



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Alaska Region
Tongass National Forest
Juneau Ranger District

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File Code: 1500

Date: December 30, 2014

Kim Kiefer
Manager
City and Borough of Juneau
155 S. Seward Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Ms. Kiefer:

The Juneau Ranger District is a tourism partner in providing services for cruise ship passengers at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center. In 2014, we hosted over 450,000 passengers from cruise ships who walk trails and enjoy the Visitor Center and viewing wildlife.

Providing for visitor safety and adequate services has become challenging in recent years as congressionally-allocated funding has declined. Fees collected from visitors entering the Center are inadequate to address many of our needs outside of the Visitor Center building. For example, we have inadequate capacity of restrooms and parking spaces, and bus congestion is an issue on many busy days. Employees of the Visitor Center often spend more of their time directing traffic and preventing vehicle/wildlife collisions than interacting with visitors.

Our 1996 master plan addressed the needs of only half the visitors we currently receive. In September 2014 the Forest Service will initiate a facility master plan update with the community using a grant from Federal Highways. Meanwhile, congestion continues to increase as the primary mode of transportation to MGVC is diesel powered buses from 6 transport companies who form long lines while waiting to drop or retrieve passengers. In a phone call received by the MGVC director in April 2014, resident Tom Dawson complained "*what are you going to do this year about the traffic congestion....last year I counted 27 buses lined-up along the Glacier Spur Road?*" This link is to a video showing a typical Monday afternoon at MGVC:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SglQ1t5_H4Y&feature=youtu.be

Parking is also in short supply for 11 additional tour companies and for vehicles from residents and independent travelers who often line the road shoulder. This narrows the useable road surface and promotes hazardous unloading along the crowded transit lanes.

Tour operators have asked the FS for transportation solutions and other facility improvements for several years. Transporters and guides would like to increase the number of clients they bring to MGVC but without solutions to congestion problems the FS has capped growth at levels established in 1996. This has a dampening effect on job opportunities and visitor experiences that is recognized by the FS.



The City of Juneau can help by awarding funding from marine passenger fees toward the hiring of a bus-safety coordinator. Their duties would include the following:

- Trains bus drivers in parking and staging protocols
- Directs bus loading and unloading at the glacier during congested times (about 4 days/week)
- Manages an “information board” to display bus arrival and departure information for visitors (similar to airport operations)
- Communicates with all bus drivers via radio to “call them forward” to the loading area at the appropriate time, therefore limiting the number of coaches on the roadway.
- Seen as “independent”, not favoring any single company, and not employed by the USFS, yet also responsible for communicating with USFS to improve operations

The above solutions were suggested by bus drivers themselves, not by the FS. The concept has been endorsed by Kirby Day under the TBMP practices for bus operations. John Neary, Director of MGVC, has also worked with the major bus companies to configure parking spaces and procedures. Drivers will be trained in the spring and the coordinator will start on May 1.

Budget:

Bus Coordinator Salary at \$18 per hour x 40 hrs/week = \$720/week x 20 weeks = \$14,400

Radio, Uniform, Information Board, Equipment and Supplies = \$ 1,600

Total = \$16,000

This is a temporary solution to a challenge that will be addressed in the new master plan. We are considering, for example, a remote parking lot with a circulating tram to reduce congestion.

Thank you for considering this proposal. I look forward to partnering with the City to provide and enhance high quality visitor services for our cruise passengers.

Sincerely,

/s/ BRAD ORR

BRAD ORR
District Ranger