

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 31, 2023

1:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator James Kaufman, Chair
Senator Löki Tobin
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Robert Myers

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator David Wilson, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES FEDERAL FUNDING AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

-HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JAMES MARKS, Director
Division of Planning and Development
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Delivered a report on the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities Planning for the Future.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:31:43 PM](#)

CHAIR JAMES KAUFMAN called the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Kiehl, Tobin, Myers and Chair Kaufman.

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES
FEDERAL FUNDING AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE PRESENTATION**

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CHAIR KAUFMAN announced the committee would hear a report from The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities on Federal Funding and Planning for the Future.

JAMES MARKS, Director, Division of Planning and Development, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Juneau, Alaska spoke about the department's past and probable future He highlighted the planning efforts over the next year and beyond.

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MR. MARKS detailed the agenda depicted on Slide 2: Agenda.

- 1) Retrospective "The year so far"
 - Federal Funding & Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) to Date
 - Opportunities & Lessons Learned
- 2) Planning "It all starts in planning"
 - Family of Plans & Recent Changes
- 3) Deployment "We're doers. We do"
 - Strategic Partners
 - Community-driven Planning
 - New State Funding Programs

[1:36:15 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN wondered how the department incorporated land use.

MR. MARKS offered to address the question later in the presentation.

[1:36:48 PM](#)

MR. MARKS moved to slide 4: Federal Funding Overview. He described the various program examples listed on the slide. The depiction explained the federal funding flow for the programs listed. He highlighted the apportioned programs at the top of the list. The additional programs listed were relatively new.

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SENATOR MYERS wondered about the Bridge Program and the Bridge Investment Program. The first was formula-funded and the latter discretionary. He asked about the differences between the programs.

MR. MARKS responded that the two programs received money from two funding sources. He informed the committee that states received a formula of \$45 million per year. The discretionary piece requires the state to apply for additional funds. He noted that the state applied for additional funding for bridges through the discretionary program.

SENATOR KIEHL mentioned a District Q project known as Grandpa's Farm Road Bridge in Gustavus. He wondered if formula or discretionary money was utilized for that bridge project.

MR. MARKS replied that he would follow up with the correct answer.

SENATOR KIEHL asked if he would review past documents to ascertain the funding source.

MR. MARKS replied that funding was derived through various channels.

SENATOR TOBIN expressed excitement about the Reconnecting Community Pilot Program listed on Slide 4.

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CHAIR KAUFMAN asked about the color coding in the graphic.

MR. MARKS replied that the department worked with a continuous improvement methodology. Evaluation and learning were hallmarks of this strategy. He highlighted the importance of partnerships. The graphic represented that thoughtful analysis.

CHAIR KAUFMAN asked if the first part of the presentation focused on learning retrospective content.

MR. MARKS answered yes.

CHAIR KAUFMAN asked if slide 4 presented a comprehensive list of programs.

MR. MARKS responded that a more comprehensive list was forthcoming.

CHAIR KAUFMAN introduced the idea of a Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed (RACI) chart. He asked if the department used such a chart or system for program evaluation.

MR. MARKS noted the complexities involved in acclimating to new partners. He spoke to the benefits of clear roles and team philosophies.

CHAIR KAUFMAN stated his need for data from the department to best inform his role as Chair of the committee.

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MR. MARKS moved to slide 5: Eight Apportioned Programs. He stated that the slide depicted formula programs including high-level funding of \$3.5 billion for Alaska over the last five years. He detailed the various programs and grants shown on the slide. He mentioned working with University of Alaska Fairbanks and Two Bears. He pointed to climate change predictors that help inform new programs including the Carbon Reduction Program and the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) program.

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SENATOR KIEHL asked for an explanation of Two Bears.

MR. MARKS replied that Two Bears was a climate advocacy group in Alaska.

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MR. MARKS discussed slide 6: Alaska's Transportation Share, which provided a sense of scalability. He highlighted the growth of 28-30 percent from previous levels. He clarified that Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) authorized existing programs and created some new ones. The Fast Act allowed for approximately \$170-200 million in funding. He pointed out the highlighted boxes that demonstrated that the state did not receive the full year apportionment. The federal omnibus passed but required further processing, leading to a six-to-eight-week gap.

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MR. MARKS continued with slide 7: Federal Funding Programs, which highlighted funding before IIGA. He explained that the first bar depicted inflation-adjusted funding from FY22-FY26. The expected amounts showed growth in existing and new programs. He spoke about the totals listed at the bottom of the slide. Of the \$559 million in growth, approximately 41 percent arrived through the traditional national highways fund. He spoke about transportation alternatives, which saw some of the largest growth with the Fast Act.

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SENATOR TOBIN wondered about the state match to the federal funds. She asked if the state must compensate for the additional federal dollars. She wondered how to maximize federal dollars.

MR. MARKS replied that the numbers listed in the presentation exemplified federal dollars. He pointed out that the growth was represented in the state's Capital Budget.

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CHAIR KAUFMAN wondered about representation of the Alaska Marine Highway.

MR. MARKS replied that the programs depicted were formula programs. The Alaska Marine Highway was classified as an allocated program and was subject to annual appropriation and another pre-defined formula.

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MR. MARKS discussed Slide 8: "Current Challenges.

1. "Disconnected" from land use, community, and regional needs
2. "Silo Mentality" vs. "Team mindset"
3. Legacy systems and data practices; Information dominance
4. Planning holistically; Multimodal level-of-service (LOS)
5. Current regulations are onerous, outdated, and obsolete
6. Slow-moving bureaucracies & processes
7. Vague working definitions for urban, rural, remote, resiliency, etc

MR. MARKS revisited Senator Tobin's point about land use. He acknowledged that the state was in a poor position to inform or direct land use, leading to the perception of disconnection. He stated that the department had planners visiting the regions and attending assembly meetings. He spoke about community driven planning and project delivery. He stressed the value of working as a team within the department. He stated that the department considered gauging access and investment across the multimodal level-of-service. Current planning regulations were outdated.

CHAIR KAUFMAN wondered about statutes driving regulations. He asked if the legislature should address specific outdated statutes.

MR. MARKS offered to provide the requested information to the committee.

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SENATOR TOBIN asked about challenges, and the vague working definitions for urban, rural, remote and resiliency. She wondered about tribes and the appropriate working definition.

MR. MARKS replied that the federal government guided certain funding sources to tribal transportation programs. He noted that the definitions of rural or remote differed with state and federal government terminology. He explained that rural areas in Alaska compete against the urban projects. Rural projects are therefore compromised by lower volume and crash histories.

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CHAIR KAUFMAN asked about point number 6, slow-moving bureaucracies, and processes.

MR. MARKS replied that he worked with the Alaska Municipal League (AML). He acknowledged that the department was challenged to move quickly. Delays related to bureaucracies and processes were felt by both communities and partners. He spoke to the value of agile and efficient process.

CHAIR KAUFMAN wondered if the slide depicted the seven top-tier issues. He asked if the issues were elevated through criticality.

MR. MARKS replied that the list included the top challenges but was limited. He pointed out that maintenance operations and the vessel fleet also encountered challenges.

CHAIR KAUFMAN agreed that the critical few issues were identified. He asked about an active improvement project tackling the slow-moving bureaucracies and processes.

MR. MARKS replied yes, an improvement process was underway but slow-moving bureaucracies hampered approximately 1000 different projects throughout the department. He spoke again about the value of team methodology as a potential solution. He noted the idea of raising literacy within the department.

CHAIR KAUFMAN requested clarification about literacy.

MR. MARKS clarified that he was speaking about data literacy for best possible outcomes. He mentioned descriptive, predictive, and prescriptive processes. Projects existed in various processes.

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CHAIR KAUFMAN wished to hear more about improvement stages.

[2:11:40 PM](#)

MR. MARKS moved to slide 9: Planning, which detailed the department's trajectory.

[2:12:32 PM](#)

CHAIR KAUFMAN asked about the status of the long-range transportation plan.

MR. MARKS replied that IIJA presented unplanned challenges. The freight plan had a shorter timeline.

CHAIR KAUFMAN inquired about the modal and system plans.

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MR. MARKS moved to slide 10: Family of Plans and detailed the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) including policies, goals, and objectives. He explained the effort required to make the plan performance based. He noted that the plans work together within a hierarchy. He highlighted the LRTP. He reminded the committee that additional plans will be added to the existing plans. He spoke about evaluations and noted that the state had various interests like erosion and rock fall mitigation. Separate communities required additional funding for specific plans. The family of plans addressed a wide variety of plans. He spoke about the yellow arrows on the slide depicting efforts to improve the planning process. The feedback loop informed future iterations of the plan. He spoke to the concept of agile planning. Area plans are adopted every 10-15 years.

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MR. MARKS continued the discussion about agility and engagement with federal partners.

CHAIR KAUFMAN asked about the various tiers depicted on the slide. He wished to know if the individual tiers had plan owners.

MR. MARKS replied that the long-range transportation manager was responsible for the development of a long-range plan every four years. He stated that the strategic investment plan provided a new section within the division employing a strategic investment chief. The modal and system plans fell under program management

with an active transportation planner. He spoke about the state's area regions.

CHAIR KAUFMAN asked how regions and modes intersect.

MR. MARKS replied that the area plans incorporate strategic investment, LRTP, the modal and system plans. Priorities for area planning vary from area to area.

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SENATOR TOBIN referenced agility and asked about federal government guidance related to IIGA. She asked how the legislature might help the department shift the mindset and enable agility.

MR. MARKS requested she clarify the question.

SENATOR TOBIN asked how the legislature might benefit the department with issues like agility and community responsiveness.

MR. MARKS acknowledged the complexity of the question. He shared that the department worked to prioritize communities. He stated that he would present the question to the Commissioner's office and return to the committee with a short list.

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CHAIR KAUFMAN asked Mr. Marks to proceed through the slides with brevity, noting the time allocated for the hearing.

[2:26:49 PM](#)

MR. MARKS discussed Slide 11: Public Perceptions of Regional Priorities. The survey received 2700 responses from various regions. He noted that the priorities were detailed through public engagement. He revisited the feedback loop from the previous slide. He pointed out that the Yukon Kuskokwim Region did not provide feedback. Trends emerged in certain areas informing future planning. Active outreach was required to access better input from the regions.

[2:29:44 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS commented about the five regions depicted in slide 11. He noted that capital and infrastructure projects could grow and strengthen the state economy. In a previous presentation, the department stated that they contribute to the development of commerce and industry in Alaska. He saw a disconnect between the legislature, the department, and the people.

MR. MARKS replied that the slide represented responses from public input, not the position of the department.

[2:31:24 PM](#)

MR. MARKS moved to slide 12: Strategic Investment Areas."

- Safety
- Economic Vitality
- State of Good Repair (SOGR)
- Resiliency
- Sustainability

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CHAIR KAUFMAN spoke about the importance of clarity.

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MR. MARKS moved to slide 13: Deployment, and spoke to the critically important nature of partnerships.

[2:34:40 PM](#)

MR. MARKS discussed slide 14: Family of Programs.

Existing Programs

1. Solicitations

- a) Community Transportation, Transportation Alternatives, and Harbors Program

2. State Programs

- a) Examples: Highway Safety Improvement Program, Bridge, Culverts, Research, etc.

New Programs

1. Solicitations

- a) Safe Ice Roads for Alaskans
- b) Rural Ports, Docks & Barge Landings
- c) Community Bridge Program
- d) Sustainable Transportation Program

2. State Programs

- a) Carbon Reduction Program (CRP)

b) Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT)

[2:38:59 PM](#)

MR. MARKS continued with slide 15, Safe Ice Roads for Alaskans. He spoke to the funding awards multiple communities in Alaska received. He mentioned the challenges involved with grant funding.

SENATOR MYERS asked about the ice roads and the planning possibilities. He wondered if permanent roads might be a better option.

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MR. MARKS replied that the ice roads often exist on rivers. The maintenance activity included plowing and ice-core drilling for thickness. He spoke to the communities' ability to maintain projects, which was awarded by extra points.

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MR. MARKS spoke to slide 16: Community Bridge Program, and detailed specific infrastructure needs.

[2:45:14 PM](#)

MR. MARKS moved to slide 17, Rural Ports, Docks and Barge Landings. He pointed out that the development of the strategic plan required much research and solicited input. He spoke about the investment plan requiring significant input. He mentioned that the eligibility was specific to rural needs.

[2:47:35 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN recalled that IT barriers were creating issues with community communication.

MR. MARKS replied that the response might be extensive but provide opinions from the large minority. He mentioned an active online tool called Public Comment, but he spoke to the importance of the human side.

[2:49:18 PM](#)

MR. MARKS reviewed Slide 18, Strategic Partners.

- Alaska Municipal League
- Alaska Regional Development
- Organizations (ARDORs)
- Alaska Energy Authority

- Denali Commission
- SEALASKA
- Southeast Conference
- US Fish & Wildlife
- National Park Service
- National Forest Service
- Western Federal Lands

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MR. MARKS moved to Slide 19, Community-Driven Planning. He talked about the map and noted that the NorthStar borough and others expressed interest in the Regional Planning Organization (RPO).

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MR. MARKS continued with Slide 20, Approach to Discretionary Grants.

- Not competing with each other
- Grant coordination team
- Strategic partners
- Online clearinghouse: "The HUB"

MR. MARKS mentioned awards the department received including a planning grant in Kodiak. He pointed out another award including a bundle of projects. He spoke about partnering with AML in the development of a project intake clearinghouse called the Alaska Federal Opportunities Funding Hub. Projects are submitted to the HUB to work with the department and AML staff connecting needs to resources or grant writers.

CHAIR KAUFMAN found no closing comments or questions.

[2:57:47 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Kaufman adjourned the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting at 2:58 p.m.