

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 27, 2025

8:04 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Rebecca Himschoot, Co-Chair  
Representative Donna Mears, Co-Chair  
Representative Carolyn Hall  
Representative Ky Holland  
Representative Mike Prax

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Justin Ruffridge

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 26

"An Act relating to the duties of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; and relating to a statewide public and community transit plan."

- HEARD & HELD

PRESENTATION: DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS OVERVIEW

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 35

"An Act relating to the use and possession of electronic devices by prisoners."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 26

SHORT TITLE: STATEWIDE PUBLIC & COMMUNITY TRANSIT PLAN

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) MINA

01/22/25	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	CRA, TRA
02/27/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE GENEVIEVE MINA  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HB 26.

REMINGTON PURNELL, Staff  
Representative Genevieve Mina  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for HB 26 on behalf of Representative Mina, prime sponsor.

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the hearing on HB 26.

PATRICK REINHART, Executive Director  
Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education  
Department of Health  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 26.

MILLIE RYAN, Board President  
Alaska Mobility Coalition  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 26.

JUDY CHAPMAN, Deputy Director  
Division of Statewide Planning  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the hearing on HB 26.

JEN WINKELMAN, Commissioner  
Department of Corrections  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Department of Corrections Overview presentation.

DUSTY DUMONT, Director

Division of Pretrial, Probation & Parole  
Department of Corrections  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Department of Corrections Overview presentation.

JEFF EDWARDS, Executive Director  
Board of Parole  
Department of Corrections  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Department of Corrections Overview presentation.

KEVIN WORLEY, Director  
Division of Administrative Services  
Department of Corrections  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Department of Corrections Overview presentation.

APRIL WILKERSON, Deputy Commissioner  
Department of Corrections  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the Department of Corrections Overview presentation.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:04:28 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR REBECCA HIMSCHOOT** called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Representatives Prax, Hall, Mears, and Himschoot were present at the call to order. Representative Holland arrived as the meeting was in progress.

^#hb26

#### **HB 26-STATEWIDE PUBLIC & COMMUNITY TRANSIT PLAN**

[8:05:31 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT** announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 26, "An Act relating to the duties of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; and relating to a statewide public and community transit plan."

[8:05:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GENEVIEVE MINA, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 26. She paraphrased the sponsor statement [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) stewards the state's transportation system as the lead body in developing the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). HB 26 aims to support and secure accessible transportation options for all Alaskans by improving DOT&PF's public engagement process and broadening the study of transportation options across the state.

First, HB 26 seeks to improve DOT&PF's public engagement process in statewide transportation planning. Sufficient collaboration with local and regional entities is federally required to secure funding for transportation and infrastructure projects. HB 26 codifies this federal requirement by specifying that DOT&PF must coordinate with public, Tribal, and community transit programs in their development of Alaska's comprehensive, long-range, intermodal transportation plan (e.g., STIP). In this case, these transit programs refer to programs such as Nome's Tribal Transit Program, Juneau's Capital Transit, Tok's Interior Alaska Bus Line, and Anchorage's People Mover.

Second, HB 26 expands DOT&PF's responsibility to study alternative transportation options by including rural and remote areas. DOT&PF is statutorily responsible for studying alternative means of transportation in Alaska, but they are currently only required to study urban areas. Alternative transportation methods, such as public transportation, are essential for those without a car and who cannot drive. According to a 2022 DOT&PF report on The Economic Value of Public Transit in Alaska, Alaskan communities benefit from transit due to increased business sales, reduction of road congestion, less air pollution, and better travel times.

Public transit is often the only transportation option for Alaskans with disabilities, low-income Alaskans, youth, and the elderly. Securing federal funding and

improving access to public and community transit is essential to connect all Alaskans to their jobs and communities. HB 26 improves the annual study, reporting, and development of Alaska's multimodal transportation network.

[8:09:35 AM](#)

REMINGTON PURNELL, Staff, Representative Genevieve Mina, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Mina, prime sponsor, presented the sectional analysis for HB 26 [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1. AS. 44.42.020(a):  
Amends subsections (3) and (4) in the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' planning duties to "study alternative means of improving transportation" and "develop a comprehensive, long-range, intermodal transportation plan for the state" by including public, tribal, and community transit programs.

Amends subsection (5) to the Department's duty to study alternative modes of transportation by adding rural and remote areas to its scope, and requiring coordination with local governments and tribal entities in this process.

Adds subsection (17) which creates a new duty for the Department to develop a statewide public and community transit plan in coordination with local, community, and tribal entities.

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT sought questions from committee members.

[8:10:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX referred to the zero fiscal note and asked what the bill plans to accomplish.

[8:11:37 AM](#)

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF), said the fiscal note describes activities that the department already conducts, such as the long-range transportation plan, area transportation plans, and

the statewide transit plan. He added that department staff already have federal directives to consider all modes, so the fiscal note reflects that these activities are largely being accomplished already.

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT opened invited testimony.

[8:14:10 AM](#)

PATRICK REINHART, Executive Director, Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education, Department of Health (DOH), gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 26. He emphasized the importance of public and community transportation to people with disabilities and expressed his hope that the bill would encourage a renewed focus on these issues. He spoke to several problems facing the council, such as fewer numbers of applicants and the failure to consider the influx of rural transportation funds for starting new programs. He also suggested that DOT&PF share information with impacted agencies and partners, which in years past, was done via annual conference.

[8:19:08 AM](#)

MILLIE RYAN, Board President, Alaska Mobility Coalition, gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 26. She emphasized the importance of public transportation to many Alaskans and applauded the bill for integrating community transportation into the department's duties and for developing a five-year plan for expanding transportation across the state.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX pointed out that DOT&PF had stated that it's already doing this work, and asked what the bill would change.

MS. RYAN acknowledged that the department's plans make reference to community transportation and transit; however, there's no specific plan that looks at community transportation in detail and considers how to coordinate and expand the availability of opportunities with community partners and providers. She shared a personal anecdote about her experience in Oregon.

[8:22:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HALL asked about the timeline for Section 17, which creates a new duty for the department to develop a statewide public and community transit plan in coordination with local, community, and Tribal entities.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA deferred to Mr. Mills.

[8:24:07 AM](#)

MR. MILLS said different plans span different timeframes dependent on the federal regulations. In general, there are 5-year plans on the short side, as well as 10-year and 20-year plans. He referred to AS 40.42, noting that many of the articulated duties in HB 26 lack timeframes, and one would defer to the federal program to set a timeframe or renew it as frequently as needed.

[8:26:09 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS observed that the cost of owning a vehicle has increased, which may increase the broader need for transport. She asked whether data supports this observation.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA referred to a report conducted by DOT&PF in May 2022 about the economic value of public transit in Alaska; however, she was unsure whether it included statistics on the cost of personal vehicles.

[8:28:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked for the bill sponsor's thoughts on commuter rail options and how it might bring more attention to what, right now, has been a citizen's advocacy process that struggles to get standing in the broader transportation planning.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA speculated that commuter rails may fall under "alternative modes" and deferred the question to Mr. Mills.

MR. MILLS agreed the "alternative modes" is broad enough and would allow the department to look at a range of options without being limited by statute, which is beneficial for planning purposes, and would allow new modalities to be incorporated as technology advances.

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked how these proposed changes might strengthen the discussion about the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) and its integration as a transportation solution in rural communities.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA shared her belief that AMHS is separate from the definition of "transit planning."

MS. PURNELL agreed that AMHS is not included in the definition.

MR. MILLS confirmed that the planning authority for AMHS falls under a different section of state statute.

[8:33:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND commented that with the separation of boards and funding, the importance of AMHS to the transportation infrastructure of Alaska is missed. He suggested that the bill could be a vehicle for elevating the importance of transit to rural coastal communities and the necessity of AMHS.

[8:35:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX said planning seems to be constrained by federal funding. He asked whether the legislature should consider including nonprofit organizations in the conversation.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA affirmed that public engagement with nonprofits, such as the Alaska Mobility Coalition (AMC), and other entities, like the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, should be included. She cited page 3, lines 7-9, which stated that the development of a statewide transit plan is done in cooperation with public community transit operators, local government, communities, and Tribal entities. She added that the inclusion of relevant stakeholders would be considered a friendly amendment.

[8:37:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked why the bill is needed.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA said to ensure that Alaska is modernizing DOT&PF's responsibilities to reflect Alaskans' needs. She added that the state would not want the department's positive work on transit planning to go away if leadership or federal requirements were to change.

MR. REINHART agreed on the importance of codifying DOT&PF's planning efforts in statute to ensure that there are reasonable expectations around the development of a public transit if leadership were to change.

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked how the bill would interface with Tribal transportation plans.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA shared her understanding that the department is federally required to coordinate with Tribal planning organizations in its long-range transportation planning efforts, such as the development of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). She deferred to Mr. Mills for further explanation.

[8:42:00 AM](#)

MR. MILLS confirmed that there is a "three C policy" - collaboration, coordination, and consultation - that's federally required of the department with regard to STIP. He added that there is also a Tribal team in many areas of the department for Tribal consultation on projects and planning activities.

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked which highway number is assigned to AMHS.

MR. MILLS answered M5 and M11. He emphasized that many communities make a firm assertion that AMHS is a highway system falling under Title 19, so as to avoid any exclusion of vehicle transport on vessels. The department experienced pushback when testing a supplemental service, which he likened to a bus service because it only transported passengers, reinforcing the philosophical viewpoint that AMHS is an extension of the road system.

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked Ms. Chapman how to best partner with Tribes and whether the bill would change or augment anything with regard to that government-to-government relationship.

[8:45:41 AM](#)

JUDY CHAPMAN, Deputy Director, Division of Statewide Planning, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF), reiterated that Tribes are engaged with regularly through consultation opportunities and monthly conference calls. She said the intent is to fully engage with Tribes and involve them in the statewide and transit planning processes as they are a valuable stakeholder.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether there are jurisdictional issues that should be taken into consideration.

MR. MILLS responded that DOT&PF actively works on projects with local nonprofit organizations (NPO) whose jurisdiction is codified in federal regulation. With regard to transit planning, conversations are had with the community transit grant recipients, but these local governments have their own committees on local transportation improvement plans (TIP), much like the STIP for the state. He said he is not aware of any jurisdictional issues.

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT announced that HB 26 would be held over.  
#

[8:50:33 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:50 a.m. to 8:52 a.m.

[Co-Chair Himschoot passed the gavel to Co-Chair Mears.]

**PRESENTATION: Department of Corrections Overview**

[8:52:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS announced that the final order of business would be the Department of Corrections Overview presentation.

[8:52:46 AM](#)

JEN WINKELMAN, Commissioner, Department of Corrections (DOC), gave opening remarks and introduced her colleagues.

[8:53:51 AM](#)

DUSTY DUMONT, Director, Division of Pretrial, Probation & Parole, Department of Corrections (DOC), gave an explanation of the Division of Pretrial, Probation, and Parole, and its pretrial and statewide services.

[8:56:45 AM](#)

JEFF EDWARDS, Executive Director, Board of Parole, Department of Corrections (DOC), gave an explanation of the Board of Parole and described discretionary parole, mandatory parole, special medical parole, geriatric parole, and the Executive Clemency Program.

[9:05:18 AM](#)

MR. EDWARDS, in response to a series of committee questions, reported that the rate of revocations for discretionary parole is 6 percent with the majority being mandatory releases brought forward by the parole officer; before release, conditions of parole are set by a board member and conveyed to the inmate in advance of the hearing; parole conditions had been reviewed and adjusted and new strategies were implemented; there is no backlog of parolees and each has an eligibility date that is set after sentencing; The Board of Parole meets for several days each month depending on the size of the docket; board members are compensated for travel, per diem, and receive honoraria compensation for file review.

[9:20:58 AM](#)

KEVIN WORLEY, Director, Division of Administrative Services, Department of Corrections (DOC), gave an explanation of the Division of Administrative Services and its organizational structure and duties.

[9:23:52 AM](#)

APRIL WILKERSON, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Corrections (DOC), in response to committee questions, said the Alaska Police Standard's Council (APSC) performs the background investigation on all correctional officers and probation officers and oversees APSC certification, psychological evaluations, and medical screening.

[9:26:03 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER WINKELMAN resumed the presentation and gave an explanation of the Office of the Commissioner and its organizational structure and duties. In response to a series of committee questions, she said DOC's training academy differs from those provided to the Alaska State Trooper (AST) and Village Public Safety Officers (VPSO), as they were established to meet the requirements for correctional officers and pretrial, probation, and parole officers; pretrial, probation, and parole officers work hand in hand with VPSOs and Tribal police; there are no specific staff assigned to process improvement, but department heads are tasked with finding efficiencies; the division has internal information technology (IT) that specialize in criminal justice information

[9:36:20 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER WINKELMAN continued the presentation with an overview of department vacancies, which fluctuate based on time of year, and reported that the overall rate is 10 percent and trending in the right direction. In response to committee questions, she said recruitment bonuses and specific retention incentives are used.

MS. WILKERSON added that DOC has provided educational opportunities and advanced step placement for more difficult locations. Letters of agreement (LOA) for hiring incentives were primarily used for correctional officers who received a bonus of \$10,000 in two installments and medical staff who received anywhere from \$15,000 to \$25,000. She noted that the agreements included a repayment clause for those who left employment before the two-year period. She added that another successful component was allowing the recruitment unit to help applicants through the process by providing onsite tours, assistance with paperwork, and issuance of conditional job offers. In Seward, a temporary duty assignment was offered, which exposed employees to the environment and boosted interest in the facility.

[9:48:24 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER WINKELMAN resumed the presentation with a summary the department's three primary goals and objectives: health and wellbeing of staff; ensuring that people leave the system better than when they entered; and identifying resources to reduce recidivism. She shared that DOC is on track to double the rate of GED completions and expressed her hope that the tablet program would engage inmates in programming and measure efficiencies. In response to a question about food service, she said inmates work in the kitchens and receive a stipend. She talked about the Point Mackenzie rehabilitation farm, and a desire to expand that.

[9:56:12 AM](#)

MS. WILKERSON added that the department is not burdened by the statutory limit on the cost of food; however, maintaining the cost of religious meal requirements can be a challenge.

[9:58:37 AM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:58 a.m.