

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

January 29, 2026

1:04 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Ashley Carrick, Co-Chair  
Representative Ted Eischeid, Co-Chair  
Representative Genevieve Mina  
Representative Louise Stutes  
Representative Kevin McCabe  
Representative Steve St. Clair  
Representative Garret Nelson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION(S) : WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 216

"An Act approving the transfer of land owned by the Alaska Railroad Corporation to the City of Whittier; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 216

SHORT TITLE: TRANSFER OF RAILROAD LAND TO WHITTIER

SPONSOR(S) : REPRESENTATIVE(S) HOLLAND

05/02/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
05/02/25	(H)	TRA, CRA
01/29/26	(H)	TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

**WITNESS REGISTER**

CHRISTINE LANGLEY, Division Director  
Data Modernization & Innovation Office  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Winter Road Maintenance presentation.

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

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Winter Road Maintenance presentation.

BURRELL NICKESON, Maintenance and Operations Manager  
Central Region  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Winter Road Maintenance presentation.

JASON SAKALASKAS, Regional Maintenance and Operations Chief  
Northern Region  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the Winter Road Maintenance presentation.

MARCUS ZIMMERMAN, Maintenance and Operations Manager  
Southcoast Region  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the Winter Road Maintenance presentation.

REPRESENTATIVE KY HOLLAND  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HB 216.

AYDEN NICHOL, Staff  
Representative Ky Holland  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Holland, prime sponsor, presented a PowerPoint, titled "HB 216 Whittier-Alaska Railroad Land Transfer."

JACKIE WILDE, City Manager  
Whittier, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 216.

MEGHAN CLEMENS, External Affairs Director  
Alaska Railroad Corporation  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 216.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:04:40 PM](#)

**CO-CHAIR Ted Eischeid** called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. Representatives Stutes, St. Clair, Mina, Nelson, McCabe, Carrick, and Eischeid were present at the call to order.

**PRESENTATION(S): Winter Road Maintenance**

[1:05:42 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID announced that the first order of business would be the Winter Road Maintenance presentation.

[1:07:47 PM](#)

CHRISTINE LANGLEY, Division Director, Data Modernization & Innovation Office, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF), gave a presentation, titled "Winter Road Maintenance" [hard copy included in the committee file]. She began on slide 2, stating that it is important not just to respond to winter events, but to prepare for them. She noted that DOT&PF has been modernizing its approach to winter road maintenance.

[1:08:29 PM](#)

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, moved to slide 3, which illustrated DOT&PF's increased role in emergency response assistance.

[1:09:18 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID noted the members from DOT&PF available online to answer questions.

[1:09:47 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE spoke to the emergencies in his district and thanked DOT&PF for its willingness to help communities solve problems themselves. He said that people truly do not see the work that DOT&PF does in this respect.

[1:10:50 PM](#)

MR. MILLS responded that DOT&PF is uniquely apt to participate in emergency responses due to its vast contract communities and established relationships.

[1:11:27 PM](#)

MS. LANGLEY moved to slide 4, which demonstrated more tools that can perform predictive weather analysis, enabling proactive planning and decision-making. She noted that there have also been great improvements in satellite communications. She moved to slide 5, explaining that increased data allows people to make safe decisions for themselves. She described the role of Alaska 511 in providing important safety and weather information to the public.

[1:13:32 PM](#)

MS. LANGLEY, in response to a question from Representative Stutes, said that she does not know how long Alaska 511 has been operational.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES described her experience using Alaska 511 on her drive from Kodiak to Juneau and emphasized how efficient and effective it was on that trip.

MS. LANGLEY said that DOT&PF is actively working to add ferry travels to Alaska 511.

[1:15:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ST. CLAIR said he has driven the Alcan Highway many times in the winter, and Alaska 511 has been a great asset on those travels. He noted that some of the cameras have been down recently and asked if there is a plan to upgrade them.

MS. LANGLEY replied that DOT&PF has been working on upgrading camera systems and shifting funding sources to create more real-time results for users on the highways.

[1:17:00 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE G. NELSON asked about how reports are prioritized in the DOT&PF mobile reporting application ("app").

MS. LANGLEY responded that DOT&PF uses mobile reporting for staff and will soon be releasing a "report a concern" report to the public. She described the paths that reports take when submitted.

[1:18:40 PM](#)

MS. LANGLEY, in response to a series of questions from Representative McCabe, said that the app shows plow trucks, and DOT&PF hopes to expand Alaska 511 for air travel as well, including the ability for pilots to know if airport runways have been plowed.

MR. MILLS added that DOT&PF is sensitive to not creating too many separate dashboards of information and that the department hopes to centralize Alaska 511 as the main information dashboard.

[1:21:42 PM](#)

MS. LANGLEY, in response to a question from Co-Chair Eischeid, stated that DOT&PF is using more artificial intelligence (AI) in its data collection and described how the department uses AI in its weather condition research.

MR. MILLS added that there is a real tension at the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, where there is a lot of consternation regarding how much states should use AI in their data collection and analysis.

[1:23:54 PM](#)

MS. LANGLEY moved to slide 6, emphasizing that all these new tools and technologies require training, both for staff and the public. She added that DOT&PF is releasing tools, like samsara, that allow the department to access the same visuals as operators to better help them remotely. She moved to slide 7 and highlighted Drivewyze. She described it as a useful tool for dispersing safety information across the commercial driving industry and said it would enable DOT&PF to alert people that an accident is ahead.

[1:26:11 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked about safety initiatives to support vulnerable road users (VRUs).

MS. LANGLEY responded that DOT&PF is looking at many ways to utilize technology to support VRUs, including software that will alert pedestrians and bicyclists to rapid changes in traffic patterns. She noted that crowd sourcing solutions in an area with low population density is difficult.

MR. MILLS highlighted the campaign for "legends deserve to be seen," which has been distributing reflective gear to VRUs, and emphasized the campaign's goal of changing the scenario for VRUs, without changing the geometry of areas.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked how DOT&PF is helping get that swag material out in the community.

MR. MILLS said he can follow up with more examples, but he has personally handed out reflective gear and bus drivers have also been provided with gear to disperse.

[1:30:10 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE noted that community councils are a good way to distribute gear to the public and invited DOT&PF to do so in Big Lake. He shared that wreckers and tow trucks on certain highways are struggling because drivers don't slow down for flashing yellow lights. He asked for a better way to light tow trucks so they can better do their job of saving people on the sides of highways.

MR. MILLS described an initiative that would provide better lighting for these vehicles and expressed interest in making them more apparent.

[1:33:10 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked where a representative could get this reflective gear to distribute in their own district.

MS. LANGLEY said DOT&PF has multiple partners in safety and can share their contact information to distribute reflective gear to representatives.

MR. MILLS said he would personally bring every committee member reflective gear to bring back to their own communities.

[1:34:52 PM](#)

MS. LANGLEY moved to slide 8 and explained that DOT&PF practices for the days that are not as good. She explained that the department deploys small teams to rural areas to share the information they gather with other state agencies. She also highlighted Alaska Alerts, which enables two-way communication with individuals in an area during an emergent event.

[1:36:11 PM](#)

MR. MILLS moved to slide 9, which provided a background on anti-icing and de-icing techniques. He defined brine, which is an anti-icing and de-icing agent, explaining that the same salt typically used to de-ice, can be rendered into a liquid form, with corrosion inhibitor agents, for application on roadways. Brine can be used to prevent or break down ice and is temperature specific, so the department uses a decision tree to decide the best time to utilize it. He noted that DOT&PF has also explored the use of beet juice and urea in de-icing and anti-icing products.

[1:39:29 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked about the anti-corrosive properties of brine.

MR. MILLS replied that there are some areas in the state that are more conducive to brine usage than other areas. He emphasized that brine is the same compound as the solid form salt that is typically applied to roadways, just rendered in a different form.

[1:41:09 PM](#)

MR. MILLS, in response to a question from Representative Nelson, confirmed that temperatures noted in the PowerPoint are Fahrenheit degrees.

[1:41:42 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked if DOT&PF has considered the environmental impacts of sand, salt, or brine.

MR. MILLS responded by highlighting the Anchorage area, where it sprays a mixture of sand and brine.

[1:43:03 PM](#)

MR. MILLS moved to slide 10 and explained that de-icing requires much less brine than a sand and salt mixture. He highlighted the cost and time advantages of brine, noting that there is also an environmental advantage associated with using less product on the roads.

[1:45:10 PM](#)

MR. MILLS, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, stated that the effectiveness of brine is very location-specific, but he would provide a clearer answer later in the presentation.

[1:46:24 PM](#)

MR. MILLS moved to slide 11, which highlighted brine reductions on the Kenai Peninsula, and explained that brine is only used on high-speed roads due to push back from local concerns. He noted that there are shopping malls that use a much more aggressive product on their parking lots than brine.

[1:47:55 PM](#)

MR. MILLS, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, stated that DOT&PF does not track the number of accidents caused by reduced brine usage, but maintains the same safety standards regardless of brine use.

[1:48:47 PM](#)

MR. MILLS moved to slide 12, which displayed the "wash boarding" that has occurred on Mackey Lake Road since DOT&PF stopped applying brine on the road.

[1:49:42 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked how much more it costs to maintain roads to the same level of safety with less brine.

MR. MILLS responded that he does not have that safety information but emphasized that DOT&PF operators do not want to compromise the safety of the roads they live on and near.

[1:52:21 PM](#)

MR. MILLS, in response to a series of questions from Co-Chair Carrick, stated that the community asked for no brine on the peninsula. He explained that DOT&PF compromised by using less than 50 percent of the brine it had previously used and that the public has been much less vocal about the concern since the brine reduction. He stated that he knows some equipment was necessary to assist in the brine reduction, but there was no divergence in funding. He said that one cannot compare the cost of one lane mile of road in one area of Alaska to another.

[1:54:47 PM](#)

MR. MILLS moved to slide 13, which highlighted the department's brine literature review, which was an effort to consider the literature on corrosion and brine usage. He explained that DOT&PF is working to mitigate corrosion from brine usage, including the options of undercoating and washing vehicles.

[1:56:17 PM](#)

MR. MILLS, in response to a question from Co-Chair Eischeid, stated that brine is being adopted to manage budgetary constraints, not staff vacancies. He stated that the state is required to find efficiencies, which includes employing new technologies like brine.

[1:59:36 PM](#)

BURRELL NICKESON, Maintenance and Operations Manager, Central Region, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities addressed three questions that had previously been asked in the meeting. He confirmed that DOT&PF does use corrosion inhibitors and described brining techniques in Anchorage. He emphasized that effectiveness of brine is weather-dependent, with the goal being to see bare pavement. He agreed with Mr. Mills that brine is being used to meet the need for safer roads, not staff vacancies.

[2:01:39 PM](#)

MR. NICKESON moved to slide 14, which showed contracting costs for snow and ice removal in fiscal year 2025 (FY 25) and FY 26 by district. He noted that these contracts began in Anchorage

three years ago and emphasized that contracting increases DOT&PF's efficiency.

[2:02:52 PM](#)

MR. NICKESON, in response to a question from Co-Chair Eischeid, stated that DOT&PF is quite successful in clearing Priority 1 roads within 12 hours and he would provide further information on the department's ability to meet its road-clearing goals.

[2:04:14 PM](#)

MR. NICKESON moved to slide 15, which listed sidewalk clearing equipment used in Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough, and the Kenai Peninsula.

[2:05:21 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked how priority levels are decided.

[2:06:27 PM](#)

JASON SAKALASKAS, Regional Maintenance and Operations Chief, Northern Region, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, explained that DOT&PF performed an evaluation of several different factors to establish priority classification standards. He described several factors considered and said that he can provide further information to the committee.

MR. MILLS clarified that "ADT" refers to average daily traffic.

MR. MILLS, in response to a series of questions from Representative Mina, stated that DOT&PF performs functional classification studies every census and considers roads for potential reclassification. He stated that schools and emergency services are factors in priority classification for both roads and sidewalks. He also said that the department is working to increase efficiency in the plowing of both roads and sidewalks.

MR. NICKESON added that the Anchorage office coordinates with the school district and DOT&PF stays in touch with the municipality to best collaborate with plowing.

[2:11:49 PM](#)

MR. NICKESON, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, confirmed that there is no sidewalk equipment on the Kenai Peninsula or in the Mat-Su Borough. He noted that limited right-of-way requires snow to be pushed out of roads and into sidewalks.

MR. MILLS added that there are supplementary contracts for Priority 3 and Priority 4 roads and sidewalks.

[2:14:19 PM](#)

MR. NICKESON, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, stated that plowing can be situational, explaining that snow machines may be necessary on certain pathways in the winter. He said that DOT&PF does maintain the bike path along the southern portion of the George Parks Highway.

[2:15:42 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID shared his experience as a life-long runner, who prefers running on trails over roads, but often must run on the highway in the winter. He emphasized that some of these issues are important to people's quality of life.

[2:16:51 PM](#)

MR. NICKESON moved to slide 16 and stated that there is no right-of-way for snow storage on certain roads in Anchorage. He described the process of snow being cleared from roads onto sidewalks and then removed from sidewalks. He moved to slide 17, which highlighted central region snow dump sites. He noted that Anchorage only has one snow dump site and DOT&PF is working on authorization for a second.

[2:20:13 PM](#)

MARCUS ZIMMERMAN, Maintenance and Operations Manager, Southcoast Region, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, , in response to a question from Representative McCabe, stated that during the December snow event, the City and Borough of Juneau received DOT&PF authorization to dump fresh snow into the Gastineau Channel. He explained that there is an environmental concern of dumping contaminants, along with snow, from roads into the ocean. Some of these contaminants include oil, dirt, debris, and trash.

[2:22:21 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked about a lane reduction test strip at the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport for snow removal

MR. NICKESON, in response to a question from Representative Mina, stated that the Municipality of Anchorage did set up a lane reduction pilot at the Anchorage Airport for snow removal. He said that increased snow storage would greatly benefit individuals who use sidewalks but would require more signage and higher costs.

[2:24:23 PM](#)

MR. ZIMMERMAN, in response to a question from Representative Stutes, stated that the Department of Environmental Conservation regulates snow dumping in waterways.

[2:25:14 PM](#)

MR. NICKESON moved to slide 18, which provided challenges and opportunities in the central region. He listed the specific areas where brine is used on the Kenai Peninsula and emphasized the issue of staff vacancies in the Mat-Su Borough and Kenai Peninsula. He also highlighted the typhoon response in the southwest region.

[2:27:07 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID asked what Mr. Nickeson needs from the legislature to fully staff DOT&PF.

MR. NICKESON responded that the Anchorage station has done a great job retaining staff. He believes that timing is a major factor in the peninsula district and that staffing ebbs and flows.

MR. MILLS added that in FY 26 budget reductions are requiring maintenance chiefs to be judicious in how they spend resources, which includes staffing and leads to more overtime hours worked.

[2:30:04 PM](#)

MR. NICKERSON, in response to a question from Representative Mina, stated that DOT&PF plowing metrics are not always shared with the Municipality of Anchorage, but he is sure they are discussed almost daily.

[2:32:11 PM](#)

MR. MILLS, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, said DOT&PF provides a voluntary exit survey to employees when they leave, which is a standard across most state agencies. He said that he can ask for that data to be distributed but noted that those reports are often scrubbed or redacted.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID added that that data would be useful for the committee to understand how it can help with the DOT&PF staff vacancy issue.

[2:35:12 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 2:35 p.m. to 2:37 p.m.

**HB 216-TRANSFER OF RAILROAD LAND TO WHITTIER**

[2:37:54 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 216, "An Act approving the transfer of land owned by the Alaska Railroad Corporation to the City of Whittier; and providing for an effective date."

[2:38:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KY HOLLAND, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 216. He began by introducing himself and the geographic features of his district, emphasizing that Whittier will become an essential part of the state's ability to move freight. He stated that he has attended city council meetings every month for the last year and a half and described their efforts working with the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC). He explained that by moving land into ownership of the city, HB 216 would help Whittier continue to grow its economy. He explained that the legislature must approve the transfer of land from ARRC to a city and the transfer is not completed until both entities agree on the transfer cost.

[2:42:22 PM](#)

AYDEN NICHOL, Staff, Representative Ky Holland, on behalf of Representative Holland, prime sponsor, presented a PowerPoint, titled "HB 216 Whittier-Alaska Railroad Land Transfer" [hard copy included in the committee file]. He began on slide 2,

titled "History: Whittier and the Alaska Railroad", which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Whittier (pop. 272) connects Anchorage with Prince William Sound shipping and ferry routes, and is a popular cruise destination
- For most of its history, the Alaska Railroad was the only land route connecting Whittier with the rest of the state, via the the Anton Anderson Tunnel
- The Alaska Railroad has long benefitted from its significant land holdings within the city limits, which constitute 85% of Whittier's developable land
- In 1998, the Railroad agreed to lease 250 acres to the City for development

MR. NICHOL moved to slide 3, titled "From a lease to City Ownership," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- The status of the land under the City's lease discourages investment and prevents the City from bringing in tax revenue from businesses situated on the property.
- Early in 2024, negotiations began for the transfer of ownership of five parcels of land from the Railroad to the City.
- In December of 2025, the City Council authorized the City Manager to negotiate a final agreement for three parcels, and the Railroad submitted a conditional letter of intent to proceed with the sale.
- Legislative approval is a critical element required to allow this deal to proceed: under AS 42.40.285, the Railroad is prohibited from relinquishing land without the authorization of the legislature.

MR. NICHOLS moved to slide 4, which showed a map of AARC the area of interest.

MR. NICHOLS gave the sectional analysis [hard copy included in committee file], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Section 1:** Authorizes the Alaska Railroad Corporation to convey five parcels of land to the City of Whittier for fair market value.

(a) Authorizes the transfer and describes the five parcels authorized for sale, including: the property where the Sportsman's Lounge currently sits, the harbor parking area below Whittier Creek, the Harbor Uplands area abutting the bay, the area surrounding the Whittier Airport, and the area surrounding the Whittier Bay Campground adjacent to the Glacier Creek Cruise Terminal.

(b) Clarifies that further platting and surveying will be necessary to execute the sale, and that the parcel boundaries articulated in this section may be reasonably modified subject to the agreement of both parties.

(c) Authorizes the Railroad to accept cash equivalent to the fair market value of the land.

(d) Designates this section as sufficient legislative approval for the transfer of land under AS 42.40.285.

**Section 2:** Establishes that the Act takes effect immediately.

[2:46:04 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK noted that HB 216 would transfer a lot of acreage in Whittier. She asked to hear from an opposing viewpoint of the land transfer, if available.

[2:49:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, stated that due to the nature of the land transfer, both entities wanted the opportunity to make any last minute changes as needed and HB 216, as written, would allow for that.

[2:50:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND, in response to a question from Representative Mina, explained that there is still some certainty regarding the resolution of the property at the head of the bay, while there is full agreement regarding the property value of the downtown parcel of land. He further explained that the intention of both entities involved is to come to an

agreement for all five land parcels, without needing to return to the legislature.

[2:52:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE confirmed the legislature's role in this land transfer.

[2:52:46 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked to hear from Whittier's city manager regarding HB 216.

[2:53:00 PM](#)

JACKIE WILDE, City Manager, City of Whittier, began by stating that over 90 percent of Whittier's land is either owned by the state or non-taxable. She explained how the current structure of the Whittier community came to be. She said that Whittier is home to 273 year-round residents but is much more than a residential community. Whittier is at an intersection of many forms of transportation from across the state, which serve much more than Whittier. She emphasized that most of the land in Whittier is non-taxable but is needed to support municipal services. Over the years, Whittier has paid over 40 percent of its total revenue to ARRC. She stated that HB 216 would help establish a better structure that reflects how land is used and responsibilities are distributed today. She reaffirmed that legislative authority is required to convey ownership and she asked for the committee's support of HB 216.

[3:01:10 PM](#)

MEGHAN CLEMENS, External Affairs Director, Alaska Railroad Corporation, testified in support of HB 216. She began by stating that selling land is not something ARRC takes lightly. She highlighted that over the last two years, ARRC and the city of Whittier have engaged in conversations regarding a mutually beneficial land sale. She described the process of their negotiations regarding the first three land parcels and noted that parcels 4 and 5 would still be available for transfer in the future.

[3:03:43 PM](#)

MS. CLEMENS, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, compared this land transfer to the one Nenana.

[3:04:16 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 3:04 p.m.

[3:04:21 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID set an amendment deadline for HB 216.  
[HB 216 was held over.]

[3:05:23 PM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m.