

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 5, 2026

1:42 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

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Rebecca Himschoot

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S) : FUNCTION OF THE ALASKA MARINE HIGHWAY
OPERATIONS BOARD

- HEARD

PRESENTATION(S) : FUNCTION OF THE ALASKA MARINE HIGHWAY
OPERATIONS BOARD~ CASCADE POINT OVERVIEW AND UPDATE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

WANETTA AYERS, Chair
Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered a presentation, titled "Function of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board."

ANTHONY LINDOFF, Vice Chair
Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered a presentation, titled "Function of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board."

CRAIG TORNGA, Marine Director
Alaska Marine Highway System
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered a presentation, titled "Function of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board, Cascade Point Overview and Update."

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the Function of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board, Cascade Point Overview and Update presentation

KATHERINE KEITH, Deputy Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered a presentation, titled "Function of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board, Cascade Point Overview and Update."

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:42:04 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:42 p.m. Representatives McCabe, Mina, St. Clair, Nelson, Stutes, Eischeid, and Carrick were present at the call to order. Also present was Representative Himschoot.

PRESENTATION(S): Function of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board

[1:43:17 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK announced that the first order of business would be the Function of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board presentation.

[1:44:36 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:44 p.m. to 1:45 p.m.

[1:45:05 PM](#)

WANETTA AYERS, Chair, Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board, gave a presentation, titled "Function of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board," via PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee file]/ She began by offering gratitude to the committee. She provided a brief history of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board (AMHOB), explaining that it was created under House Bill 63 during the Thirty-Second Alaska State Legislature. The board is populated by both legislative and executive appointees and meets several times per month. She emphasized Senator James Kaufman's role in helping AMHOB members understand legislative intent, AMHOB's responsibilities, and other important formation aspects. She noted that last year, the legislature reaffirmed its intent to maintain AMHOB's structure. After receiving feedback from Commissioner Ryan Anderson of the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF), AMHOB now provides written notes from meetings to the commissioner and welcomes two-way communication.

MS. AYERS stated that operational status is improving, despite many ongoing challenges. These challenges include inherited misalignment, workforce challenges, and an escalating price environment since AMHOB's existence. She applauded Commissioner Anderson for naming Mr. Tornga to lead the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) and described Mr. Tornga's contributions to the board. She elaborated on the funding challenges AMHOB faces, stating that certain funding sources are not guaranteed. She noted that a meeting with U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski to discuss funding was cancelled. She added that grant processes have been disrupted but AMHOB is committed to searching for other funding sources and partnerships, including tribal relationships. Ms. Ayers stated that AMHOB's next big challenge will be fleet modernization. She emphasized that fleet modernization is the most critical issue facing AMHS and that the state delayed its replacement of the motor vessel (M/V) Tustumena too long.

[1:57:47 PM](#)

ANTHONY LINDOFF, Vice Chair, Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board, added that he is a staunch cheerleader for Ms. Ayers and echoed her comments regarding Mr. Tornga and fleet modernization.

[1:58:49 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES stated that she is intimately familiar with the AMHOB legislation. She asked if the required annual report from AMHOB was altered between its submission to DOT&PF and its delivery to the legislature.

MS. AYERS responded that AMHOB is required by statute to provide an annual report and that its submission was delayed due to a cancelled meeting. She explained that the 2045 AMHS Long-range plan was a major focus during AMHOB's first three years of existence, which was summarized in a letter to Commissioner Anderson. The Long-range plan in the letter was slightly altered for release to the public. She added that the AMHOB legislation allows for the issuing of corrective notice and the board exercised its statutory responsibilities.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked if the letter containing AMHOB's Long-range plan was altered by DOT&PF.

MS. AYERS responded that AMHOB discovered the letter was altered.

[2:04:43 PM](#)

MS. AYERS, in response to a series of questions from Representative McCabe, stated that the major alterations to the report are listed in a letter on the AMHOB webpage, labeled "corrective actions." She offered some of the changes that were made, including language referring to the proposed Cascade Point project. Ms. Ayers added that AMHOB has not taken a position for or against the Cascade Point project. She said that in 2024, AMHOB requested a business case study for Cascade Point. Throughout the development of the Long-range plan, there was occasionally information presented to AMHOB, but no cost-benefit analysis was provided. She noted that the minutes from the AMHOB April 2024 meeting are indicative of the board's position. She emphasized that there are huge capital needs across AMHS.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that AMHOB's capital outlay is the legislature's job, not AMHOB's.

MS. AYERS emphasized that AMHOB's responsibility is to ensure that there is a Long-range plan in place and capital allocation does inform long-range planning.

[2:12:23 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK commented that consideration of capital outlay is a part of informed decision-making.

PRESENTATION(S): Function of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board, Cascade Point Overview and Update

[2:14:19 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK announced that the first order of business would be a presentation, titled "Function of the Alaska Marine Highways Operations Board, Cascade Point Overview and Update."

CRAIG TORNGA, Marine Director, Marine Highway System (AMHS), Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, gave a presentation, titled "Function of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board, Cascade Point Overview and Update," via PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee file]. He began on slide 2, which highlighted what AMHOB accomplished in 2025. He said his time with AMHS has been spent working on the AMHOB Long-range plan. He noted that in 2025, AMHOB retired the M/V Matanuska, approved a waterfall funding model, and engaged in workforce initiatives.

[2:17:05 PM](#)

MR. TORNGA, in response to a question from Representative St. Clair, described the waterfall model of funding.

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MR. TORNGA moved to slide 3 and explained that AMHOB's focus areas in the Long-range plan are fleet renewal, terminal upgrades, workforce development, and financial efficiency. He moved to slide 4, which summarized feedback received from 68 communities regarding AMHOB's Long-range plan. He described the public engagement regarding the Long-range plan and the process of hosting open houses and call lines to receive public feedback. Reliability was the top piece of feedback that AMHOB received, in terms of what the public wants.

[2:21:42 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK noted that this is a very high number of community responses. She asked Mr. Tornga to define reliability regarding AMHS.

MR. TORNGA responded that reliability includes services without interruptions, which requires ongoing maintenance. He said AMHOB tracks the time that vessels are out of service, with 98.55 percent of "up-time" in 2025.

[2:25:44 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID thanked Mr. Tornga for his service. He asked what this level of public engagement means.

MR. TORNGA noted the passion for AMHS and said he hears from communities why they need AMHS. He said AMHOB often hears both what the public is used to and what it experiences today with AMHS.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID described his experience as a professional planner and emphasized that mass public engagement is the basis for longevity of a Long-range plan.

MR. TORNGA emphasized that his dream is that this plan is followed.

[2:29:30 PM](#)

ANDY MILLS, Legislative Liaison, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, stated that there is a long history of work prior to AMHOB and described some previous improvement efforts for AMHS.

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MR. TORNGA, in response to a series of questions from Representative McCabe, stated that the Long-range plan is modelled out to 2045, with the gap between forecasted expenses and forecasted revenue projected to grow by \$90 million. He said that there are only two current vessels projected to still be in use in 2045, with hopes of moving towards more efficient, diesel vessels. He added that AMHS' farebox recovery ratio is around 30 percent, but he hopes it will increase to 40 percent by 2045.

[2:34:59 PM](#)

KATHERINE KEITH, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, moved to slide 5, which highlighted the currently approved Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (SEATP). She said that it launched a vision for improving travel throughout southeast Alaska, including both ferries and road access to shorten ferry routes.

[2:36:41 PM](#)

MS. KEITH, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, said that there will be slides addressing the road extensions to shorten ferry routes.

[2:37:07 PM](#)

MS. KEITH, in response to a question from Representative Mina, said she assumes that public engagement was extensive for the 2004 SEATP and that these recommendations regarding road access would open more opportunities for travel.

[2:38:14 PM](#)

MS. KEITH moved to slide 6, which highlighted Sitka and the complications ferries experience currently traveling to the city. She said that more direct ferry routes between Sitka and Juneau would offer more frequent service, decreasing fuel usage, staffing time, and operational costs.

MR. TORNGA added that mainline vessels consume the most fuel and that a road across Baranof Island would make routes more efficient. He said that a Native regional hospital will be built in Sitka.

[2:40:33 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked about the winter maintenance and operational costs for a road across Baranof Island.

MS. KEITH said she can offer dollar amounts for similar road projects and that the Alaska Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) would accomplish preliminary reconnaissance studies to answer questions regarding maintenance and costs of that road.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK clarified that DOT&PF would like to build a 16-mile road to a ferry terminal and would have to cover the costs of maintenance and operation.

MR. TORNGA confirmed that that is correct and that this project would cost less than a ferry run on that same route.

[2:42:51 PM](#)

MS. KEITH, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, explained that there would be a bus provided by AMHS to carry passengers to the ferry terminal.

[2:44:30 PM](#)

MS. KEITH moved to slide 7, which demonstrated another example of a road extension near Petersburg and Mitkof Island to pull ferry terminals closer together.

MR. TORNGA highlighted that there is already a partial road in this direction, which would help direct the project.

[2:46:06 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked about the average cost to build roads on these Southeast Alaska islands, across challenging terrain.

MS. KEITH responded that there are existing logging roads that the state has easements to. She said that she could provide proposed costs to the committee.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK emphasized the state has a limited capacity for new capital projects right now.

[2:47:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked about the environmental impact of running a ferry versus a car.

MS. KEITH said that she can provide those calculations and there would be a significant carbon emissions reduction by shortening ferry routes.

[2:48:52 PM](#)

MS. KEITH identified multiple road segments on Chichagof Island that would allow ferry service to shift from long regional runs to short shuttle connections.

MR. TORNGA emphasized the need for a road between Hoonah and Tenakee Springs.

[2:50:40 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID asked about Kaufman Cove, where a ferry terminal was built far from the town it was intended to service, and ultimately closed. He asked about the risk of the same occurring again.

MR. TORNGA responded that that terminal was put in place by the Inter-Island Ferry Authority and was not an AMHS terminal at that time.

[2:52:09 PM](#)

MS. KEITH, in response to a series of questions from Representative Stutes, stated that the 2045 Long-range plan includes a recommendation to evaluate road connections to reduce time for longer ferry runs, but road construction costs were not included in the plan. She stated that DOT&PF has provided operating costs of the ferry terminal in the presentation's slides. She said that the operating analysis by Ed King did not include capital costs, but the department has provided the full cost analysis to AMHOB.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES stated, "I give up."

[2:55:02 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID observed that he heard both "no" and "yes" in Ms. Keith's previous statements.

MS. KEITH replied that the answer depends on which report is being read.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID said that was a confusing answer

MS. KEITH said the department has the full capital costs and operational savings and it has shared them publicly.

[2:56:45 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK asked DOT&PF to follow up with the committee.

[2:57:00 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked DOT&PF to include the funds needed to maintain the capital infrastructure in its follow-up to the committee.

[2:57:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked DOT&PF to include the funds needed to lease the land that the ferry dock would be built on.

[2:58:32 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:58 p.m.