

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 25, 2025

1:34 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senator Löki Tobin, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Bert Stedman

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Mike Shower

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S) : ALASKA TRUCKING ASSOCIATION 2025

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JAMIE BENSON, President
Alaska Trucking Association (ATA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented Alaska Trucking Association
2025 Legislative Priorities

DARREN KESSLER, Division Transportation Manager
Odyssey Logistics
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented Alaska Trucking Association
2025 Legislative Priorities

JOEY CRUM, President
Northern Industrial Training
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented Alaska Trucking Association
2025 Legislative Priorities

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:34:55 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN called the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Tobin, Kiehl and Chair Bjorkman. Senator Stedman arrived thereafter.

PRESENTATION(S) : ALASKA TRUCKING ASSOCIATION 2025

[1:35:36 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced the presentation Alaska Trucking Association 2025, Legislative Priorities.

[1:36:17 PM](#)

JAMIE BENSON, President, Alaska Trucking Association (ATA), Anchorage, Alaska, introduced herself. She noted two key issues: funding for staffing and maintenance on the Dalton Highway and the development of a robust and skilled workforce.

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SENATOR STEDMAN arrived.

[1:37:26 PM](#)

MS. BENSON advanced to Slide 2 and discussed Alaska Trucking Association's (ATA) role in the trucking industry:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Our Role in an Essential Industry

- Advocating for the trucking industry as a collective voice
- Education and Training
- Commercial services
- Networking Opportunities
- Resources and Support
- Safety and Compliance programs
- 100+ member companies
- Represent Land, Sea, and Air

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MS. BENSON advanced to Slide 3 and discussed the impact trucking has on the economy. She emphasized Alaska's dependency on transport in general, and truck transport in particular.

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MS. BENSON advanced to slide 4 and discussed the Dalton Highway, the 500-mile road that stretches from Fairbanks to Prudhoe Bay:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Dalton Highway

- Support a long-term funding plan to maintain and improve the Dalton Highway
- Fund operating plan for basic staffing of maintenance crew, equipment and operators

MS. BENSON said hundreds of trucks use this road daily, transporting materials to the oil and gas industry, among others. She explained that the Dalton Highway is a dirt road and needs regular maintenance to ensure safety. She shared a story and examples to illustrate this.

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SENATOR STEDMAN asked for more information about specific problem areas on the highway. He asked if there have been improvements and commented that he has heard stories about severe damage caused to trucks on the Dalton Highway.

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DARREN KESSLER, Division Transportation Manager, Odyssey Logistics, Anchorage, Alaska, said that it typically costs \$8 per mile for a wrecker to recover trucks along the highway. He listed a variety of reasons a truck might break down, some of which are simple issues. All breakdowns are due to issues with the highway itself.

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MS. BENSON offered a list of mile markers where significant repair is necessary. She also provided examples of the repair that is needed at each location. She explained that areas with paving are more difficult to manage.

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SENATOR STEDMAN asked Ms. Benson to submit a list of the necessary repairs. He indicated that this would be helpful in discussions with Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF).

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MS. BENSON said she would provide this.

[1:46:50 PM](#)

MS. BENSON advanced to Slide 5 and continued to discuss the Dalton Highway:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Dalton Highway

Economic Vitality

- Vital transportation corridor for
 - North Slope oil and gas activities
 - local communities
- Necessary maintenance allows efficient transport of supplies and resources

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MS. BENSON advanced to slide 6 and continued discussing the Dalton Highway:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Dalton Highway

Trips per Week

- Lynden companies 135
- Colville 75
- Black Gold Express 70
- Odyssey 27
- Big Dreams Transport 30

*Data compiled January 2025 - not all companies represented.

MR. KESSLER emphasized that the Dalton Highway is a high traffic road, and trucks bring necessary services; however, the road condition makes this difficult.

MR. KESSLER added that drivers have begun to utilize the ice road between Deadhorse and Utqiaġvik.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN asked who is responsible for building and maintaining the ice road.

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MR. KESSLER shared his understanding that the oil companies are maintaining the ice road. He explained that utilizing the ice road is a recent development and is one way Odyssey Logistics is working to help the community of Utqiagvik.

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MS. BENSON advanced to Slide 7 and continued to discuss the Dalton Highway:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Dalton Highway

Safety for Drivers and Travelers

Regular maintenance = reduced accident risk

- Identify and repair hazardous road conditions
- More truck / bus / RV interactions

MS. BENSON explained that while professional vehicles are outfitted to drive the Dalton Highway, everyday vehicles (e.g. SUVs and RVs) are not prepared for the degraded road conditions. She said that truck drivers stop to assist vehicles that break down and emphasized the need for road maintenance to ensure safety.

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MS. BENSON advanced to Slide 8 and continued discussing the Dalton Highway:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Dalton Highway

Infrastructure Longevity

- Cost-Effectiveness: Consistent maintenance reduces the need for more extensive and expensive repairs or complete overhauls
- Extended Lifespan: Regular upkeep extends the lifespan of the highway infrastructure

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MS. BENSON advanced to Slide 9 and discussed emergency services on Dalton Highway:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Dalton Highway

Emergency Response and Accessibility

Critical Access for Emergency Services:

- A well-maintained highway allows timely response to accidents, medical emergencies, or natural disasters

Accessibility for Remote Areas:

- Maintenance is essential year-round, remote communities rely on essential services and supplies

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CHAIR BJORKMAN asked about winter maintenance on the Dalton Highway.

[1:53:11 PM](#)

MR. KESSLER replied that winter maintenance is a challenge due to low staffing. Road closures have caused issues, particularly for commerce.

[1:54:18 PM](#)

MS. BENSON said that ATA has a good relationship with Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF). She emphasized that the staffing shortage has reached a critical point. Adequate staffing is essential to ensuring road safety and project completion.

[1:55:35 PM](#)

JOEY CRUM, President, Northern Industrial Training, Palmer, Alaska, advanced to Slide 10 and discussed workforce development:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Workforce Development

- Enhancing skill sets: training that equips drivers with the latest skills and knowledge to operate safely and efficiently
- Regulatory Compliance: Ongoing education keeps drivers up to date with industry regulations and

safety standards, reducing legal and operational risks

MR. CRUM emphasized the importance of workforce development to the trucking industry. He said that each truck depends on a variety of other positions in order to run and offered examples. He explained that the Dalton Highway is challenging and therefore requires a certain level of driving skill to ensure safety. He briefly described the required training.

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MR. CRUM advanced to Slide 11 and discussed workforce development programs:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Workforce Development

Current Programs in Alaska

- Alaska Teamsters Apprenticeship Program
- Northern Industrial Training - Professional Driving Program
- UA Diesel Maintenance Program
- Alaska Vocational Technical Center
- Center for Employment Education
- Alaska Driving Academy

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MR. CRUM advanced to Slide 12 and discussed improving safety standards:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Workforce Development

Improving Safety Standards

- Safer Roads: A well-trained workforce is crucial for maintaining high safety standards, which ultimately leads to fewer accidents and safer roadways.
- Emergency Preparedness: Training programs can include emergency response and safety protocols, preparing drivers for unforeseen circumstances

MR. KESSLER emphasized the importance of training when it comes to both safety and emergency preparedness.

[2:00:02 PM](#)

SENATOR STEDMAN stated that CDL training is not readily available in Southeast communities. He suggested that ATA could help with this.

[2:00:30 PM](#)

MR. KESSLER expressed a willingness to help. He explained that federal CDL requirements can make it difficult to train and test in some locations. He said that a new waiver makes it possible to do CDL exams in those locations.

[2:01:43 PM](#)

SENATOR STEDMAN asked for follow-up on the 14 Southeast communities.

[2:01:56 PM](#)

MR. CRUM agreed to follow up.

[2:02:00 PM](#)

MR. CRUM advanced to Slide 13 and discussed the ways that ATA is working to attract younger generations into the workforce.

Workforce Development

Attracting Young Talent

- Career Awareness: Workforce development initiatives can promote trucking as a viable and rewarding career path, appealing to younger generations.
- Promote trade as an alternative to traditional academic pathways.

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SENATOR KIEHL recalled that the CDL age limit was recently lowered and asked if there has been a noticeable difference in the number of younger workers entering the workforce.

[2:03:19 PM](#)

MR. CRUM answered that there has been some positive movement. He said that the federal requirement is still 21 years of age for those working in interstate commerce. He explained that drivers aged 18-21 can haul gravel or other material produced and

transported in state. He reiterated that there has been an increase in CDLs for this age group. He surmised that - though they are initially limited in the work they can do - the lower age limit ultimately leads to additional opportunities once they reach 21 years of age.

[2:04:13 PM](#)

MR. CRUM advanced to Slide 14 and discussed economic growth:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Workforce Development

Boosting Economic Growth

- **Increased Productivity:** A skilled workforce enhances productivity, leading to more efficient operations and increased profitability for trucking companies
- **Supporting Local Economies:** A thriving trucking industry contributes to the overall economic health of Alaska by facilitating trade and commerce

[2:04:54 PM](#)

MR. CRUM advanced to Slide 15 and discussed employee retention:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Workforce Development

Retention of Skilled Workers

- **Employee Satisfaction:** Providing training and development opportunities leads to higher job satisfaction and employee retention, reducing turnover costs
- **Career Advancement:** Clear pathways for career growth and advancement can motivate employees to stay within the industry and in the state long-term

[2:05:07 PM](#)

MS. BENSON said that employee retention improves employee satisfaction. This leads to long-term career investment and potentially keeps younger generations in-state.

[2:06:43 PM](#)

MR. CRUM returned to Senator Kiehl's question about the lower age limit for CDL and offered an example to illustrate how CDL drivers under age 21 are benefitting from those licenses.

[2:07:15 PM](#)

MR. CRUM advanced to Slide 16 and discussed the key presentation takeaways:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Key Takeaways and Objectives

1. Support the trucking industry and its partners
2. Fully fund infrastructure maintenance
3. Higher standards for training programs will result in a stronger workforce
4. Keep Alaska moving

MR. CRUM offered examples of training programs that positively influence the trucking industry. This includes individual training accounts (ITA) within the Department of Labor, the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) grant, and the University of Alaska's Retention and Recruitment program. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of the trucking industry.

[2:10:24 PM](#)

MS. BENSON concurred and said ATA's goal is to keep Alaska moving.

[2:10:42 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN shared that he has heard concerns related to tire quality and road conditions. He asked either Mr. Crum or Ms. Benson could share their observations related to tire quality in winter conditions.

[2:11:36 PM](#)

MS. BENSON answered from the perspective of a former professional driver and a mother. She emphasized the need for defensive driving standards and winter preparedness. This includes utilizing the proper tires at the proper time.

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MR. CRUM noted his personal experience. He said that tires are an important tool; poor tires lead to issues with vehicle performance. He noted various safe driving components. He

emphasized that the most important thing is for drivers to give the task of driving their full attention.

2:14:20 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Bjorkman adjourned the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting at 2:14 p.m.