ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE
March 11, 2003
2:13 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Jim Holm, Co-Chair
Representative Beverly Masek, Co-Chair
Representative Cheryll Heinze
Representative Vic Kohring
Representative Mary Kapsner

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Hugh Fate
Representative Albert Kookesh

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 147
"An Act naming the William Ransom Wood Centennial Bridge in Fairbanks."

- MOVED HB 147 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 156
"An Act increasing the motor fuel tax and repealing the special tax rates on blended fuels; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 173
"An Act relating to a fee on studded tires; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 170
"An Act increasing certain motor vehicle registration fees; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS ACTION

BILL: HB 147
SHORT TITLE:WILLIAM RANSOM WOOD CENTENNIAL BRIDGE
SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S)HOLM

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
03/04/03	0377	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/04/03	0377	(H)	TRA
03/11/03		(H)	TRA AT 2:00 PM CAPITOL 17

BILL: HB 156
SHORT TITLE:INCREASE MOTOR FUEL TAX
SPONSOR(S): RLS BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
03/05/03	0424	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/05/03	0424	(H)	TRA, FIN
03/05/03	0424	(H)	FN1: ZERO(DEC)
03/05/03	0424	(H)	FN2: (REV)
03/05/03	0424	(H)	GOVERNOR'S TRANSMITTAL LETTER
03/05/03	0424	(H)	REFERRED TO TRANSPORTATION
03/11/03		(H)	TRA AT 2:00 PM CAPITOL 17

BILL: HB 173
SHORT TITLE:FEE FOR STUDDED TIRES
SPONSOR(S): RLS BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
03/05/03	0447	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/05/03	0447	(H)	TRA, FIN
03/05/03	0448	(H)	FN1: (REV)
03/05/03	0448	(H)	GOVERNOR'S TRANSMITTAL LETTER
03/05/03	0448	(H)	REFERRED TO TRANSPORTATION
03/11/03		(H)	TRA AT 2:00 PM CAPITOL 17

WITNESS REGISTER

GEORGE LEVASSEUR, Maintenance and Operations Manager
Southcentral District
Northern Region
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF)
Valdez, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information pertaining to HB 156; testified in support of HB 173, providing information on studded

tires and their effect on the roadways, and on alternatives to studded tires.

RONALD GEORGE (ph)
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 156, expressing concern regarding the total amount of the proposed tax.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 03-8, SIDE A
Number 0001

CO-CHAIR BEVERLY MASEK called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 2:13 p.m. Representatives Masek, Holm, Kohring, and Heinze were present at the call to order. Representative Kapsner arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 147-WILLIAM RANSOM WOOD CENTENNIAL BRIDGE

CO-CHAIR MASEK announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 147, "An Act naming the William Ransom Wood Centennial Bridge in Fairbanks."

Number 0104

CO-CHAIR HOLM, the sponsor of HB 147, provided the following information:

> House Bill 147 will name the bridge in honor of Dr. William Ransom Wood.
>
> In 1973, Dr. Wood retired as the president of the University of Alaska after 13 years of service. One of two University of Alaska presidents who decided to stay in [the] state, Dr. Wood opened an office in Fairbanks where international, state, local, and academic ideas and plans were given birth and manifested as parks, plazas, hospitals, and industrial and agricultural growth.
>
> It is important to remember that Dr. Wood was not only an educator, but also a poet, a thinker, an advocate for economic development, and an advocate for individual responsibility and self-reliance. He also understood the requisite relationship between

successful, self-reliant individuals and a robust, prosperous community.

Dr. Wood inspired thousands of individuals around the world through his deeds and dedication for this place that we call home. He also leaves a legacy of Alaskans and "Fairbanksans" who consider him a regional and a local hero - this from a man who asked no more from life than to leave his community and the state a little better than he had found it. And at that he succeeded.

Number 0233

As the executive director of Festival Fairbanks, he desired to commemorate the centennial of Fairbanks with a pedestrian bridge crossing the Chena River. By naming that bridge the William Ransom Wood Centennial Bridge, we will hopefully inspire future generations of Alaskans to ponder and aspire to Dr. Wood's simple yet magnificent legacy, to ask nothing more of life than to leave our state, our home, just a little better than we found it.

Number 0263

CO-CHAIR MASEK referred to the committee packet and noted that it included the following: a series of resolutions in support of HB 147, a letter of endorsement from U.S. Senator Ted Stevens, a picture of the proposed bridge, and a map of the bridge's location in Fairbanks.

CO-CHAIR HOLM testified that the bridge is well under construction and is expected to be finished this year. He said the bridge goes from Griffin Park to the Doyon Building, a Native corporation building located at the north end of the park.

REPRESENTATIVE HEINZE asked if there was currently a name for the bridge.

CO-CHAIR MASEK indicated that the bridge was not currently identified by name, but was identified as bridge number 1995.

Number 0401

CO-CHAIR HOLM moved to report HB 147 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying zero fiscal note. There being no objection, HB 147 was reported from the House Transportation Standing Committee.

HB 156-INCREASE MOTOR FUEL TAX

Number 0444

CO-CHAIR MASEK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 156, "An Act increasing the motor fuel tax and repealing the special tax rates on blended fuels; and providing for an effective date."

Number 0554

GEORGE LEVASSEUR, Maintenance and Operations Manager, Southcentral District, Northern Region, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), noted that he was Acting State Maintenance Engineer, and gave an overview of what is encompassed by the highway user fee. He said that increasing the highway user fee from $.08 to $.20 a gallon would take effect July 1, 2003. The increase from $.08 to $.20 will generate $41 million in additional revenue to the State of Alaska. The total, raised from the highway user fee at $.20 per gallon, will be $70 million annually. Each year, the department spends $60 million in highway maintenance and an additional $50 million in federal match for highway construction; this is a total of $110 million per year. Even after the tax rises to $.20 per gallon, 38 states will have a higher fuel tax than Alaska, when taking into account all state taxes on fuel purchases.

Number 0640

MR. LEVASSEUR stated that the national average is $.20 per gallon. The current rate of $.08 was enacted in 1961 when the annual highway maintenance costs were $10 million. If that $.08 was adjusted for inflation, using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the rate would actually be $.48. The department has a large backlog of deferred highway maintenance projects that have not been addressed due to lack of funding. The projects include jobs such as brush cutting, culver replacement, ditching, and replacing signs. Several years of increased maintenance will be needed to complete these deferred maintenance projects. This is a highway user fee for vehicles used on roads and highways. It is not intended to affect fuel used for snowmobiles, all-terrain

vehicles (ATVs), or motorboats. Alaska is no longer required to use oxygenated fuels to meet air quality standards. This bill eliminates the tax benefit that producers and distributors receive on the production and distribution of oxygenated fuels. According to the air quality requirements of EPA, Anchorage and Fairbanks are no longer areas of non-attainment.

Number 0748

CO-CHAIR HOLM noted that there was no mention of JP-8 [jet fuel] and recalled that the tax for JP-8 was about $.035. He asked why the fuel for [Boeing] 747s was not being taxed.

Number 0798

MR. LEVASSEUR responded that landing fees are applied to the large jets that land in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau, and there are fuel flowage fees as well. In rural Alaska, increasing the cost of aviation fuel - which is already extremely high - wouldn't generate a lot of money. Landing fees and fuel flowage fees are already being paid at the large airports. He stated that DOT&PF spends about $18 million per year on airport maintenance.

CO-CHAIR HOLM asked if the cost of airport maintenance versus the landing fees and other fees could be looked into further. He said that with the tremendous amount of money being put into the Anchorage airport, for example, he was interested in finding out more information on the possibility of lessening the impact to the state.

MR. LEVASSEUR said that landing fees were only charged at the international airports. He commented that the Juneau airport is operated by the municipality and the remaining airports do not have landing fees. He said he would provide information on maintenance costs versus the state's collected landing fees and fuel flowage fees to Co-Chair Holm.

CO-CHAIR MASEK asked if the increased motor fuel tax would only be at the pumps where gas is obtained for vehicles, thereby not impacting rural areas such as Anvik where fuel is barged or flown in to the area.

MR. LEVASSEUR said the tax pertains to highways.

Number 0966

REPRESENTATIVE HEINZE asked for further clarification on the types of fuel that would be taxed.

MR. LEVASSEUR confirmed that the tax has nothing to do with aviation fuel and does not apply to off-highway vehicles. The current rate of $.02 per gallon for a construction vehicle, for example, will remain the same.

CO-CHAIR MASEK asked how the tax would apply to purchases of fuel at a gas station for an outboard motor, four-wheeler, ATV, or lawnmower.

MR. LEVASSEUR referred that question to the Department of Revenue.

Number 1030

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER asked, if a person drove a snow machine to the gas pump in Bethel, whether the receipt could be saved for a refund. She also asked how the tax would apply to a road like the Chief Eddy Hoffman Highway, which is only about six miles of road, or some of the other hubs that don't have highways in or out of the community, but yet are referred to as highways.

MR. LEVASSEUR said he would research that question and provide additional information.

Number 1088

RONALD GEORGE (ph), Anchorage, testified that he agreed that additional money was necessary because the highways need a lot of work. He expressed concern about U.S. Representative Don Young's reference to increasing the fuel tax to $.33 per gallon.

MR. LEVASSEUR said that a federal fuel tax already exists. About $.25 per gallon bought at the pump goes into the Federal Highway Trust Fund. The federal government disburses that money to the states on a formula-based means. That money is used to fund DOT&PF's summer construction program. He said the fuel tax would not be $.32 in addition to what is now being paid, but would be a raise of a few cents.

CO-CHAIR HOLM asked if the change from $.08 to $.20 had any bearing on the additional $.25 to $.33 that Representative Don Young was proposing.

MR. LEVASSEUR said the state rate was not tied in any way to the federal rate. He said he was not sure what the federal rate increase was going to be.

CO-CHAIR MASEK indicated that HB 156 would be held over in committee.

HB 173-FEE FOR STUDDED TIRES

CO-CHAIR MASEK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 173, "An Act relating to a fee on studded tires; and providing for an effective date."

Number 1277

GEORGE LEVASSEUR, Maintenance and Operations Manager, Southcentral District, Northern Region, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), provided the following testimony:

> This legislation would impose a $10-per-tire surcharge on all studded tires sold in Alaska beginning on July 1, 2003. Based on projections from the [DOT&PF], the surcharge would raise an estimated $2 million per year. Businesses who sell the tires would be allowed to retain 5 percent of the surcharge, up to $1,000, to cover their expenses. According to the Department of Revenue, the state's cost to administer the program will be about $50,000 per year.
>
> Many drivers use studded tires as an aid to winter driving to improve traction on icy surfaces. An analysis of Alaska winter driving conditions [shows] that primary roads, where traffic volumes are highest, are covered with ice or snow only about 5 percent of the time. During the remaining 95 percent of the "studded tire season," pavements are bare and/or dry.

MR. LEVASSEUR continued:

> Alaskan pavement wear rates an average of .13 inches per million studded-tire passes. This means that for every 250,000 cars with studded tires that travel over a one-mile stretch of road, that will generate one dump truck full of asphalt and aggregate pieces. We spend over $5 million per year repairing the rutted roads in Alaska, and we're behind the curve. Our

studies show that every studded tire that's sold causes about $50 worth of damage.

Studs consist of two main components: we've got a tungsten carbide steel pin that is surrounded by a sleeve, either of steel or of aluminum. Heavy studs had a steel outer shell and a carbide stud; the new ones are aluminum, which do have a little less wear.

Number 1380

MR. LEVASSEUR referred to photographs depicting studded tires' impact on pavement, noting the chips in the asphalt and aggregate. He referred to another photograph of a rutted road in Anchorage that revealed up to two inches of rutted grooves.

CO-CHAIR HOLM asked if the condition of the Juneau-Douglas bridge was the result of a similar condition.

MR. LEVASSEUR replied that he wasn't sure, but said it was probably caused by the same thing if the surface was asphalt over concrete. He said one could tell by the distance of the rut, pointing to photograph which revealed a rut measuring 57 to 60 inches, noting that this was the size of a rut from an intermediate-sized vehicle such as a Subaru, whereas a rut from a large truck would measure 78 to 83 inches in width.

Number 1432

MR. LEVASSEUR told the committee that speed is also a significant factor in pavement wear, as studies have shown that there is 44 percent more wear at 55 mph than at 35 mph.

Number 1465

CO-CHAIR MASEK asked if commercial vehicles, such as double trailers and the semi-trucks, add wear and tear to the highways.

MR. LEVASSEUR replied that deformation occurs during the summer months, especially when it's hot, when heavy trucks are traveling on roads that don't have a heavy asphalt-treated base underlying the pavements. He said there is some deflection and deformation; however, the majority of the wear is caused by studded tires.

Number 1493

MR. LEVASSEUR continued with the following testimony:

> When studded tires were first introduced in the late 1960s, they were undoubtedly an effective winter driving aid. But since then there have been several other innovations that have dramatically increased winter driving safety. Some of these are: the anti-lock braking systems, which are standard on [some] newer vehicles; radial all-season tires; increased availability of all-wheel drive vehicles; increased availability of front-wheel-drive versus rear-wheel-drive vehicles; very aggressive maintenance programs; chemical deicing strategies; more sophisticated plowing-and-scraping maintenance vehicles; a tire design which is called a "sipe," which is a cross cut in the tread of the tire to give better traction on ice; and early warnings by the National Weather Service of approaching storms has really helped as well. New research shows that studs only give about a 5 percent increase in traction over winter siped tires.

Number 1550

CO-CHAIR MASEK inquired as to the cost of "higher technology" tires as compared with "standard tires."

MR. LEVASSEUR suggested that the difference in cost would be about 10 percent. He explained that about five years ago, an aggressive chemical deicing program was begun by the department in Valdez, involving the use of a chemical called magnesium chloride, which is a derivative of seawater. He said the chemical is considered to be a "magic bullet" in the maintenance field and is being used in two different methods: one is to spray the sand as it's leaving the sand-spreader, at about 13 to 15 gallons per cubic yard of sand, with a 30 percent magnesium chloride concentration. When this is sprayed on the sand, it hits the snow pack on the roadway and immediately dilutes and imbeds the sand to keep it from blowing off from traffic. Over time, the magnesium chloride migrates through the snow pack, hits the pavement, and then breaks the bond between the ice and the pavement. With repeated plowing and with traffic over the magnesium chloride, it turns into an "oatmeal-type consistency," and within a short period of time following a storm, the roads are bare again. He said the [deicing program used] on the primary routes for the past four years has worked wonders, and

accidents have been down. The cost is about $1.40 per gallon of magnesium chloride, he said.

MR. LEVASSEUR explained that in drier areas, the roads can be pre-wet with this chemical in order to prevent the ice bonds from forming; this helps in drier storms, although it is not very effective in wet storms.

Number 1637

MR. LEVASSEUR continued his testimony as follows:

> On one side of the equation, the studded tires provide the public with a valued safety measure and increased mobility. On the other hand, the road damage results in ongoing state expense, an increased amount of airborne particles, a decrease of the effective life of our highway traffic markings, and deep pavement ruts. As you notice as you drive around, we are losing our "stripes" at an alarming rate; in areas we sometimes have to stripe three times a season. And it's real dangerous when you have foggy conditions and you can't see the centerline or the fog line. So studs have a real impact on that.
>
> These pavement ruts that you see up here in the pictures result in four major impacts. The first one is when the ruts fill with water, we've got excessive hydroplaning that occurs, especially at high speeds. The tires float on the trapped water, and it reduces the driver's ability to steer and to brake. Second, the ruts cause a channeling of tires, which can cause a driver to lose steering when making lane changes. If you've driven on any of these routes that have these deep-channeled ruts, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Third, the water from the spray and splash, as you're driving through that, reduces visibility and can cause problems for the driver behind you. Fourth, there is an increased cost of vehicle maintenance due to wear on shocks, springs, struts, and needed alignments.

Number 1698

MR. LEVASSEUR continued:

Our department has often been criticized or asked, "Well, what are you doing to try to help minimize stud wear?" Well, we've instituted several projects to try and increase the abrasion resistance of asphalt pavement. I've been involved in several of [these projects] personally. One of the major sources of wear is the lack of hard aggregate in Alaska. Alaska is a new state, geographically, and we don't have hard aggregate quarries. We know of only two in the state that are in the medium range: one is located in Haines and the other is at Cantwell. Out here, on Egan Expressway, we have barged in hard aggregate from Haines and also from DuPont, Washington, where it's much harder aggregate down there. It's very expensive to do that, but it does help us in reducing stud wear.

Number 1728

MR. LEVASSEUR continued his testimony:

The second thing is that we've gone to what we call a stone mastic-type asphalt, where we're using a larger aggregate; it seems to hold up just a little bit better. We've also been experimenting with adding various polymers to our asphalt. I was speaking to Representative Kohring before, and talking about the asphalt that we used to use back in the [1970s] when I was involved in paving, many years ago. Some of the asphalts came from the [Middle East], but especially the asphalts that came from Venezuela, particularly Lake Maracaibo, were very tough, durable asphalts. Alaska asphalt is inherently soft.

We need to use Alaska asphalt because we're refining oil here and we need to get rid of the product - and we're using it. We've undertaken a program to add polymers to our asphalt, to increase its resiliency and resistance to wear. A couple of the compounds are styrene, that you find in the beads that you pack packages with, and butadiene, which is a rubber-type chemical. We're also adding plasticizers to our asphalt to make it tougher and stronger. These, in combination with the harder aggregate sources - we're hoping that we get better performance of pavements.

Number 1791

CO-CHAIR HOLM said he recalled the use of "old rubber tires" that were "chewed up and put into the asphalt mix" and asked why that procedure was no longer being used.

MR. LEVASSEUR replied that the program was no longer very effective. He said that it provided for some flexibility in the asphalt, but it is better if the rubber from the tires is liquefied because tires are mostly butadiene compound, and this "gives us more stretch." He said that from a maintenance perspective, the polymers help by eliminating the thermal cross cracking. He explained that cracks on roads can be seen about every two or three hundred feet, due to the thermal contraction and expansion from summer to winter. The asphalt doesn't have quite the stretch, but by adding these new polymers, these thermal cross cracks are almost eliminated, he said.

MR. LEVASSEUR mentioned that this is currently the third year of a pilot program being conducted in Valdez on Richardson Highway, from mile 6 to mile 14, with the result that cross cracks have only been located where there has been a cut-fill transition or a culvert that's lifted up due to frost conditions. He noted that there have been experimental projects with polymers in Juneau, as well. The drawback to using polymers is the increased cost of paving by about $40,000 per mile; however, if there are an estimated 65 to 70 cross cracks per mile from thermal expansion and contraction, and maintenance crews are sealing all of these cracks to avoid premature pavement-life failure, then the additional cost would be worth it, he said.

Number 1862

MR. LEVASSEUR told the committee, "We've got our fingers in lots of different areas, trying to improve the performance of our Alaskan asphalts." He mentioned that another critical point was that of asphalt-treated bases that lie underneath the pavements, explaining that with a thicker base, there is an improved distribution of the load throughout the "subgrade" instead of just on the upper two inches. Therefore, more asphalt-treated base work is being done, he added.

Number 1876

MR. LEVASSEUR stated that studded tires cause an excess of $5 million of pavement wear per year, and that HB 173 is a small step towards recovering some of those costs by asking users of studded tires to pay a nominal fee.

Number 1892

CO-CHAIR MASEK referenced the $5 million amount and asked where the worst wear and tear from studded tires was being generated.

Number 1900

MR. LEVASSEUR replied that the worst areas were the Anchorage area on the Glenn and Seward Highways; Thompson Pass, south of Valdez; and in the Juneau area. He said that the Interior Alaskan areas don't have nearly the stud wear and tear because the roads are covered more with snow pack, fewer people use studded tires in the Interior, and there is better traction once the temperature drops to below 20 degrees.

CO-CHAIR HOLM commented that the previous discussion was leading to the obvious question, "Why not just get rid of studs completely?"

MR. LEVASSEUR responded that about 10 years ago, the department proposed a bill of that nature but it didn't pass. Also, he continued, in certain cities, the quality of maintenance on the side streets that is performed by the municipalities isn't up to the same level as the state's maintenance program. He explained that there is often one major arterial coming through an area with many side streets, and the cities don't have the resources to enact a chemical deicing or scraping program. Oftentimes, if there is a hilly community adjacent to a state road, there will be real traction problems on the off-roads.

CO-CHAIR HOLM commented that many vehicles today are either four-wheel drive or front-wheel drive and that the radial tires that are available are just as good, or almost just as good, as studded tires. He said he'd received a letter written by a Canadian who indicated that studs are not being used in Canada and that Alaska is one of the last states allowing for the use of studs on the highways.

MR. LEVASSEUR said that there are only a few states that still allow studded tires to be used. He told the committee that he used to live in Minnesota, where hundreds of miles of roads had been destroyed, and that after the damage was ascertained, studs were banned in that state. He said that Minnesota countered that [legislation] with a very aggressive chemical deicing program and used sodium chloride. Similarly, when Japan had a similar problem, resulting in banning the use of studded tires, initially there was a lot of trouble, which it countered by

implementing a more aggressive program that included the use of siped tires, which then helped to lower the accident rate.

Number 2041

CO-CHAIR HOLM suggested that with the use of magnesium chloride, banning the use of studded tires might help to solve the problem, rather than taxing the public for something that may eventually be discontinued.

MR. LEVASSEUR responded that magnesium chloride is effective for temperatures as low as 20 degrees, but not for temperatures below that.

CO-CHAIR HOLM questioned whether the current proposed legislation was a "Band-Aid approach" and expressed his desire to consider a long-range approach. He reflected upon the frequency with which various regions in the state experience temperatures registering below 20 degrees.

Number 2111

REPRESENTATIVE HEINZE questioned whether the perception of studded tires' providing additional safety was, in fact, true.

MR. LEVASSEUR responded that years ago, studded tires were much safer than standard tires. He told the committee that his wife has used crosscut siped tires for the past three years and that this has worked very well in Valdez. He maintained that there will just be times when it's best for a prudent driver, in response to the weather conditions, to adjust his/her schedule and to allow time for the crews to use deicing methods. For example, one might choose to not drive from Eagle River to Anchorage on a rainy day when the temperature has warmed after having been zero degrees - a day in which "everybody's in trouble" because of there being an inch of black ice. He stated that studies have shown that studs are about 5 percent safer - that there is approximately 5 percent better traction than that of the siped tire. He explained that a sipe is a thin, crosscut line, perpendicular to the flow of the tire, and "they're very close, about 1/8 inch apart, and as they flex, they grab that ice and slippery pavement," providing for a high level of traction. He told the committee that siped tires are becoming more popular and that he knows of several dealers in Anchorage who make siped tires available.

Number 2189

CO-CHAIR MASEK asked how much a set of four siped tires would cost.

MR. LEVASSEUR said that the price was dependent upon whether the tires were for a large truck or a passenger car, but suggested that the price would probably be about 5 to 10 percent more expensive than a standard radial all-season tire, due to the extra manufacturing process of making that cross cut.

REPRESENTATIVE HEINZE said that her tires were from Norway and contained chopped walnut [shells] and asked if those tires damaged the roads as studded tires do.

MR. LEVASSEUR said he didn't believe that the tires damaged the roads, but noted that the problem with the walnut-shelled tires is the retention of the walnut shells themselves, in the tires. Tests have revealed that when vehicles were driven at higher speeds, less of the walnut shells were maintained, and the tires became ineffective after one year. He said that a couple of Scandinavian countries still use studs and mandate the use of lightweight studs while closely monitoring the duration of months allowing for their use on vehicles; however, a lot of areas in Scandinavia have banned the use of studded tires. He mentioned that throughout coastal and Southcentral Alaska, during this particular winter, ice and snow pack have been on the roadways approximately 1 to 2 percent of the time, indicating that the wear from studs has been phenomenal due to the roads being bare most of the winter.

REPRESENTATIVE HEINZE asked if technological advances warranted her changing from "chopped walnuts to a siped tire."

Number 2270

MR. LEVASSEUR responded that she wasn't behind the curve, as the walnuts are a valid technology that's been available on the market for quite some time, although he opined that the use of siped tire would provide for better traction. He mentioned that siped tires could be used throughout the year, but that eventually, over time, the cross cuts would be worn down and the tires would become less effective. He pointed out that studded tires also become less effective, and are only good for three or four years.

Number 2242

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER said she didn't realize that such an expense was being incurred to the overall maintenance of the road system. She referred to other technologies that had been suggested, such as anti-lock brakes, radial, all-season tires, front-wheel drive, and all-wheel drive, and said that those technologies presumed that people had at their disposal a budget that allowed one to buy whatever car was desired in order to meet one's safety requirements. She said that before considering the elimination of studded tires altogether, [legislators should recognize] that all Alaskans don't have such a budget, and that studs provide for a safety measure on roads which aren't being chemically treated.

MR. LEVASSEUR said the department is not proposing a ban on studded tire use, but is proposing a $10 user fee on each tire that is purchased after July 1, 2003; assuming that tires last for four years, the $40 surcharge would amount to $10 per year for the use of those tires. He said he didn't think of this as a huge burden.

REPRESENTATIVE HEINZE asked if the ruts on the highways were the result of the weight of huge trucks.

MR. LEVASSEUR replied that the distance between the ruts was indicative of a mid-sized vehicle, which was 55 to 60 inches, whereas larger trucks measure at about 78 to 83 inches in width. He said there is deformation that occurs during the summer months from the larger, overloaded trucks, but that deformation is minimal compared with what is being experienced from stud wear.

TAPE 03-8, SIDE B
Number 2358

REPRESENTATIVE HEINZE asked if a SUV [sport-utility vehicle] qualified as a larger vehicle.

MR. LEVASSEUR confirmed that SUVs were about 6 to 8 inches wider.

Number 2347

REPRESENTATIVE KOHRING referred to earlier comments concerning the types of oil used in pavement, with the oil extracted in Alaska considered as being of a lesser quality than oil from other areas. He then asked about roads within the state, such as the Fairview Loop Road, that were paved with a different kind

of oil and considered to be roads of a higher quality. He asked whether there was any requirement mandating the use of Alaskan oil.

Number 2305

MR. LEVASSEUR replied that the asphalt that was used in the 1970s came from Venezuela, the Middle East, or even the Gulf of Mexico, and was a harder asphalt that lasted longer. He said he was not aware of any statute mandating the use of Alaskan asphalt; however, he brought up the concern of what would then be done with the asphalt that was refined in Alaska, if it was not utilized. He added that over the years, polymers have been added to the oil, in attempts to improve the quality.

Number 2272

CO-CHAIR MASEK commented that although HB 173 was focused on the continued usage of studded tires, she wondered about the possibility of prohibiting the use of certain types of studded tires, in consideration of eventually phasing out [the use of studded tires] in the future.

CO-CHAIR MASEK announced that HB 173 would be held over and that additional public testimony would be heard on March 18th.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m.