

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 6, 2025

1:31 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair  
Senator Löki Tobin, Vice Chair  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Senator Mike Shower (via teleconference)

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Bert Stedman

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION(S) : WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

- HEARD

PRESENTATION(S) : RURAL AIRPORT SYSTEM OVERVIEW

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

ANDY MILLS, Special Assistant to the Commissioner  
Office of the Commissioner  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Continued the Winter Road Maintenance presentation from February 20, 2025.

BRAD BYLSMA, Equipment Fleet Manager  
Statewide Equipment Fleet (SEF)  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Continued the Winter Road Maintenance presentation from February 20, 2025.

BURRELL NICKESON, Manager  
Maintenance and Operations  
Central Region  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF)  
Anchorage, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the Winter Road Maintenance presentation.

TROY LARUE, Operations Manager  
Division of Statewide Aviation  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF)  
Anchorage, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the Rural Airport System Overview.

REBECCA DOUGLAS, Aviation and Planning Chief  
Statewide Aviation  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF)  
Anchorage, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the Rural Airport System Overview.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:31:38 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN called the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Kiehl, Tobin, and Chair Bjorkman. Senator Shower arrived thereafter (via teleconference).

#### **PRESENTATION(S) : WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE**

[1:32:34 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced a presentation from the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) on winter road maintenance. This is a continuation of the presentation [from the February 20, 2025 Senate Transportation Committee meeting].

[1:32:56 PM](#)

ANDY MILLS, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF), Juneau, Alaska, continued the Winter Road Maintenance presentation from February 20, 2025. He noted that the presentation was updated to include additional information.

[1:33:35 PM](#)

BRAD BYLSMA, Equipment Fleet Manager, Statewide Equipment Fleet (SEF), Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF), Anchorage, Alaska, advanced to Slide 20 and discussed the state equipment fleet (SEF):

[Original punctuation provided.]

51 Maintenance Shops Statewide

125 Mechanic Positions

**Over 7,500 pieces of state equipment and vehicles**

- Executive branch
- University of Alaska
- Other state agencies

**Primary Focus in October-March:**

- Snow and Ice Removal Equipment

MR. BYLSMA discussed State Equipment Fleet (SEF) winter challenges. He addressed a question asked in the previous meeting regarding issues obtaining approval for equipment maintenance. He clarified that approval is not needed prior to performing equipment maintenance, although funding can sometimes be an issue.

[1:35:41 PM](#)

MR. BYLSMA advanced to Slide 21 and discussed equipment mechanic staffing. Slide 21 includes a table with heavy equipment mechanic positions and vacancy rates for maintenance districts across the state. He stated that, while approval is not necessary for equipment maintenance, vacancies in heavy equipment mechanic positions do cause maintenance delays.

[1:36:03 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL expressed concern about the number of vacancies, which he noted seems to be increasing. He asked what DOTPF is doing to ensure those positions are filled.

MR. BYLSMA agreed with this assessment. He briefly listed the approaches DOTPF has taken in an effort to fill vacancies. He indicated that changes in federal requirements created additional barriers. He added that, while the presentation is specific to SEF, the heavy equipment mechanic shortage is an industry-wide issue.

[1:37:49 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked about the entry-level pay rate for a heavy diesel mechanic.

MR. BYLSMA replied that the starting wage varies by location. Anchorage starts at \$28-\$29 per hour. The pay in remote locations is typically 30-40 percent higher. He noted that DOTPF's starting wage is typically lower than the private sector.

[1:38:43 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL agreed that this is lower than the private sector.

[1:38:47 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced that Senator Shower joined the meeting (via teleconference).

[1:38:58 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked for additional information about how funding impacts SEF's ability to maintain essential winter maintenance equipment.

MR. BYLSMA clarified his earlier statement. He said that funding is not an issue when it comes to general maintenance and repairing the equipment. Large scale repairs require approval. He explained that SEF has a budget to maintain equipment.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN asked how SEF prepares for winter weather around the state and ensures that there is a redundancy in equipment for snow events.

MR. BYLSMA explained how SEF prepares for the winter season. This process begins in the summer and continues into the fall. Plow trucks are used as dump trucks in the summer and mechanics perform maintenance on the trucks in the fall. The same process applies to all other winter road maintenance equipment. SEF aims to have the entire fleet ready for winter road maintenance by mid-October.

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MR. BYLSMA advanced to Slide 22 and discussed alternative sources for maintenance resources:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Addressing Mechanic Vacancies**

- Increased reliance on alternative repair methods

- Utilizing:
  - Equipment dealers
  - Car and light truck dealers
  - Independent and specialty shops
  - MO staff and local airport contractors

**Exploring New Partnerships**

- Working to collaborate with large construction companies
- Potential use of their maintenance facilities for equipment servicing

[Slide 22 also includes a table titled, "SEF Contracted Maintenance" containing data for FY2022-2025.]

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CHAIR BJORKMAN commented on the importance of winter road maintenance. He opined that DOTPF should have the necessary equipment and personnel in house and not depend on private contractors or other institutional entities. He pointed out that different priorities can cause strained relationships and stated that he does not want Alaska's core government services to be at the whim of those entities and their priorities. He opined that it is good for the government to deliver on its core constitutional missions - road maintenance being one. He asked to what extent DOTPF contracts with private mechanics to repair equipment - and to what degree this practice is successful in ensuring the equipment is ready when needed.

MR. BYLSMA agreed that it is the responsibility of DOTPF and SEF to maintain equipment and have it ready and available when it is needed. He stated that DOTPF and SEF fulfill this obligation. He acknowledged that different priorities are a concern and said that contractor agreements are leveraged to the state's advantage. He offered examples to illustrate this. He emphasized that DOTPF's mission is to use its own maintenance crew to keep the fleet on the road.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN emphasized that DOTPF is responsible for maintaining the fleet and blame should not be placed on contractors or other entities if DOTPF is unable to fulfill this obligation.

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SENATOR KIEHL concurred. He acknowledged that utilizing contractors makes sense for certain types of work; however, he expressed concern with the amount of contracted work shown on Slide --. He commented that, while DOTPF is responsible for ensuring the fleet is ready and available for work, the money comes from the Legislature. He asked whether a cost-benefit analysis has been done on the current level of contract work. He wondered if the contract work is in response to immediate need without considering the long-term implications.

MR. BYLSMA replied that the cost-benefit of utilizing external mechanics is constantly monitored. He briefly discussed the various factors considered. He agreed that DOTPF has contracted more in recent years and explained that this has been an attempt to mitigate the 33 percent vacancy rate. He clarified that in some instances, contracting is done out of necessity, in an effort to keep equipment on the road - with cost-benefit in mind. He added that the long-term implications may be a separate question.

[1:53:53 PM](#)

MR. MILLS referenced slide 21, Equipment Mechanic Staffing, and explained that the LTC contract from 2024 was a confounding variable. He briefly explained how the pool of available mechanics impacts this. He emphasized that the recruitment issues are industry wide. He then referenced Slide 22, Alternative Sources for Maintenance Resources, and explained that this refers to nominal dollars. He acknowledged that this does not explain the increase over time. He added that a shrinking pool of available mechanics must be met with an increased pay rate in order to capture the limited availability.

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SENATOR TOBIN noted that the mechanic vacancy in Western Alaska is 50 percent despite a large population of skilled individuals. She shared her understanding that one reason for this is a lack of retirement benefits for the mechanic positions.

[1:56:30 PM](#)

MR. BYLSMA advanced to Slide 23 and discussed new equipment purchasing:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Current Challenges**

Long lead times for heavy equipment (18-24 months)

**Improving Availability**

Some equipment categories seeing shorter wait times:  
Loaders and Graders  
(8-16 months)

[Slide 23 also contains a table titled, "Plow Truck Orders by Fiscal Year," which displays data for FY2022-2025.]

MR. BYLSMA noted that in FY2022, DOTPF took delivery of six plow trucks, and discussed the impact of pandemic and supply-chain issues and nationwide worker shortages.

[1:58:33 PM](#)

MR. MILLS advanced to Slide 24 and discussed the Virtual Snow Summit:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Building on the October 2023 Summit**

- Continued discussions and regional updates

**Key Topics in 2024**

- Maintenance Updates - Regional insights and improvements
- Statewide Equipment Fleet - Overview and optimization
- 511 System - Innovations and upgrades
- Winter Operations Dashboard - Real-time monitoring tools
- Sidewalk and Pedestrian Improvements - Accessibility and safety

**Commitment to Future Snow Summits**

- Affirmed annual summits for continued collaboration
- Rotating host communities to expand engagement

[2:00:05 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN asked what name was chosen for the snowplow at this year's summit.

MR. MILLS replied that Darth Blader was chosen two years ago but he could not remember this year's name. He briefly described the naming process. The MO operators choose the final name. He said he would provide this information.

[2:01:15 PM](#)

MR. MILLS advanced to Slide 25 and discussed brine:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **What is Brine?**

Brine is typically Sodium Chloride (solid salt) that is rendered into a solution of 23.3 percent for direct application on roads or sand to then be used on winter roads

MR. MILLS provided details regarding the chemical makeup of brine and how it is applied. He said that brine is the least corrosive of the available options. He briefly discussed creative brine alternatives.

[2:04:06 PM](#)

MR. MILLS advanced to Slide 26 and compared brine and solid de-icing:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Brine vs Solid De-icing**

- Improves the persistence of the brine on the road surface - prevents a bond forming between the snow and the road surface
- Corrosion inhibitors (additives) used to reduce impact on vehicles and infrastructure, percentage added per product specifications
- Cost savings - through faster application, fewer trips to clear, and lower commodity costs (less chemical on road and in environment)

[Slide 26 includes two infographics comparing the typical scatter pattern of road salt to the scatter pattern of pre-wet road salt.]

MR. MILLS emphasized that utilizing brine is a trade-off. He acknowledged that there are concerns regarding its corrosivity but opined that this is worth the increase in road safety that brine provides.

[2:07:44 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN agreed with the stated trade-offs. He listed several concerns related to corrosion caused by brine and asserted that the anti-corrosion agents are not effective. He listed some of the safety issues that brine causes, including

corroded brakes and fuel lines. He opined that DOTPF should consider limiting brine use. He added that many of his constituents support ending brine use. He referred to a petition to end brine use on the Kenai Peninsula. He expressed a desire to return to previous methods of winter highway maintenance (packed snow, etc.) for both safety and ease of driving. He emphasized that he supports reducing or eliminating brine use.

MR. MILLS said that he understands the concerns. He added that some of this would be addressed in a later slide, which offers some alternatives. He said that he has spoken to some residents of the Kenai Peninsula who did not share this perspective. He said that DOTPF does its best to respond to concerns. He acknowledged that the amount of brine used on the Kenai Peninsula did result in legitimate concerns and added that this would be discussed on an upcoming slide.

[2:12:08 PM](#)

MR. MILLS advanced to Slide 27 and explained the difference between de-icing and anti-icing:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Anti-icing is pretreating a surface to maintain/preserve better condition whereas de-icing is treating a surface after ice has formed
- Without pretreatment, an operator must return to a site more frequently
- Brine pretreatment is data-driven

[Slide 27 contains a flow chart illustrating how brine application is determined.]

MR. MILLS drew attention to the photo on Slide 27 and explained why certain roads benefit from the use of brine. He briefly discussed concerns related to compacted snow (as an alternative to brine). He explained the variables that determine whether or not to use brine and emphasized that DOTPF drivers make informed decisions regarding the use of brine (they do not simply apply brine to all roads in the winter).

[2:15:55 PM](#)

MR. MILLS advanced to Slide 28, and discussed brine engagement on the Kenai Peninsula:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- 2023 petition with over 6K signatures and auto service companies with concerns
- DOTPF Commissioner's Office participated in several borough assembly meetings and town halls on brine to directly hear from residents
- Legislative and Borough Mayor letter
- Commissioner directed reduction plan (40 percent), pilot for Funny River Road, literature review, enhanced brine training for operators, and public engagement
- Winter 2023/2024 saw reduction of ~60 percent
- Further reduction at milepost 0-16 on K-Beach Road in 2024/2025
- Literature review slated for release in 2025

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CHAIR BJORKMAN said that residents on Funny River Road were happy with the road quality when brine was not used.

MR. MILLS said that DOTPF was very attentive to Funny River Road and expressed appreciation for this feedback.

[2:19:36 PM](#)

MR. MILLS advanced to Slide 29 and discussed winter road maintenance jurisdiction and priorities. Slide 29 contains a map of Anchorage roads maintained by DOTPF and a map of all Anchorage roads. He emphasized that not all roads are DOTPF roads.

[2:20:25 PM](#)

MR. MILLS advanced to Slide 30, Winter Road Maintenance - Prioritization:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Winter Road Maintenance Priority**

Established by DOTPF in 2017 to better communicate winter maintenance to public, with small tweaks in the last 5 years

Criteria to establish priorities includes:

- Annual average daily traffic (AADT)
- Weather events
- Major shipping lanes and freight/cargo transport

- Access to other modes of transportation
  - Safety corridors
  - Public transit systems
  - Emergency responders and hospitals route and segment access
  - School bus routing
  - Population density of surrounding/connected area
  - Alternative emergency routes, types of roads, bridges and rivers
  - Existing DOTPF resources
  - Distance from MO station
  - Pedestrian facilities\*
  - Trails and waysides\*
- \* survey results asked for additional consideration

[Slide 30 contains a table that presents priorities 1-5, along with road clearing timeframes and examples of each.]

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SENATOR TOBIN expressed surprise that sidewalk clearing does not begin until after priority 4 roads are clear. She asked about the reasoning behind delaying sidewalk clearing, particularly when so many people utilize the sidewalks.

MR. MILLS explained that sidewalk clearing was recently decoupled from road clearing. He deferred to Mr. Nickeson for additional information.

2:23:21 PM

BURRELL NICKESON, Manager, Maintenance and Operations, Central Region, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF), Anchorage, Alaska, said that DOTPF has heard from legislators and the public that clearing sidewalks is a priority. He explained that clearing snow on major roads with very limited right-of-way makes clearing the sidewalks difficult, as this is the only place to put the snow. Snow is later removed from the sidewalks using a blower and trucks. He said that DOTPF is working with the Municipality of Anchorage to ensure bus stops and the surrounding sidewalks are clear. In addition, DOTPF has non-permanent positions that rove throughout the municipality and work to clear sidewalks. He confirmed that sidewalks have been decoupled from the surrounding roads. He added that DOTPF has made a lot of progress with sidewalks, and this will continue to be a focus.

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SENATOR TOBIN said that it is helpful to hear about the prioritization. She directed attention to the GIS map and noted that the timeframe for clearing a priority 1 road is 12 hours, while the timeframe for clearing a priority 1 sidewalk is 48 hours. She requested additional information about these timeframes.

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MR. MILLS briefly explained the challenges but acknowledged that citizens would like more equity in clearing roads and sidewalks. He said DOTPF is working to do more in this area.

[2:27:26 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked whether property owners have a responsibility to clear adjacent sidewalks.

MR. MILLS replied that in Alaska, DOTPF and municipalities are responsible for clearing sidewalks; however, property owners are responsible for clearing berms in driveways.

[2:29:08 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL clarified that it is not a state requirement; however, some municipalities do require property owners to clear adjacent sidewalks.

[2:29:29 PM](#)

MR. MILLS noted that on Slide 30, there is a color-coded list that indicates the priority of various routes. Operators receive a sheet and use this as a guide.

[2:30:11 PM](#)

MR. MILLS advanced to Slide 31 and discussed FY2023 intent language:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**FY2023 INTENT LANGUAGE**

It is the intent of the legislature that DOTPF create and implement a method to solicit input from and consult with local municipalities, community organizations, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Regional Transportation Planning Organizations and service areas on the creation and revision of the prioritized list of state-maintained roads and

highways for snow plowing, and to coordinate these efforts, where appropriate, with local governments and service areas. This plan shall be developed and submitted to the Finance Committee Co-Chairs and Legislative Finance Division by December 20th, 2022.

**CY2022 STIP List (Survey #1)**

1,100 contacts reached municipal (mayors and city managers), village and city council members.  
616 total submissions received.

**CY2022 MPO Member (Survey #2)**

Distributed to Municipal Planning Organization members directly.  
31 total submissions received from MPO members.

**CY2022 Community Council (Survey #3)**

Distributed to community council members directly from lists compiled by DOTPF communications staff.  
42 total submissions received.

[Slide 31 also contains a table titled, "2022 Winter Road Priority Maint. Criteria ranking (Survey Summary)".]

[2:30:24 PM](#)

MR. MILLS advanced to Slide 32, and discussed winter operations improvements:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Winter Ops - Continuous Improvements:**

**Responsive improvements:**

- Functional classification census review happening 2024-2025 (March 27 is next public engagement, April 15 in Anchorage and through December of this year)
- Pedestrian-specific focus with mapping of Anchorage sidewalk priorities in 2024
- MO has ongoing discussions with local government on additional local road swaps (efficiency of operations)
- Priority 3 and 4, plus sidewalk contractor support through supplemental service

- Winter Ops Dashboard piloted, working on expanding to other areas of Alaska

MR. MILLS said that supplemental services can speed up clearing sidewalks and roads.

[2:33:38 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN noted the time and suggested that any additional discussion be taken up during subcommittee hearings.

[2:33:50 PM](#)

At ease.

**PRESENTATION(S): RURAL AIRPORT SYSTEM OVERVIEW**

[2:35:17 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN reconvened the meeting and announced a presentation from the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) titled "Rural Airport System Overview."

[2:35:41 PM](#)

TROY LARUE, Operations Manager, Division of Statewide Aviation, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF), Anchorage, Alaska, advanced to Slide 2:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Mission Statements:

**Alaska DOTPF**

"Keep Alaska Moving Through Service and Infrastructure"

**Alaska International Airports System (AIAS)**

"To Keep Alaska Flying and Thriving"

**Statewide Aviation (SWA)**

"To Sustain and Improve the Quality of Life Throughout Alaska"

[2:36:21 PM](#)

MR. LARUE advanced to Slide 3 and provided an overview of DOTPF organization and leadership. Slide 3 contains a flowchart to illustrate DOTPF, SWA, and AIAS leadership positions and locations.

[2:36:38 PM](#)

MR. LARUE advanced to Slide 4 and discussed statewide aviation. Slide 4 contains a map of the Lower 48 overlaid with a map of Alaska to illustrate the distance/geographical coverage. 82 percent of Alaskan communities are not connected to the road system and rely on aviation. He noted that aviation faces many challenges but opined that Alaska has a good relationship with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

[2:37:14 PM](#)

MR. LARUE advanced to Slide 5 and discussed the rural system operating budget:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### Rural System Operating Budget

FFY2024

- Operating Cost = \$48.69M
- Revenue = \$11.08M (\$6.8M Leasing + \$4.3M Fuel Taxes)

#### System Sustainability

- Cost Reductions/Efficiencies
- Sand/Chemical Optimization
- Maintenance Conversion from General Fund to Federal Program

#### Workforce Challenges

- Staffing and Training

[2:38:31 PM](#)

REBECCA DOUGLAS, Aviation and Planning Chief, Division of Statewide Aviation, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF), Anchorage, Alaska, advanced to Slide 6 and discussed Airport Improvement Program (AIP) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Funding:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### Airport Improvement Program (AIP) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Funding

##### **Federal Capital Funding**

FFY2020 AIP = \$198.9M

FFY2021 AIP = \$184.2M

FFY2022 AIP = \$236.4M (BIL = \$19.6M) TOTAL= \$256M

FFY2023 AIP = \$172.9M (BIL = \$56.4M) TOTAL= \$229M

FFY2024 AIP = \$163.6M (BIL = \$81.2M) TOTAL= \$244.8M

### **Rural Airport System State Match**

Generally, 6.25 percent of Project Eligible Costs FFY2025 and FFY2026 are at 5 percent Ratio Essential Air Service (EAS) Airports Remain at 5 percent Match of Project Eligible Costs

[2:40:47 PM](#)

MS. DOUGLAS advanced to Slide 7, and discussed AIP and BIL funding for FFY 2024:

[Original punctuation provided.]

AIP Program: \$211.0M

- Rural Airport System = \$163.6M
- Alaska International Airport System = \$47.4M

BIL (Stimulus): \$98.0M

- Rural Airport System = \$81.2M
- Alaska International Airport System = \$16.8M

MS. DOUGLAS noted that unused BIL funding rolls over to the next year, though it is typically used.

[2:42:13 PM](#)

MS. DOUGLAS advanced to Slide 8 and discussed the FFY2024 grant timeline:

[Original punctuation provided.]

FFY2024 Grant Timeline

- Due to FFY2024 Continuing Resolutions
  - Record Slow Obligation Year
  - Obligated 84 percent In September 2024
- 11 Rural Construction Projects Advertised
- First Grant Executed July 11, 2024
- Last Grant Executed September 9, 2024

MS. DOUGLAS contrasted the FFY2024 funding with FFY2025. She noted that large construction projects would not be advertised until federal AIP funding is secured.

[2:43:49 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN requested follow-up on the FFY 2026 allocations and FFY2025 construction when additional information becomes available.

MS. DOUGLAS agreed and said that additional information would be available in the coming weeks. She stated that the planned program would likely continue to move forward in spite of funding delays.

[2:45:08 PM](#)

MS. DOUGLAS advanced to Slide 9 and discussed airport terminal projects:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### Airport Terminal Projects

- Terminal Projects Funded Through Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Airport Terminal Program (ATP) Funds
- Two Terminal Projects in Coordination Between DOTPF and Respective Boroughs, Operating Through Co-sponsorship Agreements
  - Sitka Terminal Building Modifications - Currently in Construction with Phase II Grant Planned for FFY2025
  - Ketchikan Terminal Area Expansion - Funding Planned for FFY2025

MS. DOUGLAS discussed construction grants for airport projects across the state, including improvements to Ketchikan and Sitka airports.

[2:47:19 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked about the backlog of maintenance needs and expectations for rural airports. He wondered if maintenance needs (e.g. roofs) would be paid for with state or federal funds.

MS. DOUGLAS replied that Alaska Airlines carries management responsibilities for the majority of Alaska's rural airport terminals, not DOTPF. She explained that DOTPF has co-sponsorship agreements for the Sitka and Ketchikan airports. These agreements (with the Sitka City and Borough and the Ketchikan Gateway Borough (KGB), respectively) result in a shared responsibility. She explained that, in Ketchikan, KGB operates the airport and DOTPF owns the airport. In Sitka, DOTPF

operates the airport, and the terminal is owned by the borough. With respect to funding for rural airport maintenance, she explained that Alaska Airlines or Grant Aviation are responsible for updating those terminals. While DOTPF does focus on maintenance updates (e.g. roofs) and fire safety, AIP funds are not used in those locations because the terminals are owned by private companies.

[2:49:24 PM](#)

MR. MILLS added that DOTPF does not own any airport terminals. He noted that the last terminal DOTPF owned was in Skagway.

[2:49:35 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked who owns the terminals.

MR. MILLS replied that he does not know who purchased the Skagway terminal. He shared his understanding that the terminal is run very well. He said that the City of Homer owns the Homer terminal. Likewise in Ketchikan, Sitka, Unalaska, and Adak, among others. He opined that co-sponsorship agreements are advantageous.

[2:50:29 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked for additional information and said he has heard conflicting reports.

MR. MILLS said he would be happy to share information and to hear those reports.

[2:50:47 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL said that he has heard reports that wind has caused ceiling tiles to fall in the Skagway terminal.

MR. MILLS said he would investigate this.

[2:51:07 PM](#)

MS. DOUGLAS advanced to Slide 10, Rural Airport System Executed Grants, which showed the number of executed grants per year from 2018 - 2024:

[Original punctuation provided.]

[Slide 10 contains a bar chart with the following data:]

Airport Improvement Program (AIP)  
Executed Grants per Year

2018 - 37  
2019 - 25  
2020 - 39  
2021 - 82  
2022 - 92  
2023 - 66  
2024 - 83

MS. DOUGLAS said there was a significant shift in the number of grants during this timeframe. She briefly discussed the shift in perspective regarding the grant program and offered examples to illustrate this change. She explained that, under the new funding structure, each project has its own grant. This change resulted in an increase in paperwork; however, it created a simpler grant closeout process. There are roughly 90 grants scheduled for 2025, the bulk of which fall under the maintenance program. She explained that ordering more equipment with federal funds would help the maintenance staff, as there is a limited general fund budget for maintenance. She said that previously, DOTPF spent \$2 million per year in equipment (graders, loaders, etc.) and now anticipates spending \$15-20 million per year to ensure the fleet has the necessary equipment. Updating maintenance equipment is a priority, as it improves the life of the runway and supports the teams to keep the runways open. This will remain a priority until the fleet has all the necessary equipment.

[2:54:15 PM](#)

MS. DOUGLAS advanced to Slide 11, Upcoming Rural Airport Projects:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **Upcoming Rural Airport Projects**

- Ketchikan Terminal Expansion
- Buckland Airport Improvements
- Kotzebue Crosswind Runway Improvements
- Deering Airport and Access Road Improvements
- Unalaska Apron and Taxiway Pavement Rehabilitation
- Takotna Airport Improvements
- Kwigillingok Airport Improvements
- Nunam Iqua Airport Improvements
- Murphy's Pullout Seaplane Basin Expansion

- Talkeetna Airport Lighting Improvements
- Haines Repaving, Drainage, and Lighting
- Bethel Taxiway, Apron, Fencing Improvements, and Service Road
- Kokhanok Resurfacing and Fencing
- Mountain Village Snow Removal Equipment Building Replacement
- Seward Snow Removal Equipment Building and Sand Storage Building
- Seward Airport Improvements
- Noatak Airport Relocation
- Tununak Airport Rehabilitation
- Ketchikan Seaplane Ramp Relocation and Floats Removal

MS. DOUGLAS said these projects are in the queue for construction in the coming years. The first few are planned to go to grant in 2025 - they will likely begin construction in 2026. She noted that this data is available on the Alaska Aviation System Plan website.

[2:56:02 PM](#)

MS. DOUGLAS advanced to Slide 12 and discussed rural aviation projects that are underway. She noted that safety is the focus of most FAA funding:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Underway Rural Aviation Projects**

Advertised or Awarded:

**State of Good Repair / Safety**

Buckland (FFY24-25)  
 Chalkyitsik (FFY23-24)  
 Chenega Bay (FFY24)  
 Chevak (FFY24)  
 Deadhorse (24)  
 Homer (FFY23)  
 Kodiak (FFY24)  
 Kwethluk (23)  
 Nightmute (FFY24)

**Economic Vitality (Rural Access)**

Coldfoot (FFY24)  
 Marshall (FFY23-24)  
 Mekoryuk (FFY23/24)

Noorvik (FFY24)  
Wrangell (FFY23)

**Sustainability (Equipment Buildings and Terminals)**

Akutan Generators (FFY24)  
Chignik SREB (FFY23)  
False Pass SREB (FFY24)  
Sitka SREB (FFY23)  
Mekoryuk SREB (FFY23-24)  
Sitka Terminal (FFY24-25)  
Valdez SREB (FFY24)

[2:56:49 PM](#)

MS. DOUGLAS advanced to Slide 13, and discussed the AIP funding breakdown for FFY2024:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Airport Improvement Program (AIP) Funding Breakdown  
FFY2024:

FFY2025-2026 State Match 5.0 percent

Cargo Entitlements (\$12.6M)  
Earned By Airports with More Than 100 Million Pounds  
Landed Weight

Primary Passenger Entitlement (\$31.6M)  
Earned By Airports with More Than 10,000 Enplaned  
Passengers and Scheduled Commercial Service

Non-primary Passenger Entitlement (\$24.3M)  
Earned By Airports with Fewer Than 10,000 Enplaned  
Passengers Annually

State Appropriation (\$20.7M)  
An Area/Population Formula Used After Cargo/Passenger  
Entitlements Calculated

Alaska Supplemental (\$21.0M)  
Congressional Amount Based On 1980 Amounts

Discretionary (\$95.5M)  
What Remains - Divided Among 50 States

MS. DOUGLAS commented that DOTPF received a resiliency supplemental discretionary grant for Yakutat airport master

plan. She explained that this frees up additional funds for another priority project.

[2:58:42 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN noted the time and suggested a second presentation.

[2:58:55 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN noted that the Seward airport is on the list for upcoming improvements and requested additional information. He asked if there is a way to track the various other funding sources that come into DOTPF from airports. Specifically, he asked if there is a way to track funding from a particular airport - so that it can then return to that same airport - or if it was placed in a general fund.

MS. DOUGLAS said that Alaska's entitlement funding is unique, as most airports are rural (and DOTPF operates 235 airports across the state). She stated that DOTPF pools entitlement funding into specific projects and briefly explained this process. She emphasized that DOTPF utilizes all entitlement funds.

[3:01:29 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Bjorkman adjourned the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting at 3:01 p.m.