

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 3, 2026

1:02 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

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."

- MOVED HB 216 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PRESENTATION(S) : WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

- HEARD

OVERVIEW(S) : DEFINING ADVANCED CONSTRUCTION AND FEDERAL AIDE SOURCES

- HEARD

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 |
| 01/29/26 | (H) | Heard & Held |

01/29/26 (H) MINUTE (TRA)
02/03/26 (H) TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

AYDEN NICHOLS, Staff
Representative Ky Holland
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Representative Holland, prime sponsor presented HB 216.

JACKIE WILDE, City Manager
City of Whittier
Whittier, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on HB 216.

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: Co-offered the Winter Road Maintenance presentation.

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison
Office of the Commissioner
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-Offered the Winter Road Maintenance presentation.

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

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

BRAD BYLSMA, Statewide Equipment Fleet Manager
State Equipment Fleet

Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Anchorage, Alaska

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

CHRISTINE LANGLEY, Division Director
Division of Data Modernization and Innovation
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Fairbanks, Alaska

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

DOM PANNONE, Director
Division of Program Management and Administration
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered the Defining Advanced Construction and Federal Aide Sources overview.

ADAM MOSER, Federal Aide Program Manager
Division of Program Management and Administration
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the Defining Advanced Construction and Federal Aide Sources overview.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:02:16 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ASHLEY CARRICK called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Representatives Mina, Stutes, McCabe, St. Clair, Nelson, Eischeid, and Carrick were present at the call to order.

HB 216-TRANSFER OF RAILROAD LAND TO WHITTIER

[1:03:00 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK announced that the first 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."

[1:03:46 PM](#)

AYDEN NICHOLS, Staff, Representative Ky Holland, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Holland, prime sponsor, provided a brief recap of HB 216. He said that HB 216 would give limited and specific authorization for the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) to transfer five parcels of land to the City of Whittier.

[1:04:15 PM](#)

MR. NICHOLS, in response to a question from Representative Nelson, that 40 percent of Whittier's budget is spent on land leases.

REPRESENTATIVE G. NELSON asked for the dollar amount of these leases and how long they have been ongoing.

[1:05:21 PM](#)

JACKIE WILDE, City Manager, City of Whittier, clarified that 40 percent of Whittier's gross revenues have been spent on master lease lands, since 1998. She said that Whittier has spent about \$2 million on these leases.

[1:06:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK opened public testimony on HB 216. After ascertaining that no one wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[1:07:11 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID moved to report HB 216 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 216 was reported out of the House Transportation Standing Committee.

[1:07:39 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:07 p.m. to 1:11 p.m.

PRESENTATION(S): Winter Road Maintenance

[1:11:50 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK announced that the next order of business would be a continuation of the Winter Road Maintenance presentation [begun on January 29, 2026].

1:13:49 PM

REPRESENTATIVE G. NELSON returned to the brine versus salt conversation. He described the terrain of the Moose Creek bridge and the Glenn Highway and asked how many hours were spent working on this area.

1:15:10 PM

BURRELL NICKESON, Maintenance and Operations Manager, Central Region, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) referred to the north side of the Glenn Highway, just east of the Moose Creek bridge. He elaborated on the surface water coming out of the ground in that area, emphasizing that DOT&PF cannot predict when that is going to happen. He stated that DOT&PF worked 231 hours on that project as of last week, with two to five individuals treating that problem at a time.

REPRESENTATIVE G. NELSON appreciated the context and data Mr. Nickeson provided.

MR. NICKESON said the design section of DOT&PF has taken notice of this area as well, noting an environmental assessment conducted in the 1990s and an ongoing search for solutions.

1:19:13 PM

JASON SAKALASKAS, Regional Maintenance and Operations Chief, Northern Region, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, gave a PowerPoint presentation, titled [hard copy included in the committee file]. He began on slide 19, which provided Northern Region performance measures from September to December 2025. He highlighted that 72 percent of target conditions were achieved. He also addressed questions from the previous committee meeting, stating that the Northern Region uses brine corrosion inhibitors, which reduce the temperature needed for brine application. He added that brine is used in the Fairbanks and Valdez districts.

1:21:27 PM

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked about private entities using brine on sidewalks and parking lots.

MR. SAKALASKAS responded that he is unaware of any prohibitions against ant-icing chemicals.

[1:22:45 PM](#)

MR. SAKALASKAS continued addressing previous committee questions. He said that it is very difficult to perfectly quantify brine efficiency. He stated that brine is only utilized in temperatures above 20 degrees and is used in the pre-wetting process to help lock aggregates into the roadway surface for longer durations. He confirmed that brine is not used to supplement staff vacancies but using it does make operations more efficient.

[1:25:56 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked if there is sufficient sidewalk equipment and staffing to support pedestrians walking in Fairbanks.

MR. SAKALASKAS said DOT&PF would like to increase sidewalk maintenance to meet pedestrian requests, so it has contracted some sidewalk maintenance, following in Anchorage's lead.

[1:27:38 PM](#)

MR. SAKALASKAS moved to slide 20, which highlighted Northern Region winter contract usage, providing total expenditures from fiscal year 23 (FY 23) through FY 25. He said that so far this winter in Fairbanks, DOT&PF has utilized roadway contracts four times and sidewalk contracts five times, which is on target for an average level of expenditures. He moved to slide 21, which displayed a chart of staff vacancies by maintenance district. He highlighted Dalton district, which had 14 vacancies as of January 16, 2025, and only two vacancies as of January 21, 2026. He said that although there has been an overall downward trend in vacancies across Northern Region districts, the Valdez and Western districts continue to struggle in their recruitment efforts. He explained that one attempt to decrease staff vacancies is a program that covers the cost of commercial driver's license (CDL) training for employees.

[1:32:33 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked if the equipment operator positions in these districts include airport positions.

MR. SAKALASKAS answered that these numbers do not reflect staffing at the Fairbanks International Airport, but they do cover some of the smaller airports.

[1:33:24 PM](#)

MR. SAKALASKAS, in response to a series of questions from Co-Chair Eischeid, described Dalton's flexible work schedule. He explained that employees work two weeks on and two weeks off, which some other districts have implemented. He noted that in the case of emergency needs, the district can ask operators to work additional days. He stated that he does not know the percentage of positions filled by women but noted that applications are open to all applicants. He highlighted that the CDL program offers an opportunity to individuals who could not previously obtain operator positions.

[1:37:04 PM](#)

MR. SAKALASKAS moved to slide 22 and stated that the Northern Region has experienced a fair winter regarding snowfall amounts and extremely cold weather. He said that the region has faced challenges including overflow and water management. He described a frozen creek near Tok that overflowed onto a bridge and DOT&PF's response to it.

[1:38:37 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked if DOT&PF is struggling with equipment challenges in Fairbanks due to the extreme cold.

MR. SAKALASKAS responded that cold weather does impact DOT&PF's fleets; certain equipment cannot be operated in temperatures below 30 degrees, causing delayed responses to snow events.

[1:40:20 PM](#)

MR. SAKALASKAS moved to slide 23 and explained that a major winter event in January caused the closure of the Richardson Highway for two days. He described the snow, rainfall, and avalanches that occurred during the event and said that during the closure, crews performed guardrail repair, addressed flooding, and de-iced parts of the highway.

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, added that a social media post used a fabricated image and recycled old material and old themes during the event. He emphasized that DOT&PF must be vigilant about misinformation and artificial intelligence (AI) usage.

[1:44:04 PM](#)

MR. SAKALASKAS moved to slide 24, which provided challenges regarding Dalton Highway. He said that there is limited commercial support in response efforts to vehicles that get stuck in the roadway, causing extended response times and limited communications along the route.

[1:45:24 PM](#)

MARCUS ZIMMERMAN, Maintenance and Operations Manager, Southcoast Region, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, moved to slide 25, which provided challenges and success in the Southcoast Region this winter. He said that there have been 69 total events across the region with 86.3 percent of target conditions achieved. He moved to slide 26, which discussed winter contract usage in the region. He said that sidewalk maintenance contracts in Juneau have expanded from last year's, but there are still limits on sidewalk snow removal and snow haul contracts.

MR. ZIMMERMAN moved to slide 27, which highlighted the Tom Madsen Unalaska Airport closure. He said that during the winter event, 120 miles per hour wind gusts caused wave actions and the runway was closed for 72 hours. He explained that emergency lighting and debris clearing efforts took place and that this occurred during the busiest time of the year for Unalaska. He moved to slide 28 and highlighted the record setting snowfalls in Juneau during the month of December and stated that there were several record setting days within the month as well.

[1:50:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES noted that Kodiak was left out of the Southcoast Region's report and that Sargent Creek freezes and floods homes every year. She said that despite DOT&PF promises to address the issue, she has seen no work yet. She emphasized that due to a lack of plowing, people that live in Bells Flats cannot get to town or to the U.S. Coast Guard base.

MR. ZIMMERMAN responded that there is a bridge project planned at Sargent Creek, but he does not have details on the project's status. He also said that he is unaware of the issues regarding homes flooding.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES expressed gratitude for the bridge project and emphasized that this is a critical issue as some cars cannot even cross the road due to flooding conditions.

MR. ZIMMERMAN responded that plowing crews have been instructed to clear roads to Marine Hill, which is located beyond Bells Flats.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES said she would appreciate any additional efforts in that direction.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked for a status report on the Sargeant River bridge project.

[1:54:54 PM](#)

MR. ZIMMERMAN moved to slide 29, which highlighted record snowfall in Skagway and Haines. He said that there have been 287 hours of closure on the Klondike Highway this winter so far, due to avalanches and blizzard conditions and 43 hours of closure on Haines Highway due to avalanches. He stated that emergency snow-clearing contracts were implemented to maintain access and restore operations as conditions allowed and he described the collaboration between the northern and Southcoast Regions during this winter storm.

[1:57:18 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked about equipment in Central and Southcoast Regions and if equipment sharing is a sustainable practice.

MR. MILLS responded by describing DOT&PF's approach to scaling up contracting.

MR. ZIMMERMAN added that it was great that the Northern Region could share equipment with Juneau when needed, especially because the Southcoast Region had broken equipment at the time.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked if the Central or Southcoast Regions need specific operational equipment.

[2:00:14 PM](#)

BRAD BYLSMA, Statewide Equipment Fleet Manager, State Equipment Fleet, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, responded that DOT&PF does not have the fleet or manpower to respond to an apocalyptic statewide storm event, but the state

has resources to share. He explained that DOT&PF maintains a daily renting pool of equipment that is not assigned to a specific region and there is always a need for more equipment. He highlighted the major snow and landside event last winter that closed the George Parks Highway, which the Southcoast Region supported.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK reiterated that there is sharing across regions for extraordinary events.

MR. MILLS emphasized the need to focus on extending the lifetime of DOT&PF vehicles, rather than investing in new equipment.

[2:04:19 PM](#)

MR. ZIMMERMAN moved to slide 30 and stated that Governor Mike Dunleavy issued a state of disaster declaration on January 6, 2026, regarding the winter storm events in southeast Alaska. He described how the state supported Juneau with additional resources during that time. He moved to slide 31, which showed a map of avalanche detection surrounding downtown Juneau. He highlighted the additional staffing resources that the Northern Region provided Juneau with during its winter storms. He noted that Thane Road was closed for 93 hours due to avalanche activity.

[2:07:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES said that additional expenses, due to extreme weather, have been requested in subcommittee meetings, and urged DOT&PF to alert the committee soon if it needs an increase.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK agreed that it is good to know needs in advance.

MR. MILLS responded that the state equipment fleet and innovations can be brought into future conversations.

[2:10:38 PM](#)

CHRISTINE LANGLEY, Division Director, Director of Data Modernization and Innovation, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, moved to slide 32, which showed a screenshot of the Alaska DOT&PF Avalanche Dashboard. She said that there were 729 hours of road closures due to avalanches in 2025. She moved to slide 33, which displayed Doppler radar being used to

detect avalanches. She explained that this technology reports automatically and she hopes for it to be included in Alaska 511. She moved to slide 34, which highlighted the infrasound detection system, which does not require line of sight and has automated notifications. She continued to slide 35, which showed the mobile boom whoosh. She explained that this tool does not require ammunition and uses propane to project a bulbous of air. She said that it is safer for the public, recharges in 20 seconds, and will decrease road closure time.

OVERVIEW(S): Defining Advanced Construction and Federal Aide Sources

[2:14:00 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK announced that the final order of business would be the Defining Advanced Construction and Federal Aide Sources overview.

[2:14:27 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 2:14 p.m. to 2:17 p.m.

[2:17:42 PM](#)

DOM PANNONE, Director, Division of Program Management and Administration, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, co-offered an overview, titled "Defining Advanced Construction and Federal Aide Sources" [hard copy included in the committee file]. He began on slide 2, which defined advance construction (AC). He explained that AC allows DOT&PF to begin a project without committing federal funds immediately, which can occur later when the budget allows for that. He described the process of converting an AC project to an obligated federal project. He said that AC increases project output each year and allows projects to advance if they are ready to go. He noted that there are over 30 fund types from the U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

[2:20:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked if AC funds must be used on a federally approved project.

MR. PANNONE responded that projects using AC must be included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and

adhere to all the same standards as any other federally funded project.

[2:21:28 PM](#)

MR. PANNONE, in response to a question from Representative Mina, explained that when DOT&PF submits for AC approval, it indicates the funding source that it anticipates using in the future. He said that the project may convert to federal obligations before there are any expenditures, but expenditures would be reimbursed if needed.

[2:22:57 PM](#)

MR. PANNONE moved to slide 3, which highlighted the major phases of a transportation construction project. He noted that these are discreet phases, and that AC is used on a particular, discreet phase. He reiterated that AC is typically used when a project is ready to begin and it allows DOT&PF to move funds based on project availability.

[2:24:56 PM](#)

MR. PANNONE, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, explained that there are two different uses for AC: within the year, which gives DOT&PF flexibility in fund usage; and AC programmed into the STIP, which increases project commitments.

[2:27:28 PM](#)

ADAM MOSER, Federal Aide Program Manager, Division of Program Management and Administration, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, provided an example of AC usage. He said that obligation authority is sometimes limited and that AC is used in a given fiscal year to move a design phase forward with the intent to convert funds within the fiscal year.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK confirmed that AC keeps current projects going and noted that she does have additional questions.

[2:29:02 PM](#)

MR. PANNONE, in response to a series of questions from Representative Stutes, explained that funds are not associated with a specific project until they are obligated. He said that DOT&PF is obligated to complete a phase once funds are obligated to a project.

MR. MOSER added that once funds are obligated, they are available until that project is completed or closed. He clarified that the advantage of using AC on a project is that it gets a project started, which can then be converted to federal funds.

[2:33:18 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID asked about the disadvantages of using AC.

MR. MILLS responded that future repayment is a potential downside. He emphasized the department's desire to get projects on the street and said that leveraging AC allows for follow through of that goal.

[2:34:57 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked if there is any risk to contractors with the use of AC.

MR. PANNONE responded that paying back AC means reimbursing the state and there is no difference, risk, or liability for contractors. He said that DOT&PF faces the decision of when to pay down AC balance.

MR. MILLS compared AC usage to buying a new car with a loan with zero percent annual percentage rate (APR).

CO-CHAIR CARRICK stated that she has received feedback that the state does lose confidence from the contracting community by using AC.

[2:39:33 PM](#)

MR. PANNONE, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, said AC does not create problems paying contractors. He described how DOT&PF pays its bills.

[2:41:07 PM](#)

MR. PANNONE, in response to a series of questions from Representative Mina, said that, in the decades DOT&PF has used AC, there has not been a case where it has not received federal obligation. He explained that the state can only use AC up to the state's match amount, that there are also AC limits within

the STIP, and that legislative authority is required for a project itself.

MR. MOSER added that FHWA funds are available for three years and emphasized that it is important to obligate funds when it is appropriate to obligate.

[2:44:29 PM](#)

MR. PANNONE, in response to a question from Representative St. Clair, stated that DOT&PF can only use AC on the federal portion, and that the state must have the match funds available at the time of AC use.

[2:45:21 PM](#)

MR. PANNONE, in response to a question from Co-Chair Eischeid, said that DOT&PF tracks timely contractor payments as a metric and that late payments are subject to interest. He emphasized that the department is committed to paying contractors timely so they can also pay their payrolls.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID said he would like to know the total interest paid to contractors due to late payments.

[2:48:51 PM](#)

MR. PANNONE moved to slide 4, which provided citations for where AC resides in laws and federal regulations. He moved to slide 5, which included limitations to implementing AC, from both the federal and state perspectives. He highlighted that federal statutory caps on a state's total AC were removed in 1995. He moved to slide 6, which showed a graph of AC balance over time since 2004. He noted that in 2006, the AC balance was 200 percent of the annual apportionment.

[2:52:11 PM](#)

MR. MILLS, in response to a question from Representative Mina, stated that he did not know what occurred in 2006 but would forward that information to the committee.

[2:53:42 PM](#)

MR. PANNONE, in response to a series of questions from Co-Chair Eischeid, stated that DOT&PF receives a single match appropriation with three allocations in the capital budget. He

said that the millions of dollars for match funding that were vetoed affected this match amount for AC projects.

[2:55:40 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked if DOT&PF can use funds for that project on a current project.

MR. PANNONE, in response to a series of questions from Co-Chair Carrick, explained that DOT&PF must show AC usage in the STIP and that changes in funding sources require an amendment. He emphasized that DOT&PF is fiscally constrained within the STIP.

[2:59:54 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:59 p.m.