

**Statement
to the State of Alaska Legislature,
Senate Finance Committee
SB 154-the Capital Budget**

by
Rebecca Knight
March 19, 2020

Sent via email to: finance.committee@akleg.gov

Hello Senate Finance Chair(s) and Committee Members,

I attempted to testify before your committee on March 19 from my fishing vessel in Stephens Pass, en route home, following a fishing trip. Unfortunately, my connection dropped twice and you were only able to hear part of my testimony. Thank you for your patience.

Following is my complete testimony:

Good morning Finance Committee Chair(s) and Committee Members,

As a matter of serious fiscal responsibility, I request that you immediately repeal the unexpected balance of the 2012 capital budget appropriation for the Kake-Petersburg road project. It is a colossal and shameful waste of public funds, which could be better spent on far more important and legitimate needs. Throwing \$40 million dollars toward a risky and incomplete venture like this one-lane, nine-mile, gravel road is not fiscally prudent. This translates to construction expenses of \$4.5 million per mile, when nearby and similar US Forest Service roads are constructed at an average of \$250 thousand dollars per mile.

Moreover, it is a misnomer to label it as the “Kake-Petersburg Road” because, as currently planned, it would not connect the two communities and would require many more dollars —perhaps hundreds of millions— to complete.

This project, in one form or another, has been debated, studied, and abandoned numerous times in the last few decades. The latest version of this boondoggle includes no ferry or ferry terminal, (or bridge) to Petersburg, as was included in the 2013 project version and which proved to be far too expensive. It is a “want’ by a very few individuals—especially some in high power—but a not a true “need.” It would serve no commerce if built as planned. Quite simply, it does not pencil out, given the demographics and highly speculative benefits—especially now in a time of austerity for all Alaskans.

Kake and Petersburg are island communities. If constructed, the road would be literally a “road-to-nowhere,” ending at 12-Mile Creek [12 miles from Petersburg] in the wilderness and windswept north shore of Kupreanof Island. It would serve virtually no one. Securing the necessary funding to complete the project is remote at best and for the foreseeable future. This includes construction of the last twelve miles

of the road, and a reasonable means to cross the Wrangell Narrows to Petersburg, in order to simply make the project viable.

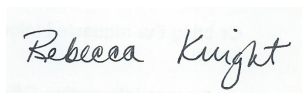
As defined by the Alaska Department of Transportation, the so-called Purpose and Need for the “Kake Access Project” is for subsistence and recreation, which instead, really appears to be a project in desperate need of a justification. With hundreds of miles of logging roads already existing on Kupreanof Island, which cannot be maintained, there is no need for yet more road miles to serve such a clearly, disingenuous rationale for the road. Absent from the DOT project description is any analysis of exactly how this road would benefit subsistence and recreation uses.

In fact, as evidenced by the recent petition, the overwhelming majority of Kake residents do not support the road in large part due to the potential negative impacts to their traditional and customary subsistence uses. The City of Kupreanof is unanimous in their disapproval for the road, and there is strong opposition to it by many Petersburg residents. A \$40 million dollar project should serve more than speculative benefits and be desired by those who are most impacted, which is not the case in this situation.

By some undisclosed stroke of political maneuvering, this latest “Kake Access” project iteration was excluded from any in-depth examination. Moreover, it is the poster-child for project “piece-mealing” and is an irresponsible and underhanded method to get projects underway with no real planning or realistic budgeting.

Alaskans expect that their elected representatives will act in the fiscal interest of their constituents. For this reason and the above rationale, I ask that you please repeal the 2012 line item Capital Budget appropriation for the Kake-Petersburg road project and return it to the General Fund for truly legitimate needs. Ferry service would be a good start.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca Knight". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Rebecca Knight
Petersburg, Alaska