

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 4, 2024

1:02 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Craig Johnson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): UNVEILING PORT MACKENZIE: NAVIGATING TIDES~
ICE~ DREDGING~ AND INFRASTRUCTURE REALITIES

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

DAVID GRIFFIN, Port Operations Manager
Matanuska-Susitna Borough
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a PowerPoint, titled "Unveiling
Port Mackenzie: Navigating Tides, Ice, Dredging, and
Infrastructure Realities."

MICHAEL O'SHEA, Vice President of Planning and Business
Development

Cook Inlet Tug & Barge
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during a PowerPoint,
titled "Unveiling Port Mackenzie: Navigating Tides, Ice,
Dredging, and Infrastructure Realities."

MARK THERIAULT, Director of Operations

Cook Inlet Tug & Barge
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during a PowerPoint, titled "Unveiling Port Mackenzie: Navigating Tides, Ice, Dredging, and Infrastructure Realities."

CAPTAIN RON WARD
Southwest Alaska Pilots' Association
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a slideshow, titled "SWAPA info - Port MacKenzie" during the Unveiling Port Mackenzie: Navigating Tides, Ice, Dredging, and Infrastructure Realities presentation.

CAPTAIN ANDREW WAKEFIELD
Southwest Alaska Pilots' Association
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information during a PowerPoint, titled "SWAPA info - Port MacKenzie."

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:02:05 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.

PRESENTATION(S): Unveiling Port MacKenzie: Navigating Tides, Ice, Dredging, and Infrastructure Realities

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CHAIR MCCABE announced that the only order of business would be the presentation, titled "Unveiling Port Mackenzie: Navigating Tides, Ice, Dredging, and Infrastructure Realities."

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DAVID GRIFFIN, Port Operations Manager, Mat-Su Borough, before starting the PowerPoint, titled "Unveiling Port Mackenzie: Navigating Tides, Ice, Dredging, and Infrastructure Realities [hard copy included in the committee packet]," informed the committee that maps included in the committee packet would assist in understanding the presentation. Slide 2 was shown, which displayed a picture of Port MacKenzie and Port of Alaska and he noted the close proximity of the two but that Port

MacKenzie was still somewhat remote. Slide 3 showed a geographical map, and he explained how the Knik Arm functions somewhat like a river. He said all the ships that come into "Port Mac" come up Cook Inlet and pass over the Knik shoal, which contains a lot of sediment, and the ships must cross at high tide which is a strategic part in bringing ships up into the area.

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MR. GRIFFIN proceeded to slide 4, titled "Transportation Corridors," which showed a map of Port MacKenzie current and proposed access. He explained that the port district covered about 9,000 acres and is all zoned industrial commercial area for port specific purposes. He added that in the event of a catastrophic disaster, the borough is isolated from the Anchorage area; therefore, Port MacKenzie could serve as a "plan B" for any need, and the military is also taking a closer look at the possibility.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE expressed a concern regarding seismic activity and asked what conversations have been around the issue and how to strengthen the infrastructure.

MR. GRIFFIN replied that there is a seismic monitoring station in the port district, and he acknowledged that there is frequent seismic activity there. He noted some past repairs that were made and added that the barge dock would be assessed since it was constructed in the year 2000 with a design life of 30 years. He said he would talk in more detail about construction, but presently the barge dock would be the focus the next three to five years.

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MR. GRIFFIN, in response to Representative Mina regarding how the geography at Port MacKenzie compares to the Don Young Port of Alaska, in terms of [withstanding] earthquakes, noted that later this month the Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee would host a discussion focusing on seismic activities and he would have more information soon. In response to Representative Stutes, he said Port MacKenzie currently does not require dredging of silt but would not say it never would, and he explained what happens naturally with currents and tidal

fluctuations. In response to Chair McCabe, he acknowledged that it had been dredged during early construction.

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MR. GRIFFIN proceeded to slide 5 showing a photo including port district uplands on Port Mackenzie, on which he expounded. He said a goal is to figure out a business plan and to figure out the needs of the Cook Inlet maritime industry, and he mentioned products that have been shipped in to the port. In response to Representative Stutes, he confirmed that there was going to be a fast ferry to and from Anchorage, but it never materialized. He circled back to slide 4 and he pointed out that the Port MacKenzie area had potential for private property growth, and the idea was to have a town site where people could, for example, work in Anchorage and hop on the ferry, thus relieving highway traffic.

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The committee took an at-ease from 1:27 p.m. to 1:29 p.m. [during which Chair McCabe passed the gavel to Vice Chair Vance.]

[1:29:18 PM](#)

MR. GRIFFIN, in response to Representative Sumner, related that the borough tried to sell the conveyer, but it did not have any "tire kickers," and the borough also tried to give it away. The conveyor comprised three conveyors that came together as one, and portions came from various places in the country, he explained. An inspection was done for its worth and it did not "pencil out" for the borough to spend the money; furthermore, no industry was interested in it. In response to a follow-up question, he confirmed that a design firm is currently looking into the roll-on/roll-off dock. He expounded on what the dock could be made out of and how it could be used. He described it as a "giant gravel boat ramp."

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MR. GRIFFIN, in response to a question from Representative Mina regarding the ramp and approval of federal funds, noted that the accurate amount in funds was \$4.75 million for the ramp. Slide 6 was shown, and he explained it illustrated low tide and tidal fluctuations and the deep draft dock pile exposed at low tide.

He expanded on what happens during low tide, and how the life of the dock could be extended.

VICE CHAIR VANCE passed the gavel to Chair McCabe.

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MR. GRIFFIN, responding to a question from Representative Mina, offered his understanding that the \$1 million approved by the borough for repairs of the piling dock was done through a resolution. Returning to the PowerPoint, he proceeded to slides 7-9, showing various vessels at low and high tides. He confirmed the Port of Anchorage experienced the same. He showed vessels at high tides on slide 10-12, one image being of ice around a vessel. He responded to speculations about ice. He advanced to slide 17, titled "Business Development," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Coordination with Department of Defense for use of port
- Cement, salt, and sand at the deep-draft dock
- Hydrogen fuel production and storage on Port District lands
- Heavy equipment, building supplies, & fuel at the barge dock
- Barge haul-out infrastructure
- Renewable and alternative energy
- Networking with Cook Inlet maritime trade organizations
- Identifying regional transportation logistical solutions for industry

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MR. GRIFFIN, in response to Chair McCabe and Representative Sumner, replied that the Ocean Renewable Power Company (ORPC) was still interested in an experimental tidal power generator installed in [Port MacKenzie] but would readjust its focus and look at Nikiski as well as projects in some Western Alaska villages. He also noted the possible impact to belugas from the equipment being an issue. Regarding a generator that works on currents in the river underneath ice, he said he did not think the door was closed on the project, but ORPC was pausing its activities.

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MR. GRIFFIN, in response to Representative Stutes and Chair McCabe regarding railway construction, informed the committee that the last time any physical construction occurred there was 2015. He offered his understanding that \$184 million of funding was all state funds, and the borough had not contributed. He deferred to Mr. Brown for further elaboration.

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MR. GRIFFIN, in response to Representative Mina, he said that Port MacKenzie was not capable of becoming a strategic port or labeled as such through the military. He showed slide 22, a photo at a deep draft dock, and slide 23, featuring a schematic of a barge ramp for a roll-on, roll-off ramp. He noted that it was just a conceptual rendition. In response to Chair McCabe regarding barge repair and companion barges, gave an example of accommodating cruise ships and barges, switching docking locations when necessary. He then moved through the slides 24 through 27 featuring photos of vessels at various docks.

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MR. GRIFFIN, in response to Representative Vance, advised that the borough owned four square miles of tidelands, and the port made up one hundredth of that area; therefore, there was a lot of room to expand. He concluded on slide 28, titled "Current and Future Priorities, Progress, and Projects," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Pursue completion of the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension
- Land use authorizations w energy and alternative fuel companies
- Start pile sleeve construction project
- Design, engineering, and permitting for barge ramp project
- Port security improvements
- Removal of wood chip conveyor
- Economic Development Summit 4/24 - 4/25
- Cooperation and networking with Cook Inlet Maritime Industry
- FEMA funded earthquake repairs completed
- Pile Sleeve Project EDA Funded
- Apply to the PIDP grant program for port infrastructure improvements
- Northern Economics regional economic benefit report
- Won \$1M grant for mobile crane USMHP MARAD

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MR. GRIFFIN responded to committee questions. He noted the numbers of ships at Port MacKenzie and the age of the port. He noted that Captain Jeffrey Monroe could answer maritime and port executives' questions. He noted that it cost the borough \$850,000 per year to operate the port, which is basically its budget, he said. He further explained that each time a ship is in port it costs \$100,000.

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MICHAEL O'SHEA, Vice President of Planning and Business Development, Cook Inlet Tug & Barge, answered questions after the presentation and described that there are two 60-ton tug boats that can handle any type of conditions in Port MacKenzie, and he noted that Cook Inlet Tug & Barge (CITB) also took care of the Port of Alaska. He added that he does consulting for project work and that he is looking forward to the "rail belt," which he opined would open up a world of opportunities.

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MARK THERIAULT, Director of Operations, Cook Inlet Tug & Barge, answered questions after the presentation and provided a brief background. He noted he was on the construction site as an operator when the dock was built, and he was familiar with the facility. He stressed that CITB would be ready to assist in any kind of help needed. He response to questions from Chair McCabe regarding pancake ice and securely tying up a vessel.

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CHAIR MCCABE thanked the presenters for their availability.

[2:18:33 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 2:18 p.m. to 2:19 p.m.

[2:19:19 PM](#)

CAPTAIN RON WARD, Southwest Alaska Pilots' Association, as part of the Unveiling Port Mackenzie: Navigating Tides, Ice, Dredging, and Infrastructure Realities presentation, gave a PowerPoint [hardcopy included in the committee packet], titled "SWAPA info - Port MacKenzie." He proceeded to slide 2, titled

"Southwest Alaska Pilots Association," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Established in 1975, serving Southcentral for 49yrs
- Comprised of 19 Marine Pilots licensed by the State and federally licensed by the US Coast Guard
- Pilots licensed by the State have a primary duty to safely navigate vessels under their direction and control and to protect life and property and the marine environment while engaged in the provision of pilot services.

MR. WARD went through slides 3 and 4, which featured a map of a chart representation of approaches from the upper Cook Inlet to Port MacKenzie. He highlighted the areas where one should not go due to the lack of room available. He noted that Port MacKenzie is "in a hole" which is why there is less siltation than the Port of Anchorage. He expounded on the functions of the tugboats and the use of currents to the pilots' advantage.

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MR. WARD continued to slide 5 that showed a schematic of the dock and where the fenders are. He concluded on slide 6, titled "SWAPA service to Port MacKenzie," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Since 2005 SWAPA has docked/undocked 19 vessels at Port Mac.
- When SWAPA is called upon to dock and undock vessels at Port Mac, we do so in a safe and efficient manner as mandated by the State of Alaska.
- SWAPA participated in a Maritime Navigation Risk Assessment of Port MacKenzie as contracted by the Mat-Sue Borough in 2014.
- There are sufficient tug-boats in the area for mooring assist.
- We follow the US Coast Guard guidelines during ice conditions
- The current at the dock requires strong mooring bollards and quick release mooring hooks especially during ice conditions.

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CAPTAIN ANDREW WAKEFIELD, Southwest Alaska Pilots' Association, added that Port MacKenzie is a great location for expansion and

he looked forward to future business. He noted risk assessment and mitigation and said most issues around the port are in the winter; however, they have been able to bring every ship in that has called, even in the winter.

CHAIR MCCABE thanked the captains and asked whether Anchorage had the same issues in the wintertime.

MR. WARD explained the geology as shown on slide 3 and how it played into working with wintertime issues. He added that Port MacKenzie's current and ice bring in a lot of mass and weight; therefore, there are more issues there than the Port of Alaska.

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REPRESENTATIVE MINA shared that she thought the maritime navigation risk assessment report was helpful, and she pointed out recommendation 20 for ice mitigation or a deviation system to complement the mooring system for vessels docked in the area.

MR. GRIFFIN replied that he saw the report only very recently and that he was impressed. He confirmed there had not been any ice mitigation measures taken place at the deep draft dock, but he would look into it.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked Captain Ward how many vessels dock in the wintertime versus the summertime.

CAPTAIN WARD replied that the first two ships came in January through March with two returning in the summer. He gave further details on which vessels had come through at various points throughout the year.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE, pertaining to the illustration on slide 3, asked whether the borough looked at the cost of what it would take to address some of the issues with the tide.

MR. GRIFFIN said not to his knowledge.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stated that she was aware of the concerns and that more opportunities can be opened to take care of the port.

[2:38:46 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCABE offered a 7-page PowerPoint, titled "NOAA TIDES" [hardcopy included in the committee packet], which consisted of random days for tides in Port MacKenzie and Port of Alaska. He explained that he did his own study on the currents in the two different areas and how they would "stack up." The slideshow featured depths, dates, and times. He stressed how much he learned from the presenters today and invited closing comments from committee members.

[2:42:19 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES commented that she appreciated the slideshow provided by Chair McCabe.

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CHAIR MCCABE thanked the presenters and emphasized that without efficient transportation infrastructure, resource development efforts will stall, and it is crucial to diversify approaches.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:44 p.m.