened, and noted informal and individualized conversations with Homer Food Pantry patrons and volunteers. Roughly 20 participants completed a paper survey on their current transportation practices and potential transit usage.

### *Potential User Surveys*

SKPTC collected 37 additional surveys to augment ongoing Peninsula-wide efforts to understand residents' current transportation choices and gauge future interest in transit usage. SKPTC also identified and analyzed area-specific responses from that previous effort. Total surveys specific to the Southern Kenai Peninsula now number 176 responses from the 343 surveys collected across Kenai Peninsula communities.

### *SKPTC Meetings*

Along with grant-related SKPTC subcommittee meetings throughout the summer, SKPTC hosted a general discussion on August 28th and discussed needs assessment findings, a potential Department of Transportation "Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods" grant opportunity, reinstatement of regularly scheduled monthly SKPTC meetings, and next steps for

transit efforts on the southern Kenai Peninsula. Seven attendees participated in the meeting, with representatives from:

- Homer Economic Development Commission
- MAPP (Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships)
- KPEDD (Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District)
- The Governor's Council on Disability and Special Education
- Independent Living Center
- Alaska Mobility Coalition

Regular monthly meetings were set for the last Thursday of each month, at 1pm, at the Kachemak Bay Campus—the next SKPTC meeting will be on September 28th.

#### *Kenai Peninsula Homelessness Coalition: Transportation Committee Meeting*

SKPTC members participated in a Transportation Committee meeting hosted by the Kenai Peninsula Homelessness Coalition on August 22, 2023. Updates included recent Transit-related happenings across the Kenai Peninsula Borough and local updates from various community representatives. The Department of Transportation "Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods" grant opportunity was also discussed, with particular interest in including the Southern Peninsula in the application due September 29, 2023.

Participants included representatives from:

- Kenai Peninsula Homelessness Coalition Board Members
- Kenai Food Bank
- Central Area Rural Transit System (CARTS)
- Seward Community Health Center
- Kenai Senior Center
- Soldotna Independent Living Center
- Alaska Cab
- Nikiski Shelter of Hope

## **Results**

All stakeholders we consulted shared a need for increased transportation options serving the community in some form. However, what that transportation solution might look like and who it best fits was varied. (See Appendix A).

### ***Housing and Transportation***

Stakeholders pointed to a lack of affordable housing contributing to transportation challenges. Multiple stakeholders pointed to Homer's workforce needing to move farther away from town in search of affordable housing, increasing transportation costs and feasibility. Stakeholders also point to the lack of density in the study area as a transportation challenge. Alternative transportation options, such as walking and cycling, are challenging and impossible for some residents when covering the longer distances typical for the community. Of note, only 2 survey respondents of the 176 analyzed indicated that they didn't drive because: "No need, I can access everything I need without a car." Most area residents need a personal vehicle to access goods, services, and employment opportunities.

### ***Young Adults***

Agencies that work with young adults pointed to a lack of transportation options as a community issue affecting youth opportunities and community engagement. Stakeholder comments highlight a lack of after-school transit options as a reason many high school and middle school students miss out on after-school opportunities. Many area youths depend on the school bus to transport them home, which does not allow them any flexibility for additional after-school activities. The lack of transportation options in Homer for youth and young adults is a significant barrier to educational, occupational, and social opportunities.

### ***Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities***

Multiple stakeholders remarked on the need for more transportation options for seniors and individuals with disabilities, stressing the importance a door-to-door transit system would offer to their numerous patrons with mobility concerns. Others noted minimal options for an accessible taxi. Our data shows a significant aging population in Homer. Roughly 33% of survey respondents indicated that they were 60 or older. Similarly, 20% of respondents stated that they were retired or semi-retired. The most recent 2021 U.S. Census data confirms Homer's aging population, with 28.6% of residents 60 years and older. Stakeholders also noted that a lack of reliable transportation options makes getting to appointments difficult and leads to social isolation.

### ***Economic Gap***

Paper survey responses indicate that 15% of area residents do not have access to a car, and 16% do not have a valid driver's license. For those survey respondents who did not drive, cost

was the number one barrier (22), followed by a medical/physical condition (11). Stakeholders also noted the heavy reliance on Taxi services in the community and shared that their cost can be prohibitive, even when subsidized. Multiple stakeholders shared that their organization provides taxi vouchers to assist individuals in getting to their programs and services. The Independent Living Center (ILC) and the Homer Food Pantry also provide vouchers for the community. For fiscal year 2022, the ILC voucher program logged 5,846 passenger trips, with an operating budget of over \$78,000. Likewise, in 2021, the Homer Food Pantry distributed over \$5,000 in free taxi vouchers and over \$30,000 in gas vouchers to area residents. The organization recently suspended its gas voucher program when the costs became prohibitive.

### ***Seasonal Congestion and Parking***

Many stakeholders pointed to seasonal high traffic volumes and roadway congestion as reasons to support a seasonal shuttle connecting the Homer Spit to Downtown Homer. Parking issues on the Spit were also cited by many stakeholders, pointing to a shuttle system as a potential solution. Many stakeholders also pointed out that the Spit is a place of social and recreational opportunities that are important for many residents who experience transportation challenges.

### **Conclusion: Fixed Route or Demand Response or *Something In-Between***

Before the APTA grant supported community needs study, SKPTC was focused primarily on a fixed transit route system for the southern Kenai Peninsula region. This original vision included three loops with a central hub connecting the three routes.

- In-Town Loop: connects residents from their neighborhoods to central Homer's shopping areas, medical district, social service offices, senior housing, recreation, local schools, and Old Town.
- Community Connector Route: extends from Homer to the west, at least to Anchor Point; east to at least Fritz Creek. Discussion included extending service from Ninilchik to Razdolna.
- Seasonal Service: shuttles connecting Homer's downtown and the Spit.

However, most stakeholders in this study made clear that a fixed route system would not effectively serve the area population most in need of transportation services. Stakeholders highlighted the door-to-door needs of a significant portion of the population, particularly seniors and individuals with disabilities. Stakeholders also highlighted the need for demand response, particularly with winter weather exposure and vulnerable populations in mind. Stakeholders also pointed out that the area's low-density housing has many residents living a considerable distance from significant travel corridors where likely stop locations would be.

Many stakeholders shared that the transportation challenges in Homer and surrounding communities should be addressed with a multi-pronged approach, identifying problems and seeking solutions. Recommendations included:

- Employer-subsidized VanPools from outlying communities to their places of work.
- An early-evening school bus route so area youth can participate in afternoon community programs and services.
- A hybrid bus/Uber model with elements of a fixed route combined with on-demand.
- A subsidized seasonal spit shuttle with a Downtown loop.
- More subsidized Taxi Voucher programs.
- Smaller vehicles operating as an on-demand ride share.

## **Appendix A: Stakeholder Feedback**

Common themes to the feedback we received includes access to services by youth and students, accessibility for seniors, winter and weather, flexibility, door-to-door, on-demand, stopping location issues, geographic, local, and cultural challenges, cost, impact on taxis, parking, housing, shuttle to and from the Homer Spit and community support.

Directly quoted from stakeholder interviews and field notes:

*Medical/Service Provider stakeholders shared:*

- "Patients have difficulty getting to a clinic if they don't have reliable transportation or any transportation."
- "We pay for a taxi if it is the patient's only way to get care."
- "The second issue is our patients who don't own vehicles and need transportation."
- "We work with patients with a variety of mobility needs – some are confined to their homes due to immobility, some don't have Medicaid and can't afford cabs to medical appointments."

*On Area Youth and the Student Population concerns:*

- "Most youth are not able to stay at the program due to having to catch the bus home."
- "If teens and youth and adults could access our services it would increase communal health and wellbeing."
- "Some of our youth participants are limited by the lack of transportation to after school activities."
- "Provide transportation for students who do not make the school bus in the morning or who have to stay in town after school."

*Accessibility and Seniors:*

- "Many residents also have severe mobility issues, so a door-to-door service would be very important."
- "I have seen the need for a bus or ride system for elderly and handicapped, especially for wheelchair service. Most of the time there is not a handicapped cab available."

- "Lack of any organized transportation for seniors needing to get to appointments."
- "Seniors would be able to get out and go places where as before they were reliant on others to bring them."
- "What if our system in Homer started with a design that we base on the everyday needs of seniors, for example, and service their needs as an approach?"
- "Kids and elderly are our most frequent users."

*Winter Weather:*

- "Employees would greatly appreciate this option during winter time especially."
- "60 % of 86 clients struggle with transportation over the year and need increases in the winter."
- "Talk in town is usually about seasonal transit needs; but needs to be discussed for area residents and year round, including winter."

*Flexible, On-Demand Door-to-door Service:*

- "Ideally, a call-to-order vehicle that holds passengers would have a social benefit."
- "There are many mobility-challenged individuals in the community, so accessibility is a must."
- "Since our geographic area is widespread, the taxi service seems to be the best option, as it's not only serving a specific route."
- "It seems to always loop around back to the taxi solution, which has worked well for us over the years."
- "Perhaps a small fleet of manageable smaller buses."
- "A taxi bus system would be best, but I don't think that is feasible."
- "What if the City of Homer owned a fleet of vehicles and ran it like a subsidized City-owned "Uber?" Since we know that demand and response taxis are our most efficient option."
- "Many residents also have severe mobility issues, so a door-to-door service would be very important."

*Stop Locations:*

- "Not sure if Homer and Anchor Point has the population and demand for a regularly scheduled bus service with stops between Anchor Point, Homer and East End Road."
- "Coming from a central point in Anchor Point, for example, still requires people to get to the bus stop."
- "Three routes: In-town loop for local residents including all the major business districts. Periphery route including at least Anchor Point to at least Fritz Creek. Seasonal to the Spit."
- "It would be ideal to have a bus that goes from Fritz Creek to Homer city, stopping as needed along the way."

- "Regarding Anchor Point to Fritz Creek, I would challenge whether people need it or we think they need it."
- "Anchor Point Gas Station, Ninilchik Three Bears, Fritz Creek, McNeil Canyon, Chevron, The gas station on top of Bay Crest, Clam Gulch, AP Post Office, Homer Post Office, Safeway or Library, Hospital, The Top and Bottom of the Spit, Hornady Park, just to name a few!"
- "Ideally, Anchor Point to Fritz Creek. It needs to include Kachemak City. Workforce focused."
- "Being out here on the East End, I see little need for transit. I can see modeling a system after the privately run Trolley being well used."
- "The 'last mile' continues to get longer in all the communities."

*Geographic concerns:*

- "Homer is challenging. It's too spread out and doesn't have the population density to support a traditional transit system."
- "The reality of the challenges here. Geographic reality is really tough."
- "Given the widespread nature of our communities, and that people live in such a wide geographic area with varying degrees of maintained roads, it is a challenge."
- "To imagine what the system would look like to be effective is messy because of challenges like distance and mobility issues, so route needs are all over."
- "The Southern Kenai Peninsula, with considerable distance from house to house, doesn't lend itself to the traditional model."

*Local and Cultural concerns:*

- "My concern is the pushback and challenges to get it in place."
- "Just the overall idea of getting this going is great, but daunting."
- "The variables in our community make the logistics time-consuming and challenging to sustain."
- "Overlapping jurisdictions, Homer's culture, and habits are challenges. If you have snazzy buses, you still have to get people out of their cars."
- "The cultural shift that needs to happen. Getting people to change their set ways."
- "There is a lot working against transit in Homer. Independent Alaskans by nature. Visitors with resources to provide their own transportation. Realities of privately owned drop locations. Post-COVID realities in the change of lifestyles. Lack of local funding and support. Transportation is an emotional and politically charged issue, and that's a challenge in Homer."
- "Homer can be reluctant to change."

*Cost and Affordability:*

- "Most taxi drivers are great with our residents, but the cost is too much for many to afford."

- "Fuel costs are also a barrier. Younger people are disadvantaged and don't have the resources to make living/working in Homer feasible."
- "Cost is a significant issue with hourly wages and housing costs in mind."
- "Not everyone has reliable and safe transportation."
- "Clients have a difficult time making it to the pantry."

*Taxi Services:*

- "We provide taxi vouchers for those in need."
- "We periodically pay for taxi vouchers for clients who need to get to and from their appointments."
- "We provide cab vouchers for students in need."
- "We pay for a taxi if it is the patient's only way to get care."
- "We do have several employees that rely on taxi cabs or walking to get back and forth to work."
- "The only form of public transportation we have right now are the taxi companies and many people do not want/can't afford them."
- "Most [residents] rely on taxis, but cost can be prohibitive even with subsidized vouchers."
- "There is lots of reliance on taxis in Homer."

*Parking:*

- "Every year we are seeing more long term parked vehicles on the Homer Spit which is reducing the availability of short term parking."
- "We have limited parking and often surpass availability."
- "We have limited parking."
- "Parking around Homer during our peak summer season is very challenging and we have very limited options to expand parking options."
- "We joke: "Do not go out to lunch!" or you'll lose your parking space. We have no overflow area."
- "Homer has limited public parking. Almost non-existent. Except for the Spit, which has its own parking issues."
- "Public parking lots need to happen so people can park once and walk."
- "The number one issue is not enough staff and patient parking."

*Spit Shuttle:*

- "We believe that planning for and developing an off Spit park and ride option would be a valuable long term improvement for the City, Borough and State."
- "There's the reality of Spit service needed in Summer."
- "Getting people to and from the Spit and reducing vehicle traffic would benefit those inclined."

- "Homer needs a reliable and affordable mass transit system around town to help keep cars from having to find parking on the Spit."
- "The Spit needs a summer shuttle. HAS to have one."
- "Our community could use seasonal connections between downtown and the Spit."
- "During [summer] months we could use a Transportation System that would bring employees from downtown Homer out to the Homer Spit."

*Housing:*

- "The reality of housing means that many individuals who want to work simply can't get to work. Housing reality is a driver for a lot of transportation needs."
- "Since housing supply is tight in Homer many of our workers have to find places to live in Anchor Point or farther out East End Rd."
- "We have unfilled staff positions directly related to housing issues."
- "The housing issue has exploded in Homer of late. In my 13 years, it has never been anywhere near this bad. The current waitlist for just in Homer is over 40 households for 51 currently occupied units."
- "Housing is a major barrier and potential/current staff are living farther from town."
- "Housing has forced staff to make challenging decisions, including relocating."
- "Housing is a HUGE ISSUE and the labor force needs reliable transportation."
- "Housing shortage is a root cause that transportation can help mitigate."
- "Fifteen people either resigned or didn't take jobs because of housing."
- "Staff are moving farther out from town, so getting to work can be a challenge."
- "Biggest concern is when seeking staff from outside as housing and transportation concerns are a big consideration."

*Positive Reinforcement, 9 stakeholders interviewed said::*

- "Anything would be phenomenal!"
- "Keep at it!"
- "The need for transit is so important."
- "Absolutely 100000000%."
- "Please make this happen, please reach out and thank you."
- "It would be wonderful!"
- "It would help tremendously for our team members that don't have vehicles and our guests that arrive on a motor coach."
- "A mass transit system is the only real viable option to relieve our traffic congestion."
- "Transportation is a very high concern for our Chamber members. So our organization would be very interested in working on solutions to bring more options to Homer."

## **Appendix B: Paper Survey Data Points**

176 total surveys have been submitted from the Southern Kenai Peninsula region, with 343 surveys for the entire Kenai Peninsula.

Specific to the 176 Southern Kenai Peninsula survey findings (communities south of Ninilchik):

- 33% of respondents indicated that they were 60 years or older.
- 20% of respondents indicated that they were retired.
- 13% of respondents indicated that they or a family member use a mobility aid.
- 84% of respondents indicated that they had a valid driver's license.
- 16% of respondents indicated that they do not have a valid driver's license.
- 85% of respondents indicated that they had access to a car.
- 15% of respondents indicated that they do not have access to a car.
- 26% of respondents indicated that they would "never" use public transportation.
- 90% of respondents indicated that they have a cell and/or smartphone
- 91% of respondents indicated that they have access to the internet.

### **Addendum: Rural Alaska-Specific Transit Examples from Southcentral Alaska**

Several communities in southcentral Alaska can serve as models for various transit options, including seasonal shuttles, fixed route systems, microtransit (on-demand rideshare), or a hybrid of the three.

#### ***Model for Homer Spit / Central Business District Shuttle***

- **Glacier Valley Transit: The Girdwood Shuttle**
  - *Seward Highway to Downtown Girdwood and Area Resorts.*
  - Very similar route configuration to Homer's CBD and Spit needs.
  - Out and back service with in-town loop connections (approx 13mi loop)
  - Free Service. Flex Route upon request. Hourly service. Seasonal.
  - <https://glaciervalleytransit.com/route-mapschedule/>

#### ***Model of In-Town / Out-of-Town / Hybrid:***

- **Soaring Eagle Transit:**
  - *Multiple routes, including Copper River Basin and beyond.*
  - Gulkana Village Council operates Soaring Eagle Transit.
  - Delivers a fixed-route, demand response, and call-out service.
  - Daily serves Copper River Basin: Glennallen to Copper Center.
  - 3-days/week service to Anchorage and Valdez (reservation required)
  - <https://gulkanacouncil.org/programs/transit/>

- **Sunshine Transit:**
  - Serves Talkeetna, Trapper Creek, Willow, Wasilla, Caswell, and Houston: "Accessible Transportation for Everyone!"
  - Multiple fixed routes with flex upon advanced request.
  - Free fare, with per-mile fees for Specialized Services.
  - Focal destinations can change by the day of the week.
  - <https://sunshinetransit.org/>
  
- **Valley Transit:**
  - *Mat-Su Valley to Anchorage.*
  - Commuter-focused and accessible; fixed route and demand response
  - Nine zones: Houston, Big Lake, Meadow Lakes, Knik Goose Bay, Fairview, Port MacKenzie, Wasilla, Palmer, and Butte
  - Free Fridays for Seniors and Youth
  - <http://www.valleytransitak.org/>
  
- **CARTS:**
  - *Central Area Rural Transit System*
  - Weekdays, no weekends.
  - Door-to-door service
  - Serves Soldotna, Kenai, Funny River, Kasilof, Nikiski, Sterling
  - Advanced registration and scheduling are required.
  - <https://ridecartsak.org/>
  
- **KATS: Kodiak Area Transit Service:**
  - Fixed and Dial-A-Ride: M-F, 6:30am-6:30pm; Weekends 10am-3pm
  - Work, shopping, medical, education, counseling, and social services.
  - Senior Citizens of Kodiak administers, contracts with First Student, Inc.
  - Advanced registration and scheduling are required.
  - <https://katsbus.org/>
  
- **BUMPS:**
  - "Basic Unified Multi-Path Service."
  - M/W/F with one round trip/day; major retail outlets as stops.
  - Loop from Ninilchik-AP-Homer-AP-Ninilchick-Soldotna-Kenai and return.
  - Operated by the Ninilchik Traditional Council.
  - <https://www.ninilchiktribe-nsn.gov/>
  - Often provides unofficial stops upon rider requests and driver discretion; we noted their requests to stop within Homer as Safeway, Ulmer's, the Medical District, Pioneer Ave (near Salvation Army), Ocean Drive, the Homer Airport, and The Spit.

**THIS DOCUMENT IS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.**

**Independent Living Center**

**265 E Pioneer Ave #201**

**PO Box 2474**

**Homer, AK 99603**

**(907) 235-7911**