

Framework for a Sustainable Statewide Backhaul Program

The Framework presented at this meeting is the product of a recent series of efforts by a number of groups, organizations, and communities across the state. Making waste backhaul sustainable in rural Alaska has been a growing concern among communities for many years.

The concept of a more organized, statewide framework for sustainable backhaul took root October 2014. Several groups and meetings were formative at this time. The Fall 2014 Alaska Tribal Conference on Environmental Management precipitated the formation of the Solid Waste Alaska Taskforce (SWAT), whose primary mission is to find a path to sustainable village backhaul. SWAT consists of members from the State Solid Waste Program, RurALCAP, Zender Environmental, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC), and the Kawerak Backhaul Program. At about the same time, Senator Murkowski, via a panel of experts, began to develop a framework for her concept of an "Adopt a Barge" program, whereby the private sector would help to sponsor backhaul.

The SWAT determined that, even separate from the "Adopt a Barge" sponsorship piece, the "Adopt a Barge" logistical groundwork identified how a statewide backhaul program could be efficiently operated. This structure was then presented by SWAT at an October 14, 2015 meeting of community backhaul experts representing each ANCSA region as a potential framework, with the aim of determining its viability as a working model at the regional level. Attendees were positively responsive to the framework and identified their priority concern, the issue of regional differences in training needs. This consideration was then incorporated into a more fleshed out version.

Finally, on January 27-29, 2016 a panel of recyclers, transporters, community backhaul representatives, vetted and approved that framework. They also formulated additional detail as to how its main precepts could work at the local and regional level, while stressing the importance of working on village backhaul development even as the framework is being implemented.

The Framework involves five main precepts that are all designed to make the process of backhaul as efficient as possible to minimize partner time and program cost.

- 1. Logistical Coordination:** A "control tower" approach is needed to coordinate the dynamic transporter schedules with backhaul-ready villages for the most efficient routing, transporter (including plane, barge, truck, rail) and carrier type to haul the wastes to their intended end-vendors. Communicating directly with the tower would be regional coordinators, as well as a statewide coordinator who helps to secure the regional coordinators' needs, fills in for regional coordinators, and facilitates training and resource development. For best logistical efficiency, the control tower likely would be a single entity, just as in a busy airport. With minimized time in port and maximum convenience in route stops, less fuel and personnel time is used and backhaul cost is reduced. Regional and local efforts could still operate without the control tower, but are expected to benefit significantly from its use.
- 2. Village Preparedness:** To receive the discounted rates that are anticipated to accrue from the program, Villages would need to meet a uniform "readiness" checklist that is vetted by transporters and recyclers. Supplies needed for backhaul that the village doesn't possess such as connexes, shrink wrap, totes, etc. are noted and the regional coordinator assists the village in obtaining them. Village preparedness includes community involvement and potentially a small affordable fee once capacity is built.
- 3. Village Coordination:** Regional Coordinators would assist villages in meeting the checklist, in all facets including training, supplies, technical support, and even community involvement, and they, rather than individual villages, would perform the primary coordination with the control tower. A Statewide Coordinator works with the Regional Coordinators, updates resources, seeks funding, and serves as backup to the Regional Coordinators.
- 4. Uniformity:** Uniform training, steps, and forms would be developed. Wastes are packed and signed off by village staff with the vetted training. Uniform standards minimize the liability and regulatory risk that transporters and end-vendors incur from improperly packaged wastes. With less risk, companies are able to offer greater discount and more backhaul opportunities. With greater clarity and accessibility in training, paperwork, and procedures, villages can more easily build a program.
- 5. Partnership Opportunity:** Maximum advantage is taken of "Good will" opportunities with barge and plane services, both scheduled and charter. Partnerships with agencies, contractors, and organizations interfacing with rural village projects, facilities, and services are crucial to getting the wastes out. Again, costs decrease and the burden is shared.

At the Alaska Backhaul Logistics meeting on January 27-29, 2016, communities, transporters, and recommended that the following “take home” messages be considered by agencies in serving as partners in considering community waste backhaul and in working to make the Framework a reality.

- *Backhaul from villages is not a money-making venture and villages should not be burdened with wastes or the expectation that they can make backhaul a financially sustainable program on their own. Disposal of certain wastes in place results in an unacceptable public health risk, as well as a risk to subsistence resources that are the village way of life.*
- *The wastestream created by every project, program, and facility that comes into the village should be considered by agencies and their contractors. Each waste contribution should be acknowledged and an equivalent burden on the villages be lifted.*
- *Backhaul support must be continued in the interim while developing the Statewide Program. Backhaul creates jobs that people can do. These jobs are lifesaving for a number of families in the community.*