

I am Debra Schnabel. I have been a resident of Haines for 62 years and have given my opinion on the Juneau Access project repeatedly at public hearings held by various government agencies and fact-finding committees because no one seems to be able to deal with the politics of the issue. Its an out-of-date project idea that recalls massive government programs that historically follow a period of war. It makes no sense in today's world where economical, efficient, sensible and green technological solutions are employed to solve public infrastructure issues. Let's shift our paradigm.

I challenge the assumption that long-term economic benefit would come from this project except during the construction phase and maintenance jobs related to it. "Jobs" is not an acceptable rationale for this massive undertaking that will undo forever the ability of Alaska to market wilderness scenery to the cruising industry.

There is no better example of a road to nowhere than the proposed road connecting Juneau to nowhere. The argument that a road connecting Interior of Alaska to a point in the middle of the Lynn Canal makes the capital city more accessible to citizens can be made sincerely only by those who have never driven Alaska's highways when they absolutely have to get somewhere. If you can't afford to fly from Barrow, Anchorage or Fairbanks to Juneau, you certainly can't afford to drive there.

I argue that the suppositions and postulations and assumptions upon which this proposal is built are not grounded in any data-based need for a road. This proposed road – the Juneau Access Improvement Project – was borne in the minds of people who do not respect the geography of Southeast Alaska, and people who cannot accept that the capital of Alaska is in the southeast...people who think that a capital city without road access is somehow a lesser capital city than one that had a road to nowhere. Alaska spends millions of dollars advertising its respect for wilderness tourism, and spends millions of dollars to adulterate it by forging a road through it.

I can only conclude, and I do this with respect for your intelligence and your service to this great state: that, in this particular instance, the Juneau Access Road Improvement Project stays alive in the minds of men with a bent toward engineering, who simply want a legacy of having done something that many said couldn't or shouldn't be done. From the perspective of how to spend money wisely on the needs of people living in a challenging environment, with need for immediate infrastructure improvements to existing roads, airports and bridges, with many unique social and educational needs, building a road to nowhere is not advised.

The Socioeconomic Effects Technical Report for this project might as well postulate that kissing a frog will net a prince. I argue that commerce will not improve in Haines or Southeast Alaska by road access from the north, and neither will commerce in interior Alaska, Canada or elsewhere improve by access to Juneau. I question sincerely the projection that 730 vehicles per day will travel the road in the summer. What thought has been given to how Juneau could absorb those 730 vehicles per day or where those vehicles come from? Everyone knows that Juneau gets its life from the south. That will not change.

My opposition to this project is not based on romanticizing rural lifestyles. It is on use of public funds. This project makes no practical, visionary or economic sense.