

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

February 8, 2001
1:35 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator John Cowdery, Chair
Senator Jerry Ward, Vice Chair
Senator Robin Taylor
Senator Gary Wilken
Senator Kim Elton

MEMBERS ABSENT

All Members Present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 44(TRA)

"An Act designating the Joe Redington, Sr., Memorial Trail."

MOVED CSHB 44 (TRA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 3

"An Act making a special appropriation for studies for the northern access into Denali National Park and Preserve; and providing for an effective date."

MOVED CSSB 3 (TRA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action.

WITNESS REGISTER

Mr. Edward Grasser
Staff to Representative Beverly Masek
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182
POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced CSHB 44(TRA)

Senator Gene Therriault
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 3

Ms. Wilda Rodman
Staff to Senator Gene Therriault

Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182
POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on SB 3

Mr. Jim O'Toole
Staff to Senator Frank Murkowski
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
322 Hart Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
POSITION STATEMENT: Supports SB 3

Mr. Thomas B. Brigham, Director
Division of Statewide Planning
Department of Transportation &
Public Facilities
3132 Channel Drive
Juneau, Alaska 99801-7898
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on SB 3

Ms. Susan Schrader
Conservation Advocate
Alaska Conservation Voters
PO Box 22151
Juneau, Alaska 99802
POSITION STATEMENT: Opposed to SB 3

Mayor Johnny Gonzales
Denali Borough
PO Box 480
Healy, Alaska 99743
POSITION STATEMENT: Supports SB 3

Ms. Nancy Bale
Denali Citizens Council
PO Box 78
Denali Park, Alaska 99755
POSITION STATEMENT: Opposed to SB 3

Mr. Troy Nave
National Parks Conservation Association
750 West 2nd, #205
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
POSITION STATEMENT: Opposed to SB 3

Mr. Land Cole
Denali National Park Wilderness Centers, Ltd.
PO Box 67
Denali Park, Alaska 99755
POSITION STATEMENT: Opposed to SB 3

Mr. Don Lowell

PO Box 71047
Fairbanks, Alaska 99707
POSITION STATEMENT: Supports SB 3

Mr. Joseph N. Fields, III
Kantishna Holding, Inc.
PO Box 71047
Fairbanks, Alaska 99707
POSITION STATEMENT: Supports SB 3

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 01-3, SIDE A
Number 001

CHAIRMAN JOHN COWDERY called the Senate Transportation Committee meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. Chairman Cowdery announced the first order of business would be HB 44.

#HB 44

HB 44-JOE REDINGTON SR. MEMORIAL TRAIL

MR. EDDIE GRASSER, staff to Representative Beverly Masek, said that Representative Masek introduced HB 44 to recognize a true Alaskan hero, Joe Redington, Sr. Joe Redington was a legend who played a huge part in starting the Iditarod Sled Dog Race, which brought Alaska worldwide recognition. The Iditarod Sled Dog Race is uniquely Alaskan, and Representative Masek feels that further recognition of Mr. Redington would be appropriate. The designation of the Knik-Goose Bay Road would start in Wasilla and go just past the Redington homestead. The sign would sit where Joe and Vi Redington lived and where the family still lives. HB 44 passed the house unanimously and Representative Masek would appreciate the support of the Senate.

SENATOR WARD moved CSHB 44 (TRA) out of committee with individual recommendations. There being no objection, CSHB 44 (TRA) moved out of committee.

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#SB 3
Number 287

SB 3-APPROP: ENV. ASSESS. NORTHERN DENALI ACCESS

SENATOR GENE THERRIAULT, sponsor of SB 3, said after SB 3 was introduced, it was determined that the first calculation of \$264,000 was incorrect. CSSB 3 has the correct calculation of

\$330,000. Senator Therriault became interested in this issue because his senate district includes the Denali Borough and because of Senator Frank Murkowski's interest in this project. Language has been included in federal legislation authorizing money for a northern access study, money the state has failed to match. The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) has this project on its Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), but due to environmental opposition, the administration has put it out as a possible project for the future - past Governor Knowles' term in office.

SENATOR THERRIAULT said that Senator Murkowski thought the legislature should step forward and make the match so the study can get underway.

SENATOR THERRIAULT said the money is intended to match \$1.32 million allocated as high priority funds in the federal 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). The legislature has previously passed two resolutions. The first was HJR 28 in 1994, which supported increased access near Mt. McKinley through an establishment of a visitor activity area at Kantishna. The second resolution was SJR 25 in 1997, which supported enhancement of visitor access through development of a northern railroad route. Despite those resolutions and the fact that the federal government categorized the project in its high priority funds, STIP does not include matching money until 2002. While recognizing that appropriations are usually considered in the context of a larger spending measure, SB 3 was introduced at the urging of Senator Murkowski to generate discussion and highlight the need for this project.

SENATOR THERRIAULT continued by saying a northern access route would both increase the number of visitors, currently restricted by vehicle capacity limits, and expand the shoulder and winter tourist seasons. The concept of a northern access route has been endorsed by the National Park System Advisory Board in its resolution of 12/14/94, the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, the Anchorage Municipal Assembly, the City of Nenana, the Anchorage Star of the North Chamber of Commerce, the City of Seward, the Alaska Visitor's Association, the Anchorage Convention and Visitor's Bureau, and the Associated General Contractors of Alaska, among others.

SENATOR THERRIAULT addressed concerns brought up by the Alaska Conservation Voters (ACV). The first concern he addressed was the South Denali Development Plan. Currently, there is minimal funding for this project, even though ACV makes it sound like facilities are being developed and are near actual construction. The second

concern is that Taxpayers for Common Sense have said a second access route into Denali is one of the "ten worst road projects in America." SB 3 is an appropriation for a study, and if it is determined that rail access, which Senator Therriault supports, is the best and preferred way of providing access, the road could be developed by the private sector - it would not have to be done with taxpayer money. The third concern addressed is that Denali Park is proposing a closed-door policy toward park users. Senator Therriault said if half of the current visitors went into the park by bus and the other half entered by rail, half as many vehicles would enter. The existing visitor population could be served better and in a more environmentally sensitive manner. Senator Therriault said it would make sense for the state to match the funds so the study can get underway.

Number 685

SENATOR WARD asked if any of the other "9 worst roads in America" were in Alaska.

SENATOR THERRIAULT said a web site for Tax Payers for Commonsense (TPC) might have this information.

CHAIRMAN COWDERY said he would contact them and ask for this information.

Number 727

SENATOR TAYLOR asked if a right-of-way has been designated.

SENATOR THERRIAULT said Wolf Townships is one area that extends into the park but not inside the boundary. This area extends to the west, off the park highway. It is state land that is envisioned to be part of the access route and is not an identified right-of-way. This study will identify right-of-way.

SENATOR TAYLOR said that instead of doing an environmental analysis on an entire watershed it might be preferable to designate what is to be studied. He recommended adding the words "preliminary engineering and other studies" after the words "environmental analysis." This would allow a "P line" through the area. The environmental analysis would speak to the effects on the environment from the centerline of the road.

Number 867

CHAIRMAN COWDERY asked about the proposed changes Senator Taylor suggested.

MR. JIM O'TOOLE, staff to Senator Frank Murkowski, said Senator Taylor's changes were a fine idea. Knowing the routes would add more meaning to the environmental impact statement.

SENATOR TAYLOR said the route should be determined before doing the environmental analysis. Previous bills have included the words "EIS and preliminary engineering." Possibly the words "additional" and "studies" would be an important addition.

Number 960

MS. WILDA RODMAN, staff to Senator Therriault, said a letter was received from the Federal Highway Administration concerning the definition of "construct" in the TEA-21 bill. "In their interpretation, construct is a very broad term and includes studies environmental, all work incidental to construction."

SENATOR TAYLOR said the words "preliminary engineering" would be a tighter definition. He recommended not appropriating the money to DOTPF and asked if there would be a way to divert the appropriation and place it with another authority. Senator Taylor wondered if there was a borough or public entity to which state funding could be conveyed, insuring the funding would be spent.

Number 1058

SENATOR THERRIAULT said the state has to make the match. The Denali Borough would like to receive the money and they have lined up a consultant that would oversee the work. The work would be contracted out.

SENATOR TAYLOR said it still might be necessary to put something in the bill saying the money would go to DOTPF but must be transferred to the borough doing the work.

MS. RODMAN said she had a letter addressed to the commissioner of DOTPF from the Denali Borough asking for a transfer of responsibility agreement, allowing the borough to do the work. She does not know if DOTPF can grant the transfer of responsibility agreement or if the legislature has to appropriate the money first.

SENATOR TAYLOR said that legal services should be consulted to see if SB 3 could be worded in a way that would remove discretion from DOTPF. The intent needs to be clear - money is to flow through DOTPF to the borough.

Number 1069

SENATOR ELTON commented that if this project is on the STIP, DOTPF seems to be biased. He would like to know why it is on the STIP and where it is.

MS. RODMAN said DOTPF has told her that once the money is authorized as high priority funds it is then appropriated in a lump sum. DOTPF doles it out on case-by-case projects. First, to projects that come forward with a local sponsor - in this case a local sponsor had not come forward. Now, the Denali borough has written a letter for the transfer of responsibility agreement and they have passed a resolution. There is also a letter designating Alaska Transportation Consultants as their engineering department.

SENATOR ELTON said this would comport with the relationship he has with DOTPF. He asked about a study the National Park Service did in 1997, which had a conclusion that the northern access route did not fit the management plan for the park.

MS. RODMAN said she had read the study and thinks it is a "difference in opinions."

SENATOR ELTON said it might be helpful if a copy of this study could be part of the committee packet.

MS. RODMAN said the Denali Task Force (DTF) was commissioned to do a study on transportation issues in the park. One of their recommendations was against a north Denali access route. The National Park System Advisory Board looked at this study and then passed an amendment overruling the Denali Task Force saying they did not concur with the DTF decision. Ms. Rodman said she would provide the committee with copies of the resolution.

Number 1335

SENATOR WILKEN commented that 300,000 visitors travel to Denali National Park each year expecting to see Mt. McKinley. Less than a third of these visitors have an opportunity to see the mountain. Alaska promises its visitors a view of the mountain and what they are shown is an "ugly canyon." Senator Wilken said he applauds Senator Therriault for telling Senator Murkowski and the people of Alaska that the legislature is serious about this project. "This is world class, and it's high time that we develop that mountain and develop the view of that mountain in an environmentally friendly way that fulfills the promise we make to our visitors."

Number 1451

SENATOR WARD said he thinks this is a good project and he hopes this same procedure would be considered for a Juneau access road.

SENATOR TAYLOR said he would also like access for the Bradfield road.

SENATOR TAYLOR asked if Loren Croxten chaired the report done by the Denali Task Force. It is Senator Taylor's understanding from Mr. Croxten, that the park service and Governor Knowles' appointees to the board distorted that report so much that that is why the report was overturned.

MS. RODMAN gave the committee copies of the resolution that was passed by the park system advisory board.

Number 1532

MR. TOM BRIGHAM, Planning Director, DOTPF, said the department has no problem with SB 3, on the assumption that the appropriation is in addition to the existing capital budget.

SENATOR WARD asked what would be the best way to ensure the money does not go through DOTPF and goes directly to Mayor Gonzales of the Denali Borough.

MR. BRIGHAM replied he did not know if this could be done legally. DOTPF would have no problem with language in the bill showing clear intent that the funds are to go through DOTPF to the Denali Borough for local match. DOTPF has no interest in "short stopping" this from happening.

Number 1623

SENATOR ELTON asked what would happen to the position on the STIP now that there is local sponsorship.

MR. BRIGHAM said this project is in 2002-2003 in the STIP. It is his assumption it would remain in 2002. There does not seem to be a problem with the Denali Borough initiating this project.

SENATOR ELTON asked if "preliminary engineering" would be one of the necessary studies.

MR. BRIGHAM replied yes. Given a project of this nature, Mr. Brigham estimates that \$1.5 million would not be sufficient to complete the environmental work.

SENATOR ELTON asked if there would be a cost estimate, after the

preliminary studies are done, for putting a road through.

MR. BRIGHAM said he did not know what it would cost. There have been rough estimates done in connection with the railroad proposal but he does not know of one done for a road.

SENATOR ELTON disagreed with Senator Wilken's comment about the route to the mountain being an "ugly canyon."

Number 1763

SENATOR TAYLOR asked if DOTPF has done anything about a right-of-way corridor through the park.

MR. BRIGHAM commented that he is not aware of a right-of-way corridor.

SENATOR TAYLOR asked for a ballpark idea on the quantity of state owned land that would be accessed by this route.

MR. BRIGHAM responded he did not know.

SENATOR ELTON said he thinks the Wolf Townships are all state land and that most of the route will go through the townships.

SENATOR TAYLOR commented that that is 36 square miles of land.

SENATOR WILKEN said if you go from Healy to Kantishna, the Wolf Townships is about half, and it is all state land, the other half of the land is federal.

SENATOR TAYLOR said it must be "townships" because a township by itself is six miles by six miles. This route is 60 miles and if 30 miles of this is state land, it may be a vast amount.

Number 1846

SENATOR THERRIAULT said the Stampede Trail starts at the park's highway, goes through the Wolf Townships, and then to a mine. This was one of the pioneer roads, build in the early 1960's, under the state's pioneer road program. The Wolf Townships cover about one third of what would be the total distance, one third of the property would be on state land.

SENATOR TAYLOR asked if there is a road going through this land now.

SENATOR THERRIAULT said there is an eight-mile stretch of road that

is used for recreational access.

Number 1940

SENATOR TAYLOR asked if there is private land in the Kantishna. Is the mine site private property?

SENATOR THERRIAULT said the mine facilities were destroyed by the park service, and he is not sure if it is still privately owned.

MR. O'TOOLE said the 106th Congress passed a bill giving the University of Alaska a mine outside the park, and Stampede Mine was given back to the park service.

SENATOR TAYLOR said there might be several thousand acres of state land the public could be using for recreational purposes but because there is no access it is unavailable. He asked if the park wants to take this land back.

SENATOR THERRIAULT said the state owns this land. The price put on the acreage is about \$90 million. The sale of this land into park status is something Senator Therriault would oppose. The proposal for swap and sale has been stopped.

SENATOR ELTON said the state did not propose to sell this land; there was a proposal to give the land to the university as a land grant.

SENATOR TAYLOR added that the university proposed to sell the land.

Number 2060

MS. SUSAN SCHRADER, Alaska Conservation Voters, read the following statement:

Alaska Conservation Alliance (ACA) and Alaska Conservation Voters are sister nonprofit organizations dedicated to protecting Alaska's environment through public education and advocacy. Our 44 member organizations and businesses represent over 35,000 registered Alaskan voters. Many of our members each year join with visitors from other states and other countries to enjoy activities within our national parks. We are particularly committed to the conservation of the wilderness resources and values of our park lands.

ACA has several concerns with SB 3. Building a road or railroad that begins only 17 miles north of an existing

road and ends at the same place makes little sense. It is difficult to justify putting \$264,000 towards a study for a speculative and unnecessary project when the same money could be put to use building actual projects. There are many other opportunities to spend money on roads around the state.

The final price tag of \$87 to \$213 million, depending on whether it is a road or railroad will require a substantial match by the state, especially since the National Park Service opposes the project at this time.

There are better opportunities to promote tourism in Denali National Park. The main problem with the northern access is that it has not been demonstrated to have much demand. The park service feels for the next 15 or 20 years their current plan can accommodate increased visitation.

The main reason people come to Denali is to see the mountain, but the second reason is to see wildlife. This particular route does not have good wildlife viewing. There is the risk of increasing visitor expectations and then leaving them unsatisfied because of the wildlife viewing.

Number 2166

CHAIRMAN COWDERY asked what roads would be better for viewing wildlife.

MS. SCHRADER said ACV would be happy to look at any routes the legislature or DOT would propose. ACV would scrutinize the routes and look at their merits and drawbacks.

MS. SCHRADER noted that Denali Park does not have a closed-door policy towards park users. The north and south entrance areas each have a development plan. These plans include a visitor center, interpretative trails, picnic areas, and campground sites that would address visitor needs.

MS. SCHRADER said another issue is where the development is taking place. The south side development seems to be a more reasonable place to focus on development because it is closer to major population areas.

MS. SCHRADER noted that this is a very controversial project, nationally as well as within Alaska. Taxpayer's for Common Sense

list this road as one of the 10 worst road projects in America.

MS. SCHRADER said there are additional concerns about the possible transfer of responsibility to the borough. The borough is local government without any road powers at this point.

MS. SCHRADER said this is an ill-advised project that will have considerable controversy and ACA suggests the committee vote against SB 3.

Number 2250

SENATOR COWDERY asked Ms. Schrader if she had visited this area.

MS. SCHRADER said she had not yet had that opportunity.

SENATOR TAYLOR asked Ms. Schrader about her concerns over the conveyance of money to the Denali Borough because it does not have road powers.

MS. SCHRADER said it is her understanding the Denali Borough is a relatively new borough and not financially well off. The concern is whether or not the borough would be able to properly manage the work needed on construction and long-term maintenance.

SENATOR TAYLOR said no one is contemplating that the borough would be responsible for the maintenance of the road. He said transferring money to a borough without road powers might be a concern.

MS. SCHRADER said she did not have all the details on this specific argument.

SENATOR TAYLOR said a lawsuit could possibly be filed to prevent the expenditure of the funds because a borough does not have road powers. He said this needed to be investigated before passage of SB 3.

SENATOR ELTON said he was also concerned that the lack of road powers would impede local sponsorship.

Number 2349

SENATOR WILKEN asked if ACV would object to a railroad going through the park instead of a road.

MS. SCHRADER said it would depend on the project and how the ownership was structured.

Side B

SENATOR WILKEN asked Ms. Schrader to explain the "closed-door policy" again.

MS. SCHRADER referred to her written statement and said that sometimes the park service comes under criticism for not being as responsive to visitor needs as some people would like.

SENATOR WILKEN said that during the summer the park service closes the gates to the road that leads to the mountain and opens the road again in the fall. The only way to get through is on a bus or with a permit. Senator Wilken said, "To me, that's closed door that they open when they want. There's no question that there's a line at the door to get in. People who go there cannot just go into the park."

SENATOR WILKEN said the viewing opportunities on the north and south side of the mountain are different. The chances on the south side are one in three of seeing the mountain. The chances are two in three on the north. There is a reason for having access to both sides of the mountain. "The mountain and the park are big enough for as many people that can be put in in a friendly manner."

SENATOR WILKEN said this is not a controversial project in his town and there is broad support for this project.

SENATOR WILKEN said he did not mean to infer, in earlier comments, that the canyon getting to the mountain was "ugly." It is the development at the mouth of the park that is ugly. It is ugly because the canyon is interspersed with hotels that are attached to the hills, flags are flying, and trinkets are being sold next to a beautiful river.

Number 2256

SENATOR TAYLOR asked Ms. Schrader to name any road development project that ACV has ever supported.

MS. SCHRADER replied that most members in Anchorage have supported road maintenance on existing urban roads.

SENATOR TAYLOR said he meant new road development.

MS. SCHRADER said she was certain there had been roads in certain urban areas that ACA had not opposed. She does not condone building in areas where there would be significant environmental

impacts that outweigh the benefit of a road.

SENATOR TAYLOR said that she was expressing an opinion without offering the committee actual information that there are significant environmental impacts outweighing the benefit of the road.

MS. SCHRADER said she did not know all the environmental impacts of the road.

SENATOR TAYLOR commented that she also did not know what the economic benefits of the road would be. Senator Taylor said he would like to see this information if she had it.

Number 2154

MS. SCHRADER said her first point was that ACA does not think this is a good use of money. \$264,000 is not an insignificant amount of money. ACV has looked at the maps, and knowing from experience what the area looks like, they are suggesting this money could be put toward other road projects that would have less environmental impact.

SENATOR TAYLOR asked if ACV had done a cost benefit analysis on this road, or are they aware of any cost benefit analyses that have been done.

MS. SCHRADER said the arguments were outlined in her position paper. In the opinion of the organizations that belong to ACV, this is not the appropriate place to put a road at this time and it is not appropriate to spend state money evaluating a road or railroad.

Number 2030

SENATOR ELTON said he suspects that history will show that environmental organization opposition has not stopped the building of roads but that other things have happened to stop the roads. Economic feasibility has probably played a big part in this issue and also in how the legislature and DOTPF have prioritized projects.

Number 1972

MAYOR JOHN GONZALES, Denali Borough, said that the borough would be willing to take the lead. This project would help all the people of Alaska. This is an opportunity to open up the park to the many visitors who come and are not able to see the mountain. All aspects have to be looked at, but he was sure that when a study had

been completed it would show that a road or railway would be feasible and could be done in an environmentally friendly way. Mayor Gonzales said the Denali Borough supported SB 3.

SENATOR TAYLOR asked if Mayor Gonzales knew of a cost benefit study being done on this route.

MAYOR GONZALES said a study had been done by the park service.

MR. O'TOOLE said that Senator Murkowski has been working on this project for about 12 years. One of his objectives was to make the road environmentally sound and alleviate the overcrowded conditions, enhancing the visitor's experience. SB 3 was the first step in ensuring these objectives.

SENATOR TAYLOR said he would like to know the utilization of Denali Park compared to Yellowstone or Glacier National Park.

MR. O'TOOLE said Denali was twice the size of Yellowstone, which has four entrances compared to Denali's one entrance.

SENATOR TAYLOR asked if Senator Murkowski's office had access to studies that show the cost of a railroad or road and what the economic benefit might be and what the environmental detriment might be.

MR. O'TOOLE said as far as he knew there had been no studies conducted.

MS. NANCY BALE, speaking via teleconference for the Denali Citizens Council (DCC), made the following comments:

I am president of the Denali Citizens Council, a local citizens oversight group. Our organization has followed the north access issue for the past ten years. We have a few concerns and questions concerning SB 3.

First, this bill is vague and we request that clarification be provided on the following points.

- How was the figure of \$264,000 determined? Is this the entire sum or is it to be combined with another study? Does it constitute matching funds for Senator Murkowski's north access rider or is it a freestanding, state study?
- Upon what criteria is the expense based? Is this to be a full environmental impact study, a survey, an analysis of costs, what?

- What route is meant? Is it the Stampede Road, a new route, a combination of routes? Is this a route through state land to the eastern boundary of Denali or is it a route through state and federal land, all the way to Wonder Lake?
- What sort of capital project is being referred to in the body of the bill? Is this the road itself, a railroad, a hotel?

Second, is there a demonstrated need for a new study for this access? I have copies of the Denali Access Task Force Report of 1991, the Denali Task Force Report of 1994, and the North Access Feasibility Study of 1997. It is clear to the Denali Citizens Council that this issue has been studied adequately over the years. We urge the committee to reconsider committing state funds to yet another study of this issue.

Third, this appropriation for a north access study would simply be the tip of the iceberg, in terms of potential costs. If a road or railroad were actually to go forward the cost would be staggering, as previous studies have shown. In addition to the estimated costs, \$100,000,000 for 80 miles of road or \$198,000,000 for a railroad, there would be ancillary costs involved for building in an area with multiple jurisdictions. These include but are not limited to:

- Projected maintenance costs, including continued supplies of gravel.
- Costs for bridges over braided streams.
- Wetlands mitigation.
- Wildlife management issues, as the north side of Denali harbors the threatened Toklat wolves and migrating caribou herds.
- Subsistence jurisdictions.
- Litigation costs regarding conflicting claims and rights of way.
- Opposition of NPS to new hotel construction at Wonder Lake, and the lack of carrying capacity at Wonder Lake for new tourist beds.

Fourth, this bill takes the cart before the horse. Presently, the state is undertaking a Parks Highway Corridor Study. This study is now being formulated, but it proposes to cover the entire George Parks Highway Corridor. Nowhere are the problems more obvious than in

the current situation. Before the state undertakes any new, potentially contentious capital transportation project in the Denali area, you need to conduct this corridor study. It will provide all of us an opportunity to sit back and take stock of what has already happened to our major north south transportation corridor and try to fix that before undertaking anything new.

Undertaking a project of this magnitude would require greater opportunities for public input in the selection of alternatives that have heretofore been given. A full EIS is required. There is considerable disapproval in the Denali community as to the desirability of north access into the park. Despite the value of increased tourism for borough coffers, tourism increased beyond a reasonable level will end up costing the borough far more than it provides. Please study the park's highway in a systematic manner and learn of the concerns that exist on the ground, now, before taking on such a questionable project as north access.

The Denali Citizens Council opposes any state appropriation for a north access study or construction.

MR. TROY NAVE, speaking via teleconference for the National Parks Conservation Association, thanked the committee and said that Ms. Bale covered the issues he was concerned with.

MR. LAND COLE testified via teleconference from Anchorage for the Denali National Park Wilderness Centers, Ltd. Due to technical problems, Mr. Cole's testimony was inaudible. Following are highlights from his faxed testimony:

- The existence of an additional transportation corridor would irreparably harm the wilderness character of the park and its wildlife.
- The \$1.5 million dollar appropriation is only a fraction of the actual cost of the planned environmental assessment. This under funding of an environmental assessment begs the question of how this money would be spent since it is not enough to complete the project. The construction, environmental impact studies, and litigation expenses surrounding the total cost of building another road into Denali would be a waste of federal and state transportation funds.
- Use of the current road is only required for less than three

and a half months of the year. Two roads to the same place, with their beginning point only 17 miles apart makes no sense.

The present road has been adequately improved and maintained to serve area businesses as well as over half a million park visitors during the summer season. The current road provides access to the best parts of the park. Extra roads would only serve to diminish the wilderness and the wildlife experience visitors expect and businesses rely on.

- Busses used on the current road are new buses and are not old school buses used prior to 1994. Of the approximately 116 buses going into the park per day only four go as far as Kantishna - there is not much demand for a 10-hour ride.
- The majority of visitors only go the first 15 miles into the park. SB 3 will increase tourism causing a demand for park access closer to Anchorage, not for a longer bus or train ride to and from Kantishna.
- The railroad proposal, which intends to reduce visitor impacts yet increase the number of visitors, ignores the following facts: Year round visitation to Denali is not sufficient to support a railroad financially. The level of development in Kantishna required to support the projected numbers of visitors would be in direct conflict to the National Park Service's management plan.
- The Denali Task Force report, which addressed the feasibility of a variety of development opportunities for Denali, arrived at the conclusion that a north access route should not be part of future development because of the negative impacts it would have on the park. The group suggested that further development should be concentrated on the southern side of the park.

MR. DON LOWELL, testifying via teleconference from Fairbanks, said he was a retired special assistant for DOTPF. Mr. Lowell headed up the study for DOTPF on the northern access route to Denali. The study found both a road and railroad feasible. The average daily road traffic would be 11,000 vehicles a day.

MR. LOWELL said the Denali Borough is now involved with DOTPF in the Nenana Canyon Safety Project. The borough could certainly be involved in the engineering and planning of the new access route. Since his retirement, Mr. Lowell has been involved with a nonprofit transportation-consulting firm. The firm wants to promote and assist rural and urban areas with transportation projects that are

not being pursued by the state. His organization has agreed to assist the Denali Borough in doing the pre-construction environmental impact statement. The borough can do this and they do have the authority to do this.

MR. LOWELL said the existing road is one of the most dangerous roads in the world with steep curves, vertical drop-offs, narrow roads, and no guardrails.

MR. LOWELL commended the senate for recommending SB 3 and he hopes it will approve this project.

SENATOR TAYLOR asked if a feasibility study had been done in the past for this road.

MR. LOWELL said the studies were not feasibility studies. The state was involved in two projects, one in 1961 for building the Pioneer Access Road, the other in 1993 for a road from Healy into McGrath. Governor Knowles canceled the later study. DOTPF provided cost estimates and estimated daily traffic flow to the park service so it could respond to a request from Senator Murkowski.

MR. JOSEPH N. FIELDS, III, testifying via teleconference from Fairbanks for Kantishna Holding, Inc. (KHI), said he had been involved in the northern access process for about a decade. KHI had looked at this issue very carefully and had provided the committee with resolutions from all across the rail belt supporting SB 3. Mr. Fields wanted to emphasize that the park is not at its carrying capacity, the road is. The park is 10,000 square miles, 6.4 million acres. There was a BRW study that said 1,300 administrative vehicles could be taken off park roads and if they were replaced with 1,300 buses, 50,000 more people could enter the park. Mr. Fields said the railroad broadly appeals to the general environmental community.

SENATOR WILKEN asked to move CSSB 3 from committee with individual recommendations.

SENATOR ELTON said he would be more comfortable if the committee held onto the bill until the committee was furnished with the economic analysis and impact studies.

CHAIRMAN COWDERY said SB 3 had been referred to the finance committee, and he wanted to move it out of the transportation committee.

SENATOR ELTON objected to the motion to move CSSB 3 out of committee. A roll call vote was taken. Senator Taylor, Senator

Wilken and Chairman Cowdery voted "yea," and Senator Elton voted "nay." CSSB 3 was moved from committee.

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There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned.