

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 10, 2026

1:32 p.m.

DRAFT

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

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

RYAN ANDERSON, Commissioner
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Anchorage, Alaska

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

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

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

CHRISTOPHER GOINS, Director
Southcoast Region
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska

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

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:32:40 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CARRICK called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:32 p.m. Representatives McCabe, Mina, St. Clair, Stutes, Nelson, Eischeid, and Carrick were present at the call to order.

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

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CO-CHAIR CARRICK announced that the only order of business would be a continuation of the Function of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board, Cascade Point Overview and Update presentation [began on February 5, 2026].

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RYAN ANDERSON, Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF), 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 10, which described the 2045 Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) Long-Range Plan. He noted three road connection projects included in the plan: Kake to Petersburg; across Baranof Island; and Tenakee to Hoonah. He added that the Cascade Point project fits into this planning process as well.

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REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated that she was shocked by this slide and asked for clarification on the public comment in support of building roads. She said that she did not hear support in the meetings she attended.

MR. ANDERSON replied that this statement is word for word from the plan.

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CRAIG TORNGA, Director, Alaska Marine Highway System, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, added that the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board (AMHOB) held several focus groups regarding road connections and that there is a push for a road to the east in Sitka. He acknowledged that the whole community may not be in support, but he has heard support in the meetings he has attended. He emphasized that AMHOB supports these roads.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT noted that the tribe has a new executive director and invited Mr. Tornga to include the tribe in this decision. She asked if AMHOB had a meeting with the whole community of Sitka. She said that she does not believe her community is speaking in full support of these roads. She expressed great concern for this conclusion.

MR. TORNGA clarified that AMHOB has not taken a position on a particular road and that there have not been meetings with the new tribal leadership. He said he wants to improve AMHS services to Sitka.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT emphasized that reducing costs for the state does not necessarily reduce costs for communities or individuals.

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MR. TORNGA, in response to a series of questions from Representative Stutes, stated that this road would not be in conjunction with the road to Cascade Point. This road would be to the east side of Baranof Island. He said he is not sure of the exact route. Mr. Tornga confirmed that this ferry run would depart from the Auke Bay ferry dock.

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MR. TORNGA, in response to a series of questions from Representative McCabe, stated that there is a hospital room on board each ferry and there are always emergency medical technicians (EMTs) on board. He said that he has had to rush elders to shore who experienced medical emergencies on board ferries and that AMHOB did not take a position on which road would be the preferred route to Sitka.

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MR. TORNGA, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, said he does not have a comparison of the total costs of building those roads versus the cost of maintenance for current marine vessels. He stated that AMHS recommended building these roads in the long-range plan, but he is not an expert on roads.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, added that the existing road to Cascade Point is better than the road he drives home on every night. He said that the bridge is required on Goldbelt Inc.'s ("Goldbelt's") property. He noted that those who wrote the 2004 Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan were aware of tough fiscal climates. He said that he received a letter from a former commissioner who warned him that there will be controversy regarding AMHS and recommended shorter ferry routes. He said that if the volume and demand pick up, DOT&PF will expand the road. He provided an example of the road to Tanana, which residents find vital. He included that decreasing greenhouse gas emissions is a benefit to shorter ferry routes.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK explained that she is struggling to understand why the state is investing so much money in Cascade Point, as opposed to other necessary road projects in other parts of the state. She asked why Cascade Point is receiving funding over those projects.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON said that operational efficiency is essential to DOT&PF. He explained that there are limited funds for replacing vessels, while there are funds available to build roads. He also explained that different fund types can only be used for certain projects. He expressed a desire to strengthen AMHS and said he believes Cascade Point is part of that plan.

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REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said AMHS costs about \$5 per mile per car transported, compared to \$0.02 per mile per car on the Glenn

Highway. He said that Cascade Point would help preserve vessels for the future.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON responded that one could argue all day about the assumptions made regarding the economic analysis. He said that shorter ferry routes save people time and that time is very valuable. He said that across the country, states employ longer roads to shorten ferry routes when possible.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE replied that this terminal would service Juneauites and would save their time, as opposed to other proposed ferry terminals that would service much smaller communities.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON clarified that there is no tunnel at Cascade Point. He noted the 225 rural airports in Alaska that serve remote communities.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES emphasized that AMHS was created for Alaskans to serve them. She said that 92 percent of the 622 public comments opposed Cascade Point. She explained that most comments in support of Cascade Point expressed desire for transportation to a Canadian mine.

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REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT clarified that the vote on the road in Sitka was a statewide vote in 2012 or 2013 and there has been no vote since then. She questioned how much a 16-mile road would cost and emphasized the safety concerns of dropping an elder off at the end of a road like this. She stated that she is unaware of another ferry system that does what AMHS does and warned against comparisons. She emphasized that there is only one car in Tenakee.

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The committee took an at-ease from 2:06 p.m. to 2:07 p.m.

[Co-Chair Carrick passed the gavel to Co-Chair Eischeid.]

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REPRESENTATIVE MINA stated that, operationally, Cascade Point is projected to save the state over \$700,000 per year, but the

construction costs are not predicted to be offset by the operational savings. She asked if the project is intended to save money or to streamline operations.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON said that subsequent slides will address the costs and savings of the project. He said that the capital costs are treated separately from operational costs, which also differ from environmental benefits.

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REPRESENTATIVE G. NELSON asked how much time shorter ferry routes would save and how the size of crew would be impacted.

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CHRISTOPHER GOINS, Director, Southcoast Region, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, responded that the time is 1.5 hours in and out of Cascade Point. He said that, according to the long-range plan, there would be a shuttle service between Skagway and Haines, with labor savings of about \$1 million.

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MR. GOINS, in response to a question from Representative McCabe, said there is about a 30 percent farebox recovery rate in Cordova.

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MR. GOINS, in response to a series of questions from Representative Stutes, said that Goldbelt would provide the shuttle service to Cascade Point. He noted that there are currently safety issues with walk-on passengers in Auke Bay. He said that AMHS is trying to turn this into a discussion about equity. He said that he does not know if the walk-on cost would increase. He suggested a single rate for all walk-on passengers. He said that the public comments show a lot of fear and he wants to make the project better to dispel that fear.

MR. GOINS estimated that the capital cost of the project will be another \$90 million to \$100 million. Mr. Goins explained that the department is still in negotiations, so he is limited in his ability to speak about the leasing cost of the land. The state would own the land where the road and pad are built, but the surrounding waters would be leased. He said the intent is to own the lease in the water and the dock itself but noted that

there are other potential options through the Goldbelt partnership.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON added that there was a lot of pressure on the department to establish the shared dock agreement. He emphasized that the dock would be a public facility but there are still complications with creating a multi-use dock, including mining and fishing.

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MR. GOINS, in response to a question from Co-Chair Eischeid, said that he is aware of the opposition to Cascade Point and his staff wants to address every comment individually. He hoped to have public meetings prior to public comment opening. He said that the public comment period was extended to give more people the opportunity to comment with more accurate information. He explained the upcoming process for public meetings and public hearings on Cascade Point. He said that people became worried when DOT&PF hired a contractor to begin the design/build process.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID responded that Mr. Goins does not need to be so thorough.

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MR. GOINS, in response to questions from Co-Chair Carrick, confirmed that Goldbelt has committed to providing a shuttle to Cascade Point, but he does not know how long Goldbelt has committed to running it.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK replied that it feels like Goldbelt is the primary beneficiary of a project that the state is going to fund and support. She emphasized the indeterminate impact this project will have on the communities it will serve. She stated that equity means equity for Alaska communities and that this project feels like subsidizing corporate interests.

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REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE noted the big corporation that is benefiting from the Seward dock. He asked if this is a similar situation, as far as corporate interests are concerned. He asked if the state will ever recover the capital costs from previous projects. He emphasized that AMHS is in the business of serving the public in the best, easiest, cheapest, fastest

way it can. Representative McCabe also noted that Goldbelt is a Native corporation and asked if the committee is supposed to be supporting those.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON responded by recognizing what the private sector does for the economy in Alaska and stated that DOT&PF needs to accommodate the demands of the state. He said that the mine has created many jobs in Tok and emphasized the industries that drive Alaska's economy.

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MR. GOINS, in response to a series of questions from Representative G. Nelson, said that three fifths of all passengers on the AMHS vessels are travelling this Northern Lynn Canal route, which Cascade Point directly affects. He added that an economic analysis was completed on Cascade Point. He said he is unsure of feasibility studies on other projects mentioned by the committee today.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES clarified the differences between the Seward ferry dock, where the entire community supported the project, and Cascade Point. She said that the fox is already in the hen's house and that this does not speak very well for the department.

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REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked if the presenters would be moving through the slides, because there is a slide he would like to highlight for the public.

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MR. GOINS, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, said that Governor Mike Dunleavy supports the project and he was duly elected.

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MR. GOINS picked up on the PowerPoint begun by Commissioner Anderson, on slide 18, which showed the projected fiscal net impact of the Cascade Point ferry terminal. He highlighted the total efficiency gains of the project.

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REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE highlighted the environmental benefits of the Cascade Point ferry terminal.

MR. GOINS noted that the statistics on slide 19 represent savings per year. He highlighted the \$1.3 million contract that was signed with Juneau Hydropower for potential electrification of the site.

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CO-CHAIR EISCHEID asked if any of the statistics listed were included in a cost-benefit analysis.

MR. GOINS responded that Ed King is an economist and made his report with the best information available to him. He noted that the department also fills in the gaps left out in Mr. King's analysis.

CO-CHAIR EISCHEID noted that an economic analysis differs from a cost-benefit analysis.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON added that DOT&PF does not have a policy regarding cost-benefit analyses for new ferry terminals.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES said that the report would carry more weight if it were completed by an independent body.

COMMISSIONER ANDERSON responded that Mr. King has a master's degree in economics from the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

MR. GOINS added that DOT&PF has received criticism from both those in support of and opposition to the project.

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MR. GOINS, in response to a question from Co-Chair Eischeid, stated that the department adhered to its own policies when seeking out its contract with Mr. King.

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MR. GOINS, in response to a question from Co-Chair Carrick, stated that Mr. King's analysis cost about \$15,000.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK noted that the analysis has many inaccuracies and links that do not go anywhere. She said, "For \$15,000, the state did not get much more than an artificial intelligence-generated letter of support."

MR. GOINS replied that he is not concerned about those links, and he offered his understanding that Mr. King would object to that comment.

CO-CHAIR CARRICK noted that the committee has invited Mr. King to testify.

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MR. GOINS moved to slide 20 and emphasized that this project works because it aligns state transportation responsibilities with private land ownership. He described the partnership the state has structured with Goldbelt, outlining the core mission of each party.

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MR. GOINS, in response to a series of questions from Representative Stutes, stated that the ferry terminal would only be used by AMHS boats but there would be opportunities on the backside for Goldbelt to put a small boat harbor that would not conflict with state vessels. He said that there is a connecting road from the parking pad to the terminal, and Goldbelt would have to expand to the opposite side of the road from the terminal.

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ADJOURNMENT

The House Transportation Standing Committee was recessed at 2:59 p.m. to be continued at 12:30 p.m. on February 12, 2026.