

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 18, 2025

1:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Ashley Carrick, Co-Chair
Representative Ted Eischeid, Co-Chair
Representative Genevieve Mina
Representative Louise Stutes
Representative Kevin McCabe
Representative Elexie Moore

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Cathy Tilton

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: COMMUNITY PUBLIC SAFETY ALONG ALASKAN ROADWAYS

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

SHANNON MCCARTHY, Communications Director
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "Bike and Pedestrian Safety."

PAM GOLDEN, State Traffic and Safety Engineer
Design and Construction Standards
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "Bike and Pedestrian Safety."

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:30:35 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR TED EISCHEID called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Representatives Stutes, Moore, Eischeid, and Carrick were present at the call to order. Representatives McCabe and Mina arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION: Community Public Safety Along Alaskan Roadways

[1:31:42 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID announced that the only order of business would be a presentation by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities on public safety along Alaska's roadways.

[1:32:08 PM](#)

SHANNON MCCARTHY, Communications Director, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "Bike and Pedestrian Safety" [hard copy included in the committee file]. On slide 2, she spoke to the percentage of Alaskans who are active transportation users, noting Alaska's high ranking among other states in the country. She noted that DOT&PF has an Active Transportation Long Range Plan.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID expressed surprise that Alaskans would rank high among other states in the country.

MS. MCCARTHY concurred, adding that the data is from the U.S. Census Bureau. She expressed the understanding that walking to work would be easier in small villages.

MS. MCCARTHY asked the committee if they knew anyone who had been involved in a serious car crash, and she noted that over 50 percent of the committee responded in the affirmative. She pointed out the fatality statistics on slide 3, and she acknowledged that this represents a roadway problem. She stated that the presentation would focus on vulnerable road users, such as bicyclists and pedestrians. She pointed out that over a 5-year period, 70 pedestrians had lost their lives from a car crash. She noted that the data on the slide has been verified, adding that Alaska's small population would affect these statistics.

[1:36:33 PM](#)

MS. MCCARTHY, in response to a question from Representative Stutes, said that these fatality statistics would include drivers who were running redlights or speeding.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID questioned whether the fatality category of "lane departure" would only refer to distracted drivers.

PAM GOLDEN, State Traffic and Safety Engineer, Design and Construction Standards, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, responded that "lane departure" could refer to changing lanes in an urban setting; however, she noted that the fatalities in this category mostly reflect accidents in rural communities, where cars have run off the road. She noted that law enforcement would report this data at the time of the crash. She stated that distracted driving is "a tough nut to crack," as this can only be determined if law enforcement saw the accident in real time. She added that distracted driving is not currently reported at the federal level.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID commented that he has witnessed distracted drivers in his community.

[1:39:57 PM](#)

MS. MCCARTHY moved to the statistics on slide 4, and she pointed out that because of the state's low population, pedestrian fatalities are overrepresented. She explained that pedestrians are involved in only 2 percent of the car crashes in the state, but they represent between 15 to 20 percent of all fatalities. She indicated that many of these fatalities have occurred in Anchorage.

MS. MCCARTHY moved to slide 5, and she explained that bicycle crashes on the roadway would be reported differently than crashes with pedestrians. She pointed out that even though there were few fatalities, there have been many crashes with bicyclists. Out of the average 95 crashes a year, over 75 percent of bicycle crashes had occurred in Anchorage. She noted that while total bicycle crashes were declining, the fatalities are increasing.

MS. GOLDEN co-presented the PowerPoint, titled "Bike and Pedestrian Safety." She pointed out that pedestrian crashes are higher in the fall and winter months, as seen in the statistics on slide 6. She suggested that low light and weather conditions would play into these high statistics. She noted that the peak

for these crashes would be during the evening commute. She pointed out a pie chart on slide 7, which showed that 70 percent of crashes occur in Anchorage. She quoted statistics from other high population areas in the state.

[1:44:10 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE requested a breakdown of pedestrian crashes in Anchorage over the last four years, in relation to the reduced jaywalking law. He also requested data on pedestrian crashes in relation to homeless camps, and he discussed how these camps could create pedestrian accidents. He expressed the opinion that these types of accidents could be "a significant part" of the high fatalities in 2024.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK, per slide 7, requested information on these statistics. She questioned the pedestrian commuter traffic in Anchorage versus other urban areas in the state. She pointed out that the NorthStar Borough does not have the same "worldclass" commuter trails as Anchorage; therefore, the number of pedestrian commuters in Fairbanks would be less.

MS. GOLDEN expressed uncertainty, noting that the department has not tracked this. She offered to follow up after the meeting with an answer.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK suggested that pedestrian crashes would increase in Fairbanks if there were more of a commuter network.

[1:49:13 PM](#)

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 8. She indicated that the deadliest month for pedestrians on the road system in over a decade was last September in Anchorage. She stated that attention has been brought to this issue and its contributing factors. She moved to slide 9 and spoke about the department's Safe Systems Approach in Anchorage, pointing out that this is the foundation for the Strategic Highway Plan. She stated that this system is based on creating redundancies, so a single mistake would not likely cause someone to lose a life.

MS. GOLDEN, in response to a question from Representative Mina, moved to slide 10 and spoke about the creation of the Vision Zero Task Force. She stated that the task force consists of the Anchorage Police Department (APD), the Municipality of Anchorage, Anchorage Metropolitan Transportation Solutions (AMATS) and DOT&PF. She stated that APD would explore the

contributing factors to the crashes so the task force could determine commonalities. She noted that driving speeds are an important factor, along with the number of available lanes. She expressed the understanding that changing a speed limit sign would not necessarily change the speed that people would drive. She suggested that the road should be changed, not the sign, and she discussed the concept of "target speed." She explained that the task force would prioritize the needed actions by investigating the problem roadways.

MS. GOLDEN, in response to a question from Representative Mina, said the Vision Zero Task Force would determine the priority list. In response to a follow-up question, she indicated that options to address the pedestrian fatalities would include speed limit changes and the use of traffic cones. Concerning any other options, she said that nothing would be "off the table at this point," as all proven safety measures are being considered. She expressed the importance of making meaningful changes, not necessarily quick changes.

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 11 and discussed Anchorage's Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment. She stated that the plan was published in 2022, and it identified the "high injury network," as seen on the map. She pointed out the corridors and intersections listed on the slide.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE expressed the understanding that the problem areas are the east and west corridors. He opined that if commuters were the problem, it would be reflected in the north and south corridors.

MS. GOLDEN stated that the slide shows reported crash data from areas with repeated problems. She added that the calculation is data driven.

[1:57:52 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA questioned the factors that determine the priority list.

MS. GOLDEN responded that any sort of injury or fatality crash would determine the priority list. In response to a follow-up question from Co-Chair Eischeid, she stated that these would include both pedestrians and bicyclists.

MS. MCCARTHY, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, said that when the police investigate crashes, they would

determine whether there is a line-of-sight issue. If so, DOT&PF would be contacted, and it would take action. In response to a follow-up question, she stated that when an individual reports an issue, an engineer would make an inspection.

MS. GOLDEN noted her previous work experience for the department and explained that department crews would measure the line-of-sight distances; however, sometimes the homeowner would need to correct the problem. She stated that the task force would address quick-response projects, including clearing brush.

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 12 and pointed out that there are proven safety countermeasures specific to bicyclists and pedestrians. She stated that crosswalk visibility would include rectangular flashing beacons, road diets, and improved lighting.

[2:03:26 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE questioned the use of temporary bike lanes, and he suggested that these could create issues for pedestrians once the temporary lanes are removed for the winter.

MS. MCCARTHY responded that a later slide would address the pilot project that was set up to test the temporary bike lanes. She noted that the research data has not shown increased crashes. She suggested that once the lanes are removed in the winter, more research could be done on crashes.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE expressed the understanding that there would be a fine of \$125 for using a motorized vehicle on a pedestrian or bike path where this is prohibited. He suggested that the fine should be increased. He referenced a pedestrian fatality on a trail where brush had been in the line-of-sight of a prohibited motorized vehicle. He expressed the understanding that after this accident the department had not responded to a request to clear the brush.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA discussed snow removal for bike lanes in Anchorage and snow storage in slip lanes. She questioned whether this should be considered when discussing pedestrian safety countermeasures.

MS. GOLDEN responded that snow clearing is a focus for the Vision Zero Task Force. She noted that snow removal and storage is a nationwide issue. She expressed the opinion that slip lanes are a "dinosaur of engineering," and now there is a move

to put non-car road users within the cone of vision of approaching drivers.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID questioned the definition of "vulnerable user law." He expressed the understanding that Alaska does not have this.

MS. GOLDEN responded that vulnerable user laws would be found under the public safety section in the Alaska Administrative Code. She noted that this would not be found under the transportation section. She stated that this law would reference the rights of way for pedestrians and bicyclists crossing the road. She stated that to have these laws or any fines changed, DOT&PF would need to work with the Department of Public Safety.

[2:10:43 PM](#)

MS. GOLDEN discussed successful safety countermeasures, as seen on slide 13. She stated that the 50 roundabouts implemented across the state have shown a significant reduction in injuries and fatal crashes. She noted that the department has not pursued the use of speed safety cameras. She continued that there are two different variable speed limit projects being considered.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE noted that several requests have been sent to DOT&PF to ask for lower speed limits in some problem areas. He expressed the understanding that the department would need to do a study before lowering any speed limits. He opined whether a study should be needed to lower a speed limit by 10 miles per hour. He urged that this issue be resolved.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK expressed the opinion that there should not be any speed safety cameras in the state.

[2:14:05 PM](#)

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 14 and discussed speed limits. She noted that speed plays a role in every crash, and she pointed out that higher speed crashes are typically more severe. She expressed the understanding that changing speed limit signs would not always result in slower traffic. She observed that it would be difficult to have drivers slow down unless law enforcement is present on a regular basis.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA pointed out that vehicles are getting larger. She suggested that these vehicles could have a greater impact at lesser speeds.

MS. GOLDEN responded that concerning crashes with pedestrians and bicyclists, the National Highway Safety Administration is investigating a change to vehicle safety ratings. She suggested that for the system to be safer, all sectors must work together. She expressed excitement about changes in vehicle technology that could help reduce crashes.

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 15 and discussed road safety audits. She pointed out that a nonbiased, independent team would do these audits. She stated that the audits would produce a package of near-term, mid-term, and long-term opportunities for future project decisions. She noted that the state would have three safety audits in the upcoming year.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID questioned whether locals would have a voice in the safety audits.

MS. GOLDEN responded that the nonbiased team would include community members, but not local engineers.

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 16 and listed the actions the department is taking to support safety. She pointed out the development of the Complete Streets policy, as this would consider all road users. She noted that the Alaska Traffic Manual is being updated to conform to federal requirements. She added that this new manual would update the rules for pedestrians and bicyclists. She noted the following actions: the speed policy is being rewritten, the urban safety corridor selection criteria are being addressed, the Highway Preconstruction Manual is being rewritten, pedestrian signal technology is being implemented, and safety measures are being taken for the influx of pedestrians during the cruise ship season.

[2:21:54 PM](#)

MS. GOLDEN, in response to a question from Representative Mina, stated that the timeline for the release of the Complete Streets Policy would be December 2025.

MS. GOLDEN, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, estimated that the project for the crosswalk pedestrian flashers in Fairbanks would have been around \$500,000; however, she noted

that since this installation the prices have risen. She expressed uncertainty concerning the cost of the audible pedestrian signals, and she estimated that each pole would be around \$1,000. She noted that there would be four poles at each intersection.

MS. MCCARTHY stated that she would follow up with the committee on these exact amounts.

MS. GOLDEN referenced the technological initiatives that would support safety. On slide 17, she pointed out the Winter Operations Dashboard, audible alerting for Alaska 511 users, crash reporting metrics, and the sidewalk priority level update. She noted that crash data is reactive rather than proactive. In order to be proactive, she asserted that the department would need to understand where people feel unsafe. In reaction to this need, she pointed out that the department created the Partners in Safety program, as seen on slide 18. She explained that while crash data only relates one perspective, this program would engage with all transportation users. She pointed out that a quick response (QR) code was created so users would be able to show the areas of concern by "dropping a pin" on the map.

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 19 and addressed Alaska's Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP), which is based on the safe systems approach. She noted that this approach is used in Washington State. She explained that with this approach, if there is a failure in one part of the system, this would be caught by another part of the system. To create this as a whole, she stated that all programs must align with SHSP. She moved to slide 20 and addressed the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP). She stated that HSIP focuses on data driven projects, with the goal of achieving a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads.

[2:28:17 PM](#)

MS. GOLDEN, in response to a question from Representative Mina, stated that all department funds would be eligible for use on road safety improvement projects, as this is a department priority. She expressed uncertainty concerning the funding programs, but she stated that every project would have to have a safety review. In response to a follow-up question, she clarified that funds would be transferred through HSIP, and she gave some details of these transfers. She noted that the department would be legally allowed to do these transfers.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA requested a follow up after the meeting on the details of how funds would be transferred by the department between the different areas.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK, for the record, stated that the committee has requested an updated HSIP plan, but it has yet to receive this. She noted that this plan might examine Representative Mina's question.

MS. GOLDEN responded in the affirmative.

[2:32:14 PM](#)

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 21 and discussed the Highway Safety Office, which produces safety campaigns. She noted that the office would focus on data to determine driving behavior, and it receives funding through grants from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. She explained that this is a competitive grant program, and it focuses on high visibility law enforcement and other safety programs and events. She noted that the office hosts a yearly summit, bringing together all the stakeholder groups.

MS. MCCARTHY moved to slide 22 and spoke about the protected bike lane pilot project in Anchorage. She discussed the two phases, as described on the slide. She noted that the public response had increased after Phase 2. She acknowledged that pilot projects will often capture the public's attention, and this creates more feedback. She added that these projects had provided data without making a permanent change. She spoke to the Phase 2 project results, which saw around 100 to 130 bike users, with only a slight speed reduction for car traffic. She stated that before the Phase 1 project, there had been excessive speeding in the area. She noted that this speeding had dropped after the Phase 1 project. She stated that crashes had not increased in either area. She added that there are no plans for permanent projects at this time.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID pointed out that he had biked the area in Phase 1, and he suggested that the project changed the outlook in the area.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA expressed appreciation for the protected bike lanes; however, she pointed out that the implementation had not been "perfect." She questioned how the information collected on the projects would be conveyed to the public.

MS. MCCARTHY responded that a report and a presentation has been given to AMATS. She expressed the opinion that the feedback had been "very lively."

MS. GOLDEN added that this pilot project was done using DOT&PF research funding, so there would be a report on this. She added that this was a unique way of doing something different, and she suggested that a pilot project model could be used for other projects.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE questioned why the busiest traffic parts of Anchorage had been chosen for the pilot project. He suggested that less busy routes should have been chosen.

MS. MCCARTHY expressed uncertainty, and she offered to follow up with this information.

MS. GOLDEN, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, stated that Fairbanks has a plan to do a pilot project in conjunction with DOT&PF. She asserted that the department would be open to new pilot projects with any willing community.

[2:41:33 PM](#)

MS. MCCARTHY moved to slide 23 and discussed the department's Active Transportation Plan. She stated that this is about improving safety and accessibility for active users. She noted the QR code linking to the plan's report. She added that some of the information from the report has been used for the presentation. She pointed out the department's goal of providing an active transportation network and infrastructure to encourage biking and walking.

[2:42:43 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID expressed appreciation for the work, and he discussed the importance of addressing pedestrian fatalities.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE expressed the understanding that Kodiak needs more stoplights.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID gave closing comments.

[2:44:49 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

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