

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 20, 2004

2:00 p.m.

TAPE(S) 04-1 [SENATE TAPE]

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator John Cowdery, Co-Chair
Senator Thomas Wagoner, Co-Chair
Senator Gene Therriault
Senator Georgianna Lincoln
Senator Donny Olson

Representative Jim Holm, Chair
Representative Vic Kohring
Representative Beverly Masek
Representative Dan Ogg
Representative Nick Stepovich

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Mary Kapsner
Representative Albert Kookesh

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Lyda Green

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW OF KNIK ARM BRIDGE AND TOLL AUTHORITY

CO-CHAIR JOHN COWDERY convened the Joint meeting of the Senate and House Transportation Standing Committees at 2:00 p.m. Present were Senators Wagoner, Therriault, Lincoln, Olson, and Co-Chair Cowdery and Representatives Kohring, Masek, Ogg, Stepovich, and Chair Holm. Also present was Senator Green. [Senator Therriault and Representative Kohring arrived while the meeting was in progress.]

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

GEORGE P. WUERCH, Chairman, Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority (KABATA), gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "The New Knik Arm Bridge Project." He told the committee that KABATA's seven-member board is comprised of himself [George Wuerch] as Chairman, Vice Chairman Darcie Salmon, Dave Haugen, Senator Lyda Green, Representative Bill Stoltze, Commissioner Bill Corbus, and Commissioner Mike Barton; the board has hired Henry Springer as the Executive Director. Mr. Wuerch addressed the "who, what, where, and when" of KABATA, and offered a historical perspective - from 1955 to the present. He noted that although there are many toll authorities in the Lower 48, this would be the first one in Alaska. He explained that the project bridges the Knik Arm by connecting the Port of Anchorage to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Port MacKenzie; it uses existing roads and will be railroad compatible.

CO-CHAIR COWDERY questioned whether railroad tolls would be charged.

MR. WUERCH replied that this might be possible. In response to a comment from Co-Chair Cowdery, he explained that because of the [U.S.] Air Force's concern, and because of cost, the bridge's elevation would be kept low. In response to a question from Representative Stepovich, he said the length of the bridge would be about 2.3 miles; however the section on supports would be about 7,000 feet. He said the [U.S. Army] Corps of Engineers (USACE) at the world-renown Waterways Experimental Station in Vicksburg, Mississippi, has been consulted and has built tabletop models for the project.

SENATOR LINCOLN asked if other options for the location of the bridge have been considered.

MR. WUERCH responded that alternatives were being considered and that this location had not been finalized.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER asked if consideration had been given to experimenting with tide-generated hydroelectric power.

MR. WUERCH responded that there were problems from the sediment load from three glacial rivers, and that further exploration would be taken up by the engineers.

MR. WUERCH summarized that construction would take about three years, design would take about one year, "permitting - who knows" and funding was from the TEA-21. He said there is about \$5 million dollars on the table in the Omnibus Appropriations

Bill, and also mentioned that as a public corporation, the authority can sell revenue bonds. In response to a question from Co-Chair Cowdery, he said KABATA would try to use the existing [Draft] EIS and that the estimated cost ranged from \$400 million on the low end to a probable \$800 million at the high end. He said that a request will be submitted to Congress for \$100 million per year for six years and that KABATA will probably have to come up with a match of \$54 million - nine percent - which is do-able because of the toll capability. He noted that because building will be done on state land, the state will get credit for donating the right-of-way.

MR. WUERCH mentioned design constraints such as river, tide, ice flows and seismic. He also spoke to environmental considerations involved with the project. He told the committee that the goal was to build this project without asking for general fund monies, and to have the toll pay for the operation and maintenance (O&M) costs; the O&M cost is about \$1.5 million per year. He said that the military struggles for space in the port of Anchorage and that the bridge's immediate benefit would be to reduce the convoy's estimated two-hours of travel time to get to the other side, by connecting two ports that are within convenient driving distance from each other.

SENATOR LINCOLN asked about selling land for development, and questioned future growth that is envisioned for the area.

DARCIE SALMON, Vice Chairman, KABATA, answered that this would allow Anchorage to have two ways out and would allow the city to grow and prosper.

MR. WUERCH responded to further questions from committee members regarding engineering concerns, land development, and the use of automatic scanners by toll authorities. In conclusion, he said that the presentation would be available to any organization and that additional information was available on the website, www.knikarmbridge.com.

CO-CHAIR COWDERY stated that consideration was being given to holding a hearing on this project in Anchorage.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the committee, the Joint House and Senate Transportation Committees adjourned at 2:52 p.m.

NOTE: The meeting was recorded and handwritten log notes were taken. A copy of the tape(s) and log notes may be obtained by contacting the Senate Records Office at State Capitol, Room 3, Juneau, Alaska 99801 (mailing address), (907) 465-2870, and after adjournment of the second session of the 23rd Alaska State Legislature, this information may be obtained by contacting the Legislative Reference Library at (907) 465-3808.