

STATE OF ALASKA
THE LEGISLATURE

1999

Source
CSHCR 5(TRA)

Legislative
Resolve No.
26



Relating to extension of the James Dalton Highway to the Arctic Ocean.

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

WHEREAS there is an immediate need for a public highway from the Yukon River to the Arctic Ocean; and

WHEREAS this highway will provide the first year-round, overland route to the Arctic Ocean and will result in the completion of a public highway from the Pacific Ocean to the Arctic Ocean; and

WHEREAS this highway is named the James Dalton Highway, popularly known as the Dalton Highway; and

WHEREAS the Dalton Highway will provide North America's only highway link to the Arctic Ocean; and

WHEREAS the Dalton Highway is the second northernmost highway in the world; and

WHEREAS the Dalton Highway was opened for unrestricted public access to and including the Deadhorse industrial area in 1994; and

WHEREAS the Federal Highway Administration added the Dalton Highway to the National Highway System in 1995; and

WHEREAS highway traffic to Deadhorse has increased 34 percent since the Dalton Highway was opened to the public; and

WHEREAS the Dalton Highway offers unparalleled scenic beauty and access to the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, the Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge, and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; and

WHEREAS the Dalton Highway was designated a State Scenic Byway in 1998; and

WHEREAS the Dalton Highway is under consideration as an All American Road eligible for additional federal funding; and

WHEREAS the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and other agencies are adding waysides, campgrounds, and other facilities for the increasing number of travelers on the Dalton Highway; and

WHEREAS there is an increasing demand from these travelers for unrestricted private vehicle access to visit the Arctic Ocean; and

WHEREAS the division of tourism's official state map and Alaska's National Highways map both show the Dalton Highway reaching the Arctic Ocean shores; and

WHEREAS it is illogical to block a 500 mile long route just seven miles short of the Arctic Ocean, especially when the infrastructure is in place to accommodate beach access; and

WHEREAS the only public access to the Arctic Ocean is through a \$20 payment to an oil company-sanctioned private tour operator for a guided half hour on the beach; and

WHEREAS a report by the University of Alaska states, "A large number of visitors expressed disappointment in not being allowed ocean access without payment, others with large families could not afford the cost, and others were livid with the restriction"; and

WHEREAS AS 38.05.127(c) states "Nothing in this section affects valid existing rights or limits in any way the constitutional right of the public to use and have free access to the navigable or public waters of the state"; and

WHEREAS an existing seven mile road, designed to state highway secondary standards, leads to East Dock on the shore of the Arctic Ocean; the East Dock, which is mostly vacant, provides a reasonable and suitable site for a visitor wayside; and

WHEREAS in an era of declining oil revenues, Alaska's tourism industry will benefit from travelers' desires for unrestricted access to the Arctic Ocean; and

WHEREAS tourism is now the second largest employer in Alaska; and

WHEREAS state and federal regulatory agencies have offered assistance in working with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, the oil industry, and the North Slope Borough in assuring that the opening of the East Dock Road would be safe for industry, wildlife, and tourists; and

WHEREAS the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and the Department of Natural Resources, by taking the lead in working with industry, regulatory agencies, and the North Slope Borough, can work to resolve concerns that would allow citizens to journey to the Arctic Ocean without charge;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature supports opening the last few miles of the Dalton Highway to provide increased public access to the Arctic Ocean; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests Governor Tony Knowles to direct the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and the Department of Natural Resources to work with North Slope operators, the tourism industry, the North Slope Borough, and the public to resolve issues associated with providing improved and increased public access to the Arctic Ocean and to move expeditiously to provide public access to one of America's most incomparable destinations, the shores of the Arctic Ocean, for the 1999 tourist season.