

To whom it may concern,

Southwest Alaska Pilots Association (SWAPA) is writing to express support during the comment period and for potential changes due to the Essential Air Service (EAS) proposal for Valdez, AK. SWAPA is an association of marine pilots mandated by the State of Alaska to provide efficient and competent pilotage service on the inland and coastal water of and adjacent to the state to assure the protection of shipping, the safety of human life and property, and the protection of the marine environment.

Over the years, SWAPA marine pilots have faced challenges with the reliability and consistency of air service to and from Valdez and this has obviously deteriorated further since the unforeseen and ongoing effects resulting from the COVID pandemic. While we understand the complexities of providing service to remote areas, the unpredictability of flights has often left our pilots with no choice but to rely heavily on driving as a primary means of transportation in order to facilitate the required marine pilotage services to vessels calling in Valdez and Prince William Sound. Driving such long distances, on roads which may be poorly maintained due to environmental conditions inherent in this state, is not only time-consuming but also impact productivity, reliability, and safety.

SWAPA pilots have been commuting to and from Valdez since the early days of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, and we maintain a year-round presence, with a significant increase in pilots during the summer peak season. Given these circumstances, a reliable, consistent, and frequently scheduled air service would be of immense benefit for both our operations and the overall economic health of the region.

We believe that a thorough review of the EAS proposal, with a focus on addressing these long-standing issues, could greatly benefit the community and hope to see change by advocating for a service that meets the needs of the region and ensures that our businesses can operate efficiently and safely.

We would appreciate it if you could consider this perspective as you engage with this process. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Southwest Alaska Pilots Association