



May 12, 2017

RE: Arctic Strategic Transportation and Resource (ASTAR) Project

House Finance Committee Members:

For decades NPR-A and ANWR have been political boundaries that have hampered the State of Alaska's ability to develop its resources. Under the previous administration, the Department of the Interior finalized plans in the NPR-A and ANWR which either blocked resource development all together, or limited opportunities so drastically that it is not economically feasible for resource development to occur. In this attempt to limit resource development, previous federal administrations have unintentionally prevented the communities in the region from developing needed infrastructure.

ASTAR will clearly demonstrate that these plans were not developed in the best interest of the State and ignored the needs of current and future local stakeholders, to appease special interest groups in the lower 48. ASTAR will balance the needs of the communities and responsible development, showing that they can co-exist. It is certain that ASTAR will show the short comings of those plans and will provide a new plan that in the best interest of the region, its stakeholders, and the State.

ASTAR is three-year effort to re-write these integrated management plans, which will lay the framework for community connectivity and responsible resource development in the region. This effort must begin as soon as possible, as the window to achieve this goal may close during the 2020 election cycle, 3 years from now.

As background to why this project was not in the original governor's budget, allow me to explain the evolution of this idea. After the election of the new federal administration, our team began a strategy discussion surrounding the opportunities that may have become available to access the resources that have been restricted by the federal government for so long. In January, we initiated discussions with the incoming Secretary of the Interior. Those discussions spurred good conversations about how to analyze, plan, and manage these areas while highlighting the concerns with the federal government's past planning and management methodology.

Knowing that community support would be pivotal to any successful efforts, I also began conversations with community leaders on the North Slope. I was not prepared to request funding from the legislature until I knew those community members that would be most impacted would support this effort. Over the last couple of months DNR has listened to community members voice their concerns and vision for the region while sharing our own. By March, I had received the support of the North Slope Borough Mayor and OMB had identified a source of funds that could be used in this effort. At that time, I began a more aggressive push to seek that funding. Since then, DNR has begun developing partnership plans with the NSB and other entities to assure that there is a shared vision and agreed upon roles and responsibilities. Once the management plans have been re-written, we envision passing the baton to the North Slope

Borough to complete the construction of the infrastructure. This plan has now been identified as a priority need and has strong support from the NSB and other regional entities and residents.

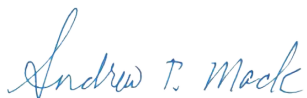
In order to achieve these goals, ASTAR will require the addition of long-term non-perm staff and the hiring of resource specific contractors. Due to the diverse collection of stakeholder and the wide range of opinions regarding community connectivity and resource development, significant interaction with the communities and corporations will be necessary to develop a shared vision for the region. Staff and contractors will need to have continuous face-to-face interaction with the stakeholders to develop this vision. Without consensus from the stakeholder's, implementation of the strategies developed through ASTAR are unlikely to come to fruition.

ASTAR will focus on developing a shared vision to serve as overarching guidance for scope work and a public engagement strategy. As soon as we have funding, we will initiate scoping meetings in communities to understand their needs, opportunities and local issues. We will hire consultants to investigate resources potential, conduct corridor route analysis, identify areas of habitat and cultural concerns, and complete social and economic studies, which will help to develop goals and regional strategies. Ultimately, this will result in a document that provides guidance to the BLM as we assist in re-writing their management plan, will identify projects that benefit communities and foster economic investment in the region, and will start design and preparatory work needed to advance priority projects identified through the analysis.

The current administration is more willing than ever to acknowledge the short comings of the current plans in the NPR-A and ANWR, and show a more balanced approach can be taken. A one year delay will put achieving these milestones at risk as we move a year closer to an election year.

I ask for your support for this project as the House debates SB 23.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew T. Mack". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andrew T. Mack  
Commissioner of Natural Resources