

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 25, 2025

1:33 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: PORTS AND HARBORS OF ALASKA

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

BRYAN HAWKINS, President
Alaska Association of Harbormasters and Port Administrators
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a PowerPoint presentation on the ports and harbors in Alaska.

ACTION NARRATIVE

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CO-CHAIR ASHLEY CARRICK called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:33 p.m. Representatives McCabe, Stutes, Moore, Eischeid, and Carrick were present at the call to order. Representatives Tilton and Mina arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION: Ports and Harbors of Alaska

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CO-CHAIR CARRICK announced that the only order of business would be a presentation on the ports and harbors of Alaska.

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BRYAN HAWKINS, President, Alaska Association of Harbormasters and Port Administrators (AAHPA), gave a PowerPoint presentation on the ports and harbors in Alaska [hard copy included in the committee file]. He pointed out on slide 2 AAHPA's mission statement of serving and promoting Alaska's ports and harbors. He said that AAHPA is a nonprofit with 47 harbor members and 60 supporting businesses. He continued that it leads the harbor grant program for the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF). He pointed out the list of the board members on the slide, emphasizing that they are from across the state. He moved to slide 3, which showed a map with the locations of AAHPA's harbor members. He noted that river communities are becoming part of the association. He discussed the network that is created through AAHPA, which has become a strong source for the supply chain.

MR. HAWKINS, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, said that the Nenana Harbor has been an AAHPA member for about five years. He expressed uncertainty on the amount of traffic taken at the Nenana Harbor. He added that when Emmonak joined in 2016, it was serving as a port, but all it had was a riverbank. He stated that Emmonak had received a build grant, and now it has a dock and a barge landing at the mouth of the Yukon River. He expressed the understanding that around 10,000 people live upriver.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE pointed out that Port MacKenzie serves around 200,000 people, and he expressed disappointment that the presentation would not directly discuss this port.

MR. HAWKINS, in response to a question from Representative Stutes, stated that Port MacKenzie is an operating port.

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MR. HAWKINS moved to slide 4, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Alaska Ports and Harbors are an economic Driver for the State and the Nation
- Alaska Ports and Harbor provide a critical network of transportation for people and for the supply chain
- Sound Port and Harbor infrastructure is key to economy stability, growth and security
- Workforce Development is essential to the longevity of our infrastructure and our way of life.

MR. HAWKINS moved to slide 5, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Alaska has 33,000 miles of coastline more than the entire continental US combined.
- 82% of Alaskans live in coastal communities
- 70,000 Alaskan jobs are in the maritime industry (20% of our work force)
- Three of the top 10 fishing ports in the U.S. are in Alaska
 - Dutch Harbor (first by volume), Kodiak & Naknek
- Tourism is essential to Alaska economy
 - Nearly 60% of all tourists arrive via cruise ship
 - Tourism is largest private employer in Southeast Alaska
- The United States is an Arctic Nation because of Alaska

MR. HAWKINS moved to slide 6 and pointed out facts about the state's ports and harbors. He noted that there are three large private ports in Alaska, including the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System port in Valdez. He stated that the largest public port is the Don Young Port of Alaska in Anchorage. He noted that 85 percent of the state's cargo would go through this port. He stated that the state has 125 small boat harbors, with 108 being under local municipal control.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES questioned who would control the harbors that are not under local control.

MR. HAWKINS responded that the state owns these harbors. He explained that, over time, the state has been transferring the ownership of these harbors to the local cities and municipalities. He gave the example that in 1999 the state had sold the harbor in Homer to the city for \$1. He added that many communities own multiple harbors.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID questioned the designation of the Don Young Port of Alaska in Anchorage as a U.S. Commercial Strategic Seaport.

MR. HAWKINS explained that the Don Young Port of Alaska in Anchorage is adjacent to the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richarson (JBER), and military equipment is often transported across the dock facility at the port.

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MR. HAWKINS said that the Alaska Society of Civil Engineers does periodic evaluations of the ports and harbor facilities in the state. He stated that in 2017 the state received a grade D for the reasons listed on slide 7, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- No plan for establishing Arctic Deep Water Port
- Port of Alaska (Anchorage) had no recapitalization momentum
- Southeast Alaska regional cruise ship approach accommodating neo-Panamax was incomplete
- Small Boat Harbor matching ADOT Grant uncertain

MR. HAWKINS, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, expressed uncertainty on the definition of a "neo-Panamax" cruise ship.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE explained that neo-Panamax is the new largest ship, and these could not fit through the Panama Canal until its renovation. He expressed the understanding that some ports in Southeast Alaska would be able to take cruise ships this size.

MR. HAWKINS discussed the construction of the Port of Nome. He directed attention to slide 8, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- March 2020: Army Corps of Engineers completed Port of Nome Modification Feasibility Study & Final EA
- December 2020: Project Authorized by Congress in 2020 WRDA Bill
- \$505M US Army Corps of Engineers Project w/local match \$126M required

MR. HAWKINS said that the Nome project went out to bid; however, the bids had come back too high. He expressed uncertainty concerning the project at this point; however, he added that "it is not a dead issue." He moved to slide 9 and slide 10 and discussed the cruise ship ports in Juneau. He pointed out that the new dock facilities could handle the bigger ships. He noted that the docks had been dug in deeper water, and they have concrete floats that accommodate the ship's gangways. He noted other improvements in the state, including new private cruise ship docks in Hoonah, Ketchikan, and Whittier.

MR. HAWKINS moved to slide 11 and discussed the renovation of the Don Young Port of Alaska that has taken place since 2017. He stated that the \$208 million replacement project for the Petroleum Concrete Terminal was completed in 2022. He pointed out that this port has received around \$134 million in grants between 2019 and 2022.

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MR. HAWKINS discussed the DOT&PF Harbor Facility Grant, as seen on slide 12, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Established in 2006
- Only fully funded three times
- Woefully underfunded at the legislative level
- Purpose is to encourage local municipalities to assume financial and managerial responsibility of small boat harbors
- Requires 50% local match.
- For most Alaska harbors it is the only source of grant funding.

MR. HAWKINS moved to slide 13, which showed a chart on the DOT&PF Harbor Facility Grant funding for projects from 2020 through 2026.

MR. HAWKINS discussed the Municipal Harbor Facility Grants Program. He pointed out the funding for projects in fiscal year 2023 (FY 23), as seen on the chart on slide 14. He stated that during this year the governor's budget had awarded \$16.4 million to municipal harbor projects in the state. He pointed out that this has been the largest grant award since the conception of the program. He added that there would be a local match for each grant request. He stated that in FY 24, \$8 million in grants had been requested for three projects; however, only \$5.5 million was approved, as seen on slide 15 and slide 16. He stated that only one grant project had been put forward and awarded in FY 25, and it was for \$5 million, as seen on slide 17. He continued to slide 18, which addressed the FY 26 grant requests for this program. He stated that these grant requests total \$7 million for four projects, while the total cost with the local match for these projects would be \$30 million. He stated that local contractors would be used on these projects, and he expressed the opinion that these projects are "very much needed."

MR. HAWKINS moved from slide 19 through slide 20, pointing out the "big" grant wins over the past few years. He stated that the grant money received for these projects have resulted in upgrades and recapitalization projects throughout the state. He stated that this was done by leveraging state grants with local dollars. He noted the Emmonak dock project on the list.

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MR. HAWKINS, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, pointed out that the Port Development Infrastructure Program (PDIP) grant is a Maritime Administration (MARAD) grant. He noted that the port in Anchorage has received two of these grants.

MR. HAWKINS, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, expressed uncertainty when the PDIP grant had been awarded for the Jakolof Bay Dock in Seldovia. He expressed agreement that it might have been in FY 23. He expressed uncertainty on the progress of this project. He stated that he would report back to the committee on this progress.

MR. HAWKINS stated that in 2021 the Alaska Society of Civil Engineers raised the state's grade for its ports and harbors to a D+. He discussed the reasons for this higher grade, as seen on slide 22, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Congress authorization to designate Nome as Deep Draft Arctic Port was more than a decade in the making
- Port of Alaska Port Modernization Project is underway
- Private Investment for Cruise Ship Docks has built capacity for tourism economy

MR. HAWKINS noted that the small boat harbor grant remains unfunded and uncertain, so this had not helped the grade. He expressed the understanding that Alaska's ports and harbors should be receiving a new grade soon.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES questioned whether the deep-water port in Nome would require maintenance dredging.

MR. HAWKINS, in response, expressed uncertainty. He added that the entrance to the small boat harbor in Nome has always required maintenance dredging.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE expressed the understanding that within the last few days, the Alaska Society of Civil Engineers raised the state's grade from a D+ to a C-. He questioned whether the port in Nome has an anchor tenant.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES expressed the understanding that it would be the military.

MR. HAWKINS expressed uncertainty.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE discussed the barge activity in Cook Inlet and Southcentral Alaska. He expressed the understanding that companies are struggling to find places to work on their barges and places to lay them up for the winter. He questioned whether ports in this area would be able to accommodate this.

MR. HAWKINS expressed the understanding that there is a lack of moorage space for barges in this area. He noted that barges would be too big to enter the harbors. He stated that in Kachemak Bay there are some permanent moorings for barges, and some barges have been hauled out on airbags and stored in the marine repair yard. In response to a follow-up question on the increased barge activity in Port MacKinzie, he expressed agreement that more moorings are needed. He noted that there is no winter moorage in Western Alaska. He stated that these

barges could not be left in the rivers, and when they are hauled out on a bank, they need to be clear of the water because winter ice would create damage. He stated that in the past, much of the barge traffic had traveled to the Lower 48.

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CO-CHAIR CARRICK thanked the presenter, and she 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 2:07 p.m.