

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

Anchorage, Alaska
October 6, 2011
1:09 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Peggy Wilson, Chair
Representative Lance Pruitt, Vice Chair
Representative Eric Feige
Representative Max Gruenberg
Representative Pete Petersen

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Craig Johnson
Representative Cathy Engstrom Munoz

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Mike Hawker

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: TRAFFIC SAFETY CORRIDORS

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

MARC LUIKEN, Commissioner
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a presentation with regard to the traffic safety corridors established in 2006.

SCOTT THOMAS, Engineer
Traffic Section
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During presentation regarding traffic safety corridors, answered questions.

ROB CAMPBELL, Regional Director
Central Region
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During presentation regarding traffic safety corridors, answered questions.

TERRY VRABEC, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Public Safety
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During presentation regarding traffic safety corridors, provided comments.

LIEUTENANT TOM DUNN, Deputy Commander
Alaska Bureau of Highway Patrol
Alaska State Troopers
Department of Public Safety
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a presentation regarding traffic safety corridors.

CAPTAIN RANDAHL HAHN, Commander
Alaska Bureau of Investigations
Department of Public Safety
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During presentation regarding traffic safety corridors, answered questions.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:09:07 PM](#)

CHAIR PEGGY WILSON called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:09 p.m. Representatives Feige, Pruitt, Gruenberg, Petersen, and P. Wilson were present at the call to order. Also in attendance was Representative Hawker.

Presentation: Traffic Safety Corridors

[1:09:48 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON announced that the only order of business would be presentations regarding traffic safety corridors in Alaska. She stated that this meeting is a follow-up of a meeting that occurred two years ago. She related her understanding that new safety data is now available for review.

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MARC LUIKEN, Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, informed the committee that today he is going to focus on the traffic safety corridors that were identified in 2006. The identification of those traffic safety corridors were driven by head-on collisions occurring between 2001 and 2007. The map on the slide entitled "Define the Problem" uses dots to represent a head-on collision or major injury accident during 2001-2007. The other issue [driving the designation of traffic safety corridors] is the 50 years of two-lane interstates in Alaska. In 1960 Alaska was excluded from the Interstate Highway Program; the federal government decided that Alaska could get by without an interstate highway system for about 20 years. Fifty years later and Alaska still has little to no multi-lane, divided, interstate highway. He noted that he tried to point out the aforementioned to U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary LaHood when he was in Alaska a couple of weeks ago. He said he also pointed out the challenges Alaska faces as it's the only state with national highways over permafrost and a good portion of its national highway is gravel. The aforementioned didn't seem to faze Secretary LaHood. He then shared a photograph of the Seward Highway in the summer when it's at capacity, which illustrates the various use conflicts of the highway.

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COMMISSIONER LUIKEN pointed out that the chart entitled "TOTAL Fatal Crashes & Fatalities in ALASKA: 1977-2011 with Annual Statewide Vehicle-Mile TOTALS" illustrates that the traffic volume on Alaska's roads are gradually increasing. However, over the last 35 years there has been a downward trend in the number of crashes, major injuries, and fatalities. Although the traffic safety corridors were established five years ago, the aforementioned downward trend illustrates the ongoing effort over the last 20-30 years to identify and address safety issues. Again, the Seward Highway is a good example of the aforementioned as it was realigned to its current alignment several years ago to address safety issues, although it wasn't identified as a traffic safety corridor. He then pointed out the chart entitled "2008-2011 Statewide Fatal & Major Injury Crashes with Annual Statewide Vehicle-Mile Totals", which illustrates that the number of fatal crashes and major injuries is down compared to how many more vehicle miles are being transited on Alaska's roads. He then informed the committee

that all the traffic safety corridors have been recognized as a service level A, which results in those corridors receiving a significant amount more of attention in terms of maintenance and operation annually. He then directed attention to the map on the slide entitled "Current Traffic Safety Corridors", which illustrates where these traffic safety corridors are located. The traffic safety corridor idea was taken from Oregon and Ohio, both of which had similar programs that were successful. Initially, this was approached from the "3 E's" perspective such that engineering, education, and enforcement would be addressed. The DOT&PF deals with the engineering and adds signs, lanes, rumble strips, guardrails, and reflective striping. He noted that he and Commissioner Masters, Department of Public Safety (DPS), are part of an ongoing education effort via radio spots, public safety announcements, and various other initiatives to educate the public. Enforcement is left to the Department of Public Safety. He mentioned that two years ago DOT&PF utilized its funds to help establish the Alaska Bureau of Highway Patrol (ABHP) in order to help enforce the driving under the influence (DUI) safety aspect. Again, the goal is to concentrate on the high volume roads that have been identified.

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CHAIR P. WILSON inquired as to the percent [of accidents] in which drinking was part of the problem.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN deferred to the Department of Public Safety. He then informed the committee that less than 10 percent of fatal or major injury crashes were attributed to passing maneuvers. Therefore, [accidents] are more about loss of control, speeding, impairment, and fatigue.

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REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT inquired as to the impact of new technology in vehicles with regard to people surviving accidents. He then asked if the engineering on the roads is resulting in safer [accident outcomes].

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN opined that the earlier related statistics are the result of the combination of the 3E strategy and new [automobile] technology. Although he didn't have the specific numbers, he offered to carve out what he could from the data. He highlighted that all of the decisions being made are driven by the data. In further response to Representative Pruitt, Commissioner Luiken said that regarding whether [the 3E strategy

and new automobile technology] make drivers feel more comfortable with passing and going faster would be relevant to the driver behavior, which DPS could discuss.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG surmised that there seem to be two types of collisions: multi-vehicle collisions and single-vehicle collisions. Therefore, he inquired as to why the problem was devised such that it only involved multi-car collisions.

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SCOTT THOMAS, Engineer, Traffic Section, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, clarified that DOT&PF isn't exclusively concerned with head-on traffic collisions. The department is just as concerned about single-vehicle run-off-the-road collisions, which also lead to fatalities and major injuries. Often, [crashes] begin as a single-vehicle event [caused by driver behavior], but then meet another vehicle, particularly on the higher volume stretches of road. Therefore, such situations become multi-vehicle collisions [and thus the focus on head-on collisions]. [The statistics presented], he clarified, actually consider total crashes and other types [of crashes].

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG acknowledged that less than 10 percent of crashes are due to passing maneuvers. He then inquired as to the percentage of the total crashes that are single-vehicle crashes versus multi-vehicle crashes that are not attributable to passing maneuvers.

MR. THOMAS informed the committee that DOT&PF and DPS are working together to develop a strategic highway safety plan, including an emphasis on single-vehicle crashes. Although the totals per year are still being compiled, there are 26 deaths and over 100 injuries statewide annually for single-vehicle run-off-the-road crashes. Therefore, he estimated that 26 deaths would be about one-quarter to 30 percent of the deaths. All the fatal and major injury crashes are being reviewed, albeit in different ways. For example, rumble strips are being used down the center line as well as the shoulders of roads.

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CHAIR P. WILSON asked if the department has any information regarding the success of the rumble strips.

MR. THOMAS answered that the department only has such information from other states, which illustrate a possible 30 percent reduction in head-on collisions.

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REPRESENTATIVE PETERSEN opined that it's important to remind visitors to turn on headlights at all times in the [traffic safety] corridors and have signage to inform drivers of pull outs. Furthermore, visitors need to be educated with regard to the rule that a vehicle with five or more vehicles behind it should pull over. The aforementioned could be related via signage/message boards.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN added that the department could also work with rental agencies to educate its out-of-town clients with regard to the aforementioned rules.

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COMMISSIONER LUIKEN, returning to the presentation, directed attention to the slide entitled "4 E's-EMS", which relates that the department has included the emergency management system (EMS) in its coordinated effort to gather data on DOT&PF's emphasis areas. He then continued on to the slide entitled "What has been done?", which lays out the following accomplishments:

- Identified traffic safety corridors
- Ruts repaved
- 3+ signals in Mat-Su
- DOT/DPS audits with EMS
- Message boards, Joint agency media on REDDI [report every dangerous driver immediately], holidays
- Public acceptance, change in behavior
- 2009 ABHP staffed; two positions in Girdwood
- 2010 shoulder, centerline rumble strips
- 2011 headlights required, REDDI signs
- 2011 Potters Marsh repaving

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN provided the committee with photographs of aerial enforcement marks, rumble strips, additional passing

lanes, and electronic message boards. However, the weather wasn't conducive to much of the aerial support.

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CHAIR P. WILSON asked if there has been an increase in calls since the REDDI initiative has been [advertised].

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN deferred to DPS.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG inquired as to what can be done to improve the situation in a way that isn't the traditional use of highway funds.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN stated this year that the legislature will see a focused effort on some budget themes for capital funding, regardless of whether it's state or federal capital funding. This effort will include focusing on safety first, reliability, maintaining the current system, and other aspects. The point, he specified, is to build a prioritized list of projects that are aligned with budget themes with the hope to address what is really necessary. In further response to Representative Gruenberg, Commissioner Luiken said he could share the aforementioned information now or at a future briefing. He noted that the budget is an ongoing discussion at this point.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG expressed interest in hearing a preview from DOT&PF today, if time is available.

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COMMISSIONER LUIKEN, continuing his presentation, moved on to the slide entitled "Alaska Highway Safety Office." The Alaska Highway Safety Office is very much involved in the education piece of this effort. He reviewed the various advertisements used by the Alaska Highway Safety Office, noting that he and Commissioner Masters target specific topics at specific times of the year. Much of the advertising efforts are funded through the Alaska Highway Safety Office and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. In response to Chair Wilson, the committee was told that the acronym AIPC stands for Alaska Injury Prevention Consultant.

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COMMISSIONER LUIKEN moved on to the slide entitled "Traffic Reporting Upgrades" and explained that the 12-200 police crash report form allows the collection of more detailed data. The expanded form helps DOT&PF to better analyze crashes and determine how to avoid them in the future. He then informed the committee that TraCS is software that ties in traffic and criminal activity so that [DOT&PF] can provide the appropriate information to the appropriate parties. The aforementioned allows better coordination for solutions, he noted. He then informed the committee of the data driven accident and criminal tracing system (DDACTS) that compares indices over time to determine whether there are relationships. The aforementioned automation allows for quicker analysis of data and decisions. Turning to the slide entitled "511 Traveler Info System", Commissioner Luiken informed the committee the 511 system is expanding from being only computer-based to mobile devices. He noted that individuals can sign up for this system and be provided weather and road information and can provide information to the system as well.

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CHAIR P. WILSON assumed that travelers and truck drivers would be interested in the information provided by the 511 system.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN agreed.

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COMMISSIONER LUIKEN, returning to his presentation, continued with the slide entitled "5-1-1 Telephone", which ties into Canada. He informed the committee that in the spring there will be real time weight restrictions, such that the trucking industry will be able to review a map with the weight restrictions, weather conditions, warnings, and advisories. He emphasized that the goal is to make these initiatives as interactive as possible for the traveling public. He noted that the system will also include information regarding construction. In response to Representative Gruenberg, Commissioner Luiken confirmed that all the information in the aforementioned systems will be available to just about anyone. He then mentioned that the system will be wireless so that folks can obtain up-to-date information via wireless devices. The department is also considering the use of social media websites like Facebook as related on the slide entitled "Additional Features."

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG requested review of whether anything in the text messaging laws would prohibit or impede the public updating this system from wireless devices.

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COMMISSIONER LUIKEN, returning to his presentation, directed attention to the slide entitled "The Difference is Night and Day", which provides photographs illustrating the reflective materials being used on Alaska's roads. Pointing to the chart entitled "Seward Highway Traffic Safety Corridor Fatal & Major Injury Crashes: 1977-2011", Commissioner Luiken highlighted that through the traffic safety corridor initiative a difference has been made in terms of fatal and major injury crashes. He opined that part of the reason he is present today is because of the increase in fatal accidents this year, a few of which occurred in the traffic safety corridors. This marked increase is following about three years in which there was a decrease in [fatal] accidents.

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CHAIR P. WILSON related her belief that [these fatal accidents] can be attributed to the fact that there have been no new highways constructed in Alaska over the last 30 years. Roads constructed in the 1970s are facing an increased amount of traffic. Therefore, Alaska needs to [update] its roads to the 21st century.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN agreed.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG asked if the department is analyzing the data to determine why there is an increase in accidents this year or whether it's a statistical aberration.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN said that the department will review the data to determine if there's something that explains the increase in accidents experienced this year. As mentioned earlier, he predicted that driver behavior will be found to be a significantly contributing factor to many of these crashes.

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COMMISSIONER LUIKEN informed the committee that since 2006 when the traffic safety corridors were designated, there has been a reduction of [fatal and major injury crashes] by about half over all four of the traffic safety corridors. The combined efforts of DOT&PF and DPS have resulted in this reduction in fatal and major injury crashes. He then moved on to the slide entitled "What is next?", which lies out the department's goals for 2011-2013 and 2014 and beyond.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG inquired as to the cost of the digital message signs used by DOT&PF.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN offered to provide that information to the committee.

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COMMISSIONER LUIKEN informed the committee that for 2014 and beyond, the department plans the following: continue to review passing lanes in design, updating bridges, and [find funding] to go to four lanes. He noted that the cost of four lanes in one of the traffic safety corridors would be about double what the department would expect in federal funds. He then moved on to the slide entitled "Planned Enhancements", which relates that the department is planning a 511 iPhone App, weight restrictions on web maps, real-time ferry schedule via telephone and phone transfers to the Alaska Marine Highway System, and real-time public transit schedule information via telephone for Juneau, Fairbanks, and Ketchikan.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG asked if the reference to Twittering was to occur while driving because that would run afoul of the state's texting laws.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN clarified that the intention is for that information to be accessed on home computers.

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REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE thanked the commissioner for his work and the presentation. Although there has been much effort, there still are areas where work remains. Furthermore, many of the improvements don't necessarily garner large changes in fatality

statistics. For instance, on the Glenn Highway mile post 66.5-90 there are a lot of little accidents due to the vegetation being so close to the highway and the freeze thaw cycle that results in rocks on the highway. He then inquired as to the plan to modernize specific sections of the highways by planning some capital projects in those areas.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN offered to provide such information, which he indicated may be provided in the next State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP).

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ROB CAMPBELL, Regional Director, Central Region, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, surmised that the area being referred to is north of Palmer to the region boundary on the Glenn Highway. Much money has been spent in that area over the last 10 years, specifically for projects at Caribou Creek and Moose Creek. Currently, the department is reviewing remaining segments in the area under a 3R analysis. The 3R analysis means that the primary focus is on the existing alignment and accident areas that are statistically above normal are identified and fixed without realignment of the entire road. Those projects are in development and are in the design side of the department. In further response to Representative Feige, Mr. Campbell agreed to provide [the committee] with more specific information on these areas and projects.

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COMMISSIONER LUIKEN interjected that while the department has concentrated on the traffic safety corridors, the Alaska Highway Safety Office reviews all the state's highways to determine areas in need. He then reiterated that the federal process to design, obtain right-of-way, mark utilities, and construct result in a 7- to 10-year process.

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CHAIR P. WILSON opined that any time federal government funds are used more hoops are required than if all state funds are used. She stressed that practically all roads built in the 1970s need to be replaced, and thus there has to be a prioritization.

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REPRESENTATIVE PETERSEN informed the committee that the Muldoon interchange has experienced increased traffic and requires finding a solution before there is a severe accident, particularly in terms of winter weather road conditions. He offered to help with finding a solution for the Muldoon interchange.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG characterized the Muldoon interchange as a top priority.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN confirmed that the department is aware of the issue with the Muldoon interchange. In fact, it's something that the department is studying and has placed money in the 2012 budget for it. Thus far, it's been determined that it will be a significantly expensive project. However, he mentioned that there are some things that can be done in the interim to calm some of the conflicts in the area.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG suggested that it would be helpful for the department to hold a local meeting that brings residents up-to-date with the department's intention.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN agreed to do so.

TERRY VRABEC, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Public Safety, thanked the committee for its support with regard to the traffic safety corridors. He related that the ABHP started in December 2008 and has been working on a very pro-active program with education, enforcement, and presence. Although there has been an increase in enforcement and presence, he opined that education is the most important aspect of [DPS's efforts].

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LIEUTENANT TOM DUNN, Deputy Commander, Alaska Bureau of Highway Patrol, Alaska State Troopers, Department of Public Safety, began by echoing Commissioner Luiken's remark that success depends upon strong partnerships with various governmental agencies as well as the public to improve the state's transportation infrastructure. He then began his presentation by informing the committee that the Alaska Strategic Highway Safety Plan was adopted in September 2007. The plan is a statewide, comprehensive, and data driven effort that addresses highway safety issues unique to Alaska and its highway system. The idea is to have a comprehensive guide that identifies the

issues for which objectives and strategies are developed to resolve the issues within the resources available. The plan, he further related, was designed to be fluid and long living in order to adjust and grow with the needs of the state. He informed the committee that in 2007 DPS had the following three areas of emphasis: special users, driver behavior, and roadways. In 2011, the plan has grown such that the group decided that there should be sound and direct influence from leadership, which has resulted in the top layer [of emphasis] being the Governor's Road-Side Safety Advisory Committee (GRSAC). He explained that the idea with [GRSAC] was for lead folks within the departments to take an active role, obtain information from the emphasis area groups, collect information, develop strategies and objectives, and present plans to GRSAC. The hope, he related, was to have sound and effective plans.

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LIEUTENANT DUNN, in response to Chair P. Wilson, explained that for each emphasis area there are various strategies upon which there is focus. He clarified that DWLR stands for driving while license revoked.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG asked if GRSAC considers any legislative or budgetary changes of which the legislature should be aware.

LIEUTENANT DUNN explained that these are preliminary discussions with regard to highway safety. These groups don't control/discuss the budgetary aspect of this; they just develop ideas to address [highway safety problems].

CHAIR P. WILSON suggested that letting the legislature know if during discussions legislative involvement/action would be helpful.

LIEUTENANT DUNN agreed to do so. He added that essentially the idea with the GRSAC structure is to have a chain of command such that GRSAC can take ideas/suggestions to higher levels, such as the legislature.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG interjected that with the 90-day session the legislature needs to obtain information quicker, particularly in the second session of a legislature.

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LIEUTENANT DUNN said that there will be more meetings and he will be sure to mention this to all those involved. Returning to his presentation, he directed attention to the slide entitled "4E's", which was mentioned earlier. He opined that the traffic safety plan hinges on the 4E's: engineering - DOT&PF, enforcement - DPS, education - DOT&PF and DPS, and emergency services. With the improvement of medical services and training, equipment, and locations there is success in reducing fatal collisions due to better responses. As the process continues and the various entities work together more, the more effective the organization will be. Ultimately, the goal is to reduce fatality counts to zero. He then informed the committee that ABHP was established December 1, 2008. As mentioned by Commissioner Luiken, ABHP was established in partnership with DOT&PF, which provided essential funding. The Alaska Bureau of Highway Patrol is: "A statewide traffic law enforcement team safeguarding the wellbeing of everyone through proactive leadership, sustained high visibility and dedicated enforcement, education, and technology."

2:16:30 PM

LIEUTENANT DUNN directed attention to the slide entitled "Current Positions", which provides a chart of the current structure of DPS. He pointed out that there are three teams throughout the state, with the largest being in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. The notion was that as there were resource needs elsewhere, the larger team could be separated to address those. "We're trying to be as most effective as we can with the resources we have," he remarked. The second largest team is located in the Kenai Peninsula, which is a vast region. Two of the troopers out of the Girdwood region are dedicated to the Seward Highway traffic safety corridor. The smallest team is the Fairbanks team. In total the Alaska Bureau of Highway Patrol consists of 26 commissioned positions and 2 commercial motor vehicle positions. The commercial motor vehicle enforcement recognized the opportunity to partner with ABHP. He then directed attention to the slide entitled "4 Safety Corridors".

2:18:21 PM

CHAIR P. WILSON noticed that the traffic safety corridor on the Sterling Highway is only 10 miles long and therefore she questioned whether that stretch of road has lots of curves.

LIEUTENANT DUNN confirmed that the traffic safety corridor on the Sterling Highway does have curves. For whatever reason, the data relates that the designated 10-mile stretch is where most problems occur. In further response to Chair P. Wilson, Lieutenant Dunn related that the [data collection] system is moving from a paper system to an electronic system. However, it's not "quite there" yet. The data along with mapping from DOT&PF has been extremely helpful in pinpointing problems from a traffic safety standpoint and focusing resources more effectively to address the concern.

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MR. VRABEC pointed out that mile 92 of the Sterling Highway is the beginning of the city limits of Soldotna, which is a mix of residential, business, and visitor traffic. Therefore, the 10-mile traffic corridor has a lot of traffic.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG suggested that perhaps there could be federal funds available to gather the necessary data to make preliminary determinations regarding what's occurring.

LIEUTENANT DUNN said some federal funds through the TraCS program have been used to obtain electronic information quicker.

[2:21:16 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT DUNN continued with the slide entitled "2009 Seward Highway" and highlighted that there were six crashes and eight fatalities on the Seward Highway in 2009. Two of the crashes were due to driver behavior and the remaining crashes were suspected to be due to impairments of some type. Resolution of some of these cases takes some time, and therefore he said he doesn't always have access to or the ability to disclose all of the information. In 2009 there were no fatalities on the Knik Goose Bay traffic safety corridor, the Parks Highway traffic safety corridor, and the Sterling Highway traffic safety corridor. However, there were three fatalities on the Seward Highway traffic safety corridor in 2009. In 2010 there were four crashes and four fatalities on the Seward Highway. Within the traffic safety corridors there were no fatalities, save two in the Seward Highway traffic safety corridor in 2010. He highlighted that 2010 was the lowest statewide fatal collision rate of the state. In 2011 there have been, to date, two

crashes and two fatalities within the Seward Highway traffic safety corridor. In 2011 there were also two fatalities within the Knik Goose Bay traffic safety corridor, one in the Parks Highway traffic safety corridor, one in the Sterling Highway traffic safety corridor, and two within the Seward Highway traffic safety corridor. Therefore, there has been an increase, as pointed out by Commissioner Luiken. Lieutenant Dunn related that it has become evident, through DOT&PF's 30 years' worth of data, that about every seven years there appears to be a spike [in the number of fatalities], although he couldn't provide a good reason why. Still, as DOT&PF related, overall there has been a regression in the number of serious injuries and fatalities, even while vehicle traffic has increased. Therefore, although it's important to review the annual data it's also important to review the data over a longer term. He then directed attention to the slide with the chart relating the statewide fatalities, fatal crashes, alcohol-related fatal crashes, and percent alcohol related fatal crashes per year.

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CHAIR P. WILSON asked if it's typical for there to be an increase in fatal collisions during the holidays when people are drinking more.

LIEUTENANT DUNN replied no.

[2:26:02 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT DUNN, returning to his presentation, told the committee that the data in 2010 and 2011 is preliminary and subject to change. The current data relates that in 2010, there were 56 fatalities in 52 fatal crashes, which reflects a 12.5 percent decrease in fatalities and 11.9 percent decrease in fatal crashes from 2009. Furthermore, the number of alcohol-related fatal crashes in 2010 decreased by 22.7 percent from 2009. Again, he reminded the committee that the aforementioned figures are subject to change depending upon the data that becomes available from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS). Returning to Chair P. Wilson's question regarding alcohol use during the holidays, Lieutenant Dunn confirmed that there is an increase in the use of alcohol during the holidays. However, in Alaska the highest months for fatalities appear to be June, July, August, and September when there is more volume on the highways. The aforementioned is related in the chart entitled "Alaska Traffic Fatalities Updated 09/19/2011".

[2:27:55 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON expressed interest in knowing how much of an increase in vehicle traffic there is in the summer.

LIEUTENANT DUNN offered to work with DOT&PF to obtain that data.

[2:28:15 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT inquired as to whether there is any way to determine how much of the increased vehicle traffic is from outside visitors versus Alaskans.

LIEUTENANT DUNN said that he doesn't have such data.

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT commented that this year there seemed to be more traffic on the roads, including Alaskans.

LIEUTENANT DUNN offered that it was a nice weather year and people were getting out and enjoying it.

[2:29:38 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT DUNN, continuing his presentation, directed attention to the chart entitled "Fatalities Not Wearing Seatbelts", which relates information from 1994-2011. The chart relates that as seatbelt use has increased fatalities have decreased. Data also relates that seatbelt use is increasing and fatalities of those wearing seatbelts have decreased. With regard to an earlier question, Lieutenant Dunn opined that new technology on vehicles is helping reduce fatalities. However, there are ways to get around the technology that people do and only education and active enforcement can be used to thwart the aforementioned. Lieutenant Dunn said that he didn't want society to hang its hat on technology as there is always a level of self-accountability.

CHAIR P. WILSON asked if the legislation allowing law enforcement to stop drivers for possible violations of the primary seatbelt law is helping.

LIEUTENANT DUNN replied yes, adding that law enforcement does actively engage in seatbelt enforcement as it's taken seriously. As people learn and grow, there seems to be more compliance with seatbelt use.

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REPRESENTATIVE PETERSEN congratulated DPS on its ripple-effect advertisements that illustrate that the effects of an individual killed because he/she didn't wear a seatbelt reach beyond that individual. He encouraged continued use of such advertisements.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG recalled the update of the kid seatbelt law and asked if any data has been collected regarding its effect.

LIEUTENANT DUNN replied no, but from his own experience he said that he sees more kids buckled than in the past. He offered to obtain data on kid seatbelt use.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG said he would like to review any of the data collected related to the use of seatbelts by children. He opined that data regarding whether seatbelt use makes a difference [in fatalities] is of interest to legislators and the public.

LIEUTENANT DUNN agreed to begin collecting the data and providing it to the committee as soon as possible.

[2:33:48 PM](#)

MR. VRABEC interjected that the topic for the media yesterday was child safety seats, which he opined would be a good presentation.

[2:34:08 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT commended the departments for their work and collaboration. He then inquired as to the feedback with regard to education.

LIEUTENANT DUNN related that he is receiving positive feedback, which he believes makes a huge difference because it impacts behavior before an incident. The success with seatbelt use is a classic example of saturated education with enforcement.

[2:35:31 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT DUNN, in response to Representative Gruenberg, related that there's a 50:50 split regarding whether people want to be allowed to use hands free cell phones [while driving] or to ban cell phone use [while driving] entirely.

MR. VRABEC interjected that many of those present today would likely agree that although they consider the use of cell phones while driving distracting, they still find the ability to use them helpful.

CHAIR P. WILSON offered that there are also a certain amount of folks who just don't want to be told what to do, regardless of whether they believe it's the correct thing or safe thing to do.

2:38:29 PM

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT inquired as to how successful law enforcement is in enforcing situations in which an individual is pulled over due to the distracted driving because of cell phone use.

LIEUTENANT DUNN clarified that currently drivers are allowed to use their cell phones while driving. Therefore, at present if law enforcement identifies a safety risk due to the driver using his/her cell phone, the office will initiate contact via an investigative stop to determine the situation. If the driver's actions do endanger the welfare of others, there are laws addressing that; if action is necessary, law enforcement will take it. However, he opined that most situations can be remedied through roadside education. Lieutenant Dunn said that identified safety risks cause law enforcement to take action in order to avoid an accident.

2:40:12 PM

LIEUTENANT DUNN, continuing his presentation, stated that enforcement and education are what's being used to reduce fatalities and serious injury collisions in Alaska. He then directed attention to the slides entitled "Citations 2009" and "Citations 2010", which relate that law enforcement is active in the traffic safety corridors and that activity increased in 2010 as did the staff. That activity, he reiterated, is to reduce the number of serious collisions and fatalities. He moved on to the slide entitled "Citations 2011", which relates data through September 22, 2011 and relates another increase, although it's fairly consistent with the 2009 and 2010 citations in the traffic safety corridors. He noted that the citations aren't for a particular type of citation issued, but rather for all citations issued. However, he noted that typically the highest issued citation category is for speeding. Although a lot of the speeding citations are for speeding 9 miles per hour over the

limit rather than the higher amount that the driver was likely speeding, law enforcement is trying to find a balance [between enforcement and deterring behavior] while achieving safety.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG observed that the citations from 2010 to 2011 seem to have increased for all the traffic safety corridors except the Seward Highway traffic safety corridor. He acknowledged that the information for 2011 is only through September 22, 2011.

LIEUTENANT DUNN remarked that although the 2011 information is not for the full year, much effort has been placed on the Seward Highway traffic safety corridor. This year there have only been two fatalities so far on the Seward Highway traffic safety corridor, which he believes is making a difference.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG pointed out that the citations for the Knik Goose Bay Road traffic safety corridor is also down. However, the number of citations for the Parks Highway and Sterling Highway traffic safety corridors has increased significantly. He then inquired as to whether there is a difference in enforcement in these areas.

LIEUTENANT DUNN related that the Alaska Bureau of Highway Patrol shifts its resources as much as it can to address problematic areas. For example, after observing the increases in the Seward Highway traffic safety corridor, the bureau increased its efforts in that area. As a result of shifting areas of focus, the number of [citations] will shift as well.

[2:45:28 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT pointed out that although the Seward Highway traffic safety corridor citations have decreased, the overall Seward Highway citations have increased.

LIEUTENANT DUNN highlighted that there is a significant penalty for violations in traffic safety corridors, which he believes is a powerful tool to curb behavior in those problem areas.

[2:46:05 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON asked if more troopers would be helpful.

LIEUTENANT DUNN replied yes, but added that there will never be enough troopers to police everyone at once. Therefore, there needs to be a level of community partnership and self-accountability in order to achieve success.

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LIEUTENANT DUNN, continuing his presentation, moved on to the slide entitled "Education". He stressed that he believes in influencing behavior prior to an incident happening, which can only be achieved through education. He reviewed the various education efforts and those that are coupled with the media.

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CHAIR P. WILSON relayed, from a testifier who had to leave, the concern that Alaska's 16-year-olds obtain their driver's license without receiving driver's education. Therefore, this testifier expressed his desire to have driver's education returned to schools.

LIEUTENANT DUNN said that he doesn't have a personal opinion on requiring driver's education in schools other than that education is always good. However, he recalled from the Strategic Traffic Safety meetings that studies have shown that the results of driver's education in comparison to the cost don't balance. He confirmed that the public in Alaska has expressed interest in returning driver's education to the schools.

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REPRESENTATIVE PETERSEN told the committee that the issue he has heard from education administrators is the liability of having driver's education back in the curriculum, and therefore he didn't believe it would be returned. He then expressed interest in students having more hours of driving with parents in various road conditions.

LIEUTENANT DUNN related his understanding that the graduated driver's license program requires parental confirmation that the student performed a certain amount of hours driving in various road conditions.

[2:50:06 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT DUNN then played the ripple effect videos, which provided the committee with a glimpse of the type of advertisements the departments are putting forward. He emphasized the need for drivers to wear seatbelts, which saves lives as the data illustrates. The ABHP is also discussing alcohol/drug use while driving, obedience to traffic rules, headlight use, self-accountability, importance of rest, and a partnership with law enforcement to reduce serious injuries and fatal collisions.

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CHAIR P. WILSON recalled when she was an EMT and that those involved in accidents who didn't wear a seatbelt were almost always left in a worse situation than those who wore a seatbelt. She also recalled that summer visitors, who are accustomed to driving until its dark, didn't realize that it doesn't get dark in Alaska until much later and would fall asleep at the wheel.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG surmised that the medical community would like to be involved in this education campaign.

LIEUTENANT DUNN agreed, adding that many private stakeholders have approached the ABHP regarding partnering with them on educational campaigns. As folks reach out to the bureau, it's trying to grow and foster those relationships in an effort to influence behavior.

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REPRESENTATIVE PETERSEN related a possible advertisement with regard to falling asleep at the wheel in Alaska in which tag team driving is suggested.

LIEUTENANT DUNN remarked that the aforementioned is a good idea as the bureau has been trying to educate the public while offering an easy and attainable solution.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG noted that there have been legislative efforts to mandate the use of headlights in Alaska.

LIEUTENANT DUNN related the bureau's belief in headlight use.

MR. VRABEC relayed the department's support for the headlight law and the need to use headlights at all times and places.

LIEUTENANT DUNN mentioned that it's important to recognize that even on the brightest days, it's easier to see a vehicle with its headlights illuminated and provides better safety.

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LIEUTENANT DUNN continued with the slide entitled "Specific Outreach Efforts". He informed the committee that ABHP conducts a minimum of two driver educational presentations in Fairbanks, Soldotna, and the Mat-Su Valley. The topics of the presentations include impaired driving, speeding, aggressive driving, seatbelts, and/or distracted and drowsy driving each year. These educational presentations have brought forth a tremendous response from students, parents, partners, and the school district. The ABHP also conducts a minimum of two trainings, Drug Impairment Training for Educational Professionals (DITEP), each year. He explained that during DITEP drug recognition professionals teach education professionals how to identify drug impairment in order to notify the appropriate people prior to the student getting in the car. The ABHP conducts a minimum of five Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement (ARIDE) courses for law enforcement agencies each year. These courses help frontline officers to identify roadside impairment and take appropriate action. The ARIDE program has been successful. Lieutenant Dunn reiterated ABHP's outreach efforts to establish a firm partnership with the communities it serves and the other agencies with which it works. Moving on to the slide entitled "Effective Partner Relations DOT/AHSO", he emphasized that all of the partners have been wonderful. He then informed the committee that during the summer of 2011, DOT&PF and DPS installed headlight signs along the four designated safety corridors based on the 2010 Safety Corridor Audit. The purpose of using headlights is to maximize the lives saved at the least public cost as is the installation of centerline rumble strips in traffic safety corridors.

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LIEUTENANT DUNN then directed attention to the photograph that highlights the various signage including the REDDI signs, half mileposts, and headlight signs. He acknowledged that originally REDDI focused on reporting "drunk drivers" rather than "dangerous drivers," which is a broader focus. It's difficult to know whether the calls for "dangerous drivers" are due to alcohol involvement or distraction until the individual is stopped. He acknowledged that the signs encourage people to

call about dangerous drivers, and ABHP encourages callers to pull over or have a passenger call. Lieutenant Dunn opined that the REDDI program is working and has been effective. Continuing on to the slide entitled "Special Event Enforcement", he reviewed the various efforts in place, including the national enforcement crackdowns, Saturday night blues, Alaska Strategic Traffic Enforcement Partnership (ASTEP), Arctic Man Event, Memorial Day Enforcement, Fourth of July Enforcement, Deltana Fair Traffic Enforcement, Tanana Valley Fair Traffic Enforcement, and Alaska State Fair Traffic Enforcement. Essentially wherever there is an expected or past increase in traffic, ABHP will try to be present in order to reduce overall incidents on the highway system.

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LIEUTENANT DUNN, continuing the presentation, directed attention to the slide entitled "ABHP Statewide Focus". The ABHP, echoing his earlier comments, is a statewide effort that will shift its resources to wherever they are needed. The ABHP works to maintain high visibility to deter dangerous driving behavior. The aforementioned is most recently evident with the shift in resources to the Sterling Highway to address difficulties experienced there. He relayed reports that troopers were seen every 20-25 miles. Still, there were fatalities, which highlights that enforcement alone isn't the solution. Lieutenant Dunn then moved on to the slide entitled "Short Term", which relates that the following goals have been achieved: direct assignment of two ABHP to Girdwood; secure RADAR speed trailers for statewide use; secure crash data retrieval (CDR) systems for Fairbanks, Mat-Su, and Soldotna ABHP; and secure braking meter systems for Fairbanks, Mat-Su, and Soldotna ABHP teams. He explained that CDR systems are computers that plug into automobiles' computers after accidents to determine what was occurring with the automobile prior to a collision. The aforementioned will allow more accurate reporting information. He then explained that the secure braking meter systems allow troopers to perform a road test such that the trooper can determine the surface condition of the highway at a specific time. Those short-term goals that have begun are as follows: train ABHP total station operators in accident reconstruction; identify updated 3D accident mapping systems for improved scene investigations; and identify updated hand-held LIDAR units for improved stationary enforcement. He noted that these hand-held LIDAR units now have video capability as well as the ability to calculate the distance between two automobiles. These units would be an effective tool in reducing

collisions. Those goals remaining are as follows: fill ABHP vacancies, mandatory headlight legislation, aggressive driving legislation, and ongoing traffic regulation review (13AAC). With regard to aggressive driving legislation, Lieutenant Dunn explained that of the 11 states with such laws, most define "aggressive driving" as speeding coupled with one to two other specified violations. Arizona has the longest standing and most successful aggressive driving law and it's based on speed and a combination of passing and/or following too close offenses. He then directed attention to the slide entitled "Long Term" and related that ABHP will continue to work with the Alaska Highway Safety Office for grant applications for funding of ABHP through 2013 and 2014. He also pointed out that ABHP is in the process of evaluating how it will continue to meet its mission in the future. The ABHP is also evaluating the use of photo RADAR. Lower 48 data has shown a reduction in the volume of collisions when technology has been introduced. Since why and how the aforementioned is being accomplished is unknown, ABHP wants to evaluate it as well as sustainable aerial traffic enforcement.

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CHAIR P. WILSON recalled when she was driving a friend's automobile in Iowa a few years ago. After turning off a main road, it was several miles before there was a sign that specified the speed on that road. Her friend was later sent a photo radar ticket for speeding on the stretch of road that Chair P. Wilson had to drive for several miles before there was a sign that specified the speed limit. Therefore, Chair P. Wilson stressed the need for there to be appropriate signage for speed limits.

LIEUTENANT DUNN agreed, and added that appropriate implementation of such a program would be vital to the success of the program. Although photo radar is successful elsewhere and is worthy of review, it needs to be addressed in a slow and methodical manner.

[3:16:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT inquired as to whether the implementation of photo radar would require legislation or is the department already authorized to implement it.

MR. VRABEC recalled that the last implementation of photo radar went through the courts.

[3:17:17 PM](#)

CAPTAIN RANDAHL HAHN, Commander, Alaska Bureau of Investigations, Department of Public Safety, related that photo radar is only on the list because it's technology that's available and is being used in other locations. He emphasized that photo radar needs to be reviewed in terms of thinking outside of the box in order to reach the goal. He further emphasized that photo radar is in its conceptual phase.

[3:17:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG recalled that in 1985 folks who passed school buses couldn't be prosecuted by merely having their license plate number because it couldn't be proven who was actually driving at the time. Ultimately, Alaska followed a Minnesota law that provided that if a vehicle owner of a vehicle whose license plate number was identified as passing a bus could prove he/she was not driving, the citation to the vehicle owner could be dismissed and issued to the driver.

MR. VRABEC recalled the aforementioned situation. He further recalled that law enforcement's direction at that time was to obtain an interview with the owner. Although the aforementioned is a little bit more work for law enforcement, it's doable, he opined.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG asked whether there were problems within the courts or was it effective.

MR. VRABEC confirmed that there were some problems. However, he opined that it was probably more effective than not and often law enforcement found out who was driving.

[3:21:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PETERSEN related that there was much public opposition to photo radar, which he partly attributed to the change from the original strict use in school zones during specific times to other times. Ultimately, the public opposition resulted in the law being overturned.

[3:22:40 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON thanked the presenters and opened public testimony, but no one was present to testify.

[3:23:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG related his thanks to the chair for organizing the meeting.

[3:23:16 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON encouraged the presenters to contact the legislature for help when needed. She then inquired as to whether any of the presenters felt that the night time delineation has been effective.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN answered that it's too early to provide feedback on its effectiveness and suggested that it would be a couple of years before there is enough data to review its effectiveness. He then related that he has received quite a few comments from those driving between Wasilla and Anchorage regarding the lighting project up to the Palmer Flats.

CHAIR P. WILSON mentioned that in Juneau, between downtown and the valley there is a stretch of unlit road. She noted that the problems with unlit roads are of particular concern in areas with moose. She then asked if there has been any review of planting plants in the medians that don't attract moose.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN responded that he doesn't have any specific data, but did confirm that department staff is reviewing what kinds of species of plants will discourage moose browse. He related that the department will continue its efforts to keep the brush mowed back from the road.

[3:27:50 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON inquired as to the results of roundabouts being used in the state.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN said that although the jury is still out on that, the department believes they are incredibly effective traffic calming facilities. Roundabouts keep traffic moving and reduce the potential for serious injury and fatal crashes. There is data from the nation as well as the world that roundabouts are much safer for pedestrians as well. In response to Representative Petersen, Commissioner Luiken confirmed that roundabouts increase the traffic flow at those intersections with roundabouts.

[3:29:31 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG recalled that a [municipal] roundabout had recently been installed in the Anchorage area. He encouraged the department to obtain comments/feedback from those driving in the area of a roundabout.

COMMISSIONER LUIKEN noted that since it was on a municipal road, the department was likely not very involved in it. However, in the major roundabout installation projects in which the department was involved, there was significant public interaction before, during, and after the installation.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG mentioned that he has driven in Europe where there are many roundabouts, which he considered a great idea.

[3:32:42 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON asked whether the areas already targeted for an increase to four lanes have occurred.

MR. THOMAS told the committee that there are projects to construct four lanes in the design stage now. The information regarding which projects are in what stage is reported in an annual audit that also includes questions posed. The 2009 and 2010 audit can be found on DOT&PF's website and the 2011 audit is being compiled now.

[3:35:06 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.