

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 31, 2023

1:00 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Kevin McCabe, Chair  
Representative Craig Johnson  
Representative Tom McKay  
Representative Sarah Vance  
Representative Louise Stutes  
Representative Genevieve Mina  
Representative Andrew Gray

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Donna Mears

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

OVERVIEW: DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION & PUBLIC FACILITIES

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

RYAN ANDERSON, Commissioner  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Overview of the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities.

WOLFGANG JUNGE, Regional Director  
Central Region  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Overview of the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities.

JOE KEMP, Acting Northern Region Director  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Overview of the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities.

LANCE MEARIG, Regional Director  
Southcoast Region  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Overview of the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:00:45 PM](#)

**CHAIR KEVIN MCCABE** called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Representatives Johnson, McKay, Vance, Stutes, Mina, Gray, and McCabe were present at the call to order.

#### **Overview: Department of Transportation & Public Facilities**

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CHAIR MCCABE announced that the only order of business would be the Overview of the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities.

[1:09:00 PM](#)

RYAN ANDERSON, Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, co-offered the Overview of the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF). He began a PowerPoint presentation [hard copy included in the committee packet] and drew attention to slide 2, which shows the organization of the department. In addition to the commissioner, there is one deputy commissioner who oversees: Statewide Design & Engineering Services; Program Development & Statewide Planning; Highway Safety; Alaska Marine Highways; and Change Management. Another deputy commissioner oversees: Statewide Aviation & Airport Leasing; Alaska International Airport System; Measurement Standards and Commercial Vehicle Compliance; State Equipment Fleet; Facilities Services; and Safety Coordination. Regional Directors oversee Northern, Southcoast, and Central Capital Project Delivery and Maintenance

and Operations. He listed the following boards and committee: the Alaska Marine Highway Board; the Aviation Advisory Board; the Roads & Highways Advisory Board; and the Executive Facilities Management Advisory Committee.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, to slide 3, related DOT&PF's mission is to "keep Alaska moving," and its core values are: integrity, excellence, respect, and safety. He spoke about the department's duty to oversee a network of highways, thus contributing to the development of commerce and industry in the state, which in turn aids in extracting resources and improving the economic and general welfare of the people of Alaska.

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MR. ANDERSON showed a map on slide 4, which depicts the state's 237 airports managed and operated by the department, more than any other state. Also shown as red dots are the maintenance and operation (M&O) stations. The highway system is shown as yellow lines, and the marine highway is shown with dashes. He pointed out that the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) covers an area equal to the distance from Florida to California. He turned to slide 5, which gives the following measures of the scope of DOT&PF's infrastructure as follows [original punctuation provided]:

ROADS & HIGHWAYS

5,682 center line miles / 11,843 lane miles of roads / highways

MAINTENANCE TEAMS

80 DOT&PF staffed maintenance stations\*

AVIATION SYSTEM

235 rural airports, 2 international airports

ALASKA MARINE HWY SYSTEM

9 ferries, 35 ports of call, along 3500-mile coastal route

MARINE FACILITIES

16 harbors, 1 set of breakwaters

BRIDGES & TUNNELS 851 DOT&PF

owned bridges, 3 tunnels\*\*

MEASUREMENT STANDARDS

Inspected 7,438 scales, 4,787 meters, and 296 accessories

STATE EQUIPMENT FLEET

7,366 pieces of state equipment & vehicles

PUBLIC FACILITIES

827 maintained, inclusive of 731 DOT&PF owned

COMMERCIAL VEHICLE ENFORCEMENT

9 Weigh Stations, 2,544,047 tons weighed FFY22

STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION ASSETS

Approximately \$12.6B

STATEWIDE PERSONNEL AND DISTRIBUTION

3,393 permanent full-time, part-time and non-permanent employees in 8 labor unions in 83 locations

Federal Fiscal Year (FFY)

\*Includes seasonal maintenance stations

\*\*DOT&PF-owned tunnels and maintenance of the 2.5 mile Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to a question from Chair McCabe, confirmed that there are still commercial vehicle compliance officers. They generally work at the weigh stations.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON moved on to slide 6, which shows the department's budget in pie charts, with an operating budget of \$438,138.4 and capital budget of \$1,462,627.8. Within the operating budget is the following: highways, rural variation, facilities, \$147,048.3; international airports, \$110,487.9; Marine Highway System, \$157,222.2; and all other functions, \$23,380.0. Within the capital budget is the following: airport improvement program, \$462,009.2; AMHS annual overhaul, \$22,000.0; federal program match, \$126,755.8; state equipment fleet replacement, \$25,000.0; statewide federal program, \$66,213.5; surface transportation program, \$755,505.9; and other state funded projects, \$5,143.4.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Vance, listed some categories that fall under "all other functions," including: measures and standards; commercial vehicle compliance; management and support services; human resources; procurement; information technology; and oversight of the capital program.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Stutes, explained that the federal program match would match dollars that are representative of the department's capital program. To a follow-up question, he confirmed that would include "the ferry boat funds."

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MR. ANDERSON, in response to Representative C. Johnson, said this is the overall budget; it is not general fund (GF) monies. He offered to get a GF graph to the committee at a later date.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON returned to the PowerPoint, to slide 7, "Our Team," which shows the regions for DOT&PF: Northern, Central, and Southcoast. It also lists the following divisions within the department, which are: Statewide Aviation, Alaska International Airport System, Alaska Marine Highway System, Design and Engineering Services, State Equipment Fleet, Measurement Standards & Commercial Vehicle Compliance, Program Development, Facilities Services Division, and Civil Rights Office. He continued to slide 8, which lists the following strategic investment areas: safety, economic vitality, state of good repair (SOGR), resiliency, and sustainability. He mentioned electric vehicles and a carbon reduction mandate. He said sustainability is new and includes considerations unique to Alaska. One idea is to convert all street lights to LED.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Vance, said a presentation focused on sustainability could be requested from the committee for a future date. He moved on to slide 9, "Organizational Excellence," which includes the following areas of focus: workforce, communication, culture, innovation, information, resourcing, project, and delivery. Some ideas

include improving processes, mission critical incentive pay, and working out different scheduling.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to a question from Chair McCabe regarding current staffing and vacancies, said he hesitates to give numbers for the entire department because it is so big. He said, "When you look at all the PCNs, we're at 50 percent." Staffing issues depend on location, he added. He mentioned the airport in Nome and the Anchorage International Airport as having had challenges in hiring enough staff. He said the department looks for patterns.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON returned to the PowerPoint, to slide 10, "Information X - Traffic," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Challenges with the old system "Navigator"

- Exclusively road traffic impacts
- Funding source did not cover aviation
- Excluded most rural Alaska projects
- Redundancy in effort with 511

Solutions with the new system "Traveler 511 Info AK"

- Single source of information for all traffic impacts (maintenance, construction, weather, crashes, cameras)
- Meets the public where they're at--via phone, website, and mobile app
- Automatic data grab reduces data entry effort

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to a remark from Chair McCabe about online sources for watching road conditions, noted that other states have maps for that purpose, such as to "track a plow," and DOT&PF is considering that technology. He moved on to slide 11, "Information X - Date," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Challenges

- Need to communicate more than traffic impacts

- No central location to find information
- Data is collected, stored, and managed differently in each region
- Extensive manual data entry

#### Solutions

- Public-facing GIS map with expanded project info, STATEWIDE
- Layers of data show legislative boundaries, municipal boundaries, and more
- Automatic data processing and reports to reduce manual entry
- Scalable - useful for internal & external data

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON talked about having a "one-stop-shop" approach to consolidate data.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Mina, confirmed that DOT&PF shares information and works with local government transit systems, although there is not one system being used to do so.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON introduced Wolfgang Junge to speak on the topic of the Central Region's 2023 construction project.

[1:32:18 PM](#)

WOLFGANG JUNGE, Regional Director, Central Region, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, covered slides 12-15 of the PowerPoint, which show the projects of DOT&PF by region. Slide 12 shows the Central Region 2023 Construction, region-wide projects. In response to Chair McCabe, he said he thinks nearly all the money for these projects came from FAA monies, but he offered to find out if any of the money came from stimulus funds.

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MR. JUNGE move on to slide 13, which shows Anchorage Municipality 2023 Construction. He said one highlight is reconstruction of the Seward Highway between O'Malley and Dimond, at a total estimated cost of \$113 million. Another

project of note is the Dowling Road and Seward Highway Interchange reconstruction project, at a cost of approximately \$43 million. The final big project in that region is the O'Malley Road Reconstruction, phase II, at a cost of approximately \$41 million.

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MR. JUNGE turned to slide 14, which shows 2023 construction projects for the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) area. Of note is the Knik Goose Bay Road, at a cost of \$75 million for the first phase; the Seward Meridian Parkway, at an estimated cost of \$60 million; and the Glenn Highway, Parks Highway to South Inner Springer Loop, phase II, at a cost of approximately \$70 million. In response to Chair McCabe, he said the completion of the construction of the bridges will be by the end of 2023.

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MR. JUNGE moved on to slide 15, the Kenai Peninsula Borough projects, including: the Cooper Landing bypass project, estimated to be completed by 2027, with an estimated expenditure of \$690 million. He said this will include the state's first wildlife overcrossing. He noted environmental permits have been completed for the Sterling Highway safety corridor, between Sterling and Soldotna, Alaska, and it should be out to bid for the "design/build action" by spring 2023. He said it would be an estimated \$77 million for that safety corridor. He highlighted the Sterling Highway milepost (MP) 157-169 reconstruction, Anchor Point to Baycrest, including North Fork/Anchor River bridges.

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JOE KEMP, Acting Northern Region Director, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, as co-presenter, continued the PowerPoint on slide 16, which gives an overview of the Northern Region 2023 construction, and he discussed the timing of some projects, including construction on the Parks and Richardson Highways. He said the cost for the Northern Region is somewhere between \$330 and \$350 million; about \$150 million of that is being spent "out West."

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MR. KEMP turned attention to slide 17, which shows Fairbanks Area Construction 2023, including last phases of University

Avenue and a bridge opening ceremony. He pointed out that one project will cut "wait time" down at the Fort Richardson/Steese intersection from six minutes to about one and a half minutes.

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LANCE MEARIG, Regional Director, Southcoast Region, as co-presenter, brought attention to slide 18, which shows Southcoast Region 2023 construction, region-wide projects, including a perimeter fencing project at the airport in Kodiak, an equipment building at Cold Bay, and a navigational aide on St. Paul Island. He mentioned another navigational aide in Yakutat, an ongoing project on the Haines Highway at MP 12-20, an intersection safety improvement project in Sitka, a couple projects on Prince of Wales Island, and a rockfall mitigation project in Wrangell. In response to Representative Vance, he talked about Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) emergency projects [in response to] a storm in December 2019 in Southeast Alaska. The FEMA projects are in Petersburg, Juneau, and Skagway, he noted.

[1:52:45 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to a question from Representative Stutes regarding guard rails, said DOT&PF is putting together a plan to inventory the state's guard rails and replace them, as necessary.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to a question from Representative C. Johnson about recalled guardrails, confirmed there are some of those type of guardrails in Alaska, and the department is replacing them as funding allows and on a project-to-project basis.

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MR. MEARIG returned to the PowerPoint, to slide 19, which shows the Juneau Area 2023 construction projects, including a pathway project at Brotherhood Bridge Trail [Kaxdigoowu Héen Dei], a safety product at the Eagan/Yandukin intersection, and stage II of a Douglas Highway project that will commence summer 2023, at a cost of approximately \$11 million. He moved on to slide 20, which shows the Ketchikan Area 2023 construction projects, including Wolfe Point slope stability, Tongass Avenue

improvements, a city bridge replacement at Water Street, and others.

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MR. MEARIG continued to slide 21, which shows details of the Katlian Bay Road project from Sitka and south to the head of Katlian Bay. The project has been challenging, and it is expected to cost [\$67.9] million at completion. An operator was killed in a landslide the first season, so the contractor has proceeded with caution. Efforts are also being made to reduce costs. He offered further details regarding the challenges of the project.

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MR. MEARIG, in response to Representative Stutes, clarified the route of the Katlian Bay Road. He said it would not be a heavily traveled road; its use would be more recreational. In response to Chair McCabe, he talked about the reason for the designed route, including that it would have been longer to follow the coastline.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to a question from Representative Vance as to whether there had been a cost/benefit analysis done, offered his understanding that there had not; the department takes direction and moves forward. He remarked. He said DOT&PF recognizes it could have done better on this project, and he emphasized the importance of considering how to complete the project economically. He said the 2004 Southeast plan recognizes "this corridor."

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MR. MEARIG, in response to Representative Stutes asking where the road will get people who use it, answered there is recreational land at the end of the road. In response to a follow-up question, he began, "It's a new road to..."

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES interjected, "Seventy million bucks will go a long way in the Marine Highway."

MR. MEARIG, in response to a question from Chair McCabe, offered his understanding that the original plan in 2012 had been that

this road would be a start to the other side of the island to a ferry terminal.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Vance, said the project was funded by a general obligation (GO) bond - a package of funding - and was voted on by the public. In response to a follow-up question as to this basically being from general funds, he said, "Well, at this time, we wouldn't have authorization just to spend from the general fund." The department would have to look at unspent GO bond funds or find other appropriations that exist, he concluded.

[2:12:48 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON picked back up with the PowerPoint at slide 22, which lists services to Alaskans. He moved to slide 23 and discussed the serious crash rate. Over the past few years, the average of pedestrian fatalities associated with crashes has been 20 percent, which is high. He pointed out the chart on slide 22, which shows statistics from 1981 to 2021. The red line is the fatality rate; the blue line is the serious injury rate; and the green line is the fatality and serious injury rate. In 2006, the legislature implemented a statute that allowed DOT&PF to establish safety corridors, and there was a resulting decline in fatality rates.

[2:16:17 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to a question from Representative Mina, named two possible causes that fatalities have risen nationwide - distracted driving and driving under the influence - and said these statistics are being studied.

[2:16:58 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative C. Johnson regarding property loss versus fatalities, said the department can provide that information. In response to a follow-up question, he indicated that the information is collected through police reports, so it can be delayed.

[2:18:48 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to a question from Chair McCabe regarding safety corridors, directed attention to slide

24, which lists: Seward Highway, Potter Marsh to Girdwood; Parks Highway, Wasilla to Houston; Sterling Highway, Sterling to Soldotna; and Knik-Goose Bay Road, Palmer-Wasilla Highway to Point MacKenzie Road. He noted there has been success with the Parks Highway safety corridor, so it is being decommissioned.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Gray, discussed the considerations for establishing safety corridors, including serious injuries and fatality rates. He talked about "traffic calming" through road design. He explained that just lowering the speed limit without other engineered solutions does not lead to lower injury and fatality rates.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Mina, regarding funding for safety corridors, said they are 90 percent funded by the federal government. For example, the Bureau of Highway Patrol is under the Highway Safety Improvement Program funded by the federal government.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Vance, said he would provide regional statistics on fatalities at a future date.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Chair McCabe, regarding what could be funded, said the department looks at various factors, including pedestrian safety.

[2:27:36 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Stutes asking for feedback regarding bicyclists, said they, and possibly even motorcyclists, are considered "vulnerable" users, and he said the department is looking at that aspect in terms of transportation improvements.

[2:28:26 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON returned to the PowerPoint, to slides 25 and 26, which show West Coast Alaska storm response, challenges

and solutions. He spoke about a recent typhoon that was a several-day event that stretched a lot of agencies responding. No one was killed, but considerable property was destroyed. The sea level rose 8-18 feet, and over 50 miles of federal-aid highway was damaged.

[2:31:30 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Mina, regarding best practices, talked about having more incident command system training. He also spoke about technology and prepping teams for response.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON moved on to slides 27 and 28, regarding winter maintenance. He noted there has been an increase in the frequency of extreme events. He talked about challenges with job vacancies and the supply chain for equipment. He said DOT&PF is working more with local governments with workforce development, flexible work schedules, and mission critical incentive pay. In response to Representative Mina, regarding funding for snow plows, he said the department has a priority to plow roads, followed by pedestrian facilities, and there is discussion about how that is prioritized. He allowed that there are times when equipment breaks down, and he noted [a lack of] mechanics can exacerbate that issue.

[2:36:53 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Gray, regarding contracting and road ownership, said there is a wage study that will occur this year. He said he thinks it is good for DOT&PF to take care of main roads, and the department supports local governments taking care of the smaller roads.

[2:40:08 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative C. Johnson, talked about upgrades in relation to trades, such as one in Kodiak. He said typically, "when folks want to take on a new road, they do want a good road." He sought a list of all those roads.

[2:42:19 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Chair McCabe, further discussed trades. He added that if there are federal funds involved, there must be assurance that the road will be maintained.

[2:43:37 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON returned to the PowerPoint, to slides 29 and 30, regarding community-driven planning. He talked about rural areas and consideration of a multi-modal system, such as a model in the Lower 48 called the Rural Transportation Planning Organization. He said the department offered funding for local communities interested in this planning, and the following areas have taken this on: Copper Valley Development Association; Fairbanks, North Star Borough; Northwest Arctic Borough, and Bristol Bay. In response to Chair McCabe, he described how he got the word out about this opportunity.

[2:47:47 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON addressed slides 31 and 32, regarding the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS). He talked about aging vessels that spend more time in the shipyard, which impacts the ferry scheduling. Another issue is recruiting and retention of employees. He talked about the "Charting the Course Initiative," operational audit, review of maintenance and overhaul practices, leverage of younger ships in the fleet, and pursuit of a capital program for vessel replacement using discretionary funding. He said the department's focus in this arena is reliability and modernization.

[2:51:24 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to a remark from Representative Stutes about the forward-funding of the legislature to enable AMHS to get its schedule published earlier and the summer schedule not yet being released, mentioned issues with the Motor Vessel (M/V) Columbia and Prince Rupert. He said the department would get the schedule out as soon as possible. He noted there had been a request to extend the public comment period.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES noted the reason for the request for the extension of the public comment period was that the information had been made available only three days prior to it.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Gray, as to the main reason there is a challenge in hiring and retaining crew, said this is a nationwide problem. He noted that the department had recently negotiated labor agreements. He said this seems to be an issue bigger than wages, and the department is looking at ways to improve the experience of AMHS employees, including having Wi-Fi on the vessel for the crew.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES expressed her appreciation for Commissioner Anderson's work with AMHS.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to Representative Vance, regarding gaps in service, said the department put out contracts in Seldovia and Kodiak, and it got bidders in Kodiak. He said the department has been successful getting bids in the Lynn Canal. He indicated the learning curve in the process in terms of knowing whether the department must work harder in any given area to "find people." In response to a follow-up question, he said he would get back to Representative Vance regarding a bid in Seldovia and possible solutions.

[2:56:25 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE thanked Commissioner Anderson. He mentioned his recent experience riding on a ferry and complimented Commissioner Anderson on the professionalism of "his crew."

[2:57:39 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at [2:58] p.m.