

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 27, 2022  
1:01 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Grier Hopkins, Chair  
Representative Sara Hannan, Vice Chair  
Representative Louise Stutes  
Representative Harriet Drummond  
Representative Tom McKay  
Representative Kevin McCabe  
Representative Mike Cronk

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: ALASKA'S STATE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN:  
CALL FOR PROJECTS AND PLANNING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JAMES MARKS, Director  
Division of Program Development and Statewide Planning  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented a PowerPoint, titled "Alaska's State Transportation Improvement Plan: Call for Projects and Planning with Stakeholders."

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:01:23 PM](#)

**CHAIR GRIER HOPKINS** called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. Representatives Drummond, McKay, McCabe, Cronk, Hannan, and Hopkins were present

at the call to order. Representative Stutes arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**Presentation: Alaska's State Transportation Improvement Plan:  
Call for Projects and Planning with Stakeholders**

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CHAIR HOPKINS announced that the only order of business would be a presentation on Alaska's State Transportation Improvement Plan: Call for Projects and Planning with Stakeholders.

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JAMES MARKS, Director, Division of Program Development and Statewide Planning, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), presented the PowerPoint, titled "Alaska's State Transportation Improvement Plan: Call for Projects and Planning with Stakeholders." He stated that the mission statement for the Division of Program Development and Statewide Planning is to optimize the state's investment in transportation and meet federal requirements through effective plan programming. The transportation planning process is required, and it is the first step in identifying and selecting and getting a project into the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). He stated that DOT&PF has a diverse team of planning professionals working all over the state who will assist in getting packages to meet federal requirements. He stated that STIP is one of many plans in a federal hierarchy of plans, with the top of the plans being the Long Range Transportation Plan and Freight Plan, which has a 20-year planning span, and sets up many of the other plans. He said that the Funding and Financing Plan is in development, and not well understood, which contributes to the misunderstanding around STIP. He said STIP is a plan, not a budget, so it can be changed easily. Continuing, he stated that, because of the size of the state, the plans break the state into regions.

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MR. MARKS, responding to a committee question, addressed the development of a variation of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for unincorporated areas which do not have the population or density for MPO. Concerning the pilot project in the Northwest Arctic Borough, he responded that the department has had conversations with the leadership team there

about creating a regional transportation planning organization, much like MPO.

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MR. MARKS, continuing with the plan description, pointed out the Statewide Active Transportation Plan (SWATP), which covers bike paths, trails, and curbs. He noted that the Transportation Asset Management Plan looks at the future of assets, such as pavement and bridges. He pointed out the Strategic Highway Safety Plan consists of around 45 agencies across the state, which work at making transportation safer. Responding to a committee question, he stated that SWATP is now integrated at the state and federal level and included in all plans.

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MR. MARKS, responding to a series of committee questions, stated that there is a priority system for these programs. He stated that the mandatory programs are first priority. After this, the priority is maintaining assets, and the next priority is modernization and expansion. He stated that the current policy can dictate how these vary. He responded that most of the priorities are defined by state and federal regulations, with most plans in this discussion falling under federal requirements, with state regulations mirroring these. He stated that he would address how the areas are prioritized later in the presentation. Concerning local involvement in active transportation planning, he responded that a slide would walk through this later in his presentation. Concerning how local communities can address projects before implementation, he responded that public input is welcomed; however, especially with long expansive projects, once federal money is received, there is an obligation to finish the project, or the state would have to pay the funding back.

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MR. MARKS proceeded to slide 5, introducing the roles of various heads of the department. In response to a committee question, he stated that regional planners are listed on the map of planning areas on slide 6. He responded that the marine highway planner position has been vacant because of changes; however, the position has now been posted.

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MR. MARKS continued to slide 7, which lists the regulations. He stated 17 AAC 05.170 defines how projects are classified in four board categories: National Highway System (NHS) and Alaska Highway System (AHS), Community Transportation Program (CTP), and Trails and Recreation Access for Alaska (TRAAK). He said that 17 AAC 05.175 defines how the department will identify and evaluate the needs. He said evaluation criteria includes effects on the economy and resource access, environment, health, quality of life and safety, mobility and intermodal connections, maintenance and operation financial contributions, and public support. In response to a committee question, he stated that new regulations are being considered, but this is not an active project, so there is not a timeline. He stated that, because of the significant amount of public participation, rewriting the regulations is challenging and takes a long time. He stated that he does not know the last time the regulations were updated. Regarding the composition of the board, he responded that this is set in regulation. In response to a question concerning having a member of the public on the board, he stated that DOT&PF has gone through scenarios, and the challenge is deciding who would be included. Once decisions are close to being made, he stated he would share the information with the committee.

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MR. MARKS continued that 17 AAC 05.200 lists out mandatory recurring and required programs. Proceeding to the next slide, he said he would describe how the federal apportionments, which are in statute, relate to the state regulations, as this shapes the call for projects, and where the funding sources go within the programs. Starting with NHS and AHS, he said these two are not subject to 17 AAC 05.175, but are data driven projects using asset management. To better use the data these are performance-based programs on stratifying projects, with reoccurring and required projects being the base. The next programs in the stratification would maintain already existing assets, and improvement projects would be at the next level, followed by expansion projects. He stated that stratifying projects helps evaluate similar aspects and be more intentional about investments. Responding to a question, he said everything seen on slide 5 is in STIP, including NHS and AHS improvements, which are individual projects instead of programs. In response, he stated that the Airport Improvement Plan is separate and outside of STIP and will not be covered in the presentation. He continued that once there is stratification, the next step is developing project evaluation criteria. For a better idea of

the benefit cost, this evaluation is predictive relative to time and other projects. He stated that NHS is funded by the National Highway Performance (NHPP) funds, and AHS is funded chiefly by the Service Transportation Block Grant (STBG).

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MR. MARKS responded to a series of questions concerning road condition, repair, and funding. In the example of an impacted road adjacent to the easement, he replied that there would be significant inter-agency collaboration for these types of projects. For clarification, he responded that the "state of good repair" category means that the road is in good repair, and any work required would not be considered normal reoccurring maintenance. In agreement, he continued that this is in reference to a project that is below good repair and brought back to good repair but has not received any improvements. This is about preserving what already exists. In regard to whether this concerns funding or a certain level of disrepair, he responded that this is not just when a road has gotten to a certain state, as there is a pavement management system with predictive modeling on the future state of pavement at any given time. These models would be regional as well. The goal is to preserve the pavement through smaller and more frequent treatments before it reaches the point where full reconstruction is needed. He responded that maintenance and operation is a separate component, with a separate operating budget. Concerning the type of materials used in different paving projects, he stated he would follow up with an answer for the committee. Concerning what criteria is required by NHS and AHS and whether more local planning could be incorporated, he replied that the criteria is not in federal or state statute or regulation. He stated that DOT&PF is looking at ways of using data in selecting the right projects.

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MR. MARKS stated that CTP and TRAAK follow similar processes but have different projects with different requirements. While not included in NHS or AHS, both programs service state-owned transportation facilities at a local level. Submitted projects serve local needs but are not just locally owned. He stated that the political subdivisions are the only ones that can submit projects, so advocacy groups would need to work through a local political subdivision or municipality to work with DOT&PF. He stated that the TRAAK program is antiquated, so new federal rules do not fit easily with these older department regulations.

Concerning this he mentioned the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), which is a federal program addressing bike paths, sidewalks, and limited recreational trails. He stated that the primary funding source for CTP and TRAAK is STBG. He stated that he mentioned TAP because this is a set-aside from STBG and sub-allocated by population. He said there could be around \$17 million in funding through this source.

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MR. MARKS, responding to a series of committee questions concerning TAP funds, said the money can be transferred from one apportionment to another. A federal rule requires that TAP is strictly a public nomination process, so the state cannot submit its own projects. He responded that TAP or STBG could be used as funding for the pedestrian corridors along the Seward Highway; however, NHS would be the preferred funding. In response to whether the TRAAK money goes to the Department of Natural Resources, he said that TRAAK is a state program, not federal, so there is no TRAAK funding. The funding source for this is a small piece that comes in through recreational trail funding. He stated that the \$17 million is a STBG set aside. He responded that TAP funding has fewer eligibilities and would be used to connect communities to places, as opposed to recreational purposes.

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MR. MARKS, in reference to the composition of STIP, stated that most of the mandatory programs are federal. In example, he listed the following: the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), the National Highways Freight Program (NHFP), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ), and Preservation and Maintenance (PM). He stated that all these programs have either a data driven federal requirement or a policy that dictates how this is done, such as PM. He stated that NHFP and the new PROTECT program require resiliency plans. He discussed the different apportionments, pointing out that NHFP comprises over half the funding, and STBG comprises about 25 percent of the funding. He said all the other programs are in these mandatory programs and projects. In reference to CMAQ, he responded to a committee question concerning defined air quality areas in the state. He said that there are maintenance areas and nonattainment areas, and both qualify. For example, he pointed out Anchorage, Eagle River, and areas of Juneau with dust, stating it is usually urban areas which qualify.

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MR. MARKS pointed out the cyclical process on slide 12 which addresses the call for projects. He explained that each step with highlighted yellow icons are areas in which the public can be involved. Proceeding to slide 13, he said this gives a detailed view of what a call for projects looks like. In general, it takes 15 to 16 months. Components which can be expedited are also the ones the public does not want to move faster, because the public needs time to understand the projects. He stated that there are four major steps: pre-public notice and program prep at one- and one-half months; public notice of intent to apply at five- and one-half months; call for projects at six months, and review by the project evaluation board at about two months.

MR. MARKS stated that the first major step is the pre-public notice and program prep, which entails a statewide meeting. He stated that there are two different online public websites and a statewide mailing list. This phase came into existence because communities said that there was not enough time to apply after the notice of intent phase, which is the most important step to being eligible for the rest of the project. He explained that some things are not known at the pre-public notice, such as criteria, because it is still being developed. He suggested creating a timeline using notifications of regulations and the notice of intent. At this time the public could be introduced to planners. In summary, this phase is a pre-public notice of the general eligibilities, with a look back at the last cycle to indicate which types of projects did well. He suggested that this gives lead time to identify projects.

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REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE expressed the opinion that by the time the public is notified, DOT&PF has already committed to projects. He questioned the germination time of the projects and the point when DOT&PF would take into consideration public notices.

MR. MARKS responded that DOT&PF already is collecting the public needs. He referred to the previous slide which showed the source of all the needs. He stated that this comes from DOT&PF performance and condition data, where public needs are considered. He stated that this is an opportunity to add any additional issues, as projects go through the review process, working out the details.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE questioned how a project is germinated, concerning public input and sponsors. He expressed the opinion that projects begin in a bureaucrat's office without public input. He expressed concern that the public has no way to shut the project down once it is sponsored and moving forward.

MR. MARKS responded that he could put together a more detailed response to this concern. He stated that he cannot speak to the past, but going forward, there are a lot of people in the administration and agency who are interested in local needs and public needs. He suggested that by putting more public into the process could change the paradigm. Trying to figure out how to do this requires balancing the needs of the state while maintaining facilities and taking care of the economy, for example. But also, there is the question of balancing this with the volume, and part of that is connecting and getting the right requirements together. This is why the regulations have political subdivisions. He stated that Representative McCabe is right, there are a series of bureaucracies that the public must go through. He stated that the question becomes: "How do we make this shift."

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MR. MARKS, in response to Representative Hannan, pointed out the cycle on slide 12 represents about a two-year effort. The regulations require a review of CTP and TRAAK every three years, which would put the project delivery time at four to eight years. He stated that DOT&PF is trying to expedite some of these things, and looking at getting a more routine cadence, and a lot of people are being mobilized to get this done.

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CHAIR HOPKINS noted some projects in Fairbanks have been canceled because of public input, while others went forward. He questioned the criteria which allows for one project to move forward and one to be stopped in this process. He questioned whether public input affected this. He suggested that more local input may be needed.

MR. MARKS stated he would follow up with a response.

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REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE noted that over the next five years there will be \$3.5 billion in funding for highways and \$225 million in

funding for bridges. He noted that some bridges have been built but never used. He commented on the amount of funding in bureaucracy and expressed the opinion it is often spent on unneeded items when the money should be used elsewhere, such as AMHS or airports. He suggested that other projects may be more desired by the public. He continued listing projects which need funding. He expressed concern over the "huge" amount of money coming into a "huge" bureaucracy, and the public has been ignored.

CHAIR HOPKINS concurred with Representative McCabe.

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MR. MARKS, continuing with the presentation, stated that the next phase is the public notice of intent to apply. In this phase the draft criteria will be released, with about two months for feedback and updates to the criteria. He stated that the criteria for CTP and TRAAK are defined by regulation, but how the data can be used is not in regulation; therefore, updates can happen here, and priorities can be determined. He stated that public input at this point is important, and the call for projects will be funded simultaneously. He advised that the projects need to be in the process at this point; however, sponsors are not required to have fully developed projects. Templates will be put out with the general details listed. There will be regional planning meetings with online public notices. He reiterated that this would not be detailed scopes, schedules, and estimates, but just an overview of the projects.

MR. MARKS moved to slide 16. He stated that in the call for projects phase, the final project criteria are published with revisions. A change log will show the differences between what is started with and what happened. This would demonstrate how public input is used with changes. He added that projects sponsors are counseled by planning staff at this point, and the scopes, schedules, and estimates will be detailed. There will be geotechnical work, such as traffic counts, safety statistics, and maintenance and operation costs. This will determine the amount a municipality or political subdivision is willing to contribute financially. He advised that this phase is the longest, taking about five to six months.

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MR. MARKS, in response to Chair Hopkins, pointed out regulations stipulate that sponsors can be in the CTP program, the state, or

part of any of the state's political subdivisions. For example, a sponsor could be Fairbanks, Bethal, or a municipality. He stated that area planners can receive input and supply feedback for CTP groups or the state.

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MR. MARKS, on slide 17, stated that once all packages are received, the process moves to the last phase, or the Project Evaluation Board, which is a one-to-two-day meeting. This meeting is posted on public notice and can be attended virtually. He stated that regulations stipulate that evaluators score each project using the available criteria, which does not change after it has been made public. Once scored, the projects will be ranked; however, other factors beyond the scoring can influence the programming of these projects. Other factors include whether there is room in STIP, fiscal constraint, and scheduling, which depends on the size of the project, and the time it will take. He added that a project could be programmed further out in the 10-year plan. He stated that best-interest findings can also take precedence. Notes from these meetings are made available, and there are opportunities to comment on the process.

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MR. MARKS, in response to Representative Drummond, said that "OPN" means the Online Public Notice

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MR. MARKS continued to slide 18, which concluded the presentation. He emphasized the importance of relationships and connections throughout the process. He listed the takeaways as being prepared, subscribing to the online public notice delivery, and locating the area planners, as these people will walk the project through the process, which includes using the federal and state rules and regulations. He advised this will give the project the best chance of success.

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MR. MARKS, responding to Chair Hopkins, stated that currently the process is in the "pre-preplanning" stage. The new infrastructure's net effect is still being understood, and there are larger policy level decisions which need to be made. He

spoke about the level of funding which may or may not be received and the effect this will have.

CHAIR HOPKINS questioned whether the next step is the intent to apply process and should the committee members' districts begin to develop ideas.

MR. MARKS responded that committee members should be aware the call could get pushed out for any number of reasons, and people should avoid spending time preparing things if the call gets pushed out. He suggested waiting for the first notice from the department. Responding to a follow-up question, he stated that having a list of priorities would be ideal. There will not be a lot of funding put into developing scopes, schedules, and estimates before the initial triaging step during the notice of intent to apply. But communities should get prepared and start talking with stakeholders in their areas to get a prioritized list. He suggested it would be too early to put DOT&PF engineering resources into scheduling estimates.

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CHAIR HOPKINS, drawing attention to the electronic STIP (eSTIP), questioned whether this would be a way to put in for smaller projects.

MR. MARKS responded that whether this exists within eSTIP or another platform, the department is trying to get things to be map based and visual, so a facility can be clicked on, and what is needed can be identified. He stated that the department would like everything to exist all on one platform, making management and transparency of the process easier. He cautioned that eSTIP is in the very early stages of implementation, and it is being done in phases, with customization further down the road.

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CHAIR HOPKINS thanked Mr. Marks.

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#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:25 p.m.