

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 25, 2024

1:02 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION 2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

COMMISSIONER RYAN ANDERSON

Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a PowerPoint titled "DOT&PF Year in Review."

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison

Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during a PowerPoint titled "DOT&PF Year in Review."

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:02:01 PM](#)

CHAIR KEVIN MCCABE called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Representatives McKay, Vance, Stutes, Mina, Sumner, and McCabe were present at the call to order. Representative C. Johnson arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION(S): Department of Transportation 2023 Year in Review

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CHAIR MCCABE announced that the only order of business would be the Department of Transportation 2023 Year in Review presentation.

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COMMISSIONER RYAN ANDERSON, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, presented a PowerPoint titled "DOT&PF Year in Review." He proceeded to slide 2, titled "By Land, By Air, By Sea - It Takes a Team," which featured cross function support within the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF). Included on the slide were strategic assets, maintenance and operations, and infrastructure development which he summarized.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON continued to focus on the "Contracting Office" point on slide 2 and explained that contracting is a major part of what DOT&PF does, and to make sure it is being done right.

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The committee took an at-ease from 1:07 p.m. to 1:13 p.m.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON proceeded to slide 3, titled "DOT&PF Front Lines," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Highways and Aviation (H&A)

FY24 Authorized: \$173.5M

FY23 Actuals: \$171.3M

Position Counts: 509 PFT

Statewide Equipment Fleet (SEF)

FY24 Authorized: \$38.3M

FY23 Actuals: \$35.6M

Position Counts: 156 PFT

Measurement Standards and Commercial Vehicle Compliance (MSCVC)

FY24 Authorized: \$7.7M

FY23 Actuals: \$6.1M

Position Counts: 61

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CHAIR MCCABE asked whether commercial vehicle compliance staff are badge law enforcement or give citations.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON responded that staff are specific to commercial vehicles and have the ability to cite commercial vehicle drivers for safety infractions. He continued on slide 4, titled "Front Lines Workforce," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

H&A

- Critical Job Class Vacancies: Equipment Operators
- 621 Equipment Operators (seasonal + permanent), 180 or 28.9% vacancy rate statewide
 - 75% Southfork
 - 67% Dalton Camp
 - 60% Northway
- 14 Maintenance Districts
- 80 Staffed DOT&PF Maintenance Camps
- 235 Airports: Over 20 have Part 139 Certification

MSCVC

- Critical Job Class Vacancies: Compliance Inspectors
- 34 CVC's, 11 or 32% Vacancy rate statewide
 - 8 of 16 filled in Anchorage
 - 9 Weigh Stations

SEF

- Critical Job Class Vacancies: Mechanics
- 31 or 22% mechanic vacancies statewide
 - 50% in Denali, Nome, Ketchikan
 - 67% in Valdez, Bethel
 - 100 in Tazlina
- Co-located with Maintenance Camps in Districts

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON added that it is a tough time in rural Alaska in particular.

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CHAIR MCCABE asked whether there was a budgetary maneuver with one of the camps to allow a bit of overtime. He pointed out Dalton.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON concurred that there were efforts regarding the Dalton Highway that seemed to have helped. He added there had also been mission critical incentive pay with a 30 percent increase.

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REPRESENTATIVE MINA offered a comment related to incentive pay vacancies and wages at DOT&PF. She noted there are people who apply to DOT&PF to receive training, then jump to a private sector position with a more competitive wage. She asked Commissioner Anderson to comment on some of these aspects.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON stated he could not comment too much on particulars of existing wages and how it ties to labor relations. He reiterated the mission critical incentive pay helped some, and it would extend to other areas after it goes through the union. He continued to discuss commercial vehicle compliance.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON moved to slide 5, titled "Focus on Safety," and he explained the graph referencing 2023 worker compensation claims. He added that DOT&PF had a good trend on it, and that it was a success story.

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CHAIR MCCABE referenced the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) claims per worker being high and questioned whether it was due to being shipboard.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied that slips, trips, and falls were the primary. Storms during sailings are also a factor, and there are higher risks on the ocean.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON proceeded to slide 6, titled "Front Lines Challenges," featuring a list from September 2022 to December 2023 of all the events DOT&PF had responded to, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

September 2022

- Typhoon Merbok Emergency Repairs

January 2023

- Seward Highway: Ice Fall diversion
- Tok Cutoff Road closed: avalanche

May 2023

- Funny River Road MP 8 washout
- Taylor Highway Emergency Flooding Repairs
- Eagle Mission Road Emergency Flooding Repairs
- Richardson Hwy MP 330 Emergency Flooding Repairs
- Nome Kougarak Road Emergency Flooding Repairs
- Russian Mission Airport Emergency Flooding Repairs
- Stevens Village AprtRd Emergency Flooding Repairs
- Glenn Hwy MP 186-188 Emergency Flooding
- Dalton Highway MP 404 Emergency Repairs

June 2023

- Dalton Highway MP 404 Emergency Repairs continue
- ChitinaO'Brien Creek Emergency Flooding Repairs
- Dalton Highway Koyukuk River #1 Bridge Emergency Repairs
- Elliott Highway MP 85.9 closure: failed culvert & erosion repair

July 2023

- Seward Hwy: partnered w/agencies to free sheep caught in rockfall mesh

August 2023

- Mendenhall River Emergency Flooding Repairs

September 2023

- Glacier Highway Rockfall

November 2023

- Wrangell: Zimovia Highway Landslide
- Southcentral widespread snowstorm/rain/wind

December 2023

- Richardson Highway at Thompson Pass and MP 182-200 closed: avalanche
- Valdez/Glenallen: Richardson Hwy closed from milepost 12 to 65: numerous avalanches
- Klondike Hwy closed: heavy snowfall, inoperable plows
- Seward Highway Mileposts MP 36-40 closed: Avalanche
- Haines Highway closed: Rockfall

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE commented on the pictures on the slide and stated it was sobering to see all the events just from one year. She asked what DOT&PF had learned from these pieces of infrastructure that could be improved.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON responded DOT&PF is planning on having a whole presentation dedicated to the events [on slide 6]. He added when something happens, staff gets notified at the same time and starts to think together. Technology and information flow is important and there are real-time drones that relay what is happening, he said.

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REPRESENTATIVE MINA questioned how the number of events from 2023 compared to previous years.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied DOT&PF does not have exact numbers yet.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA expressed curiosity whether there is a climate or sustainable plan that incorporates an anticipated increase in climate-related events.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON confirmed there is a resiliency plan that is federally recommended and provides benefits related to resiliency type activities.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON continued on slide 7, titled "Front Lines Challenges," which featured bridge strikes and repeated hits since 2012.

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REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked whether there is a correlation between having new drivers in the bridge strikes and if it is emphasized in CDL training.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied that DOT&PF did not have the correlation, but it could be a possibility, and he noted increased education is key. He continued on slide 8, titled "Front Lines Challenges," which featured inflation and estimating. He noted that it had been very difficult to estimate rural Alaska's mobilization costs on projects.

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CHAIR MCCABE suggested the possibility that DOT&PF has too many highways it should not have and loses money if the roads are given back to the municipalities.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON brought up road priority and ownership, and he explained there are tools online that show the relationships DOT&PF has with the roads.

CHAIR MCCABE asked if there would be a loss of federal money if, for example, a road was given back to the Kodiak Island Borough.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON expressed that he did not believe so but would research the question.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON moved to slide 9, titled "Front Line Focus," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Snow and Ice Removal

- Road Priorities/Non-Motorized Priorities
 - New Tools and changes
- Contracting
 - Emergency Contracts - Storm Events
 - Term Contracts
 - Fairbanks Area Priority 3 & 4 Roads
 - Anchorage Area Priority 3 & 4 Roads/Sidewalks and Paths
 - Southwest & Southeast Anchorage Roads
 - Northeast Anchorage/Eagle River/Chugiak
 - Sidewalks/Paths Anchorage/Eagle River/Birchwood
- Liquid versus Solid Chemical Deicers

- Kenai Petition & Public Meeting
- Chemical use varies across the State based on climate

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON noted there would be future presentations on DOT&PF's road priorities. In addition, the slide also featured a graph showing the amounts in inches for the snowiest Novembers in Anchorage.

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CHAIR MCCABE gave an example of the sidewalks and paths in Big Lake, Alaska. He noted a dangerous sidewalk being "plugged," and asked Commissioner Anderson whether he had a contractor with a piece of equipment that could tend to the sidewalk as well as the many others in the state.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied absolutely, and he added he could bring forward some contracting costs.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether DOT&PF was reevaluating emergency contracts.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied there is an increase in the use of contractors, and this year it is in Anchorage and Juneau.

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REPRESENTATIVE MCKAY opined the state must do something different regarding the amount of snow affecting the streets in Southwest Anchorage, which are not the city's responsibility but the state's. He also requested to see an inventory of the equipment that works on the highways. He noted a safety issue being that emergency vehicles had trouble getting around. If more resources are needed, he noted his constituents would want the legislature to pursue it.

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REPRESENTATIVE MINA stated that she agreed with Representative McKay and appreciated the snow summit that was held last winter. She noted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) concerns with the sidewalks, and many constituents rely on the bus system especially during winter. She further noted that between the DOT&PF roads and municipality roads there are safety concerns.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied that DOT&PF had been in discussions with the municipalities regarding addressing sidewalks and roads to make sure they get taken care of the most efficient way.

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CHAIR MCCABE referred to the the next snow summit and anticipated having discussions on the lessons learned.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON returned to slide 9 and the final bullet, "chemical use varies across the state based on climate," and he discussed liquid versus solid chemical deicers. He then moved to slide 10, titled "Front Line Focus," which featured abandoned vehicle removal, as well as a tracking sheet for fiscal year 2024 (FY 24).

CHAIR MCCABE asked about recouping the cost from the owner who left the vehicle.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON said he was not aware at this point, but DOT&PF works with insurance companies over other costs.

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ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, joined the discussion while slide 10 was shown and said that \$100,000 is fairly modest [budgeted in FY 24]. He further explained a remote removal done in Jakalof Bay in Seldovia, Alaska, also shown on the slide. He added that DOT&PF anticipate an increase in abandoned vehicles as towing and scrapping become more expensive. In reference to the spreadsheet shown on the right side of the slide, he noted that costs added up to \$64,000 spent in the first six months.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stressed that vehicle removal is a big issue in her district. She referred to a previous conversation about DOT&PF working on a statewide inventory to find out what the need is in the budget overall. She opined that the \$100,000 is utilized well focusing on areas that deal with public safety. She brought up the importance of airport contracts and the long-term parking issue and asked about the holdup.

MR. MILLS gave an example of Homer being "painful" before the appropriation. There were talks in the city about potential partnerships, and in Sitka, DOT&PF put out a request for proposal (RFP). He added that Sitka and Homer were being handled differently, as well as looking at further options available.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES echoed what Representative Vance said, and in reference to Kodiak, she said she had people come to her and offered to clean things up themselves, who do not, in turn, get a response from DOT&PF. She stressed that towns need partnerships and communication with DOT&PF.

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CHAIR MCCABE asked whether there is a path to mitigate someone just leaving cars abandoned.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES related reading about Washington statute regarding boats, and fees going to a government agency. She offered her opinion that it was a statute being enforced.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said she had team meetings with the Department of Public Safety (DPS) regarding a minimal fine, and it is difficult to find owners and recoup the cost for the vehicles since most of the vehicles have little to no value.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON continued to slide 11, titled "Front Line Focus," featuring Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- New Flourine-Free Foams are becoming available
- FY25 Budget includes \$2.5M to begin transition for 25 Airports
- New EPA Maximum Contaminant Limits (MCL) implementation timeline not established yet

- DOT&PF continues site characterization, monitoring, public information, and providing access to alternative water sources.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked whether DOT&PF is going to address airports that have a PFAS situation in their water supply. She sought clarification if that is what the \$2.5 million is in reference to.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON answered that the \$2.5 million is to begin the transition to fluorine-free foams.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES brought up Yakutat having a "huge problem" with PFAS, and she asked whether their situation, or any airport with similar issues, would be addressed.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON responded that DOT&PF is currently addressing things in different areas, but tasks have been restricted to providing alternative water sources. He added that how everything works with funding must be considered.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON continued on slide 12, titled "Front Line Focus," which featured the Dalton Highway and Whittier Tunnel, and read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Dalton Highway / Alaska Highway

- Increased trucking activities: over 3,000 additional loads to support oil development
- New activities being proposed: Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to Fairbanks
- Continued capital investment: need for heavy maintenance
- Ore Haul activities on Alaska Highway

Whittier Tunnel

- 2022 FHWA review of Tolling agreements and Maintenance Contracts
- Tolling Agreement: Initial Determination was 80% participate rate. Subsequent discussions regarding 23 USC 218 resulted in determination of 100% Fed Participation
- Maintenance Contract: FHWA determined 51% of work eligible. Resulting in shortfall of \$2.9M
- Developing revised tolling agreement

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON moved to slide 13, titled "Front Line Focus," which featured the Ketchikan number 797 Water St Viaduct and read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

88 span 1,624-foot-long structure comprised of a reinforced concrete tee -beam superstructure and a reinforced concrete pier and column substructure founded on driven concrete piles.

High-corrosion marine environment Situated in an environment with :

- Daily tidal fluctuations, restrict necessary preventative maintenance work to be performed
- Notable degradation in both the concrete superstructure and substructure, including issues such as delamination, concrete section loss, rebar corrosion/section loss, and deep/long cracks in pier caps and columns
- Restricting traffic over specific portions of the roadway due to a calculated decrease in live load carrying capacity of structural elements

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON moved to slide 14, titled "Highway Safety," which featured crash fatalities from 2019 through 2023. He drew attention to 2023 being a positive in that the number of fatalities decreased, and he noted the numbers were preliminary. He further explained that DOT&PF is doing a number of things on the safety front. The slide also featured collaborations DOT&PF anticipated.

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CHAIR MCCABE brought up speed limits in his area, and that communities were curious about how the speeds are determined on various roads. He further praised responses by emergency medical services (EMS) staff in reference to a recent accident.

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REPRESENTATIVE MINA thanked DOT&PF for all the items related to "Complete Streets" and being mindful of non-motorized

transportation and pedestrians. She commended the collaboration between DOT&PF and the Municipality of Anchorage.

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CHAIR MCCABE said he appreciated DOT&PF's focus and noted that transportation does not have to be only cars, trucks, or asphalt roads.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON continued to slide 15, titled "Surface Transportation - Capital Program," that featured design, engineering, and construction.

Federal Highway Program

Successfully obligated \$936M of federal aid highways projects and grants.

- Includes August redistribution - additional \$108M in transportation funds

Competitive Discretionary Grants

- Applied for over \$2.4B in competitive grant opportunities across all modes

Alaskans awarded Surface Transportation grants in excess of \$692M

- National Culvert Removal Replacement and Restoration Grant Program 2022: \$44.1M
- Multimodal Project Disc. Grant (MPDG) Rural Surface Program Grant Awards 2022: \$10M
- Reconnecting Communities 2022: \$537K
- Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity 2023: \$27.8M
- Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity 2022: \$13.0M
- Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) 2023: \$1.2M
- Maritime Administration (MARAD) Funded: \$185.6M
- Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Ferry Related: \$416.4M

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON continued to slide 16, titled "Capital Focus Points and Highlights," which featured the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). He said STIP is a

big focus for DOT&PF currently, and the goal is to get to a final STIP document. He added that the document was submitted to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recently and would take 30 days for approval, partial approval, or denial.

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CHAIR MCCABE observed the difference in the number of comments between previous STIPs and the new ESTIP. He stressed it is important that the public know there is a place it can go and be heard.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON said DOT&PF is leveraging technology more so now, being more people communicate that way.

CHAIR MCCABE stated the numbers show DOT&PF is headed in the right direction.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA expressed her appreciation for the online STIP process and said her constituents are very engaged in it.

[2:27:27 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON said he hoped to continue receiving that kind of engagement. He proceeded to slides 17 and 18, titled "Alaska Marine Highway System." Slide 17 featured the maintenance program and read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Vessel Management System

- ✓ Starlink
- ✓ Vessel Server Installation
- ✓ AMOS
 - Preventative Maintenance Modules
 - Health Safety Security Environment
 - Project Management

Shipyard Planning

- Written Shipyard Specifications
- Goal: shorter overhauls, lower costs

Vessel Schedule System Upgrade

- Beta testing in-house systems

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REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER asked whether the vessel server installation could help with electronic gaming devices.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied that the vessels are becoming more modern in many ways, and there is access to the Internet.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES said she appreciated the responsiveness of DOT&PF, as well its encouragement of the relationship between the highway system and marine pilots.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON continued to slide 18, also titled "Alaska Marine Highway System," which featured 4th quarter 2023 recruitment stats and efforts. He pointed out what is holding DOT&PF back regarding the highway system are crews and ships. He summarized the chart on the left side of the slide featuring crew status, where he noted a slight improvement, and that DOT&PF is looking at bringing in a dedicated crew manager.

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CHAIR MCCABE asked whether there are scholarship programs with the Alaska Vocational Technical Center (AVTEC) to attract people to the ferry system.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied that he would get back to Representative McCabe after researching the question.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON moved to slide 19, titled "International Airport System," featuring the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport (ANC) and Fairbanks International Airport (FAI). He spoke about the November 2023 winter storm and aircraft diversions. He stressed how the airports work together and noted that there are diversions from the military as well. He proceeded to slide 20, also titled "International Airport System," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Major Investment Activities

- ANC: Proposed UPS Expansion
- ANC: Fed Ex Expansion
- ANC: Alaska Cargo and Cold Storage
- FAI: DNR/BLM Joint Wildland Firefighting Facility

International's Capital Investment FFY2023

- Airport Improvement Program \$73.8M
 - Bipartisan Infrastructure Law \$14.3M
- Total: \$88.1M

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON noted the NorthLink Aviation development was missed on the slide.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON continued to slide 21, titled "Rural Aviation," and he noted it was another strong year for the capital program. He focused on the federal Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) Grant and Alaska's rural remote operations workplan featuring drone technology.

CHAIR MCCABE said he had conversations with Mr. Mills about establishing a dashboard for airports that would relay information regarding airports, such as plowing. He noted DOT&PF being adept at putting together dashboard information for the public.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON confirmed that DOT&PF is working on many modernizations. He added that plow vehicles' automated locations are being looked into as well.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON moved to slide 22, titled "Division of Facility Services," which featured construction procurement, resource allocations, and improved asset management. He noted that DOT&PF is delegating more staff to be trained in construction jobs.

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COMMISSIONER ANDERSON concluded on slide 23, titled "Advancing Opportunity," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Advanced Air Mobility (AAM)
- Ice Roads, Winter trails, Frontier Roads
- M11 Marine Highway Route
- Regional Planning Organizations
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations

[2:42:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked about a new technology office for DOT&PF and how the department is using artificial intelligence (AI) in the division.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied that the department is careful, and there are ethical considerations. He noted that DOT&PF is aware that many people use AI, and to keep up, the department must figure it out.

[2:43:39 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON brought up the pay system and asked Commissioner Anderson what kind of numbers DOT&PF had in terms of inaccurate pay for state employees.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON replied that DOT&PF saw a fair amount of pay problems the past months, but there is a positive trend, and added that the department designated a position at the commissioner's office to handle such issues. Regarding AMHS, he said union contracts are complicated and payroll was taken back to be run by DOT&PF.

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REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON noted that if there are retention problems in the state, checks must be cut. He further noted he would bring pay issues up to other departments and subcommittees.

CHAIR MCCABE noted something similar to the designated person in DOT&PF would be helpful. He added that he was looking forward to the drone presentation forthcoming. He thanked the presenters and discussed future business.

[2:49:10 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:49 p.m.