

The Community of Unalakleet, Alaska

*City of Unalakleet | Native Village of Unalakleet | Unalakleet Native Corporation
Unalakleet Schools | Bering Strait School District | Unalakleet Valley Electric Cooperative
Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation & Norton Sound Seafood Products
Anikkan Inuit Iluqutaat Sub-Regional Clinic, Norton Sound Health Corporation*

March 4, 2025

U.S. Department of Transportation
EAS & Domestic Analysis Division
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear U.S. Department of Transportation:

We are writing in response to your request for proposals, Order 2025-1-1 issued on January 10, 2025, from air carriers interested in providing Essential Air Service to our community of Unalakleet, Alaska. We thank you for the opportunity to respond to the proposals submitted by Alaska Central Express, Inc. (ACE), Sterling Airways, Inc. (Sterling), and Kenai Aviation Operations, LLC.

On Monday, February 24th, leaders from the community met to discuss these proposals. At this meeting, we had all major stakeholders—the City of Unalakleet (municipality), Native Village of Unalakleet (tribe), Unalakleet Native Corporation (ANCSA village corporation), Bering Strait School District (serving 15 villages including Unalakleet), Unalakleet Valley Electric Cooperative (Unalakleet's electricity provider), Norton Sound Health Corporation (provides health care in the region and operates our subregional clinic), and Norton Sound Economic Development & Norton Sound Seafood Products (Community Development Quota organization and seafood processor in the region). **The unanimous decision is to recommend that the USDOT award Essential Air Service to Sterling Airways. Sterling Airways provided three options and the group supports Option B in their proposal.**

New Pacific Airlines, Inc., d.b.a. Ravn Alaska, has been our sole air service provider to Anchorage since 2017 when Pen Air ceased operations. Ravn Alaska's current prices range from \$450 to \$700 one way, not including baggage fees. This cost is not sustainable, nor affordable for the general population.

Unalakleet is a sub-regional hub, serving the surrounding villages of Stebbins, St. Michael, Shaktoolik, and Koyuk. Historically, the passengers from these villages flew to Anchorage via Unalakleet. Now, because of the high airfare, we have seen an increase in traffic through Nome. A subsidized service would once again make air travel to Anchorage affordable. If approved, the proposed subsidized prices would be about half what we are paying now. The lower cost will allow more people to travel from Unalakleet and the surrounding villages. By selecting Sterling we recognize that the SAAB 2000's combination of power, speed, rate of climb, short runway capability and service ceiling is unmatched by any other turboprop airliner, and we feel this type of plane best suits the needs of our community and region.

The community felt that should the USDOT go with the unsubsidized option of Kenai Aviation, OR the subsidized proposal of ACE, it will have the following adverse effects on our community:

1. Unalakleet will lose its FAA Part 121 service provider, which is not favorable as the Unalakleet market may never get a Part 121 back due to the competitive nature of the airline business.
2. Kenai Aviation proposes a one way ticket to be \$495 and to our best estimate, ACE would charge \$385 one way.
3. The King Air 200 and 1900 will allow only 9 passengers per flight with 1 personal bag up to 50 pounds. Having two bags per person allows for passengers to bring in much needed food items or

other personal belongings.


4. Downsizing the aircraft to only 9 or even 18 passengers per day during peak times of travel is not suitable. Peak Season includes sporting events, conferences, construction and fishing season.
5. Should either of the FAA Part 135 carriers face multiple cancellations in a week due to weather, mechanical or any other reason, they will not have the capacity to make up flights potentially leaving a back-log of passengers.
6. Should either airline have to turn back to Anchorage after a missed approach, the comfort of the larger Saab 2000 is unmatched. It is a faster aircraft with the ability to use a restroom on the three hour flight.
7. The cost of living, which includes travel, affects our quality of life. It makes it difficult to recruit or retain essential workers, such as healthcare workers, teachers and school administration, etc., if they and their families cannot afford to travel in and out of Unalakleet.
8. It is difficult and costly for students attending boarding school and postsecondary institutions to fly to and from Unalakleet at these prices.

We strongly urge USDOT to weigh the community and region's needs in your decision and **select Sterling Airways as the subsidized passenger carrier for Unalakleet and the surrounding villages**. If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact Kelsi Ivanoff, City Administrator at the City of Unalakleet, by e-mail at administrator@unk.gov or by phone at (907) 843-2425. Thank you.

Respectfully,


Christopher Masters Jr (Mar 4, 2025 14:46 AKST)


Chris Masters, Jr., Mayor
City of Unalakleet


Steve Ivanoff (Mar 4, 2025 14:53 AKST)


Steve Ivanoff, President
Unalakleet Native Corporation


Kris Busk (Mar 7, 2025 09:38 AKST)

Kris Busk, Principal
Unalakleet Schools


Anthony P. Haugen, Sr. (Mar 5, 2025 12:36 AKST)


Anthony Haugen, Chairman
Norton Sound Health Corporation


Frank Katchatag (Mar 5, 2025 09:11 AKST)

Frank Katchatag, President
Native Village of Unalakleet


Tammy Dodd

Tammy Dodd, Superintendent
Bering Strait School District


Reese Huhta (Mar 6, 2025 17:32 AKST)

Reese Huhta, General Manager
Unalakleet Valley Electric Cooperative



Janis Ivanoff, President & CEO
Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation
Norton Sound Seafood Products