

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 3, 2022

1:35 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Robert Myers, Chair
Senator Mike Shower, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Kiehl

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Click Bishop
Senator Peter Micciche

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 203

"An Act designating portions of the Parks, Glenn, Seward, and Sterling Highways as a part of the State's Purple Heart Trail and relating to signage and informational displays for the trail."

- MOVED SB 203 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 212

"An Act naming the Bragaw Street overcrossing of the Glenn Highway the Insook Baik Bridge."

- BILL HEARING CANCELED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 203

SHORT TITLE: PURPLE HEART TRAIL

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) REVAK

02/22/22	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/22/22	(S)	TRA, FIN
03/03/22	(S)	TRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR JOSH REVAK

Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 203.

EMMA TORKELSON, Staff
Senator Josh Revak
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional analysis for SB 203 on behalf of the sponsor.

JOHN KNOTT, Commander
Military Order of the Purple Heart, Alaska Chapter
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Invited testifier spoke in support of SB 203.

ANDY MILLS, Special Assistant to the Commissioner
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on SB 203.

BENNO HARRY CLEVELAND, Past Commander
Military Order of the Purple Heart, Alaska Chapter
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 203.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:35:46 PM](#)

CHAIR ROBERT MYERS called the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Kiehl, Shower, and Chair Myers.

SB 203-PURPLE HEART TRAIL

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CHAIR MYERS announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 203 "An Act designating portions of the Parks, Glenn, Seward, and Sterling Highways as a part of the State's Purple Heart Trail and relating to signage and informational displays for the trail."

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SENATOR JOSH REVAK, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 203, paraphrased the sponsor statement.

[Original punctuation provided.]

The Purple Heart medal is a United States military decoration awarded in the name of the President to those who have been wounded or killed in service to their country. Since 2008, the Alaska and Richardson Highways from the Alaska-Canada Border to Fairbanks have been designated the Purple Heart Trail in honor and recognition of the sacrifices of these service men and women. SB 203 seeks to complete what was begun in 2008 by extending the Purple Heart Trail so that it will run continuously from the Alaska-Canada Border to the End of the Road in Homer.

The Purple Heart Trail is a national project to designate portions of the interstate highway system as "The Purple Heart Trail System," reminding Americans of the sacrifices made by their country-men and women in uniform. The original Purple Heart Trail was established in 1992 in the Commonwealth of Virginia at Mr. Vernon and runs the length of the Virginia Highway. Today, Purple Heart Trails extend across the nation, including from the Alaska-Canada Border to Fairbanks.

Signage drawing attention to the designation is placed at appropriate intervals along the highways to stimulate thought and discussion among adults and children alike about the history of our nation and those who have made significant sacrifices for it.

Alaska's has a strong military tradition; we have an estimated 65,000 resident veterans, approximately 21,000 active-duty military, and more residents who serve in the National Guard. Throughout our history, many returning Alaskan soldiers have been honored with the Purple Heart Medal and the Purple Heart Trail designation serves as a reminder to each of them that Alaska is grateful for their service.

Senate Bill 203 will extend the Purple Heart Trail highway designation by ~662 miles from Fairbanks to the End of the Road in Homer. Doing so will complete a continuous 900 mile stretch of Purple Heart Trail from the Alaska-Canada Border to the End of the Road and connect the Purple Heart Cities of North Pole,

Fairbanks, Wasilla, Soldotna, and Homer. SB 203 and the extension of the Purple Heart Trail in Alaska serve as a tangible demonstration of Alaska's appreciation for the sacrifices made by our wounded and fallen soldiers and a reminder to visitors and residents alike of those who have paid the price for our freedom.

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SENATOR REVAK summarized that SB 203 would extend the Purple Heart Trail from Fairbanks to Homer, which will run continuously from the Alaska-Canada border to Homer. It will connect five Purple Heart cities in Alaska, including North Pole, Fairbanks, Wasilla, Soldotna, and Homer. He highlighted that Alaska has a robust military presence with the highest per capita in the nation. This bill reflects the service and sacrifices made by those who were awarded the Purple Heart. The Purple Heart is the oldest military decoration. General George Washington awarded the Purple Heart to soldiers as the first US military decoration. He highlighted that signage would be posted at intervals to stimulate thought and discussion among adults and children about our nation's history and those who have made significant sacrifices for it.

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EMMA TORKELSON, Staff, Senator Josh Revak, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, paraphrased the sectional analysis for SB 203.

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Section 1. Amends AS 35.40.210(a) to extend the Purple Heart Trail designation to include the ~590 miles of highway from Fairbanks to the End of the Road in Homer. With this extension, the Purple Heart Trail will, in its entirety, be made up of:

- the Alaska Highway from the Alaska-Canada Border to Delta Junction - existing
- the Richardson Highway between Delta Junction and Fairbanks - existing
- the George Parks Highway between Fairbanks and Wasilla - new
- the Glenn Highway between Wasilla and Anchorage - new
- the Seward Highway between Anchorage and the Seward-Sterling highway junction - new

- the Sterling Highway to its termination at the
- end of the Homer Spit - new

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Section 2. Amends AS 35.40.210(b) to require the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities erect appropriate "Purple Heart Trail" signage at the Veterans Memorial at Byers Lake, Wasilla, Anchorage, the junction of the Seward and Sterling highways, Soldotna, and Homer.

Removes the existing language requiring signage be placed at points "halfway between" these locations and replaces it with language that allows the department to determine the most appropriate locations for additional signage.

Section 3. Amends AS 35.40.210(c) to increase to six the number of required informational displays at pull-outs along the Purple Heart Trail. The Border to Fairbanks trail has three displays, so this will require that *at least* three displays be erected on the new portion of the Purple Heart Trail between Fairbanks and Homer.

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Section 4. Amends the uncodified law of the State of Alaska to ensure that DOTP&F has the authority to accept gifts, donations, and grants from a person or agency for the purpose of providing signage and informational displays required by AS 35.40.210(b) and (c).

Section 5. Amends the uncodified law of the State of Alaska to clarify that DOTP&F has the flexibility to erect the signs and informational displays as funds are available, without waiting to receive all the funds needed to complete the entire project required by AS 35.40.210(b) and (c).

MS. TORKELSON stated the intent was to allow the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) to work with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and other departments to accomplish signage, using the appropriate pullouts and other locations along the highway.

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JOHN KNOTT, Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Alaska Chapter, Fairbanks, Alaska, provided invited testimony in support of SB 203. As a recipient of the Purple Heart, he said he could not think of a more fitting tribute to honor recipients than this trail. He commented that the Purple Heart symbol tends to renew patriotism for people. He stated that the signage at Delta Junction sparks emotions for veterans. He said combat veterans feel supported when they see these signs. He remarked that many highway signs along roads are riddled with holes, but people do not shoot at the Purple Heart signs. He surmised that people understand the significance of the sacrifices these honored war veterans made.

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SENATOR SHOWER asked about the funding mechanism and timeline for the signage. He further asked whether state funds would be used if donations did not materialize.

SENATOR REVAK responded that many people in communities are interested in donating funds for signage. He noted that the agency has been supportive of the Purple Heart Trail. He stated the intent was to find creative ways to fund the necessary signage.

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MS. TORKELSON indicated the goal was to get the mandated number of signs erected after SB 230 passes, but to allow some time to collect donations.

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SENATOR SHOWER asked Mr. Mills to respond.

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ANDY MILLS, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF), explained that the bill would provide added flexibility for the department to receive donations or federal grants. He stated that it takes four to six weeks to produce signs, but supply chain issues may cause delays. He anticipated that the department would work with the sponsor's office to evaluate donations and produce the signage during the summer or fall. He related that the department interprets the bill, such that the department would issue a fiscal note that reflects the total signage cost, and it offsets the signage costs with any donations. He said any remaining funds would lapse back to the state.

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SENATOR SHOWER asked if anyone was actively searching for donations to accomplish the necessary signage.

SENATOR REVAK answered that he deferred to the organizations to seek donations. He also anticipated that federal grant funding would likely be forthcoming. However, he said he was not personally soliciting donations.

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MS. TORKELSON related her understanding that the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Alaska Chapter, was potentially interested in leading that effort. She stated the goal was to funnel donations through a single organization and any federal grant funding would come directly from the federal government.

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SENATOR KIEHL thanked Mr. Knott for his active involvement when Skagway became a Purple Heart City two years ago.

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CHAIR MYERS asked how the Purple Heart Trail route was selected. He acknowledged that the Fairbanks to the Alaska-Canada border made sense, given the connection to WWII. He recalled the Glenn Highway was built about the same time, but he could not think of any particular connection the selected routes had to the military from the routes.

SENATOR REVAK responded that a group of Purple Heart recipients in Alaska requested the bill, primarily led by the Military Order of the Purple Heart. He related that the Purple Heart Trails were being designated nationwide. He deferred to the organization to provide more details as it works to get additional cities designated as Purple Heart cities.

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MR. KNOTT explained that the organization wanted to start with this route since many Purple Heart recipients live along the designated highways or in nearby communities. He related that the organization has chapters in Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Kenai. He suggested that the Purple Heart Trail could later connect the Glenn Highway to the Alaska-Canada Highway.

SENATOR KIEHL remarked that doing so would create 1,000 miles of honor instead of 650 miles.

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CHAIR MYERS opened public testimony on SB 203.

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BENNO HARRY CLEVELAND, Past Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Alaska Chapter, Fairbanks, Alaska, stated that he currently serves as the Alaska Native Veterans Association president and the Alaska Native Veterans Council president. He explained that he spent his 19th and 20th birthdays in hospitals in Vietnam. He said it would be a great honor to dedicate the Purple Heart Trail in Alaska by placing plaques and highway signs along the trail. Alaska hosts tourists from throughout the world. Further, Alaska residents travel on these highways. He envisioned that children, parents, and grandparents could ask questions and discuss the physical, emotional, and spiritual sacrifices that veterans awarded the Purple Heart made. He related that the signs would also signify the state's support for its veterans, particularly those who gave their lives to defend this great nation so Americans can enjoy freedom.

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CHAIR MYERS closed public testimony on SB 203.

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SENATOR SHOWER moved to report SB 203, work order 32-LS1553\B, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

CHAIR MYERS heard no objection, and SB 203 was reported from the Senate Transportation Standing Committee.

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At ease

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CHAIR MYERS reconvened the meeting.

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There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Myers adjourned the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting at 1:58 p.m.