

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

February 25, 2006

1:40 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Carl Gatto, Co-Chair
Representative Vic Kohring
Representative Mark Neuman

SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Charlie Huggins, Chair
Senator John Cowdery, Vice Chair

MEMBERS ABSENT

HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Jim Elkins, Co-Chair
Representative Bill Thomas
Representative Mary Kapsner
Representative Woodie Salmon

SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Gene Therriault
Senator Albert Kookesh
Senator Hollis French

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Bill Stoltze

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW(S): HIGHWAY SAFETY ISSUES; KNIK ARM BRIDGE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JOHN MACKINNON, Deputy Commissioner
of Highways & Public Facilities
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the notion of the traffic safety corridor.

GORDON KEITH, Regional Director
Central Region
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed the specifics of the traffic safety corridor and answered questions.

WESLEY WARNER
Valley Alaskan Bikers Advocating Training and Education
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Expressed the need to consider the seasonal aspect of traffic safety corridors.

MARGARET BILLINGER
Big Lake Community Council
Big Lake, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Suggested the need for education in relation to alcohol-related accidents as well as for an earlier closing time for bars.

JOHN COMBS, Mayor
City of Palmer
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During discussion, asked about engineering problems and related his support of the bridge.

SCOTT THOMAS, P.E., Regional Traffic Engineer
Traffic & Safety Section
Central Region
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions.

ALLEN STOREY, Captain
Division of Alaska State Troopers

Department of Public Safety (DPS)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Related the troopers' excitement with regard to traffic safety corridors.

RK BUTTS

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Expressed concerns with regard to those who drive under the influence and with revoked/suspended licenses.

RANDY HOLT

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Posed questions related to the Southeast transportation corridor and the Knik Arm Crossing.

JOHN ODAY, Member

Anchorage Road Coalition

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Related the Anchorage Road Coalition's support for HB 261 and specified two permanent traffic corridors that should be created.

STEVE MILLER

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Expressed concern about the design of the Seward Meridian Road and the Knik Arm Bridge.

APRIL MOORE

Trappers Creek, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified that the Knik Arm Crossing would address the pressure on two of the traffic safety corridors specified.

LOIS WIER

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments on the funds for the proposed bridges and traffic safety corridors.

KEVIN ROBINSON, Board of Directors

Valley Alaskan Bikers Advocating Training and Education

Sutton, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Expressed the concerns of the motorcycle community.

ANN KILKENNY

Partners in Education

Teeland Middle School

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Urged the committees to move the completion of the Seward Meridian Road forward and to upgrade the design of it for safety and traffic.

DIANE KELLER, Mayor

City of Wasilla

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Encouraged the legislature to approve funding for various road improvements in the Mat-Su Valley as well as to consider funding the alternative transportation corridor or the bypass.

RANDY HOLT

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a comment regarding rights-of-way for the bypass.

DONNIE DARILEK

Meadow Lakes Community Council

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Expressed the need to lower the speed limit in the Meadow Lakes area [of the Parks Highway] to 45 miles per hour.

SHERRY MATSEN (PH)

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Related her support of the idea of traffic safety corridors and enforcement.

GREG BEAL

Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Expressed concerns with regard to the lack of [winter] road maintenance.

HENRY SPRINGER, Executive Director

Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority

Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an update of the Knik Arm Bridge project.

EARL LACKEY

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Asked questions regarding the Knik Arm Bridge.

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR CHARLIE HUGGINS called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at [1:40:50 PM](#). Representatives Gatto, Kohring, and Neuman and Senators Huggins and Cowdery were present at the call to order. Representative Stoltze was also in attendance.

OVERVIEW: HIGHWAY SAFETY ISSUES

CHAIR HUGGINS announced that the first order of business would be a discussion about highway safety, which was precipitated by a conversation on the same topic a week or so ago. The conversation was in relation to the Seward Highway south of Anchorage. The conversation revealed that there are multiple dangerous roads in the state. Therefore, this meeting is to hear from people regarding what can and needs to be done to address these roads. He mentioned the review of a system of traffic safety corridors. Chair Huggins then had Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) and Department of Law representatives introduce themselves as well as city officials from Wasilla and Palmer.

CHAIR HUGGINS then informed the committees that currently a facility is being built on the Parks Highway to address the demographic shift in the area and help with traffic safety. Of the 31 personnel from the Alaska State Troopers that the facility will house, about 26 individuals will be badge wearing, gun carrying personnel.

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JOHN MACKINNON, Deputy Commissioner of Highways & Public Facilities, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, began by reminding the committee that [DOT&PF] is under the third reauthorization of the transportation bill that's all about safety. He then recalled that in early January there was a fatal accident on the Seward Highway, which raised awareness in that more effort needs to be placed toward safety on the highways. The current approach to high accident rates on roads is to review what can be done to improve the road such as straighten it or widen it, which is a long process. Furthermore, often by the time such projects are complete the road has once again reached capacity. In reviewing what other states have been doing, the concept of traffic safety corridors was reviewed. In fact, in the

governor's State of the State address, the governor charged the department with drafting legislation that created these traffic safety corridors along with an educational campaign and increased enforcement. Studies have shown that when enforcement on a roadway is increased, it calms the traffic and reduces the number of accidents, particularly the very serious accidents. Upon reviewing other states using traffic safety corridors, it was found that Oregon has had a long history of using corridors and has achieved success in this area. In fact, Oregon has decommissioned a couple of its traffic safety corridors. Mr. Mackinnon informed the committee that DOT&PF has established criteria and introduced legislation in both bodies. He explained that DOT&PF would work closely with the Department of Public Safety (DPS) in determining the location of the traffic safety corridors. Furthermore, DPS and local police departments would be consulted in regard to enforcement. The DPS would also help with the funding for the additional enforcement. He noted that DOT&PF has some safety sanction funds for that. The DOT&PF has identified four roads that meet the criteria for traffic safety corridors, including the Knik-Goose Bay Road, Palmer-Wasilla Highway, and the Parks Highway. He explained that the notion is to target the worst roads first with increased enforcement and education.

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GORDON KEITH, Regional Director, Central Region, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, began by informing the committee that the central region includes the Mat-Su Valley, the Kenai Peninsula, the Aleutian Chain, Bristol Bay, and Anchorage. He explained that the Central Region has taken the lead on this matter because it has probably 60 percent of the population and probably over 60 percent of the cars and vehicular-related accidents. After reviewing the Seward Highway, it was discovered through anecdotal information that other corridors had as high or higher incidents of accidents as that of the Seward Highway. Therefore, the review was expanded and the analysis thus far indicates the need for about 10-12 [traffic safety corridors] in the central region. He related how much work it takes to discern these traffic safety corridors. He then related that at this point there is recommended criteria to select the traffic safety corridors and those recommendations are being tested. He then showed the committee charts based on the draft criteria.

MR. KEITH, in response to Chair Huggins, related that traffic safety corridors will appear to the traveling public much like

the construction work zones. Therefore, there will be a sign that informs the driver that he/she is entering a traffic safety corridor for which there are double fines for infractions in the corridor. These signs specifying the traffic safety corridor would be in place for perhaps years at a time and the limits specified on the signs would be in place every day all day. He highlighted the importance for drivers to know when he/she is entering a traffic safety corridor and the consequences of violations in it.

REPRESENTATIVE STOLTZE expressed the need for the department to relate to city officials and community members how they can be a part of this process.

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MR. KEITH explained that traffic safety corridors can be nominated by city officials, the public, and the legislature.

CHAIR HUGGINS agreed that community members must realize this is a community effort. However, if there was a big cluster of continuing accidents in one place, then he surmised that all modifications of traffic control should be reviewed because the current proposal only modifies driver behavior.

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MR. KEITH highlighted the importance of engineering, education, and enforcement for traffic safety because the engineering is [less effective] without increased enforcement. With regard to education, Mr. Keith informed the committee that some highway safety funds have been received and an advertising campaign has been started with regard to the long [proposed traffic safety] corridor from Seward to Fairbanks. He noted that the target group is young people because they seem to have more accidents.

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MR. KEITH then provided the committee with charts that provide information with regard to the location of accidents that have occurred on the Knik-Goose Bay Road, the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, and the Parks Highway. The information related a positive correlation between accidents [with pedestrians]. The charts, he pointed out, also relate which accidents involved alcohol and/or drugs, which he indicated was many accidents. The traffic safety corridors will try to intercept those drivers. He then reviewed the accident summary data provided on the

charts, which includes data regarding the number of fatalities or major injuries per mile per the number of vehicles traveling on a particular road. Of those roads charted thus far, the Knik-Goose Bay Road has the highest rate of major injuries/fatalities per mile. Mr. Keith noted that until this data was available, the state troopers probably didn't know the patterns or the areas in which enforcement should be concentrated. Therefore, this data is a real tool for the troopers.

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WESLEY WARNER, Valley Alaskan Bikers Advocating Training and Education, a motorcycle safety organization, asked whether any seasonal road conditions are considered in the data.

MR. KEITH replied no, adding this isn't a seasonal thing. He mentioned that there has been discussion regarding whether some of the traffic safety corridors can be a seasonal application, which hasn't been done in other states. He indicated the need to analyze the data to determine whether there is a seasonal aspect to the accidents.

MR. WARNER expressed the need to obtain data on that in order to address the seasonal aspect, especially in regard to education.

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MR. KEITH said the education campaign will start as early as next week. He mentioned the need for a different educational focus at different times of the year.

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MR. WARNER expressed the need for the state to also identify the conditions of the roads, which includes the conditions due to the disrepair of the roads. He opined that without [taking into consideration weather and road conditions], the data provided doesn't present the entire picture.

MARGARET BILLINGER, Big Lake Community Council, related that she has been a victim of two head-on collisions with drunk drivers. She highlighted that the state controls the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board (ABC Board), and questioned why bars can't be made to close at 2 a.m. in order to decrease the number of alcohol-related fatalities at night. She emphasized that the safety discussion has been going on for 10 years, but the same highways

and narrow roads exist. Therefore, closing the bars earlier could prove helpful. She emphasized the need for education efforts related to driving while impaired by alcohol.

JOHN COMBS, Mayor, City of Palmer, turned attention to the number of accidents on the Parks Highway - Lucas Road corridor versus the Knik-Goose Bay Road. He inquired as to whether the [cluster of accidents on the Knik-Goose Bay Road] is due to an engineering problem.

MR. KEITH said that he couldn't identify [the specific problem] and thus he offered to look into the specifics [of those accidents]. He did point out that the closer to town one is the more vehicles there are.

SCOTT THOMAS, P.E., Regional Traffic Engineer, Traffic & Safety Section, Central Region, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, related that about half of these roads were constructed in the '80s. He noted that the road alignment hasn't changed much and shoulders have been added. He indicated that approximately three of [the roads] are older and three others are newer. He explained that one process of traffic safety corridors is the field review for engineering and audit, which is the next step.

CHAIR HUGGINS expressed his hope that today is the beginning of the integration of building roads, the location of troopers, and safety aspects.

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REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN highlighted that DOT&PF has a website with this information and a link requesting opinions from the public. He then related two situations in which public complaints lead to an immediate response from DOT&PF such that they were fixed.

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ALLEN STOREY, Captain, Division of Alaska State Troopers, Department of Public Safety (DPS), related the division's excitement with regard to traffic safety corridors. He opined that the division will review the corridors from a public safety standpoint and determine if the troopers can provide enforcement. He further related that the division is aggressively recruiting troopers and the hope is to have more troopers on the road and the new trooper office mentioned earlier.

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RK BUTTS recalled the earlier mention of the drunk driving problem and opined that the legislature has done nothing about it. He further opined that the legislature has done nothing about the number of people driving with revoked/suspended licenses. Most of the individuals stopped with a revoked/suspended license merely receive a citation and they don't typically make their appearance in court, he indicated. The law needs to be changed such that individuals caught driving drunk or with a revoked/suspended license lose their vehicle. He related that individuals stopped who can't provide proof of insurance face their car being impounded until they can provide proof of insurance. All of the aforementioned will, he opined, reach most of the individuals causing the accidents.

MR. BUTTS turned to the area between Wasilla and Big Lake that has many traffic problems. He suggested lowering the speed limit and enforcing it. He then turned attention to moose-vehicle collisions, most of which occur during darkness. He questioned why the speed limit in the areas with moose-vehicle collisions haven't been lowered. Mr. Butts emphasized the need to put teeth into the existing laws and stated that doubling traffic fines or bail amounts won't accomplish anything because half of the individuals charged with such don't pay them.

CHAIR HUGGINS, recalling information from safety engineers, pointed out that the adjustment of speed is not always the answer. He then informed everyone that the Moose Federation, the organization that tracks the location of moose, is becoming involved with the moose-vehicle collisions. He opined that effort is being expended to address the concerns related by Mr. Butts.

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CAPTAIN STOREY highlighted the team of four troopers in Palmer who basically focus on driving under the influence (DUI) enforcement. However, because troopers have a statewide responsibility, the team occasionally performs enforcement efforts in other parts of the state. The aforementioned program has been so successful, the division is attempting to obtain highway safety funds to create such a team in Fairbanks as well as a DUI enforcement team on the Kenai Peninsula. Captain Storey related that in the last statistical year the DUI enforcement team [in Palmer] had arrests on par with the number

of arrests made by all the other troopers. However, he pointed out that the other troopers have to do the regular trooper duties as well as the DUI arrests. He said that the troopers try to bring as many revoked/suspended license violators before the court, but they are managed in ways in which the troopers don't have control.

MS. BILLINGER related that she has seen drivers without driver's licenses driving on the bike paths and has seen troopers who have seen such. She asked if the situation can be investigated.

CAPTAIN STOREY said that DUI anywhere is a criminal offense. He related that if there are witnesses who can identify the vehicle and the driver, the troopers try to investigate such situations.

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REPRESENTATIVE STOLTZE thanked the troopers for the statistics that the Division of Alaska State Troopers provided because it's comprehensive information over the [last] five years. Representative Stoltze said that he thought the Seward Highway was the most dangerous highway in the state, but after reviewing the data it seems that there were 72 deaths and over 1,200 injuries in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The aforementioned information indicates that there is a greater need in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

CAPTAIN STOREY clarified that there was some confusion with regard to the most dangerous stretch of highway because the statistical data regarding the stretch of highway from Wasilla to Big Lake includes the portion of highway from Wasilla to the Big Lake Cutoff, a portion of the Knik-Goose Bay Road, and a portion of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway. Therefore, those three stretches of highway make up the most dangerous portion of the highway within the state. However, he highlighted that it's a near tie between Knik-Goose Bay Road and Wasilla and Big Lake. He then returned to Mr. Butt's comments and highlighted that a few years ago the legislature passed a provision such that felony DUI vehicles were to be seized and forfeited. Since the inception of that program, approximately 240 vehicles have been seized. Furthermore, about 100 vehicles are pending forfeiture.

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RANDY HOLT asked if the proposed Southern transportation corridor will ease traffic in Palmer and Wasilla and thus help

eliminate some of the accidents in the area. He then inquired as to the members' opinions of the Knik Arm Crossing.

SENATOR COWDERY noted that he has been and remains to be enthusiastic with regard to the Knik Arm Crossing. He related his belief that the funding for the Knik Arm Crossing won't be lost.

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REPRESENTATIVE STOLTZE mentioned that he serves on the Knik Arm Authority. He said that although he is in favor of the project, he opined that it should be scrutinized as any other project. Representative Stoltze related his belief that there are innovative methods being employed, such as the public-private participation and using bonding unlike any other project. The Knik Arm Crossing, he opined, is an important part of any gas line project or realignment of the Alaska Railroad. He expressed concern with regard to an overpass of downtown Wasilla and what it would do to Wasilla. Furthermore, he suggested that such a bridge could provide economic benefit and more opportunities for business and industry in the Mat-Su Valley.

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REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN recalled recently listening to U.S. Congressman Don Young when he inquired as to the commitment [Alaskans] have for the future in the state. He questioned what there will be for Alaskans 30-50 years from now as far as the expansion is concerned. He recalled hearing Representative Stoltze mention the investment and commercial opportunities in the Point MacKenzie area which would help relieve some of the taxpayers' burden. He, too, highlighted the economic benefit of the railroad passing through the area. Furthermore, a new North-South corridor between Anchorage and Willow would move thru traffic off the Palmer-Wasilla Highway and possibly reduce the number of vehicles on it.

CHAIR HUGGINS recalled the inception of the phrase "Bridge to Nowhere," which came about nationally when Alaska had funds to build bridges. Many said that funding could have been used to help the city of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. That same argument is now utilized throughout the state as the reason various projects aren't being done in the state. That argument is convenient and he urged everyone to think about that. Chair Huggins then pointed out that the infrastructure that works for the interim for Knik Arm Crossing also works for the port

because even if the Knik Arm Bridge isn't built, the infrastructure for the port will still need to be built if the port is to emerge as a major sector in the community. He highlighted that if the Knik Arm Crossing is built, infrastructure money will come with the [federal] funds otherwise there aren't many stakeholders outside of the Mat-Su Valley area that see the importance of the port. Chair Huggins specified his support of the Knik Arm Crossing, and opined that the Mat-Su Valley area is "the single strategic transportation thing that can happen ... because it connects the two largest communities, 60 percent of the population." Furthermore, the only options that impact/ease the overcrowded Parks Highway are the Knik Arm Crossing and the bypass. He concluded by saying that there isn't one single solution.

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CO-CHAIR GATTO turned attention to the proposed gas line, and pointed out that the pipe for the gas line has a larger diameter and is thicker than that for the oil pipeline. Furthermore, the pipe for the gas line is really heavy and probably only one piece can be carried at a time on a truck. It would be horrifying, he said, to see so many trucks on the Glenn and Parks Highways if there isn't another alternative. Co-Chair Gatto then pointed out that when Alaska receives money from the federal government, the federal government is very specific in regard to how it is to be spent. He recalled that 48 percent was for the National Highway System, which included the bridges. He said that the Palmer-Wasilla Highway can't be built with those federal funds because the federal government won't reimburse those funds. While the earmarks disappeared, the funds are still there and went to DOT&PF at which point the governor announced that he wanted to reserve \$90 million for the bridge projects. However, the bridge will probably cost around \$600 million, and thus requires commitment from the federal government in order to obtain enough funding for such a project. The point, Co-Chair Gatto said, is that it's complicated to obtain the funds to build the bridge and to build it. Meanwhile, there are other safety projects. He noted that Trunk Road, which is too short of a section and wasn't included in the evaluation, wasn't even discussed. Moreover, the troopers are shorthanded. In the Mat-Su Valley, there are 1,225 open cases, which resulted in the troopers being given funds to hire more troopers, but there aren't enough people applying.

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JOHN ODAY, Member, Anchorage Road Coalition, related the Anchorage Road Coalition's support for HB 261. He then expressed the need to create the following two permanent traffic corridors: from Portage to Potter and from the junction of the Parks and Glenn Highways to Houston. He recalled a safety and design engineer from Florida with over 35 years of experience who said there is a 100 percent fatality rate in that if one survives a vehicle accident with a major injury, the chance of survival within a year are zero. Mr. Oday reminded the committees that the Anchorage Road Coalition formed in order to influence the design of streets in the city, particularly the highways. "Wider, flatter, straighter is not the answer," he said. He then turned to the problem of speeders and informed the committees that in Scottsdale, Arizona, electronic cameras are being used to catch speeders. In order to prosecute that driver and vehicle using such a system, Alaska would need to change its statute. The Anchorage Road Coalition is in the process of recommending to the Anchorage Assembly to again engage in electronic surveillance.

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MR. ODAY opined that if [electronic surveillance] can be done in the Lower 48, it can be done in Alaska. With regard to the Knik Arm Bridge and the railroad, Mr. Oday said that he has spoken with engineers who have explained that the [railroad] would require a separate bridge and it would cost two to four times the money of the Knik Arm Bridge. Furthermore, the truckers don't like the proposal because it would not save them any time. Mr. Oday then turned to the Parks Highway and said that the chief problem is the traffic pull, which is a problem in Anchorage as well. With regard to comments about transporting the pipe, Mr. Oday recalled when the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System was built and one-third of the pipeline was sent to Valdez. The highway from Valdez to Glennallen was destroyed within weeks of transporting the pipeline.

SENATOR COWDERY mentioned that he was in China where he observed the massive amounts of traffic and where this electronic surveillance is being used.

MAYOR COMBS recalled several years ago when the legislature approved [legislation] to require that headlights be on at all times, although it was repealed. Drawing upon his experience in the insurance industry, Mayor Combs highlighted the studies that show having headlights on at all times prevents accidents because vehicles can see each other. Upon repealing the

legislation, the signs regarding driving with lights on all the time were taken down rather than left in place to encourage such action. He related his understanding that there will be no change in speed limits [in the traffic safety corridors] just more enforcement. He suggested that there be larger rights-of-way, specifically at least 200 feet and 100 feet of natural corridor on each side. He informed the committees that he supports the byway concept in the Mat-Su Valley. With regard to the bridges, he said he looks forward to that being constructed some day. He noted that every large community located on the coast with a nearby peninsula or island has a bridge.

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STEVE MILLER expressed concern about the design of the Seward Meridian Road, which would cause some to have to drive an unsafe route. He said that although DOT&PF has been responsive to his concerns, thus far the department hasn't liked the suggestions.

APRIL MOORE opined that enforcement isn't all that's necessary, adding that the Knik Arm Crossing would address the pressure on two of the traffic safety corridors specified. She further opined that it's just common sense that if the pressure on the highways going through Wasilla is relieved, then fatalities on the highways would be relieved also. She then expressed her belief that the economy is ripe for the Knik Arm Crossing and the bypass because as Anchorage expands, the Mat-Su Valley's economic base needs to expand on toward Willow.

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LOIS WIER opined that it was a terrible mistake for Congress to take away the earmark for the two bridges. She commented that although the members have said they are committed to the [Knik Arm Crossing], the legislature is the only entity that can take away funds originally designated for the crossings and use it for other projects. Ms. Wier characterized the funds from Congress for the crossings as a once in a lifetime opportunity. With regard to the traffic safety corridors and the signage informing drivers they are entering such, she suggested that there also needs to be signage identifying when the corridor ends.

CHAIR HUGGINS clarified that there will be signage regarding the end point of the traffic safety corridors.

KEVIN ROBINSON, Board of Directors, Valley Alaskan Bikers Advocating Training and Education, expressed concern that the traffic safety corridors don't outline the surface conditions of the roads. He informed the committees that Alaska has more motorcycles than any other state. Three problems that need to be addressed are as follows: the lack of a comprehensive motorcycle awareness program by DOT&PF; the removal of sand and gravel from the roads; and tar snakes. Mr. Robinson opined that rather than going to a complete police state, addressing the surfaces of the roads could go far toward safety.

ANN KILKENNY, Partners in Education, Teeland Middle School, opined that part of the problem with traffic in [the Palmer-Wasilla area] is that the roads are under designed and over driven. Traffic needs to be drawn away from the center of the Wasilla Highway, Parks Highway main street intersection, which would be accomplished with the completion of the Seward Meridian Road. She recalled that back in 2002, voters approved the GARVEE [Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicles] bond that included the completion of the Seward Meridian Road as one of the projects. Furthermore, the completion of the Seward Meridian Road was supposed to have been fast tracked. However, nothing has been done with the Seward Meridian Road in the past 3.5 years. The aforementioned has resulted in money from schools being used to build an extension of Seward Meridian Road. She added that the Seward Meridian Road is under designed and lacking significant safety features, especially considering the number of schools and buses that travel along that street. Therefore, Ms. Kilkenney urged the committees to move the completion of the Seward Meridian Road forward to draw traffic out of the main corridor. She also urged the committees to upgrade the design of the Seward Meridian Road for safety and traffic.

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MR. MACKINNON, in response to Senator Cowdery, explained that GARVEE bonds are sold and repaid with the state's federal highway funds. He specified that GARVEE bonds aren't general obligation bonds but rather the state is borrowing against future federal funds coming to the state.

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DIANE KELLER, Mayor, City of Wasilla, commented that community participation is critical to solving these community problems. She mentioned that she would pass information on to the

community council regarding SB 261 and would request a resolution in support of it. She then confirmed that the Moose Federation is trying to make a moose-free corridor with fencing and designated crossing areas between Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley. Mayor Keller encouraged the legislature to approve funding for improvements to Lucille Street and for the construction of South Mac Drive as well as Seldon to Houston improvements. Such improvements will help to reduce traffic on already congested main thoroughfares. She then asked the committees to consider funding the alternative transportation corridor or the bypass. Furthermore, additional signals should be considered to allow for traffic breaks or roundabouts on the roads that already have problems. Mayor Keller opined that the aforementioned improvements along with the planned educational campaigns will go far toward making the roads in the Mat-Su Valley safer. Mayor Keller then expressed the need to work with the court system judges in order to identify the existing flaws in the law and allow for enforcement to occur as it was legislated. The aforementioned, she suggested, will allow the offenders to serve the time earned and allow law enforcement to feel as if it's making a difference.

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CHAIR HUGGINS clarified that the bypass of Wasilla will go south and spoke of other alternatives that could be utilized to access the Parks Highway.

MR. KEITH highlighted that the last legislature and the Alaska Railroad contributed \$2 million each to begin the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Wasilla bypass. A memorandum of understanding has been established between the Alaska Railroad, DOT&PF, the Mat-Su Borough, and the City of Wasilla. In fact, a request for proposals (RFP) has been drafted to review a corridor for a bypass. However, he cautioned that the EIS reviews all bypasses and thus the railroad and the highway could bypass the City of Wasilla. He then advised the committees that there is also a no-build alternative.

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CHAIR HUGGINS reminded everyone that the construction of roads are 10-20 year propositions.

RANDY HOLT related his understanding that property for the rights-of-way of the bypass is already being purchased.

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DONNIE DARILEK, Meadow Lakes Community Council, related that the council supports lowering the speed limit to 45 miles per hour [in the area of mile 49] of the Parks Highway, as there are two schools within a portion of the road that has a 55-mile per hour speed limit. Furthermore, there should be stoplights or three-way stop signs at Vine, Rainbow, and Big Lake turn off. The aforementioned could be accomplished tomorrow and would eliminate much of the dangerous drivers. Ms. Darilek informed the committee that there is already a high trooper presence on the road and it's not decreasing [accidents]. She then pointed out that at the Pittman Road area there are railroad crossings and the fire and ambulance services are located on the wrong side of the track, especially when gravel is being loaded on the tracks. The same situation will result with the new trooper station to be built at that site. Ms. Darilek informed the committee that [the Meadow Lakes Community Council] supports building the bypass rather than what DOT&PF plans to do between Lucas and Big Lake Road. She specified that the community desires road construction similar to that done at Sterling.

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REPRESENTATIVE KOHRING said he supports lowering the speed limit at least as a temporary measure until the completion of the upgrade of the road through the Meadow Lakes area.

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SHERRY MATSEN (PH) began by relating her support of the idea of traffic safety corridors. She opined that enforcement is very important. She related her belief that several areas of the Knik-Goose Bay Road and miles 44-52 of the Parks Highway need reduced speed limits in order to reduce accidents. She related her experiences on the Knik-Goose Bay Road, such as people passing when there is oncoming traffic and passing on the right when the vehicle up ahead is making a left turn. There should be a law against passing on the right when someone is turning, she opined. Adding turning lanes would help address some of the aforementioned problems. She then suggested that more lighting would help at Edlund Road, the Palmer-Wasilla extension, Vine Road, and the Fairview Loop. Moreover, reducing the number of access roads to the main thoroughfares and adding more frontage roads would also help reduce accidents. In conclusion, she opined that the speed limit at the main intersections should be

reduced to 45 miles per hour. She added that she would like lights to be added to Vine Road, Fairview Loop, and Edlund Road.

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GREG BEAL said that Palmer DOT&PF does a fairly decent job of maintaining roads, although there aren't enough [trucks and staff] to go around. However, Anchorage DOT&PF doesn't maintain its roads as it sends out only three trucks [between] Anchorage and Eklutna. Therefore, he suggested that if more trucks and staff are necessary, then the funds should be put forth to do so. He further suggested changing the schedule of sanding and plowing. Mr. Beal related that the Anchorage Police Department reports that there were 104 accidents, which amounts to \$104,000 if each accident costs \$1,000. He expressed the need for there to be a plan when there is an accident so that traffic can be moved through the other lane rather than completely shutting down the road.

CHAIR HUGGINS said that the concerns of Mr. Beal are being worked on.

[3:40:25 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:40 p.m. to 3:51 p.m.

OVERVIEW: KNIK ARM CROSSING

CHAIR HUGGINS then turned the committee's attention to the overview of the Knik Arm Crossing.

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HENRY SPRINGER, Executive Director, Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, began by characterizing the Knik Arm Bridge project as a unique project in the state because it's a toll authority. He explained that a normal road project with federal aid is paid for by the federal gasoline tax. However, a toll authority is required to pay for all the maintenance and a portion of the capital money that is raised from the toll user fees. He informed everyone that the estimated cost of the Knik Arm Bridge is \$400-\$600 million. If \$200 million [in public participation] is received, the bridge can be built. The aforementioned funds will come from a variety of funding sources, such as revenue bonds, loans, and the private sector through concessions. With such an approach it's feasible to raise the \$300-\$400 million

for the project. Mr. Springer assured the committees that Wall Street won't put money into the Knik Arm Bridge project until it's satisfied that the projections and models are fairly conservative. He highlighted that out of about 60 toll facilities, there has been only one failure.

MR. SPRINGER pointed out that the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority is required to make projections out to the year 2030. By the year 2050, projections show that there will be more people in the Mat-Su Valley than in Anchorage, bridge or no bridge. He said that [without the bridge] by the year 2020 there will be a total collapse of the Glenn Highway and \$250-\$300 million will be needed to upgrade it. Furthermore, federal funds for the bridge can't be used to fill potholes, as has been argued, because maintenance funding is an obligation of the state. However, he acknowledged that the federal government does allow accelerated reconstruction when the state doesn't put forth enough state dollars for maintenance.

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MR. SPRINGER acknowledged that household surveys have found that many Palmer residents don't support the bridge project. However, when those residents find out it will take them three hours to get to Anchorage they seem to see the benefit of the bridge project. He then informed the committees that the draft EIS is moving along and should be issued in April. To date, \$18 million has been spent on the EIS and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) process. He noted that the public will have six weeks to provide comments on the proposal. He also noted that there are some unresolved issues with the core and hydraulics. However, most of the technical matters have been addressed and the project is in the conceptual design stage. Although there are still some public relations problems with Government Hill, there are no insurmountable technical problems. Mr. Springer related that he is proud of his staff and his consultants because a lot of ground was covered.

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MR. SPRINGER then reminded the committees that AS 19.75 created the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority and gave it functions such as collecting tolls and issuing bonds. However, the legislature has to approve it all. In fact, HB 471 and SB 303, which are up for hearings, are enabling legislation to proceed with issuing bonds, incurring debt, and entering into a public-private partnership. The aforementioned is a fairly new concept

in which the private sector and the owner or the government form a partnership such that the private sector not only does the construction and the design but can also participate in the financing and in the operation and maintenance of the project. In return, the government gives the private sector the right to collect some of the revenue from the tolls. The aforementioned is being reviewed as a manner in which to get the project together if the normal funding systems don't materialize.

MR. SPRINGER reminded everyone that the federal government made \$229 million available and earmarked it for the project. Although the earmarks were removed, the money isn't gone. In fact, federal rules allow all the [earmarked] money to go into the bridge. However, the decision [to use the federal funds for the bridge] has been left to DOT&PF and the legislature.

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MR. SPRINGER related that about \$93.6 million of the original federal earmark is in the governor's budget. Furthermore, the governor recently announced that he will ask the legislature for \$15 million to pave the MacKenzie Road, which will be part of the bridge project. The aforementioned is fairly significant because it aids the port and the project.

CHAIR HUGGINS highlighted Mr. Springer's testimony regarding the fact that the Knik Arm Bridge benefits the crossing and the port because even if the bridge isn't constructed, the infrastructure for the port will be necessary assuming some rate of growth in the port. In other words, that \$15 million for the MacKenzie Road supports the crossing and the port. "It's money that will come to our community for infrastructure that we have to have," he emphasized.

REPRESENTATIVE STOLTZE opined that the port director would probably talk more about these benefits if he wasn't being stifled by the current borough administration.

MR. SPRINGER continued to discuss the [federal] funds and related his belief that with any money, where it's to be allocated needs to be nailed down. He opined that work on the MacKenzie Road can begin this summer by giving [the funds to perform the work] directly to the borough. He suggested that the road could be paved and completed by early next year. He then noted that \$16 million is left to finish the EIS, which includes some right-of-way acquisition to go through Government

Hill and the military base behind the port at which point the project is on state land.

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MR. SPRINGER said that assuming the \$93 million [isn't allocated elsewhere], the funds can be used to build what it can of the project. He then related his belief that the total project can be put together in four separate pieces under four separate contracts if the funds don't come all at once. He concluded by commenting that the Knik Arm Crossing isn't competing with the Gravina Bridge project.

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SENATOR COWDERY remarked that he has been working on the concept of this bridge for a long time. He then pointed out that coal is shipped to Seward, although he believes the terminal should be at Point MacKenzie. After talking with the railroad, he came to understand that \$2.50 per ton could be eliminated from the rail freight [were the terminal located at Point MacKenzie]. He expressed interest in the bridge project going forward.

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EARL LACKEY asked if there are provisions in the substructure that would allow the railroad to be located on the bridge.

MR. SPRINGER replied no, but added that the railroad idea has been tossed around from the beginning. He explained that a railroad bridge and highway bridge are really different, from an engineering standpoint because of the loading, impact, and seismic design. Furthermore, [a railroad located on the bridge] would cause the cost to skyrocket. He related that the Board of Directors felt that \$600 million was the upper limit, which seems to be supported by the cost estimates thus far. Therefore, [a railroad located on the bridge] would kill the project. The project is being designed such that the geometrics, the alignment of both the horizontal and vertical grades can be utilized and it would save money. However, he highlighted that the cap is being extended in the case that the population would ever support a light rail system.

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MR. MILLER, noting that he is a civil engineer, said that he liked the project how it was proposed six or eight years ago,

when there were discussions about highway corridors that would connect both ends of the bridge to the rest of the transportation infrastructure as well as a rail corridor. Subsequently, U.S. Congressman Don Young announced that he couldn't obtain the funds for the connecting highways, and thus only the bridge would be built. To which, Mr. Miller said he was concerned because a stand-alone bridge would be extremely susceptible to seismic damage. The Mat-Su Borough area is a very seismic area. In fact, when the Denali Fault ruptured in 2003 there was 50 feet of lateral displacement along the fault line. He opined that no matter how well a bridge is built, it doesn't handle 50 feet of lateral displacement very well if at all. He informed the committees that two floating bridges in Seattle sank and the Oakland bay bridge pancaked in an earthquake. Mr. Miller emphasized that he could support this project if the highway connections were built first. There needs to be a four-lane highway from Wasilla to the Knik Arm Bridge and at least a good two-lane highway from the end of the Knik Arm Crossing to Willow in order to make the project viable, he opined.

[4:19:21 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN said that Mr. Miller brings up a good point with regard to an earthquake. To that end, Representative Neuman related the need to think of an alternate egress out of Anchorage because of the problems associated with bridges in Eagle River giving out.

MR. MILLER said that an earthquake big enough to take down the Eagle River Bridge would mean that would be concern with regard to the Knik Arm Bridge also.

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MR. SPRINGER agreed with Mr. Miller that the largest engineering challenge with this project is the seismic design/criteria. He pointed out that the Geophysical Institute in Anchorage has the best earthquake monitoring system in North America. Therefore, the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority has contracted with the Geophysical Institute to perform a geological and fault analysis. The two faults in proximity to Knik Arm are different than the Denali Fault in that they have nearly vertical sheer blades. He informed the committees that a symposium of the 12 best-known earthquake design engineers in North America critiqued the project. All 12 scientists agreed with the design criteria of the project. Mr. Springer commented that by the

time the Knik Arm Bridge goes, all of Anchorage would be gone. He then related that the Federal Highway Administration has a special team providing oversight. When the draft EIS is available, there will be a separate pamphlet addressing this. He then explained the traffic modeling for the bridge and the connecting roads. He related that by the year 2022 enough money from the toll structure will be captured such that the interconnectivity between the Glenn and the Seward Highways will occur. He agreed with Mr. Miller that the bridge isn't a stand-alone structure. Mr. Springer reminded the committee that he is presenting what came out of the scoping process.

MR. MILLER opined that a four-lane highway is necessary to Point MacKenzie.

CHAIR HUGGINS said, "We agree with that."

REPRESENTATIVE KOHRING thanked everyone and said there are serious safety concerns on the Parks Highway that need to be addressed by DOT&PF.

REPRESENTATIVE NEUMAN also thanked everyone for taking the time to come out today and provide comments.

CO-CHAIR GATTO reviewed the process.

SENATOR COWDERY said that although he has been elected from a district [outside the Mat-Su Valley], he represents the entire state. Therefore, he said he tries to determine which projects will move the state forward.

[4:28:14 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committees, the joint meeting of the House and Senate Transportation Standing Committees was adjourned at 4:28 p.m.