

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

August 22, 2023

9:59 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

SENATE TRANSPORTATION

Senator James Kaufman, Chair
Senator David Wilson, Vice Chair (via TEAMS)
Senator Löki Tobin
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Robert Myers (via TEAMS)

HOUSE TRANSPORTATION

Representative Kevin McCabe, Chair
Representative Sarah Vance, Vice Chair (via TEAMS)
Representative Tom McKay
Representative Craig Johnson
Representative Jesse Sumner
Representative Louise Stutes (via TEAMS)
Representative Genevieve Mina (via TEAMS)

MEMBERS ABSENT

SENATE TRANSPORTATION

All members present

HOUSE TRANSPORTATION

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Mike Cronk
Representative Julie Coulombe

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S) : MODERN STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT
PLAN (STIP)

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

RYAN ANDERSON, Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF)
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Delivered the presentation on the Modern Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP).

KATHERINE KEITH, Deputy Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF)
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the Modern Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) presentation.

SHANNON MCCARTHY, Communications Director
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF)
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the Modern Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) presentation.

CRAIG TORNGA, Director
Alaska Marine Highway System
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF)
Ketchikan, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the Modern Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) presentation.

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF)
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the Modern Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) presentation.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:59:23 AM](#)

CHAIR KEVIN MCCABE called the joint meeting of the Senate and House Transportation Standing Committees to order at 9:59 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Tobin, Kiehl, Myers (via TEAMS), Wilson (via teleconference), and Chair Kaufman; Representatives Johnson, McKay, Vance (via TEAMS), Stutes (via TEAMS), Mina, and Chair McCabe. Representative Sumner arrived thereafter. Chair McCabe recognized the presence of Representative Coulombe. [Representative Cronk was also in attendance.]

**PRESENTATION: MODERN STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN
(STIP)**

[10:00:35 AM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE announced a presentation on the Modern Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP).

[10:01:02 AM](#)

RYAN ANDERSON, Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, Anchorage, Alaska, delivered the presentation on the Modern Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). He began by introducing himself and the other presenters.

[10:02:44 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON explained that every four years the federal government requires the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) to prepare a new Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). The STIP is the department's vision for moving transportation in the state forward using federal funds over the next four years.

[10:04:40 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON reviewed slide 4, "What is the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program?":

Modern, Resilient, Agile: DOT&PF and the STIP
What is the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program?

The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

49 U.S.C. 5304(g) - State Requirements

- Staged, multi-year, intermodal program:
 - Supports Economic Vitality
 - Increases Safety and Security

- Increases Accessibility and Mobility
- Protects and Enhances the Environment, promotes energy conservation, and consistency in application
- Enhance Connectivity across modes
- Promote Efficient System Management
- Emphasize Preservation
- Improve Resiliency and Reliability

[10:05:39 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON reviewed slide 5, "Why Change Now?" which displayed an image of a bar graph titled "STIP DASHBOARD BY CENSUS AREA OR BOROUGH." He said that the department is recognizing the need to understand where investments are made. For example, healthy contractor communities are important for quick response time when solving problems. Analyzing investments through different lenses is important and now the department has modern tools with which to do so.

[10:07:07 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON reviewed slide 6, "How Was the Draft 2024-2027 STIP Built?" He said this STIP reveals plans beyond the four-year period, as far as 2030, based on available funding and what the department hopes to accomplish in the next seven years.

[10:07:55 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON reviewed slide 7, "2024-2027 STIP: Opportunities and Challenges." He stated that in the last year the department has discussed transportation goals for the next five years. The recurring topics center on being modern, resilient, and agile. Focusing on these attributes will take transportation in the state to the next level and clarify the areas that need investments to ensure safety, economic vitality, and reliability across transportation modes, resiliency, and sustainability. He said there will also be greater focus and investment in rural and urban aspects of transportation, surface corridors, and waterways.

[10:10:09 AM](#)

KATHERINE KEITH, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Anchorage, Alaska, participated in the Modern Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) presentation. She began on slide 8, "The Modern STIP, New Tools for Understanding," explaining that she would be discussing tools the department has developed to aid public understanding and interaction with the transportation vision. In the past, there

were many projects in the STIP that lacked revenue to fund progress. In hindsight, the department has reevaluated to strategically move forward. The department wanted tools that are conducive to project management, analyzing program-related fiscal factors, and forecasting workforce demand along with critical challenges to statewide infrastructure.

10:12:06 AM

MS. KEITH referred to the State of Alaska DOT&PF 2024-2027 STIP website (<https://publicinput.com/stip/>) and spoke about the various tools newly available for the public to use to learn about ongoing transportation programs and projects.

10:14:39 AM

CHAIR MCCABE recognized Representative Andy Josephson.

10:14:52 AM

MS. KEITH continued explaining about how the public can dive deeper into the department's projects and plans by using the website.

10:17:06 AM

MS. KEITH navigated to the DRAFT STIP 2024-2027 Project Summaries, and spoke to interactive dashboards on the webpage, in lieu of slide 10, "Modern Tools: A Tutorial."

10:20:46 AM

MS. KEITH advanced to slide 9, "Modernizing the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan." She mentioned that Shannon McCarthy would be speaking about community engagement. The department wanted the ability to get high directional feedback from the public. Through an interactive GIS-enabled map on the website, citizens can troll spatially around the state to view various transportation projects and interact via comment threads. The comments are transparent, and the department's responses are publicly visible.

10:21:42 AM

MS. KEITH reviewed slide 11, "New Tools: Our Transportation Needs and Our Funding." One goal of the STIP is to seek a better way to combine the statewide legislative budget process with the federal funding allocation in order to merge the two seamlessly. The goal with the STIP is to have maximum flexibility and allow for the capital budget to have line item allocations for the ongoing project over the last couple years. There are about 45 different fund programs that were balanced by year and by fund. There are more projects than the budget allows, and the

department is vying for more federal funds to put towards projects.

[10:24:14 AM](#)

MS. KEITH reviewed slide 12, "Our Dynamic Transportation System: How We Invest Matters." One component that is different about the STIP is general simplification. Projects have been consolidated to facilitate a strategic approach and leverage projects together.

[10:25:57 AM](#)

MS. KEITH moved to slide 13, "Our Big State - Where we invest matters." She said that through the tour of available online tools filters can help show where money is invested geographically around the state. Online tools also indicate the strategic investment areas within the following areas: waterways, urban, rural, corridor, and Alaska-wide.

[10:27:27 AM](#)

SHANNON MCCARTHY, Communications Director, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Anchorage, Alaska, participated in the Modern Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) presentation, advancing to slide 14, "Modern Tools for Engagement Listening to Alaskans."

[10:27:34 AM](#)

MS. MCCARTHY reviewed slide 15, "Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act: Transportation Departments":

Modern Tools for Engagement
Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act: Transportation
Departments

- Public Opinion Surveys
- Presentations
- Mentimeters
- Listening Sessions
- Meeting the people where they are at - townhalls, neighborhoods, work, ferries, social media
- Using new modern platforms to allow them to engage via phone, text, email, meet virtually or in person.

[10:29:41 AM](#)

MS. MCCARTHY reviewed slide 16, "Engagement Best Practices":

Modern Tools for Engagement

Engagement Best Practices

Best Practices:

- Connect with the public on multiple levels
- Establish feedback loops
- Provide information across multiple channels
- Meet with people - In person, virtually or telephonically

Good Engagement:

- Is Community-Centered
- Is Culturally Sensitive
- Is Ongoing
- Is Transparent

[10:31:28 AM](#)

Representative Sumner joined the meeting via TEAMS.

CHAIR MCCABE recognized that Representative Maxine Dibert joined the meeting via TEAMS.

[10:31:40 AM](#)

MS. MCCARTHY reviewed slide 17, "Public Comments: How are we doing?" She expressed excitement about website traffic and public interaction. The website has been promoted on multiple platforms and has had over 10,000 views. Thread capability has generated 258 comments and many more are expected at the last minute. She mentioned that their press releases were opened over 6000 times. The planning staff has been working with tribal communities and reaching out to advocacy groups. She said the focus has been on improving and expanding outreach.

[10:33:06 AM](#)

MS. MCCARTHY reviewed slide 18, "Path Forward: An Agile Plan":

Modern Tools for Engagement
Path Forward: An Agile Plan

First Round:

- Earned Media
- Regulatory Notice
- Legal Ads
- Social Media
- Public Meetings

Second Round:

- Adjusting to public's needs

- Meetings with MPO's EDs and RPO's
- Tutorial videos and how to guides
- Direct contact with local government via email, phone calls and briefings
- Tribal consultation
- Radio PSA's

What's next?

[10:34:40 AM](#)

MS. MCCARTHY reviewed slide 19, "Next Steps: After the Comment Period":

Modern Tools for Engagement
Next Steps: After the Comment Period

DOT&PF encourages comment - positive or negative
Staff is reviewing content as it comes in - we are listening
Once comment closes - department reviews, makes adjustments, and responds with transparency.

Public dialog does not stop with the end of the STIP comment period - we will still accept comments and inquiries as we move forward with the plan, projects and programs.

[10:35:37 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON stated that he was proud of the work that Ms. McCarthy and her team did regarding community engagement.

[10:36:09 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON introduced the discussion on Program and Project Highlights.

[10:36:55 AM](#)

MS. KEITH reviewed slide 21, "Consolidated Programs":

Programs and Project Highlights
Consolidated Programs

Data Modernization and Innovation

- 2024-2027: \$64M
- 14 Independent Programs

Pavement and Bridge

- 2024-2027: \$506M
- 3 Independent Programs

Highway Safety Improvement Program

- 2024-2027: \$305M
- 4 Independent Programs

ADA Program

- 2024-2027: \$27M
- 3 Independent Programs

[10:40:19 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON mentioned that the governor said, "don't be a dodo," suggesting the need to keep up with modern times. He said the department is establishing exciting new programs. He reviewed the first sections of slide 22, "New Programs":

Programs and Project Highlights
New Programs

Frontier Roads, Trails, and Bridges

Surface Transportation Links for Alaska's Frontier

- New State Specific Road Standards
- Ice Roads, Snow Roads
- Frontier Style Gravel Roads; Hardened Trails
- Bridges
- Waysides

Rural Community Connections

Community Connections that Reduce the Cost of Living, Stimulate Economic Development, and Increase the Quality of Life

- Community Connection Inventories
- Beyond Moving People, Fuel, and Freight

Rural Housing Roads

Helping to Solve Alaska's Housing Crisis

- Basic Infrastructure to Bring Down Costs

He deferred to Ms. Keith to speak to the waterways program.

[10:44:17 AM](#)

MS. KEITH reviewed the following section from slide 22, "New Programs":

Waterways

Connecting Alaska's Multi Modal Transportation Network

- M-11 National Marine Highway Designation
- Supporting freight corridors through infrastructure

[10:46:13 AM](#)

MS. KEITH reviewed slide 23, "Safer Seward Highway." She introduced the new Transportation X (TrX) Pilot Program, which will utilize techniques through all phases of project delivery that will help reduce costs, reduce time, and enhance the project where possible. One example is the Seward Highway Milepost project that will improve safety, correct roadway deficiencies, and reduce congestion.

[10:47:43 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON reviewed slide 24, "Bridge Investments":

Program and Project Highlights
Bridge Investments

2024-2027 Bridge Highlights:

Approx. \$1B in bridge work

Alaska Highway Bridges (\$170M)

- Johnson River Bridge Replacement
- Gerstle River Bridge Replacement
- Robertson River Bridge Replacement

Juneau Creek Bridge (\$165M)

- Highest Crossing in the State at 285'
- Longest Single Span

Other Bridge Replacements:

- Steese Highway Milepost 5 (Fairbanks)
- Gold Creek/Tatalina (Tokotna)
- Ward Creek (Ketchikan)
- Hoadly Creek (Ketchikan)
- Hammond River (Dalton Highway)

[10:49:18 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON reviewed slide 25, "West Susitna Access":

- Construct approx. 18 miles of frontier road
- Access to state lands west of Susitna River
- Recreation, agriculture, forestry, and mining
- Public roads

2024-2027 Draft STIP: \$82.5M

[10:50:19 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON announced that Craig Tornga would be presenting on the Alaska Marine Highway System.

[10:50:40 AM](#)

CRAIG TORNGA, Director, Alaska Marine Highway System, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Ketchikan, Alaska, participated in the Modern Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) presentation, advancing to slide 27, "Federal Program Summary":

Alaska Marine Highway System Highlights
Federal Program Summary

Federal financial strategy we are working under and pursuing

- Federal Highway Authority (FHWA)
- Federal Transit Authority (FTA)
- Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG)
- Maritime Administration (MARAD)
- USDOT Multimodal Grant (MPDG)

[10:51:22 AM](#)

MR. TORNGA reviewed slide 28, "New Vessel Construction":

Alaska Marine Highway System Highlights
New Vessel Construction

Tustumena Replacement Vessel

- 2024 - \$70M
- 2025 - \$280M

Mainliner Replacement Vessel

- 2024 - \$26.8M

Hybrid No-Low Emissions Ferry

- 2025 - \$45M

[10:53:06 AM](#)

MR. TORNGA reviewed slide 29, "Upgrades to Existing Fleet":

Alaska Marine Highway System Highlights
Upgrades to the Existing Fleet

Tazlina - Addition of Crews Quarters: 2024 - \$25M

Columbia - Upgrade Controllable Pitch Propellers: 2024 - \$13.7M

Kennicott - EPA Required Emission Upgrade: 2024 - \$13.9M

Matanuska - Regulatory safety required improvements: 2024 - \$36M

Current projects modernizing our tools: installation of Starlink, a Vessel Management System, and a Computerized Maintenance Management System.

[10:55:35 AM](#)

MR. TORNGA reviewed slide 30, "Operations, Maintenance & Repair":

Alaska Marine Highway System Highlights
Operations, Maintenance & Repair

Terminal Refurbishment - 2024-2027: \$2M annually
Fleet Condition Surveys - 2024-2027: \$400K annually
Shipyard Repairs - 2024-2027: \$500K annually
Vessel Overhauls - 2024-2027: \$22M annually

[10:57:43 AM](#)

MR. TORNGA reviewed slide 31, "Dock Upgrades and Replacements Highlights":

Alaska Marine Highway System Highlights
Dock Upgrades and Replacements Highlights

Cordova Terminal Upgrade - 2024-2025: \$6.5M
Tatitlik Terminal Upgrade - 2026: \$11M
Chenega Terminal Upgrade - 2025-2026: \$13.7M
Pelican New Terminal - 2026: \$13.8M
Angoon Terminal Upgrade - 2026: \$4.6M
Facility Surveys - 2024-2027: \$240K annually

[11:00:43 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON advanced to the wrap up portion of the STIP presentation. He introduced Andy Mills.

[11:01:07 AM](#)

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, Juneau, Alaska, participated in the Modern Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) presentation, stating that he would close the presentation.

[11:01:29 AM](#)

MR. MILLS reviewed slide 33, "Investing to Move the Needle":

Goal in all of this...

The capital budget and the projects in the STIP work together to provide needed **infrastructure for**

Alaskans, good-paying jobs for our workforce, and **provide access** for commerce, medical, and recreational activities.

He stated that beyond infrastructure and access, it is important to consider training and workforce development. Each district has constituents running the spectrum of trades needed for STIP projects; the STIP can additionally be viewed as a workforce plan. From year to year, the department tracks progress in three regions. He established that training and workforce development funding in the STIP is specifically used to ensure on-the-job training, which encourages Alaskans to step into trades that the department employs.

[11:03:10 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON continued reviewing points on slide 33. He said that one thing they have learned about workforce development in rural Alaska is that community members want to receive training in their home locations. He shared an example project in which the community built a simple cemetery road. The department has limited resources but if communities are willing to step up and do these kinds of projects. This can be a model for the future.

[11:05:41 AM](#)

MR. MILLS referenced the pie charts on slide 33, which were generated using the AASHTOWare Project, a software suite by the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO). The software uses project information to provide insightful tools for STIP projects, that aid in communicating needs to the contracting community to better prepare the workforce for new projects.

[11:06:54 AM](#)

MR. MILLS reviewed slide 34, "Discretionary Grants and Match":

Wrap up
Discretionary Grants and Match

We must be "Creative and Aggressive"

RECENT GRANTS AWARDED:

~\$285M Alaska Marine Highway (FFY22 FTA, vessels and terminals)

~\$35M Culvert APO (FHWA, Fish-Passage)

~\$2M ARROW (FAA, rural drones)

2023 GRANTS SUBMITTED (PENDING) :

~\$261m FTA Rural Ferry Program

~\$968m MPDG Submitted

 Mega (\$413m)

 Infra (\$315m)

 Rural (\$240m)

~\$43m PROTECT

[11:11:31 AM](#)

MR. MILLS reviewed slide 35, "Discretionary Grants and Match":

Wrap up

Discretionary Grants and Match

Transportation funding flows directly to entities (not necessarily through DOT&PF) and BIL changed the requirements for those projects to be represented in the STIP.

Example of non-DOT&PF projects in the STIP:

- Community-Driven Illustrative: 23 projects
\$260,814,416
- Congressionally Delegate Spending (CDS): 3 projects
\$42,595,793
- Tribal Transportation Projects: 121 projects
\$410,198,570

Direct Recipients of Discretionary Grants Through 7/7/2023

- Total Transportation-Related Awards for Alaska:
\$654,408,121
- Direct Recipients: \$365,862,124
- DOT&PF: \$288,545,997

[11:13:17 AM](#)

MR. MILLS reviewed slide 36, "Working Across Boundaries: Federal, State, Local":

Wrap up

Working Across Boundaries: Federal, State, Local

Coordination and Transparency:

- Infrastructure Coordinator
- Federal Partners
- Congressional Delegation
- Associations and Businesses

- Public
- Legislature
- MPOs/Local Gov't
- Tribal Partners
- Unions

[11:16:13 AM](#)

MR. MILLS reviewed slide 37, "Please Contribute!"

Wrap up
Please Contribute!

Policymakers and public alike - being engaged is what results in action, through consensus.

Our actions prove...

We're not satisfied with status quo.

We aim to be:

More Modern

More Resilient

More Agile

Critical questions for Continuous Improvement:

- What do you like about the Modern STIP?
- What do you want to see changed/improved?
- What can DOT&PF do better and HOW do we do that?

[11:17:38 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON made some closing comments regarding the STIP presentation. He said that in Alaska this year DOT&PF requested over \$100 million and that given their success with previous redistribution, the department is ready for the extra funds.

[11:18:38 AM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE thanked the presenters and segued to questions.

[11:19:10 AM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN expressed her appreciation for the informative online tutorial. She mentioned that her committee members had read the Fairbanks Area Surface Transportation (FAST) and the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) comments. She asked for insight into those involved in the selection process and the criteria for projects in the development of the STIP.

[11:19:55 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON answered that those involved are all partners of DOT&PF. He said coordinating STIP projects can be challenging but the department wants to do things right, maintain transparency, and address concerns as they arise.

[11:20:35 AM](#)

MS. KEITH said that the department has a large STIP team supporting the development process, meeting with FAST and AMATS representatives to address comments. The department's regional planners have been working with Municipal Planning Organizations on a daily basis. The STIP is likely to have a time extension in order to finesse the execution of certain projects.

[11:23:12 AM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL expressed surprise that the past STIP was overprogrammed. In regard to reducing the number of projects programed, he asked how the department is doing with the project pipeline and whether the state would be in the position to get additional funding and spend everything.

[11:24:05 AM](#)

MS. KEITH answered that the pipeline of projects was one of the reasons the department wanted full transparency in the out years (2028-2030). The department is short on revenue while the projected plans require \$12 billion between now and 2030. The department can move projects from one year to another within a four year timeline as needed. The project pipeline is secure, given that there is a \$5.2 billion reserve of revenue that can stretch if needed. The department will push to have shovel-ready projects.

[11:26S:01 AM](#)

SENATOR MYERS said his understanding was that the department found that economic impact is difficult to measure unless there is a natural resource project already in the regional pipeline. He asked how the department calculates economic impact for specific projects.

[11:26:55 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON answered that the department does not have a quantifiable way to measure economic impact in numbers. He said from a holistic view, there is a certain type of wayside that fosters access to the outdoors, which consequently attracts people to the state. Safety projects and repair projects foster economic vitality in providing that access. Beyond that, the department is committed to seeking tangible measurement of economic vitality but that it will take time.

[11:28:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE sought clarification on the Culvert Replacement, asking whether all the culverts are fish friendly. She asked how the replacement project is being funded.

[11:29:01 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied that the recent discretionary grant was based on fish passage; the culverts are constructed with fish passage in mind which is a manual standard for DOT&PF.

[11:29:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE mentioned that recent news regarding the Cooper Landing Bypass Project indicated that the project would cost double the original amount. She asked for the original thought process and justification for the project.

[11:30:33 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied that the Cooper Landing Bypass Project was the longest environmental impact statement (EIS) in the nation. The project started in 1976. Moving forward the project has value in that a main component is safety. Inflation and wildlife are factors for the increase in cost as well as best practices expected by agency. The department is fiscally constrained every year and consequently needs to stretch out the project over time, increasing the cost of labor. The department is considering how to bring costs down. The goal is to get major projects completed that the public can use.

[11:32:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE commented that the project was started before she was born. She said she looks forward to hearing more updates.

[11:33:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES referenced the match for federal dollars for the Mainliner vessel. She asked whether the match would consist of federal dollars.

[11:33:44 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON responded that the strategy for the match is toll credit; credit for investments the department makes go through the system and return as toll credits.

[11:34:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES expressed alarm at that use of federal dollars. She recently met US Senator Lisa Murkowski and

Secretary Pete Buttigieg who both said that federal dollars cannot be used to match receiving federal dollars. As the state matches, the opportunity to receive more federal money increases exponentially. She reiterated her concern for the legitimacy of the department's funding strategy.

[11:35:20 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON said that there can be further discussion on the topic.

[11:35:49 AM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE stated that he would like to be kept in the loop on those conversations.

[11:36:04 AM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN asked whether the improvement project was funded organically within the department's normal operations.

[11:36:33 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied that DOT&PF traditionally practices on-the-job training so that's how some of these projects would be done. Some of these initiatives would make the most of federal funding, and as far as overall improvement the department's approach is integrated, applied and directed through back routes. He deferred further comment to Ms. Keith.

[11:37:27 AM](#)

MS. KEITH said that these tools often are cheaper than prepackaged proprietary software that is often used by state departments. She spoke to costly programs in development such as the STIP manager.

[11:38:32 AM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN commented that using organic funding is preferable. He said that one of the biggest questions from constituents is, "what does DOT do?" He pointed out that the theme around transparency is a long time coming. He relayed his own experience that an appropriate approach might be front-end engagement: concept development time would be followed by a weighted scoring system as the project progresses and should be an objective criteria. He asked how far along the department is on a similar objective planning system.

[11:40:46 AM](#)

MS. KEITH answered that per the establishment of the STIP database the next step is performance such as project management metrics which will reveal progress, provided by the same

dashboard system used in planning. The department is considering how to measure the outcome, such as economic vitality. Evaluating success rates will inform how to adjust plans moving forward. She said the department is launching new statewide projects in the years ahead, and that process will provide live updates to the public.

[11:42:35 AM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN commented that there are a couple of underpass/overpass projects in his district and community interest is rising regarding whether the projects are right-sized. He put forth the expectation that those concerns be addressed.

He referenced slide 17 and the Alaska Marine Highway System; he asked what is being done strategically to ensure that everything is aligned appropriately for a higher level of operations in terms of cost and performance.

[11:43:56 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON answered that the department is modernizing, such as with the implementation of Starlink in the ferry operational system. He deferred comment about reliability to Mr. Tornga.

[11:44:44 AM](#)

MR. TORNGA said that much of the funding goes into keeping the fleet running but the department is working on long range fleet replacement plans. The fleet needs newer vessels to break the cycle of spending to keep the older models running.

[11:45:51 AM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN asked about the timeframe for the long range strategic vision.

[11:46:03 AM](#)

MR. TORNGA said that the department is focused on securing a three-year budget in phase one. Phases two and three are tied to larger DOT&PF plans that will be submitted by August 2024. The marine highway plan will be adjusted accordingly thereafter.

[11:47:00 AM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE said he had several questions regarding the Alaska Marine Highway System. He mentioned that the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board received a letter from Alaska Marine Highway personnel regarding issues with how the organization was

running. He asked what the department found in its investigation of the matter and how the issues will be addressed.

[11:48:07 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON clarified that there were two different letters submitted to the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board and to local legislators. The letters included concerns about management and concerns about the commissioner. He said that some concerns related to a worry that the department was outsourcing the Alaska Marine Highway system which was not true. He mentioned that recruitment and retention are national problems. He expressed his belief that employees should go through a regular line to voice their complaints instead of whistleblowing. The letter contained general concerns of a former employee. He said that the department values all of its employees and contractors. He asserted that the department is focused on recruitment for needed positions and that there is a lot of work for Alaskans right now. Out of respect for both those making accusations as well as those accused, he would not speak further on that topic.

[11:50:24 AM](#)

MR. TORNGA pointed out that there is change that comes with new management and people should get in line with the new vision. There are open positions that need filling. He further explained the problem of recruitment and the effects on existing staff.

[11:52:24 AM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE brought up Commissioner Anderson's comment that employees should go through the normal chain. He clarified that the normal chain would be through the director to Commissioner Anderson. He requested that certain emails deemed inappropriate be forwarded to the legislature so they can work to find a way to move forward. Personnel matters and circumventing the chain of command is not the appropriate way to handle concerns.

[11:53:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA said she had two topics to address. First, the STIP has to be developed with fiscal constraint, which includes looking at committed or available revenue sources and ensuring that these are adequately operated and maintained. She mentioned that last winter there were many maintenance issues and people with disabilities had adverse issues during that time. She asked how the department assesses maintenance of these projects vs existing roads which are the main arteries of the state.

[11:54:41 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON recalled a fair share of complaints during that time. The department considers needed changes when investing in infrastructure in a northern climate. Mr. Mills is taking the lead on having have a Snow Summit with representation from all regions of the state. Another step is the "complete street policy" which looks at how roads can work for all users. Things like aesthetic niceties hinder winter maintenance. The department is looking at how to increase efficiency and is comparing Alaska to other cold snowy states looking for solutions. Additionally they are preparing for more mass weather events, and considering how to bring on additional resources when Alaska is overwhelmed.

[11:57:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA said that she appreciates the ability to see public comments as they come in on the dashboard. Constituents are vocal about access. She asked how the department integrates public comment into the STIP in time for federal approval.

[11:58:10 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON acknowledged that they may need more time to understand and respond to a large volume of comments.

[11:59:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked if there is a way for the public to use the dashboard to view the number of highway and road projects. She expressed concerns from her constituents for cyclists and pedestrians.

[12:00:16 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON deferred the question to Ms. Keith.

[12:00:28 PM](#)

MS. KEITH said that the department can probably create a couple of different mechanisms to illustrate work type such as significant construction or modification to a roadway. Incorporating existing safety planning might also create the solutions Representative Mina suggested.

[12:01:45 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked whether there was an effort to partner with tribes and access tribal transportation funding.

[12:03:20 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON said that the department has had success partnering with tribes, such as providing grants to tribes in

the winter trails program. Tribal partnership is project-based on a case-by-case basis. Project bundling would be resourceful and impactful. He deferred to Ms. Keith to respond to Senator Kiehl's question.

[12:04:29 PM](#)

MS. KEITH stated that the information compiled on the tribal transportation program is derived from the federal registry; the funds coming through the state are primarily discretionary grants. Through the STIP the department is required to include tribal programs and projects, which allows for a better view of transportation infrastructure so that resources can be coordinated efficiently. Contractors can work together when there are different fund sources and the community will benefit. The biggest challenge is the labor of research and data entry.

[12:06:18 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS referred to the concepts of workforce and construction as a well-paid occupation. He said he appreciates the notion of the cemetery road project doubling as a workforce training project, but is concerned about the planning side of such projects. He expressed concern about executing projects just to employ people.

[12:07:43 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON stated that there is no intent to run just a jobs program; the focus is providing education and experience to enter qualified people into the workforce. Those involved in the project are interested in the next steps to further their experience and find work in the field. The majority of these projects are in rural areas, where maintaining infrastructure is challenging. He said he recognizes the worker crisis in Alaska.

[12:09:45 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS said he preferred to choose projects for long-term development.

[12:10:30 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE asked how competitive Alaska is in the discretionary grants arena.

[12:11:06 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON deferred to Ms. Keith but answered that the department is using every resource it has.

[12:11:32 PM](#)

MS. KEITH spoke to the funding programs, stating that Alaska received \$1.9 billion in discretionary grants up to July 7th, out of the \$52 billion awarded nationwide. She said that the department thinks it can do better and wants to aim for every possible funding opportunity by submitting as many grant applications as possible. Being competitive is challenging for Alaska. The department can be more competitive with more money to work with. Nationwide criteria is shifting and the department is looking at programs it has not yet applied for, focusing on those with a high success rate.

[12:14:17 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE said he had more questions but would ask them offline. He thanked the presenters.

[12:14:48 PM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN thanked the presenters.

[12:15:14 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair McCabe adjourned the meeting of the Senate and House Transportation Standing Committees at 12:15 p.m.