

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 20, 2025

1:01 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: HIGHWAY SAFETY IN ALASKA

- HEARD

PRESENTATION: A PUBLIC PERSPECTIVE ON HIGHWAY SAFETY

- 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 on highway safety in Alaska.

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 on highway safety in Alaska.

DAN SMITH, Director
Measurement Standards and Commercial Vehicle Compliance
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint on highway safety in Alaska.

CARLOS ROJAS, Chief
Commercial Vehicle Compliance
Measurement Standards and Commercial Vehicle Compliance
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint on highway safety in Alaska.

JENNIFER CAMPBELL, member
Advocates for Safe Alaskan Highways
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "A Public Perspective on Highway Safety."

MARY FARRELL, member
Advocates for Safe Alaskan Highways
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "A Public Perspective on Highway Safety."

BARBARA SCHUHMANN, member
Advocates for Safe Alaskan Highways
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "A Public Perspective on Highway Safety."

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:01:35 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR TED EISCHEID called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. Representatives McCabe, Moore, and Eischeid were present at the call to order. Representatives Mina, Stutes, Tilton, and Carrick arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION: Highway Safety in Alaska

1:02:58 PM

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID announced that the first order of business would be a presentation from the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities on highway safety in Alaska.

1:03:49 PM

SHANNON MCCARTHY, Communications Director, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), co-presented the PowerPoint on highway safety in Alaska [hard copy included in the committee file]. She noted the roadway fatality in the state that had occurred the previous night, and she reminded the committee that statistics represent lives. She displayed the graph on slide 2 that showed the statistics of the overall monthly roadway crashes in the state from 2014 to 2023. She pointed out that this data is divided into rural and urban crashes. She noted that most of these crashes occurred in the winter months in urban areas when roads were icy, and daylight was limited. On slide 3, she indicated that crashes resulting in a serious injury or fatality follow a different pattern, with the peak of these being in the summer and fall months. She noted that the highest number of these crashes occurred along rural roadways.

MS. MCCARTHY, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, expressed agreement that drivers would be more careful during the winter months, as opposed to the summer months. She added that rural highways allow for faster traffic in the summertime, and this would also be an element of the statistics.

MS. MCCARTHY moved to slide 4, which listed the reasons for roadway fatalities in the state, with lane departures having the highest rate. She moved to slide 5, which addressed the designated safety corridors in the state. She pointed out that these safety corridors were created in conjunction with the legislature. These include corridors along the Seward Highway, the Parks Highway, the Knik Goose Bay Road, and the Sterling Highway. She pointed out that these highways were chosen because they have elevated rates for serious crashes. She stated that this designation has allowed resources to be used to inform the public of these crash rates.

MS. MCCARTHY, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, stated that urban areas would be next on the list to receive safety corridors.

MS. MCCARTHY, in response to a question from Co-Chair Eischeid concerning the most dangerous highway in the state, expressed uncertainty. She stated that the Knik Goose Bay Road had been considered one of the most dangerous highways, along with the stretch of the Seward Highway just south of Anchorage.

[1:10:11 PM](#)

PAM GOLDEN, State Traffic and Safety Engineer, Design and Construction Standards, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, co-presented the PowerPoint on highway safety in Alaska. In response to Co-Chair Eischeid's question concerning the most dangerous highway in the state, she added that the statistic for this ranking still needs to be determined. She moved to slide 6 and discussed seatbelt usage in the state. She noted that this is generally trending upward in the state; however, the statistics in Juneau and the Matanuska-Susitna Valley are trending downward.

MS. GOLDEN, in response to a question from Representative Tilton, expressed uncertainty concerning the downward trend. She suggested that attitudes change over time. In response to Co-Chair Eischeid, she expressed uncertainty on the fine for not wearing a seatbelt.

MS. MCCARTHY responded that the fine would be \$50.

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 7 and discussed improvements to roadway intersections. She pointed out that the department has improved the conspicuity of its signals, as this adds to better visibility. She discussed the use of leading pedestrian intervals on crosswalks, so pedestrians would be more obvious. She discussed the technology that could help clear routes ahead of law enforcement and emergency medical services. Lastly, she pointed out that roundabouts are safer than traffic signals.

MS. GOLDEN, in response to a question from Representative Mina, stated that the terminology, "roundabouts first state," means that the department would prioritize a roundabout over a traffic light while planning for intersections. In response to a follow-up question from Representative McCabe, she stated that the federal government would not fund roundabouts specifically; however, roundabouts would automatically qualify for funding from the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program and other safety programs.

MS. GOLDEN, in response to a question from Co-Chair Eischeid concerning four-way stops, stated that not all four-way stop signs have flashing lights. She expressed the understanding that, the more the flashing lights are used, the less effective they become. She stated that using flashing lights on stop signs would be saved for problematic locations. She noted some of the other safety measures that have been added to four-way stops, such as warning signs. Concerning pedestrian rights of way, she clarified that pedestrians would not have the right of way in an intersection when a do not walk sign has been displayed.

[1:20:10 PM](#)

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 8 and discussed safety measures for rural two-lane highways, with lane departure crashes being the main focus. She explained that guardrails would be installed where roadsides are unforgiving. She noted that many upgrades have been implemented, such as reflective tabs. She added that passing lanes are also used to improve rural road safety. She stated that other upgrades would include the use of curve warning signs and rumble strips.

MS. GOLDEN, in response to a question from Representative Stutes concerning the recall of some guardrails, expressed uncertainty on the number of these still in use. She added that she would follow up with this information.

MS. MCCARTHY, in response to a question from Representative McCabe concerning driving behavior in passing lanes, stated that the department would work with law enforcement officials on educating drivers. She expressed agreement that when slower drivers speed up in passing lanes, it is a dangerous situation.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK expressed appreciation of passing lanes, and she noted that the described situation is "really frustrating." She pointed out the new passing lanes on sections of the Parks Highway, and she expressed the opinion that these areas are prone to the described behavior. She questioned whether there have been increased crashes in these passing lane sections.

MS. GOLDEN responded that there is a discussion on adding more passing lanes on the Parks highway. She pointed out that the Parks Highway had had more crashes with fatalities before the installation of passing lanes. She commented that roadway engineers and law enforcement have been responsible for the drop in these crash numbers. In response to a follow up, she

expressed the understanding that fatalities on the Parks Highway have come down. She offered to provide this data to the committee.

[1:27:00 PM](#)

MS. GOLDEN stated that a safety edge has been installed on highways with a sharp drop off from the pavement, as this could cause drivers to over correct and crash. She discussed the areas where the safety edges have been installed. She noted that the department has also improved traveler information on the Alaska 511 system with twice a day updates on winter conditions.

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 9 and described the partnerships created through the department's Safe Systems Approach. She noted that the Highway Safety Improvement Program and the Highway Safety Office are both involved with this approach. She gave details on the examples seen on the slide. She moved to slide 10 and discussed the Winter Operations Dashboard. She noted the link to the quick response (QR) code, which informs users on the snowplow routes within the previous 12 hours. She added that the dashboard also helps the department with its internal fleet management.

MS. MCCARTHY, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, expressed the understanding that the dashboard would address snowplows and sanding trucks so drivers could be better prepared. In response to a follow-up question, she stated that the Alaska 511 tool would integrate with the Waze global position system; however, Waze would not always receive information back.

MS. GOLDEN, in response to a question from Representative Mina, stated that there is a plan for the 511 tool to be able to show the snow maintenance on sidewalks in Anchorage. She expressed uncertainty on the timeline.

[1:34:54 PM](#)

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 11 and stated that Alaska 511 has around 400,000 users. She noted that the department has partnered with Yukon 511, so any issues on either side of the boarder could be reported. She moved to slide 12 and explained that the focus of the Alaska Highway Office is on improving roadway behavior. She noted that it offers a reimbursable grant program to organizations promoting highway safety.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK questioned whether the committee could have a copy of the Highway Safety Improvement Program's current report.

MS. GOLDEN responded that the report was sent out before the meeting.

MS. GOLDEN moved to slide 13 and pointed out the proven countermeasures for highway safety. These included speed management, pedestrian and bicyclist safety, roadway departures, and crosscutting. She noted that most of these measures have been implemented in the state. She added that the department would not be implementing speed safety cameras.

[1:38:03 PM](#)

MS. MCCARTHY moved to slide 14 and discussed the Tetlin to Fort Knox ore haul, pointing out that the department would apply the Safe Systems Approach to this route. She noted that the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) had helped to do the research for the Kinney Report. As the mining company began its test runs, she said that DOT&PF implemented some of the ideas from TAC, including a \$1 million brush-cutting project. Considering the frequent bus stops on this route, she pointed out cutting brush would give drivers more visibility and sight distance. She stated that the Alaska 511 upgrades would coordinate with the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District to integrate bus alerts. She stated that other school districts are also interested in using the 511 tool. She noted that this could also be applied to snowplows. She explained that using sequential layers of security would help reduce the risk of crashes. She pointed out that the 511 tool now contains bridge height data, as this would be useful to freight movers.

[1:42:17 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE questioned the "100-year-old" bridges that need to be replaced on the road between Tetlin and Fort Knox.

MS. MCCARTHY responded that two of the bridges are from World War II, and these bridge replacement projects are moving forward because they are in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). She noted that these bridges have been built well. She stated that the Chena River Flood Control Bridge is located at milepost (MP) 346 on the Richardson Highway. She noted that this bridge is younger, but it has load restrictions. She added that this bridge project is also in STIP and moving

forward. In response to a follow-up question, she clarified that a non-redundant bridge would be a bridge with no bypass if the bridge were damaged.

[1:45:45 PM](#)

DAN SMITH, Director, Measurement Standards and Commercial Vehicle Compliance (MS/CVC), Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, co-presented the PowerPoint on highway safety in Alaska. On slide 15, he stated that MS/CVC's goal is to reduce commercial motor vehicle-involved accidents, fatalities, and injuries through a consistent, uniform, and effective safety program. He stated that the Commercial Vehicle Safety Plan addresses vehicle inspections, carrier audits, size and weight enforcement, outreach, and permitting. He highlighted the nine weigh stations in the state and the number of employees at each, as seen on the slide.

MR. SMITH, in response to a series of questions from Co-Chair Carrick, stated that these trucks would be seen six times a day going in each direction between Tetlin and the Fort Knox Gold Mine. He responded that they would pass through the Tok weigh station, the two Richardson Highway weigh stations, and the Fox weigh station. He responded that the haul trucks from the mine would not stop at each of the stations every time they pass. He explained that trucks with a suitable safety score would pass through an empty lane for a visual inspection. He continued that these trucks are weighed consistently when they are carrying a load, but they are not typically when empty. He pointed out that certain weigh stations become backed up easily, adding that trucks should not be backed up onto the highways. He responded that every vehicle involved with the industrial project between the Fort Knox Gold Mine and Tetlin would be weighed three times when they are carrying ore northbound.

MR. SMITH, in response to a series of questions from Representative McCabe, stated that they are weighed three times because snow and ice accumulation could cause the trucks to gain weight, but they would also be losing weight as they burn fuel. He pointed out that these trucks can also raise or lower change their axles, and this would change their weight.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK questioned whether the Richardson weigh station is located south of the Chena Flood Control Bridge.

MR. SMITH deferred the question to Carlos Rojas.

[1:51:34 PM](#)

CARLOS ROJAS, Chief, Commercial Vehicle Compliance, Measurement Standards and Commercial Vehicle Compliance, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, responded that the Richardson Highway southbound weigh station is located at MP 358, which is two mile south of Fairbanks, while the bridge is at MP 347, so it is 12-to-14 miles away. In response to a follow-up question, he stated that the trucks would leave the mine and be weighed at the Tok station, with the next fixed station being after the Chena Flood Control Bridge. He noted that portable scales could be set up between the Tok station and the bridge. In response to a follow-up question, he stated that the Tok station is fully staffed for all traffic with three inspectors and one supervisor. He stated that all commercial traffic would be inspected, so shifts are staggered throughout the day and night. He explained that not every vehicle would be weighed because sometimes officers are busy with other inspections. He noted that this also includes safety inspections.

MR. ROJAS, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, expressed uncertainty on the number of violations for commercial trucks hauling ore from Tetlin to the Fort Knox Gold Mine. He stated that these ore haulers are typically newer trucks and trailers, and he expressed the understanding that these trucks have not had many safety violations. In response to a follow-up question, he expressed uncertainty on the amount of weight an uncovered truck would gain in a rainstorm. He noted that depending on the weather, these trucks could pick up thousands of pounds of snow and ice along the route. He pointed out that snow would stick to all parts of the vehicles and not just stand on top of loads.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK questioned the entity that would set the weight limits on bridges across the state.

MS. GOLDEN responded that DOT&PF's bridge engineers would set the load calculations, and a bridge engineer would need to answer this question.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK expressed interest in hearing about the weight limit at the Chena Flood Control Bridge and other bridges in the state. She suggested that this would ensure trucks are not in violation of DOT&PF's rules on weight limits.

[1:58:41 PM](#)

MR. SMITH moved to slide 16 and discussed MS/CVC's safety efforts during the fiscal year 2024 (FY24). He acknowledged that enforcing weight restrictions would be a challenge on the longer vehicles. He pointed out that the department is aware of the seasonal weight variations for these trucks, and the inspectors would check for this. He stated that fixed weigh stations would weigh around 69,000 vehicles a year. He noted that MC/CVC is also in charge of driver vehicle safety inspections, so monitoring truck weights would only be one aspect of the requirements. In regard to safety, he discussed the importance of permit accuracy.

MR. ROJAS, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, stated that there is one weigh station between Vine Road and the Parks Highway that would capture the weights of the Interior Alaska Natural Gas Utility (IGU) tankers. He stated that this weigh station is in Ester, which is just south of Fairbanks.

MR. SMITH, in response to a follow-up question, reiterated that the trucks would be weighed in Ester, just south of Fairbanks. In response, he stated that this load would not be eligible for an overweight permit on this highway. He expressed uncertainty whether IGU has applied for an overweight permit.

[2:02:19 PM](#)

MR. ROJAS co-presented the PowerPoint on highway safety in Alaska. He moved to slide 17 and pointed out the statistics on the number of vehicles weighed per station. He moved to slide 18 and pointed out the statistics on the driver and vehicle safety inspections done per area. He noted that 47 percent of these inspections are being done in the Anchorage area and 29 percent in Fairbanks. He pointed out that MC/CVC has partnered with the Alaska State Troopers, the Soldotna Police Department, the North Pole Police Department, and others. He stated that these partners would do safety and driver inspections, which consists of 6 percent of the workload in areas without established personnel or fixed-weight facilities. On slide 19, he discussed public education and outreach.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID expressed appreciation to the presenters.

[2:05:29 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 2:05 p.m. to 2:08 p.m.

PRESENTATION: A Public Perspective on Highway Safety

2:08:40 PM

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID announced that the final order of business would be a presentation from Advocates for Safe Alaskan Highways.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID requested that the committee hold questions until the end of the presentation.

2:09:50 PM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE, for the record, objected to holding questions, as questions have always been taken during the presentations. He argued that it would be more time consuming to have to go back through the slides at the end.

2:10:33 PM

The committee took an at-ease from 2:10 p.m. to 2:13 p.m.

2:14:08 PM

JENNIFER CAMPBELL, member, Advocates for Safe Alaskan Highways (ASAH), co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "A Public Perspective on Highway Safety," [hard copy included in the committee file].

MARY FARRELL, member, Advocates for Safe Alaskan Highways, co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "A Public Perspective on Highway Safety."

BARBARA SCHUHMANN, member, Advocates for Safe Alaskan Highways, member, Advocates for Safe Alaskan Highways, co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "A Public Perspective on Highway Safety."

2:14:39 PM

MS. CAMPBELL stated that the presentation would address the results of a safety study conducted by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF).

MS. SCHUHMANN, on behalf of ASAH, expressed opposition to the planned ore haul on the effected highways. She stated that the presentation would address the report from Kinney Engineering and the Alaska-Richardson-Steese Highway Corridor Action Plan (ARS-CAP). On slide 2, she stated that ASAH is a volunteer

group of interior residents who are opposed to the use of heavy industrial equipment on the state's highways. She expressed the opinion that the road conditions in the winter months are already very dangerous without adding these ore haulers. She argued that the roadways have not been designed to carry heavy ore haul trucks.

MS. SCHUHMANN moved to slide 3, which showed the 240-mile route from the Manh Choh Gold Mine in Tetlin to the Fort Knox Gold Mine, which is north of Fairbanks. She stated that the roads used to haul ore include the Alaska Highway, the Richardson Highway, and the Steese Highway. She pointed out that these are two lane rural roads with many driveways and 86 school bus stops. She spoke to the everyday use of these roads. She continued that the route runs through downtown Fairbanks, where there are multiple stoplights and steep hills. She pointed out that currently there are around 60 round trips per day, and they run 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, for 365 days a year. She expressed the understanding that this activity would continue for a minimum of 4.5 years.

MS. SCHUHMANN referenced the photo of the truck on the bottom of the slide, stating that these long ore haulers are known as "B-Trains." She stated that the B-Trains are 95 feet long and weigh 30 tons unloaded and 80 tons if legally loaded. With the estimate of 8 grams of gold per ton of ore, she suggested that each 50-ton truckload would contain around 14 ounces of gold, with the rest of the weight being industrial waste rock. She expressed the understanding that the Fort Knox Mining Company is planning to transport ore from other mines within a 300-mile radius. The ore would be milled at the Fort Knox facility, and the tailings would be disposed of there. She discussed other proposed mine projects that would also affect public roads in the state.

MS. SCHUHMANN moved to slide 4 and pointed out the timeline and ARS-CAP's recommended actions concerning the ore haul. She noted that ASAH, state agencies, local municipalities, and others were members of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) that was formed to discuss ARS-CAP. She stated that in 2023, TAC recommended that the ore haul not begin before ARS-CAP was finalized; however, trial ore haul runs began in October 2023, with full-scale operations starting in the summer of 2024. She noted that TAC was unexpectedly shut down by DOT&PF in November 2023. She moved to slide 5, which showed a press release from DOT&PF concerning safety; however, she expressed the understanding that DOT&PF has not fulfilled all its promises.

She continued, expressing hope that DOT&PF would protect the state's roads and bridges from heavy industrial use by requiring specific permits. She expressed the hope that ARS-CAP would be considered by the legislature and the state.

[2:22:57 PM](#)

MS. CAMPBELL moved to slide 6 and stated that ASAH's most basic concerns are with safety and cost, and she urged the committee to review ARS-CAP. She argued that unless the safety measures outlined in the plan are met, super-heavy industrial vehicles that are extra-long would create an unacceptable risk to passenger vehicles on rural two-lane highways. She expressed the understanding that from DOT&PF's calculations, the ore haul would cost billions of dollars in state expenditures. She noted that this was related in the TAC meetings. She listed the responses needed before ore hauls would be considered safe. She urged that the following be addressed: deficient highways and bridges, school bus stops that share lanes with the B-Train trucks, probability of increased crashes, overweight trucks, and the state's obligation to provide for road safety. She expressed appreciation for DOT&PF's presentation, and she argued that the state could not afford to subsidize industrial operations on state roads.

MS. CAMPBELL moved to slide 7 and discussed the safety impacts of B-Trains. She argued that because of their weight, B-Trains have a very high weight-to-power ratio. This means they are slow to accelerate and cannot keep speed on hills. She stated that DOT&PF's consultant [from Kinney Engineering] has related that the speed ratio for these trucks would add to higher crash rates. She opined that this slower speed would push other drivers to take more risks. She expressed the understanding that there have already been three collisions over the last nine months. According to the ARS-CAP's report, she stated that more collisions could occur in 15 roadway sections along the route. The report recommended that 18 miles of climbing lanes should be constructed in these areas, and this would cost the state \$50.6 million. She moved to slide 8 and discussed the probability of increased severe-to-fatal crashes, noting that DOT&PF's consultant had modeled the probability of crashes resulting from B-Trains. She expressed the understanding that there could be an increase of 10 severe-to-fatal crashes per year. To understand the predictability of this, she stated that TAC had questioned DOT&PF's consultant, and the consultant had related that the statistic was likely underpredicted. This was because the model used had not included B-Trains on these highways. She

added that nationwide studies show that rural two-lane highways have the biggest crash concerns. She expressed the understanding that if the state continues to allow the ore haul without the safety considerations, the cost to the state "could be immense."

2:31:00 PM

The committee took a brief at-ease.

2:31:40 PM

[During the at-ease, Co-Chair Eischeid passed the gavel to Co-Chair Carrick.]

2:32:12 PM

MS. CAMPBELL moved to slide 9 and discussed the safety concern for children riding school buses. She stated that on two-lane rural highways, the school buses would stop directly in the lane. She reiterated that there are 86 school bus stops along the two-lane portions of the route. She added that DOT&PF's consultant had pointed out that during the winter months, 35 of these bus stops would not have adequate stopping-sight distances. She relayed that the report has recommended that immediate conversations be had between the trucking company, the school bus contractors, and the school district. Concerning safety recommendations in the report, she asserted that no new systems have been put in place to connect bus drivers with the trucking company. She acknowledged that DOT&PF has updated the Alaska 511 system; however, this would not work in areas with no cell phone coverage.

MS. CAMPBELL, in response to a question from Representative Moore, stated that the first documented incident has recently occurred, and this was reported to the state troopers. In response to a follow-up question from Representative McCabe, she stated that on December 3, a fully loaded B-Train passed a school bus. The school bus had its lights flashing, signaling that children were getting off the bus. She expressed the understanding that the truck did not stop but went by "blasting its horn." In response to a follow up, she stated that she has not seen the trooper report; therefore, she expressed uncertainty concerning any actions that might have been taken. She offered to report back to the committee with more information.

MS. CAMPBELL, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, expressed uncertainty on the number of bus stops on the Parks Highway between Wasilla and Trapper Creek. In response to a follow-up question, she stated that ASAH is interested in all highways and all school buses in the state. She expressed uncertainty about the area referenced; therefore, she declined to comment.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE suggested that the Parks Highway would not be of concern to ASAH, and he expressed surprise because the highway has many two lanes stretches where buses stop in the middle of the road, and it is a regular route for Interior Alaska Natural Gas Utility (IGU) trucks hauling fuel. He expressed confusion why this would not also be a focus of ASAH. He expressed the opinion that ASAH is only an "advocate for one highway."

CO-CHAIR CARRICK suggested that there should be a comment on how and why ASAH was formed.

MS. CAMPBELL expressed appreciation for Representative McCabe's comments. She stated that ASAH was formed specifically because of the new industrial use of the state's highways. She expressed the opinion that DOT&PF should fund a study focusing on school buses and other needed issues because "our roads are unsafe." She added that solutions to this problem are complicated. For example, she stated that making one consolidated bus stop off the road would be difficult because as children age, the bus stop would need to change locations.

MS. FARRELL reminded the committee that the presentation is only addressing the study funded by DOT&PF, which had not included the area on the Parks Highway. She expressed agreement that further studies need to be funded.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE expressed the understanding that the study was at the request of ASAH because ASAH had "created a problem." He argued that the Parks Highway is not the concern because the trucks on this highway would be delivering needed fuel and goods to Fairbanks. He suggested that the IGU trucks on the Parks Highway are just as dangerous as the B-Trains on the Richardson Highway. He requested a presentation addressing the number of bus stops and the number of IGU trucks on the Parks Highway.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK reminded the committee that it is capable of disagreeing on an issue without being disagreeable.

[2:43:59 PM](#)

MS. CAMPBELL, in response to Representative Moore, stated that the three accidents referenced had been other vehicles that rear-ended B-Trains.

REPRESENTATIVE TILTON questioned the coordination efforts between the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, the school bus contracting company, and the ore trucking company.

MS. CAMPBELL expressed the understanding that conversations are beginning to happen; however, it has been around two years of making this request. She noted that Kinross Fort Knox and the school board had members on TAC, and they had many conversations on different types of communication devices that could be put on the buses and trucks. She expressed the understanding that the technology is not developed fully. She noted the cell reception issue and the student privacy issue on the route. She asserted that truck drivers want to be safe too, and she opined that no one is driving recklessly on purpose; however, the environmental conditions need to be recognized, and the infrastructure needs to be upgraded. In response, she expressed agreement that the safety of students should be considered over the privacy of students.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK questioned whether the testifiers reside along the route under discussion.

[MS. FARRELL signaled that she lives along the route.]

MS. CAMPBELL responded that she does not live along the route; however, she stated that her activities along the route have been curtailed because of the dangers.

[2:48:26 PM](#)

MS. CAMPBELL moved to slide 10 and spoke about bridge integrity on the route. She stated that Kinney Engineering is the consultant for DOT&PF, and it has relied 100 percent on DOT&PF data to determine the safety and integrity of the bridges. She discussed a request for information that ASAH put into DOT&PF concerning bridge safety and the weight of the ore haulers. In response to this request, it was learned that 15 out of the 34 bridges along the route should be load posted. She expressed the understanding that the trucks would weigh significantly more than the posted weight. She noted that DOT&PF's response was to put four of the bridges in the STIP, but to not load post any

other bridges. She noted that 60 trucks a day are being allowed to run, with an updated bridge inspection schedule.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE requested a copy of DOT&PF's report. He questioned the process of surveying the bridges and the suggested load postings.

MS. CAMPBELL responded that the report is long, and it contains dense information. She reiterated that there had been many conversations between DOT&PF and Kinross Fort Knox. She expressed the understanding that there had been questions on the load formula for Alaska bridges, the difference between trucks with axels down or axels up, and other elements. She shared that she has worked as a structural engineer on bridges, and she said, "It's really, really complicated." She moved to slide 11 and showed the load posting summary chart, and she noted the bridges that were recommended for a posting. She reiterated that the decision had been not to post. In response to a committee question, she stated that she does not have the information on how these numbers on the chart were determined. In response to a follow-up question, she reiterated that many conversations were had over a year on the bridges, and the decision had been not to have load postings.

[2:53:40 PM](#)

MS. CAMPBELL moved to slide 12 and noted the bridges that the department have added to the current STIP, with the updated estimated cost of around \$490 million. She moved to slide 13 and pointed out that pavement damage had been listed on the report under capital improvements. She noted that a road could be near the end of its useful life but still be useful for traffic from passenger vehicles and smaller commercial trucks. She expressed the understanding that there had been daily reports of increased road damage during this past summer when the ore haul trucks had moved to full operations. She expressed the understanding that DOT&PF maintenance was out daily on the route repairing damage. She noted that Kinney Engineering has reported that a B-Train truck would impose 250 percent more damage to highway pavement than other commercial trucks. She added that there had been no information specific to IGU trucks. She expressed the understanding that the pavement degradation statistic had assumed that all axles were on the pavement; however, when axles are raised for greater traction, this would impose greater stress on the pavement. She stated that the estimated cost to replace the pavement would be \$489 million. She moved to slide 14 and showed a chart of DOT&PF's estimated

cost to support the ore haul operation. She noted that this was quoted at over \$1 billion.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE questioned whether the \$489 million estimated cost to replace the pavement would benefit others, not just Kinross Fort Knox.

MS. CAMPBELL responded that anytime DOT&PF has the funding to upgrade a road, it would benefit everybody. She argued that the issue is, because of the B-Trains, pavement would degrade faster and need to be replaced sooner.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE expressed uncertainty on the current age of the road and the last time it was repaved. He suggested that as the road gets closer to the end of its life, it would not matter the weight of the trucks. He suggested that DOT&PF might know the answer to his question.

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MS. FARRELL moved to slide 16 and provided ASAH's recommendations. She acknowledged that many of these suggested recommendations would come with "large price tags," which is difficult because currently the state is underfunded. She noted that other problems include the length of time the projects would take to build and the loss of federal money from the state's STIP. She suggested that with the help of the committee, some precautions could be implemented. She opined that because many of the roads and bridges are reaching their end of life, and the state does not have the funding for replacement, the roads should be better cared for. She argued that the traffic from overweight trucks would cause more damage.

MS. FARRELL moved to slide 17 and suggested that the Fox weigh station is often closed. She stated that the report recommended that the weigh stations be open more hours, but DOT&PF does not have the staff or the funding to do this. She noted that a report on the weigh stations showed 17 percent of the ore trucks were overweight. She stated that this resulted in DOT&PF posting a load limit on the Chena Flood Control Bridge; however, she expressed the understanding that not all trucks are weighed.

MS. FARRELL listed ASAH's short-term requests to the committee, as seen on slide 19, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Support funding of staffing in AKDOT's Commercial Vehicle Compliance Division.
- Mandate full-time (24/7) operations of one weigh station along ore haul route.
- Review Section 17 AAC 35.010 in the Alaska administrative code which deals with industrial use of highways to find a fair and equitable sharing of costs among heavy, industrial users.

MS. FARRELL listed ASAH's long-term requests to the committee, as seen on slide 20, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Support upper weight limit restrictions legislation.
- Federal law (FHWA) states that maximum gross vehicle weight is limited to 80,000 pounds, however Alaska has an exemption and has no upper weight limit. B-Trains weigh 162,000 pounds.
- Assist AKDOT in using the regulations and policies they already have in place to make our roads safer and preserve our infrastructure.

MS. CAMPBELL moved to slide 21, which showed a map of prospective mining projects in the state. She stated that at least three projects in the Fairbanks area would haul ore on secondary roads to Fort Knox. She stated that the concept known as "the Alaska Strategy" would be to transport ore from satellite mines to Fort Knox within a 300-mile radius. She expressed the concern that this would make the public roads less safe. She suggested that now is the time to address this. She expressed the hope that changes would be made to assist DOT&PF in its mission to keep the public safe on the state's roads. She thanked the committee.

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CO-CHAIR CARRICK questioned the results of ASAH's petition and the public's response.

MS. CAMPBELL answered that two years ago a petition was circulated to ensure ASAH would be representing the public. She pointed out the different locations where the petition was distributed. She stated that in a two-month period, 3,456

responses were received. She stated that 2,100 of these were from Fairbanks. She quoted the number of responses from other corridor communities.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE commented that the road pictured on slide 16 "has been like that for decades because of the permafrost, not because of the trucks." He questioned the number of individuals that signed the petition from the Harding Lake area.

MS. CAMPBELL responded that 171 petitioners signed from the Salcha, Harding Lake, and Birch Lake areas.

REPRESENTATIVE TILTON noted that the goal of developing Alaska's resources is written in the state's constitution. If all ASAH's requests were completed, she questioned whether ASAH would be satisfied.

MS. CAMPBELL responded that the recommendations listed were those that would be least expensive and could be done in the short-term. She continued that these are the recommendations that would be "more palatable." She noted that the report recommends making the route as safe as possible, as seen on slide 15. She stated that passing lanes would be the best solution. In response to a follow-up question, she stated that the issue concerns safety, not comfort. She asserted that the question should be how to extract resources without compromising safety on the state's roadways. She pointed out that the solution is not an easy one, as it should concern what is best for the state, and this is a complicated conversation.

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CO-CHAIR CARRICK pointed out that her earlier question concerning the petition and its results spoke to the role of public servants, which is representing their constituents. She noted that concerns about the haul route have been expressed during the meeting. She said, "The public spoke very, very loud, and fairly clearly about this issue." She noted that there are safety concerns, not only for those living on the ore haul routes, but also for those working in the mining operation.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK thanked the presenters and made closing comments.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m.