

Visitor Industry Summary

Strengths *Internal attributes that contribute to success*

Natural Resources & Environment

- Access to outdoor recreation (trails, parks, fishing)
- Aurora tourism drives winter visitation
- Beautiful landscapes, abundant wildlife
- Chena Hot Springs
- Midnight sun in summer
- Proximity to Denali National Park and the Arctic Circle

Businesses, Organizations, & Government

- Explore Fairbanks
- Thriving mix of local restaurants, breweries

Education & Workforce

- Quality outfitters, guides and hospitality operators

Infrastructure

- On the road and railroad system

Other

- Arts and culture opportunities; Alaska Native culture
- Dog sled racing, including the Yukon Quest

Weaknesses *Internal barriers to success*

Businesses, Organizations, & Government

- Misunderstanding from government and citizens of the purpose and use of the bed tax
- Visible homelessness in downtown Fairbanks, with insufficient services to meet demand

Education & Workforce

- Staffing challenges during pandemic (e.g., lack of J-1 Visa workers); challenges recruiting for seasonal employment

Funding & Markets

- Lack of direct flights to Fairbanks

Infrastructure

- Aging infrastructure: roads and sidewalks in disrepair, limited sidewalk snow removal in winter
- Challenge of getting from Fairbanks to Denali
- Not enough venues for hosting events
- Transportation sector is understaffed
- Winter roadside facilities are limited; winter road closures

Opportunities *External forces that contribute to success*

Businesses, Organizations, & Government

- Increased collaboration between neighboring destinations (Denali Borough, City of Nenana, Tok)

Funding & Markets

- Growing interest in Arctic tourism
- Increase in winter travel
- Increasing year-round tourism

Infrastructure

- Alaska Long Trail
- Expanding rail service to be year-round, and potential connection with Alberta

Threats *External forces that could be barriers to success*

Natural Resources & Environment

- Air quality challenges, especially in winter
- Climate change, including increased wildfire risks
- Light pollution (threat to aurora viewing)

Businesses, Organizations, & Government

- Land use conflicts at recreation and aurora sites

Funding & Markets

- Dependence on cruise lines for many visitors
- COVID-19 and ongoing impacts to health, travel, workers
- Supply chain shortages (e.g., impacts on rental car supply)

Where We Are (2019 as pre-pandemic baseline)	What measurements can we use to track progress? Where do we want to be in 5 years?	2026 Targets
5,991	Jobs – FNSB residents employed in leisure & hospitality <i>10% of total workforce in 2019; this sector saw the greatest losses in 2020</i>	6,290
\$70.5 Million	Visitor Spending – Hotel/motel annual room receipts <i>Increased 8% from 2016 to 2019, then declined 55% between 2019 and 2020</i>	80 Million
\$143 Million	Wages – Annual wages to FNSB residents employed in leisure & hospitality <i>Only 4% of total wages, indicating these jobs pay less than other industries</i>	\$150 Million
596,066	Passengers – Fairbanks International Airport passenger arrivals <i>2020 passenger arrivals were half the 2019 number</i>	625,869
11.7 days (2016)	Trip Length – Average stay for visitors whose Alaska trips include Interior Alaska <i>Visitors to Interior Alaska stay longer than the statewide visitor average of 9.2 days</i>	12.5 days (increase of ~1 day)

Sources: Employment & wages from 2019 Bureau of Economic Analysis; Hotel receipts from FNSB Community Research Quarterly (as reported by Cities of Fairbanks & North Pole, FNSB Financial Services), Passenger data from FNSB Community Research Quarterly; trip length from the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program.



“We are in a good opportunity right now with the independent travelers. We are looking ahead to the increase in cruises, and we are thinking about who we want to be as a destination going forward. Look at what Hawaii is doing.”

“A new convention center could help meet multiple objectives. It could help bring more visitors during shoulder seasons.”

“We need to move away from the concept of a ‘tourism season’ – our visitors are not just tourists, and we want to be a year-round industry, not just seasonal.”



Visitor Industry Objectives – Long term improvements and changes we want to see in five years or more



1. Interior Alaska is striving to be a year-round, world-class, adaptable visitor destination.



2. Fairbanks is a prominent international hub for military, arts, energy, and Arctic-focused conferences.



3. Interior Alaska is recognized and celebrated for its outdoor access and opportunities.

“The Alaska Railroad is involved in a major Seward project...the Seward dock is being rebuilt, which will allow for more passengers. That means more visitors to Fairbanks.”



“The J1 program is critical to tourism because they work many of the seasonal service jobs. During the pandemic, participation in the program dropped, causing businesses to close or limit hours.”

Strategies & Actions – Activities we will implement over the next five years to accomplish goals & targets

1. Coordinated Marketing/Planning – Fund destination marketing and planning efforts. (Objectives 1, 2, 3)

- a. Promote Fairbanks as an in-state destination for Alaskans.
- b. Promote Interior Alaska as a road trip destination for Canadians (currently 10% of visitors), and Lower 48 visitors.
- c. Collaborate with neighboring destinations (Denali Borough, Nenana, Tok) on marketing.
- d. Advocate to the Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA) to conduct the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program (AVSP) annually and better capture winter visitation trends.
- e. Create a local data collection strategy to gain insight about visitor trends.
- f. Conduct visitor capacity planning to determine realistic targets for future visitation based on local resources and to ensure visitors enjoy quality visits without negative impacts to local quality of life or the environment.


2. Top-Ranked Meeting Hub – Develop a world class convention and arts center. (Objective 2)

- a. Construct a convention and arts center. 
- b. Maintain the Carlson Center as a community event space. 

3. International Destination – Promote Interior Alaska as a destination for Arctic and aurora tourism. (Objectives 1, 2)

- a. Create a collective marketing strategy for aurora viewing, including international promotion.
- b. Promote summer solstice travel.
- c. Work with neighboring regions to promote Arctic tourism.
- d. Identify long-term placement for Ice Alaska venue.

4. Better Access – Advocate for reliable, regularly scheduled transportation services to and from Fairbanks. (Objectives 1-3)

- a. Increase rail service in winter months.
- b. Support long-term rail connectivity to the Lower 48. 
- c. Expand cooperative marketing programs with airlines to gain access to new visitor markets.
- d. Expand flight options in winter.
- e. Increase transportation options to destinations near Fairbanks (e.g., Denali National Park).

5. Recreation Opportunities – Expand indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities that appeal to residents and visitors alike. *(Objectives 1, 3)*

- a. Complete and implement the FNSB Recreational Trails Plan. 🔧
- b. Support establishment of the Alaska Long Trail. 🔧

See *Recreation and Entertainment* for related actions, including the *Carlson Center, Pioneer Park Master Plan and North Star Athletics Complex*.

6. Quality Infrastructure & Effective Policies – Implement infrastructure and policy recommendations from regional plans that help create livable, vibrant communities and destinations. *(Objectives 1-3)*

- a. Maintain and implement the Chena Riverfront Plan.
- b. Complete and implement the Fairbanks Downtown Plan.

See *Communication, Health Care, and Land Use* for other quality of life related and infrastructure improvements.

Key	★	Priority (TBD)	🔧	Capital Project	📖	Military-related
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Other Relevant Resources

- **Alaska Visitor Statistics Program.** Alaska Travel Industry Association. [View here.](#)
- **Chena Riverfront Plan.** Fairbanks North Star Borough Chena Riverfront Commission. Amended 2016. [View here.](#)
- **Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan.** Fairbanks North Star Borough. Est. completion spring 2022. [View here.](#)
- **Explore Fairbanks 2022 Strategic Marketing Plan.** Explore Fairbanks. 2021. [View here.](#)
- **Feasibility Study & Market Analysis for the Management Options of the Carlson Center.** Fairbanks North Star Borough. 2020. [View here.](#)
- **Fairbanks Downtown Plan.** Fairbanks North Star Borough. Est. completion Fall 2022. [View here.](#)

Visitor Industry

See Appendix A for a list of acronyms.

Strategy #1: Coordinated Marketing/Planning – Fund destination marketing and planning efforts.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
	a. Promote Fairbanks as an in-state destination for Alaskans.	Explore Fairbanks	ATIA	TBD	Varies
	b. Promote Interior Alaska as a road trip destination for Canadians (currently 10% of visitors), and Lower 48 visitors.	Explore Fairbanks	ATIA	TBD	Varies
	c. Collaborate with neighboring destinations (Denali Borough, Nenana, Tok) on marketing.	Explore Fairbanks	Denali Chamber of Commerce, Alaska Public Lands Information Centers, Interior Trails & Parks Foundation, Nenana Native Council North Pole Chamber of Commerce, Tok Chamber of Commerce	Varies	Varies
	d. Advocate to ATIA to conduct the AVSP annually and better capture winter visitation trends.	ATIA	Explore Fairbanks	TBD	Annual
	e. Create a local data collection strategy to gain insight about visitor trends.	Explore Fairbanks		TBD	TBD
	f. Conduct visitor capacity planning to determine realistic targets for future visitation based on local resources and to ensure visitors enjoy quality visits without negative impacts to local quality of life or the environment.	Explore Fairbanks	FNSB	TBD	TBD

Strategy #2: Top-Ranked Meeting Hub – Develop a world class convention and arts center in the FNSB.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
✓	a. Construct a convention and arts center.	Explore Fairbanks	FNSB, Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, Fairbanks Arts Association	TBD	TBD
✓	b. Maintain the Carlson Center as a community event space.	FNSB	Explore Fairbanks, Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce	TBD	Ongoing

Strategy #3: International Destination – Promote Interior Alaska as an international destination for Arctic and aurora tourism.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
	a. Create a collective marketing strategy for aurora viewing, including promotion in international markets.	Explore Fairbanks	ATIA	TBD	Ongoing
	b. Promote summer solstice travel.	Explore Fairbanks	ATIA	TBD	Ongoing
	c. Work with neighboring regions to promote Arctic tourism.	Explore Fairbanks	North Slope Borough, Tundra Tours, Ukpeagvik Iñupiat Corporation, Simon Paneak Memorial Museum, Inuit Circumpolar Council	Varies	Ongoing
	d. Identify long-term placement for Ice Alaska venue.	Ice Alaska	Explore Fairbanks	TBD	TBD

Strategy #4: Better Access – Advocate for reliable, regularly scheduled transportation services to Fairbanks.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
✓	a. Increase rail service in winter months.	Alaska Railroad	Explore Fairbanks	TBD	TBD
	b. Support long-term rail connectivity to the Lower 48. Learn more here .	Alberta Railway Development Corporation	Alaska Railroad	\$17 billion (\$5.5 billion in Alaska)	TBD
	c. Expand cooperative marketing programs with airlines to gain access to new visitor markets.	Explore Fairbanks	Airlines, ATIA	Varies	Ongoing
	d. Expand flight options in winter.	Explore Fairbanks	Airlines, ATIA	Varies	Ongoing
	e. Increase transportation options to destinations near Fairbanks (e.g., Denali National Park).	Explore Fairbanks	Denali Chamber of Commerce, Tok Chamber of Commerce, Alaska Railroad, transportation providers	TBD	Ongoing

Strategy #5: Recreation Opportunities – Expand indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities that appeal to residents and visitors alike.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
✓	a. Complete and implement the FNSB Recreational Trails Plan.	FNSB	Interior Trails & Parks Foundation, Alaska Trails	TBD	Plan to be completed in 2022
✓	b. Support establishment of the Alaska Long Trail. Learn more here .	Alaska Trails, Long Trail Coalition	Interior Trails & Parks Foundation, Explore Fairbanks, state and federal agencies, landowners	\$13.2 million for phase 1	TBD

Strategy #6: Quality Infrastructure & Effective Policies – Implement infrastructure and policy recommendations from regional plans that help create livable, vibrant communities and destinations.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
	a. Maintain and implement the Chena Riverfront Plan.	FNSB	Downtown Association of Fairbanks	TBD	TBD
	b. Complete and implement the Fairbanks Downtown Plan.	FNSB	Downtown Association of Fairbanks	TBD	TBD