

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 10, 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 Elexie Moore  
Representative Cathy Tilton

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**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."

- MOVED CSHB 26(TRA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 14

Supporting the completion of the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension and the Northern Rail Extension; supporting the increase in defensive capabilities at Fort Greely, Alaska; encouraging a renewed commitment by the Alaska Railroad to a community-minded approach to future rail expansion; and encouraging the development of critical Arctic infrastructure.

- HEARD & HELD

PRESENTATION: DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S ROLE IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- 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  
02/27/25 (H) Heard & Held  
02/27/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)  
03/18/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124  
03/18/25 (H) Heard & Held  
03/18/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)  
03/20/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124  
03/20/25 (H) Moved CSHB 26(CRA) Out of Committee  
03/20/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)  
03/21/25 (H) CRA RPT CS(CRA) 4DP 1DNP 1AM  
03/21/25 (H) DP: HOLLAND, HALL, HIMSCHOOT, MEARS  
03/21/25 (H) DNP: PRAX  
03/21/25 (H) AM: RUFFRIDGE  
03/27/25 (H) TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124  
03/27/25 (H) Heard & Held  
03/27/25 (H) MINUTE(TRA)  
04/01/25 (H) TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124  
04/01/25 (H) Heard & Held  
04/01/25 (H) MINUTE(TRA)  
04/10/25 (H) TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

BILL: HJR 14

SHORT TITLE: PORT MACKENZIE & NORTHERN RAIL EXTENSIONS

SPONSOR(s) : REPRESENTATIVE(s) MCCABE

03/21/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
03/21/25 (H) TRA  
04/10/25 (H) TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

**WITNESS REGISTER**

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison, Special Assistant to the  
Commissioner  
Office of the Commissioner  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions on CSHB 26(CRA) and  
during the PowerPoint presentation by the Department of  
Transportation and Public Facilities.

CHRISTOPHER GOINS, Regional Director  
Southcoast Region

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "Alaska DOT&PF's Role in Emergency Response."

JASON SAKALASKAS, Chief  
Maintenance and Operations  
Northern Region

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "Alaska DOT&PF's Role in Emergency Response."

### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1: 01:32 PM](#)

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

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

[1:02:10 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK 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." [Before the committee was CSHB 26(CRA).]

[1:02:56 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK moved to adopt Amendment 1 to CSHB 26(CRA), labeled 34-LS0276\N.1, Walsh, 4/4/25, which read as follows:

Page 3, lines 8 - 9:

Delete "**public and community transit operators, including ferry operators, local governments, communities, and tribal entities**"

Insert "**metropolitan planning organizations, local governments, communities, tribal entities, and public and community transit operators, including ferry operators**"

CO-CHAIR CARRICK objected for the purpose of discussion. She spoke to the amendment, stating that this would include metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in the development of a community transit plan.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK withdrew her objection. There being no further objection, Amendment 1 to CSHB 26(CRA) was adopted.

[1:04:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA moved to adopt Amendment 2 to CSHB 26(CRA), labeled 34-LS0276\N.2, Walsh, 4/4/25, as amended, which read as follows:

Page 3, line 8:

Delete "**cooperation**"

Insert "**coordination**"

CO-CHAIR CARRICK objected for the purpose of discussion.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA explained that replacing "cooperation" with "coordination" would conform the language concerning stakeholders on page 2, line 5 of the proposed legislation.

[1:05:08 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK removed her objection. There being no further objection, Amendment 2 was adopted to CSHB 26(CRA), as amended.

[1:05:31 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA moved to adopt Amendment 3 to CSHB 26(CRA), labeled 34-LS0276\N.3, Walsh, 4/4/25, as amended, which read as follows:

Page 2, line 5:

Delete "**local governments and tribal entities**"

Insert "**metropolitan planning organizations, local governments, communities, tribal entities, and public and community transit operators, including ferry operators**"

CO-CHAIR CARRICK objected for the purpose of discussion.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA explained the purpose of Amendment 3 would be similar as the previous amendment, as it would make the language in the proposed legislation consistent.

[1:06:36 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK removed her objection. There being no further objection, Amendment 3 was adopted to CSHB 26(CRA), as amended.

[1:06:58 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID moved to report CSHB 26(CRA), as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

[1:07:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE objected, stating that he does not [generally] oppose the bill; however, he argued that the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is already doing this work, and he questioned the necessity of the proposed bill. He expressed the opinion that "this is an Anchorage bill" and has nothing to do with his constituents and those in some of the other remote parts of the Interior. In conclusion, he expressed opposition to the proposed legislation.

[1:08:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA explained that even if DOT&PF is doing this work now, leadership and federal rules could change; therefore, active work on multimodal transportation planning and public transit planning would not be guaranteed. In terms of this being an "Anchorage bill," she stated that, while DOT&PF can do this for all areas in the state, in current statute it is only a requirement for urban transportation. She argued that the current statute is biased towards Anchorage, and the proposed legislation would remove the term "urban" because it is outdated. She reiterated that the proposed legislation would ensure DOT&PF would work on transit options in areas other than the larger cities in the state. She noted the funding issues and added that this would make sure community groups are involved with the department to address their community concerns. She added that including MPOs would allow others to be included in the process.

[1:11:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES thanked the sponsor of the proposed bill for including ferry operators, as this represents rural areas.

[1:11:29 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE argued that the 8,200 Alaskans in Southeast, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor would not include villages, such as Ruby, as it could use a ferry. He continued that the proposed legislation would not address the villages of Healy, Denali, Cantwell, Willow, or Talkeetna. He stated that it would do nothing to solve the issue of transportation between Healy and Fairbanks, which is a problem for Healy, as it has no health care services. He argued that this would not even service Big Lake. He explained that for him to support the proposed legislation, the needed additions would create too great an expense. He commented that on the fiscal note, the department has stated that it is already doing everything it can. He expressed appreciation for the proposed legislation; however, he expressed opposition.

[1:13:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TILTON noted that the fiscal note is zero because DOT&PF is already doing the work. She argued that if things were to change, the fiscal note would change as well, and more costs would be incurred. She expressed opposition to the proposed bill.

[1:14:11 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID commented on his experience in rural Wisconsin, where a transit system accessed rural places. He shared his experience as a city planner for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, stating that transportation planners had discussed issues concerning those who live in remote areas. He suggested that talking and planning would lead to action. He expressed support for the proposed legislation.

[1:15:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA requested that Andy Mills speak to the proposed legislation, concerning the changes in [paragraph (5)]. Per this, she questioned whether rural areas would be included in the community transit plan.

[1:16:20 PM](#)

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, responded that the

department's work already consists of area and statewide planning. Concerning Representative McCabe's comment, he stated that no matter the planning, without additional funding there will be no service to the remote areas. He continued that without additional resources, he could not envision a path for new services.

[1:17:27 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK expressed support for the proposed legislation, as her district has many semiurban areas, and a transportation plan here is important. She commented on the zero fiscal note, recognizing that in the future the bill could generate a fiscal impact. She opined that the fiscal impact would be positive if it led to better connectivity for communities, such as Healy. She expressed the opinion that MPOs need to be included. She noted that there would be a statewide effect for rural communities because of the inclusion of ferry and tribal consultation.

[1:19:03 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID opined that, from a former planner's perspective, plans are the envisioned future of a community; with a robust process involving public comment and professional planners, the result would be a roadmap for the future, and the funding would follow. He suggested that often a plan is needed to receive a grant, so a plan would be a first step.

[1:20:02 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA, in closing, shared that she had joined the Public Transit Advisory Board in Anchorage in 2017, when the board had been undergoing a plan for Transit on the Move. She stated that the plan was the result of a decline in ridership, and the board was trying to determine what needs were not being met. She pointed out there had been robust community involvement, but there was no new funding or new routes. She stated that the plan was created with the direction of community members who use the service. She continued that a few years later, the municipality had been able to work out the funding for the Transit on the Move plan. She argued that even if the funding were not available, planning would be important to understand the needs of the community. She concluded that the proposed legislation represents transparency and accountability.

[1:22:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE stated that if the proposed bill were a statewide plan, he would offer an amendment to include rail stops in Anchorage, Wasilla, Houston, Talkeetna, Cantwell, Healy, and Fairbanks. He argued that this would provide community transport and involve the Alaska Railroad. He suggested that this would change the railroad's focus from tourism. He maintained his objection.

[1:23:47 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK expressed appreciation for Representative McCabe's suggestion.

[1:24:04 PM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Moore, Stutes, Mina, Eischeid, and Carrick voted in favor of the motion to report CSHB 26(CRA), as amended, out of committee. Representatives Tilton and McCabe voted against it. Therefore, CSHB 26(TRA) was reported out of the House Transportation Standing Committee by a vote of 5-2.

[1:24:52 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:24 p.m. to 1:28 p.m.

#### **HJR 14-PORT MACKENZIE & NORTHERN RAIL EXTENSIONS**

[1:28:56 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 14, Supporting the completion of the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension and the Northern Rail Extension; supporting the increase in defensive capabilities at Fort Greely, Alaska; encouraging a renewed commitment by the Alaska Railroad to a community-minded approach to future rail expansion; and encouraging the development of critical Arctic infrastructure.

[1:29:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE, as prime sponsor, introduced HJR 14. He stated that the Northern Rail Extension project and the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension project would strengthen the state's infrastructure, defense capabilities, and resiliency. He stated that Alaska's strategic location on the Arctic Ocean, coupled

with the growing defense operations at Fort Greely, underscores the urgency for the need to complete the two rail extension projects, as proposed by HJR 14.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE stated that the Northern Rail Extension project would enhance the state's defense infrastructure. He pointed out that the completion is 70 miles from Fort Greely and Delta Junction, including the Tanana River crossing. He stated that the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension project, with support from the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough and the Alaska Railroad, is near completion. It would provide a range of benefits, including reduced energy costs, reduced emissions, and improved transportation costs of key goods, such as coal to tide water. He pointed out that this extension project would align with the current federal administration's goal of unlocking Alaska's resources and increasing energy exports.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE suggested that the rail extensions would alleviate road congestion, enhance supply chain resilience, and create jobs, while ensuring greater affordability for Alaskans. Furthermore, the proposed resolution would encourage the Alaska Railroad to engage with local communities. He summarized that the proposed resolution is not only about transportation infrastructure, but also about securing Alaska's economic future, strengthening defense, securing resiliency for residents in the Interior, and enhancing energy security. He noted the letters of support for HJR 14.

[1:33:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES commented on the letter of support from the mayor and manager of the Mat-Su Borough. She noted that the letter was not addressed to most of the committee members and questioned the reason for this. She also questioned why the extension projects had stopped.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE responded that the letter in question was addressed to the delegation of the Mat-Su Borough, as this was who requested the letter in support. In response to the second question, he explained that the projects had not stopped because of funding, and he pointed out the bridge over the Tanana River had cost \$2 million. He added that it is the longest bridge in the state, but "it goes absolutely nowhere." He noted that the money has been spent, but the project is not complete. He pointed out that \$184 million of state money was spent on the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension project. He said, "It's the largest, most expensive snowmobile trail in the world," and he

suggested it is now a "highway for criminals." He explained that there are 7.2 miles left to construct. There had been a right-of-way issue, he said, but once this was resolved, there was no more funding.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE, in response to a series of follow-up questions, stated that the railbed is there, but there are no tracks. He added that it is in good shape, except for some one-lane bridges. He responded that there is no railroad steel laid down yet, only a roadbed. He continued that the railroad has estimated the cost of completion to be \$290 million; however, from other sources, he has heard a maximum estimate of \$150 million. He posed the question of why it would cost the Alaska Railroad more. He noted that the Federal Railroad Administration has also provided lower estimates, and he expressed the opinion that politics has influenced the estimates. In response to a question concerning the number of tracks laid in the last 25 years, he stated that no miles of running track have been laid. He responded that he would provide the committee with maps of the projects.

[1:42:35 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK commented on the letter of support from the Alaska Railroad, which listed the cost of completing the 32-mile Port MacKenzie Rail Extension project as \$275 million to \$300 million. She questioned how much this would be per mile, and she questioned whether this cost would be reflected in any other rail project.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE responded that this would be around \$14 million per mile. He expressed the opinion that a fraction of the cost would finish the project, and he suggested that the high price is because of politics. In response to a question concerning whether the railroad has been proactive, he expressed the opinion that the Alaska Railroad's \$484 million estimate speaks for how proactive the railroad has been. He stated that the Alaska Railroad had applied for a federal grant from the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program last year, but it had been rejected because the application was incorrect. He noted that the railroad plans to apply for the grant again this year; however, the railroad has said it does not have the needed letters of support from Alaska's Congressional Delegation and the governor. He expressed the understanding that support has been voiced from these entities. He suggested that the railroad might be concerned about the anchor tenant in Port MacKenzie; however, he

expressed doubt on the concept of an "anchor tenant." He argued that for the growth of resources in the state, the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension project would need to be completed.

1:47:53 PM

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID referenced the letter in support from the Alaska Railroad and expressed the desire to ask the railroad questions concerning the estimated cost. He questioned the intent of the language on page 3, lines 15-19, of the proposed resolution, which requests that the railroad renew its commitment to a "community-minded approach".

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE expressed the observation that the Alaska Railroad has struggled with community relations and those who live on the right-of-way. He suggested that this would urge the railroad, which is owned by Alaskans, to take a more community-minded stance with everything.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID expressed appreciation for the sentiment; moreover, he voiced skepticism about organizations and government entities that are based away from communities. He noted that metropolitan planning organizations have the same concern with the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' ability to stay sensitive to local concerns.

1:51:35 PM

CO-CHAIR CARRICK expressed appreciation for the inclusion of the clause under discussion. She noted that encouraging the railroad to be more accessible to Alaskans also relates to the proposed legislation [HB 26] heard earlier in the meeting. She shared a personal anecdote about railroad travel and its affordability in the past. She noted that now flying and driving are less expensive and quicker than rail travel in the state. She opined that if it were less expensive, more people would use the railway. She stated that the resolution is "critically" important, noting the support from mine developers and industrial purposes. She suggested a clause in the proposed resolution to highlight this purpose.

1:53:33 PM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE noted that this type of legislation has been offered before, and it passed. He opined that HJR 14 could be used in support for the CRISI grant. He spoke to the success of the railroad, as it has not gone bankrupt and not asked the

state for money. He commended the Alaska Railroad on doing an admirable job, especially through the COVID-19 pandemic; however, he reiterated that the Alaska Railroad works for Alaskans.

[1:54:54 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK announced that HJR 14 was held over.

[1:55:05 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:55 p.m. to 1:56 p.m.

**PRESENTATION: Department of Transportation's Role in Emergency Response**

[1:56:20 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK announced that the final order of business would be a presentation by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' role in emergency response.

[1:57:17 PM](#)

CHRISTOPHER GOINS, Regional Director, Southcoast Region, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), co-presented the PowerPoint, titled "Alaska DOT&PF's Role in Emergency Response" [hard copy included in the committee packet].

[1:57:24 PM](#)

JASON SAKALASKAS, Chief, Operations and Maintenance, Northern Region, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, co-presented the PowerPoint, titled "Alaska DOT&PF's Role in Emergency Response."

[1:57:33 PM](#)

MR. GOINS began the presentation on slide 2 and stated that the department's involvement in emergency response is in part to maintain or restore safe access for medical, fire, and police response. He continued that the department also takes a role protecting state and public assets, such as from a flood. When the department moves in to protect infrastructure, he said, it looks to restore the asset to its original state and seeks to improve its resiliency. He stated that DOT&PF is often there as

the first response; therefore, it can be involved in a variety of emergencies, and when the governor declares an event as an emergency, the department can become further involved. He expressed the opinion that the department's ability to move quickly with its contracting arm is better than any other entity in the state.

2:00:00 PM

MR. SAKALASKAS moved to slide 3 and stated that the department covers multiple modes of transportation: land, sea, and air. These modes can vary between different communities and locations. Understanding the needs of stakeholders and communities in an emergency effects the department's ability to respond and restore transportation systems. He stated that one aspect of this is to understand the importance of each mode to each community. He discussed the importance of maintaining transportation systems during emergency operations.

2:02:02 PM

MR. GOINS moved to slide 4, which showed a partial list of emergency responses the department has participated in over the last seven months. The list covers various events over diverse areas in the state, and he noted that the department must be trained to respond to each. He moved to slide 5 and discussed incident command structure (ICS). He noted that the department uses the same structure as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). He said that using this structure allows for scaling up or down the response quickly and joining in with other ICSSs more easily. He noted the department's involvement with the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), as this allows for better communication and the sharing of resources.

2:03:31 PM

MR. SAKALASKAS moved to slide 6 and gave examples of the department's interactions with other agencies. He noted that important partners would include those fighting wildfires in the state, as traffic can be affected by this. He pointed out the importance of having uniform messaging to the public in these situations. He reiterated the quick response DOT&PF has with its contractors, emphasizing the department's familiarity with the different contractors in the state. This enables the department to efficiently refer these contractors to the fire-fighting entities.

MR. SAKALASKAS pointed out that DOT&PF also works with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) and SEOC. He stated that these partnerships allow the department to reach outside of its assets or responsibilities.

[2:06:19 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK questioned the responsibility for clearcutting along roads to help fire mitigation. She gave the example of the Cooper Landing fire that "jumped the road."

MR. SAKALASKAS responded that the department's primary focus on clearing the sides of roadways would be for safe visibility and traffic concerns. He stated that the department sets its clearing limits, while forestry entities would do additional clearing in a response to an emergency. He expressed uncertainty concerning the Cooper Landing event.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK clarified that the regular setback clearing on either side of a road would be DOT&PF's decision; however, during a fire event the department would coordinate with the Department of Forestry and others to do further cutback along the road.

MR. SAKALASKAS expressed general agreement with this statement. He stated that fire services would be in charge, and they would reach out to DOT&PF for support. He continued that it would be up to the department on its response.

[2:09:10 PM](#)

MR. GOINS stated that Co-Chair Carrick's question is covered on slide 7, which addresses right-of-way management. He discussed the recent slide in Ketchikan, and he directed attention to the aerial picture on slide 8. He noted the bypass on private property that had to be created the day after the slide, as people were cut off from road access. He reiterated that clear communication with landowners is critical. He discussed the importance of interdepartmental communication during an emergency, noting that new technology plays a role. He stated that public outreach is another important communication aspect to emergency response, noting that social media plays an important role for this.

[2:13:08 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA questioned whether the department has access to text alerts.

MR. GOINS responded that this tool has been used. In example, he discussed being able to notify the public of building closures.

MR. SAKALASKAS added that there is an option for text alerts.

[2:13:52 PM](#)

MR. GOINS moved to slide 9 and pointed out the new tools the department is using. He stated that drones are just for emergencies, but they have everyday uses as well. He discussed the Alaska Rural Remote Operations Work Plan (ARROW), which is used to enhance emergency remote response capabilities in 10 different Alaska communities. This is done by providing uncrewed aerial systems that have access to a shared geographic information system. He stated that this is important for responding to disasters affecting critical infrastructure in unserved areas. Used for disasters, he said, this technology enables beyond-visual line-of-sight missions. He stated that the Scalable Operations with Advanced Remote Technologies (SOAR) program builds on ARROW technology, such as allowing long distance drone flights to be able to respond in real time.

MR. GOINS described "drone in a box" technology, which is connected to power and Starlink, and he said, "It has really changed the game." He stated that this allows an individual anywhere in the world to fly a drone and do mapping operations and more. For example, it is useful in monitoring avalanche conditions, while keeping the individuals monitoring safely on the ground. He pointed out the pictures on the slide and stated that many of the dangerous situations in natural disaster response have been eased with the new drone technology. He added that drones are able to replace the use of helicopters in many instances, while Starlink has become crucial for collecting data from the drones. Lastly, he pointed out that the underwater submersible with underwater vision is available for use in emergencies, not just for data collection.

[2:19:42 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TILTON questioned whether there is only one state-owned underwater submersible drone.

MR. GOINS expressed the understanding that this is the only one based in Juneau. He stated that it has allowed for a visual in environmental work that has not been possible in the past. In response to a follow-up question, he stated that interdepartmental use of drones could be requested at any time. He added that, through the governor's directive, his staff could be available for use in emergencies across the state.

REPRESENTATIVE TILTON referenced a situation where the underwater drone had been in use for an emergency; therefore, it was not available for another emergency. She questioned whether there are many emergencies in need of the drone at the same time.

MR. GOINS responded that with this underwater drone "we are scratching the surface" because there is only one. He related the understanding that the department is "on the cutting edge" with technology use; therefore, the equipment is not mass-produced. In response to a follow-up question, he expressed uncertainty on the cost of the underwater drone. As staff is proving its utility, he expressed the belief there will be more in the state. He deferred to Andy Mills.

[2:24:28 PM](#)

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, stated that the drone cost around \$70,000 to \$100,000. He stated that the idea is to have a system like this on each Alaska Marine Highway System ferry so divers would not be needed in an emergency. He added that an underwater drone could be used to survey pilings at docks and more.

[2:26:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE commented that DOT&PF, with AMHS, has been involved in many, many rescues.

[2:27:35 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID questioned whether the underwater drone is a free-swimming or tethered device.

MR. GOINS, in response, provided that the drone is tethered.

MR. MILLS added that it has a tether on a spool. He discussed some of the other features and innovations.

2:30:02 PM

MR. GOINS noted that using the underwater drone saves money, as divers cost much more. He commented that because of the department's use of cutting-edge flying drones, to maintain a better connection, Starlink had move satellites for the department.

MR. GOINS stated that slide 10 to slide 13 address recent emergencies in the state, with the slides moving from least complex to more complex situations. Slide 10 showed the Wrangell landslide, and he stated that the initial response concerned safety first, and this involved securing the site. Crews then addressed search and rescue, and then search and recovery. He discussed rapid damage assessment, ICS, and the coordinating efforts. He said that ever since the Wrangell slide there are ongoing efforts with drones to identify any changes in the slope.

MR. GOINS moved to the next slide and discussed the Ketchikan landslide. He stated that it was similar to the slide in Wrangell but had a greater impact. He stated that a rapid damage assessment was done, and using ICS, DOT&PF worked with the borough because there were massive roadblocks. He pointed out that the National Weather Service was involved because weather affects risks. He stated that risk evaluations are still being done on this area.

2:35:50 PM

MR. SAKALASKAS moved to the next slide and stated the event in Merbok was more complex, as a storm had damaged assets of the department and community, and a winter freeze was arriving soon. He noted that freezing weather would stop any progress with repairs. In discussing the damages, he indicated that the airport runways had remained in good condition. He discussed the design and location of airports, as this has been a concentration for DOT&PF. He stated that the main roads in Nome had been severely damaged, but with a local contractor onsite, Nome Front Street was repaved before winter. Through communication lines, the department was able to do community outreach and address its needs, such as housing, heating systems, and power. He noted that winter had set-in weeks after the storm.

[2:40:09 PM](#)

MR. SAKALASKAS moved to slide 13 and discussed when the Sag River flooded the Dalton Highway 10 years ago. He stated that this disaster's complexity was because of stakeholder involvement, but the ICS structure worked well. He noted that the oil industry on the North Slope deals well with emergency situations, pointing out that the department and the major stakeholders were able to hold daily meetings.

MR. SAKALASKAS stated that 20 to 30 miles of the roadway were covered in 3 to 4 feet of ice, resulting in a 7-to-10-day closure. He stated that operations increased to 24 hours and additional staff was brought in. Industry coordinated with the department and other agencies to create a winter road in less than 10 days, so moving goods and services around the Dalton Highway could continue. He stated that once the ice event was solved, there needed to be preparation for the spring melt. He pointed out that the industry was prepared for this, and the department was dynamic in dealing with the flood as well. He discussed the reconstruction of the highway in terms of averting future events. He pointed out that no other flooding event has occurred in the last 10 years; he contributed this to initial response and future projection.

[2:45:37 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK thanked the presenters.

[2:45:59 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES expressed appreciation for the department's staff, and the emergency work they do.

[2:46:57 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK made closing comments.

[2:47:50 PM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:47 p.m.