



THE STATE
of ALASKA
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
Ryan Anderson, Commissioner

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February 22, 2022

The Honorable Kelly Merrick
The Honorable Neal Foster
Co-Chairs, House Finance

Deliver via email to House.Finance@akleg.gov

Dear Representatives Merrick and Foster:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide responses back to the committee following the department presentation on the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) and Infrastructure, Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) on February 15 to House Finance.

1. Chair Merrick asked why public involvement sometimes directs a change to a project and other times not? Does Public Comment ever stop a project? Why did the strong public commentary on Chena Hot springs Roundabouts not able to stop that project?

When DOT&PF conducts public involvement, we use it as an opportunity to learn more about the project area and how the facilities are used. Often, we are alerted to things that are important to consider during design or construction and are very valuable. Sometimes we find project elements or alternatives that may not be popular, but we also find there is misinformation contributing to the opposition. We take that as a sign to continue doing more outreach and education to clarify misunderstandings that may exist. In the case of the Chena Hot Springs Roundabouts, we also took the concept to the Local Planning Agency (The Fairbanks North Star Borough) who also concurred with moving forward with the project.

Statewide, we have numerous examples of projects that have stopped or changed direction completely because of public or agency feedback. We have other examples of projects where many concerns and suggestions were heard and addressed in the project design but may have pressed forward with an element of a project that some in the public were opposed to. As a transportation agency, we are sometimes faced with making difficult decisions that are not always popular, especially when there are safety concerns.

2. Rep. LeBon had questions about the Steese/Chena Hot Springs Rd (CHSR) Roundabouts specific. After soliciting input from the public through a series of 3 public meetings and comment periods, we heard several major concerns that we addressed through modification of the project design.

- Residents were concerned with our concentration of funding on the Steese/CHSR intersection when the first several miles of CHSR had greatly deteriorating pavement. In response, we initiated a project to rehabilitate the first 6 miles of CHSR. That segment of road upgrade was completed in 2021 along with the roundabout. This project would not have been completed as quickly as it did without this public input.

"Keep Alaska Moving through service and infrastructure."

- Concerns the predominant intersection movement (northbound Steese to eastbound CHSR) that had a free right via off ramp would now need a roundabout. In response, we added a bypass lane to the roundabout design.
- Concerns for oversize/overweight trucks that had to bypass the Steese bridge over CHSR and that they would not be able to navigate the roundabout. We worked closely with the trucking industry to establish a gate system that would ensure large trucks (operating under permit and traffic control) could traverse the intersection.
- Grading and other terrain concerns with the area were noted and addressed.

There were many written comments favoring the roundabouts, but supporters were not as vocal as those who opposed them. DOT&PF moved forward in this case because it was a critical element to the purpose and need to address safety, and roundabouts have clear data nationally showing they are highly effective at mitigating crashes. This intersection had a higher incidence of crashes than other similar intersections statewide. After analyzing alternatives and taking all public feedback into consideration, ultimately the roundabouts met our objectives to improve safety and operations on our state highways, and the Local Planning Agency – the Fairbanks North Star Borough, concurred with our recommendation.

Additional examples of projects that were cancelled or changed to address public concerns:

- (Fairbanks, AK) Spot Intersection Improvements. Specific countermeasures were removed due to public involvement that includes removing the lighting of the intersection of Goldstream, Sheep Creek and Murphy Dome. The transverse rumbles were installed at that location, but not the lighting.
- (Juneau, AK) Old Dairy Road/Glacier Highway Nugget/Trout Street. Juneau Old Dairy Road Safety Improvements. “Construct a puzzle-piece concrete median to prohibit through movements and left turns out of Old Dairy Road and Trout Street”. There was public opposition, primarily from Breeze-In at public hearings. Shortly thereafter, Al Clough and Kim Keifer came to an agreement that the project would stop.
- (Anchorage, AK) Anchorage Area Safety Improvements. Project cancelled due to public and business concerns for lack of alternative routes in place. Upgrade of streets was desired.

3. Rep. Rasmussen inquired about Anchorage Traffic Studies on Non-State Managed Roads.

The federally-required Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions or AMATS. AMATS is primarily responsible for traffic studies on non-state managed roads. AMATS and DOT&PF work closely together and coordinate, if it is known that traffic studies are needed, in the AMATS boundary and share traffic data. Most of AMATS traffic studies are conducted on an area-wide basis, e.g., Spenard Corridor and Chugach Way studies.

4. Rep. Thompson asked if DOT&PF thinking about or preparing for the Kinross Gold Mine Ore Hauling.

DOT&PF staff have been in communication with Kinross and have requested additional information from Kinross on truck traffic estimates. DOT&PF bridge engineers, Commercial Vehicles Compliance staff, and traffic safety engineers are providing input to Kinross’ questions to ensure they comply with our regulations. There are several projects planned for this corridor found at this link:

- [Tetlin to Fort Knox Corridor, Transportation & Public Facilities \(https://dot.alaska.gov/nreg/tetlintofortknox/\).](https://dot.alaska.gov/nreg/tetlintofortknox/)

We regularly assess the condition of our infrastructure to ensure it supports safety and mobility for all users. DOT&PF also engages with our Freight Advisory Committee, which includes representation from the Alaska Truckers Association and highway safety experts

5. Rep. Johnson asked for details on area planners, specifically those in unorganized areas.

Attached to this letter is a map that outlines the various DOT&PF area-wide planners that work with local entities and individuals on reviewing transportation needs and discussing potential projects.

Should the committee desire any additional follow-up on the above subjects, please direct those requests to DOTPF Legislative Liaison, Andy Mills (andy.mills@alaska.gov), 907-465-3900.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ryan Anderson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ryan Anderson, P.E.
Commissioner Designee

cc: Akis Gialopsos, Deputy Chief of Staff/Legislative Director, Office of the Governor
Andy Mills, Legislative Liaison, DOT&PF