

SCR

22



Dept. of Transportation & Public Facilities

Position Paper

BILL NO: SCR 22

TITLE: Alternative Road System in Denali
National Park

APPROVED: *[Signature]*
R. J. Knapp

DATE: 5/1/85
Commissioner

The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities supports SCR22 to initiate and complete environmental and location studies for three alternative routes to construct a road to Kantishna.

These routes may qualify under RS2477 and could be useful in providing a basic route for a road to Kantishna. However, the projected traffic volume on such a road is so high (5,000 vehicles a day during the summer) that a road built to required design standards may vary somewhat from the RS2477 right-of-way.

This road would provide a useful service by providing access for tourists into the park as well as for mining into the Kantishna area.

Relating to alternative road systems in Denali National Park

SCR 27

DATE INTRODUCED

4-29-85

RELATED BILLS PENDING

SB 49

REFERRALS

None

SPONSOR(S)

Coghill

ADMINISTRATION

INITIAL SUMMARY COMPLETED

LEGAL DIVISION SUMMARY

Requested 4-29-85

DEPT OF LAW SUMMARY

SPONSOR CONTACTED FOR BACKUP MATERIALS

FISCAL NOTE

N/A

AGENCY RESPONSE

OTHER INTERESTED LEGISLATORS NOTIFIED

Dick Schultz 4-30-85

INITIAL RESEARCH

SIMILAR BILLS INTRODUCED IN PREVIOUS LEGISLATURES

OTHER STATE OR FEDERAL PRECEDENTS, REGULATIONS, ETC

RESPONSES FROM INTERESTED PERSONS AND/OR GROUPS

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

CHAIRMAN BRIEFED

DATE & PLACE SET

STAFF MEMO TO COMMITTEE

TELECONFERENCE

BACKGROUND MATERIAL DISTRIBUTED

PSA/PRESS RELEASE

LIST OF WITNESSES

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS/CS DRAFTED

HEARING PREPARATION

Alaska State Legislature

SENATOR
JOHN B. "JACK" COGHILL
Chairman

Senator Jan Faiks—Vice Chairman
Senator Mitch Abood
Senator Paul Fischer
Senator Joe Josephson



POUCH V
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811
(907) 465-4921

Senate Committee on Transportation

MEMORANDUM

TO: Committee Members

FROM: Committee Staff *AL*

DATE: 5-1-85

RE: SCR 22

SCR 22, relating to alternative access in the Denali National Park, will be in front of the committee today. This resolve requests that the Governor direct the commissioner of DOT/PF to study alternative access routes to Denali National Park.

Included in your packet you will find position papers from the divisions of Tourism and Minerals, the departments of Transportation and Fish and Game, and the National Park Service. Also included is part of the Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce's Interior Transportation Needs report. Finally there is a letter from Senator Coghill to members of the Alaska Congressional Delegation asking that they explore the problem of lack of access into the park.

KANTISHNA ACCESS

Warrants

A highway to the Kantishna area can be justified on the following basis:

Tourism is Alaska's second largest industry and Mt. McKinley is the State's number one tourist attraction. The park road is inadequate to serve this industry for the following reasons:

- a. Geometrics, the road is substandard in width, alignment and grade. The road is hazardous as demonstrated by the rash of serious bus accidents that have occurred during the past few years.
- b. Access is too restrictive, visitors must travel by bus (shuttle school buses or buses operated by park concessionaires). This ride can last up to six hours and is a source of discomfort, especially to senior citizens and young children.
- c. Capacity, the demand has increased dramatically during the past decade as has the growth of tourism. The Interior Alaska Transportation Study estimated nearly 5000 vehicles by the year 2005.
- d. Because time at vantage viewpoints is extremely limited, over 50% of those seeking a view of Mt. McKinley are disappointed.
- e. The increase of traffic on this road has degraded the wildlife viewing aspect of this route.

Mining is also an important industry in Alaska and the Kantishna area is an important mining area. Recent assessments conducted by governmental officials documented the existence of commercial ore deposits. The existing road is inadequate to serve this industry because of slow moving tour bus traffic, and it is substandard.

FBKS. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Enhance the State's ability to assure our visitors and residents a quality experience. Mt McKinley is Alaska's crown jewel. Access and vantage viewing are at the sole discretion of the U.S. Park Service. However Alaska's entire tourist industry and the State's reputation suffer when visitors ride an uncomfortable bus for six hours and still do not get to see the main attraction.

Give opportunity for the private sector to provide tourist facilities that are now being provided by the government sector or not being provided at all. Mining claims in the Kantishna area are patented and can be used by the private developer to locate hotels, lodges, camping parks, hostels and other visitors facilities. The area provides an unsurpassed view of Mt. McKinley and visitors would have the opportunity to remain in the area for longer periods increasing their chances of seeing the mountain. (note, the cyclic type weather that occurs during the dry interior summer virtually assures all visitors a view of the mountain if they can remain there for a day or so.

The private sector is more sensitive to visitor satisfaction thus when this sector caters to our visitors the results are happier, longer and more return visits.

An alternate access to the Kantishna area would make it possible for the park service to redirect the park road traffic toward wildlife viewing. This is more compatible to that portion of the park's classification, (wilderness). It also provides a more focused and quality wildlife viewing concession.

A northern access, currently economically viable as far as the Kantishna area, can be extended toward the McGrath area to serve that area as the need warrants.

A northern access would tie into the existing park road, making it

possible to provide a loop system, a limited loop system or limited to wildlife tours. Note this would be a popular concession and with some imagination could be worked in two directions.

There is less precipitation on the north side of the Alaska Range than on the south. This can be documented through weather records but is clearly evident by the lack of glaciers on the north side when compared with the south side. Since viewing of the mountain is of paramount importance, this aspect cannot be overlooked when establishing park facilities, nor should the North or South facilities be exclusive, both offer differing experiences making improvements not an either/or decision but rather one of establishing priorities.

It should also be recognized that the Park is such a major attraction that constructing additional facilities will not provide a proportional increase in capacity as visitors will elect to extend their stay to experience all that is offered.

Issues and Strategy

Establishing a northern access will require careful planning and is subject to stipulations established in the National Interest Lands Act as well as the National Environmental Protection Act of 1969. It will be subject to critical review, organized environmental and philosophical opposition.

Provision has been made in the National Interest Lands Act to mandate access decision on a timely basis. When the environmental document is officially started a time frame also starts. This is an advantage, if the State has the project well in order. However, it can be a detriment if the State is unprepared to deal with all the issues that may surface, resulting in a decision that may not be in the best interest of the State. If that should occur, the ability to appeal is limited and the State may be required to begin the process all over. Because of this, it is important that the DOTPF ensure that

all interested entities are involved, all issues identified and all decision making agencies be as much in accord as possible prior to starting the clock.

This can be accomplished by adding a preliminary phase to the normal location phase of a project. Generally the location report and environmental document are prepared at the same time. In this case it is recommended that the DOTPF prepare a draft location report and in so doing identify and resolve all issues with decision making agencies to gain as much of a consensus as possible, then begin the environmental document. The location report would be finalized concurrent with developing the environmental document.

Project description

Access to Kantishna via the north has three major alternatives, they are:

1. Via the Stampede trail to Stampede then through foot hills to Kantishna.
2. Via the old sled trail leaving the Parks Highway near Rex.
3. Via the proposed Nenana Agriculture access road to the Kantishna River then upriver to Kantishna (note, the route to the Kantishna River is already designed).

It is premature to speculate on which alternate is the most attractive. All have attractive aspects. Some have already been investigated to some degree and some aerial photographs are available. It is conceivable that the final routing will be a combination of these.

The road itself will be a major highway and probably have to be widened to four lanes by the year 2020. Initially it should be paved with two 12' lanes and 8' shoulders. Alignment and grade should be designed for 55 mph and should take advantage of the scenic opportunities. The road should be designed and classified as a State

Scenic Route.

Funding

Immediate funding needs are for the location phase. During that phase the merits of the project will be documented, standards adopted, alignment chosen and preliminary costs developed. The project will have location approval with authority to design and construct or it will be determined to be in the best interest of the State or Nation not to proceed.

Because of the sensitive nature of the project the DOTPF should allow ample lead time and funding to ensure that location documents will stand up to close scrutiny. At this time the cost to accomplish this is estimated at \$500,000 with a time frame of three years.

This work entails field surveys aerial photography, research, conceptual design, economic analysis, comparison of alternatives, in-depth agency coordination and public involvement. The completed product will include:

- approved environmental impact statement with 4(f) determination
- approved location study report
- certified location public hearing documents
- draft soils report
- location approval.



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ALASKA REGIONAL OFFICE
2525 Gambell Street, Room 107
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-2892

A22(ARO-SA)

February 13, 1985

FEB 19 1985

Honorable Jack Coghill
Alaska State Senate
Pouch V
Anchorage, Alaska 99811

Dear Senator Coghill:

We appreciate your request for our review and comments on Senate Bill 49 and the accompanying report and route map.

As you recognize, Denali National Park and Preserve is a major resource and asset to both the State of Alaska and the nation. I believe it is incumbent upon all of us at the state and federal levels to work together to assure that the experience for the visitor is enjoyable and that the wildlife and other resources of the park are preserved.

We agree with and support the goal of improving the visitor's experience. However, it would be inappropriate for the National Park Service to take a position on the proposed bill to appropriate \$500,000 for a state feasibility study of a northern access route. As your study recognizes, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and the National Environmental Policy Act set forth procedures for analysis and consideration which must be followed before any decision to allow access across a national park. Title XI of ANILCA sets forth the process for reviewing and permitting construction of a new access route.

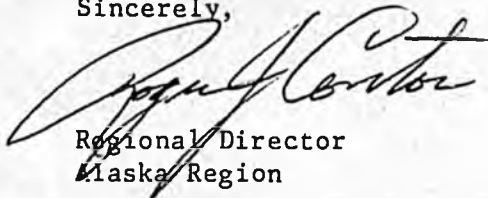
The quality of the visitor's experience in Denali National Park has been a major concern within our organization. As you know, we are currently in the process of designing a new visitor access center near the park headquarters and we will soon be contracting with another local firm for the design of the reconstruction of Denali Park Hotel. Recommended budgeting for these two projects totals \$14.2 million. In addition approximately \$15 million is programmed for improvements on the Denali Park Road.

A draft general management plan for Denali National Park will be released in March for public review and comment. This plan invites public comment on alternative ways of improving the visitor's experience while preserving the wildlife and natural features which they come to see. As soon as it is available we will send copies of this draft plan to you and members of the Senate and House Resources Committees. We would very much appreciate your thoughts and recommendations.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

This summer we will also be working with the State Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities under a cooperative agreement to investigate the possibilities for developing visitor access and facilities on the south side of the Alaska Range. We were pleased to note that your report recognizes that development on the north and south sides is not an either or situation, and that the south side development would offer visitors a different experience in a landscape which is much in contrast to that of the north. Further, it is important to distribute the points of access to the natural resources of the Mt. McKinley massif so that they are readily accessible from both Anchorage and Fairbanks. We will keep you informed of the results of this cooperative study and look forward to your comments.

Sincerely,



Regional Director
Alaska Region

cc:

Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources
Commissioner, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Members of Senate and House Resources Committees

BILL SHEFFIELD, GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

P.O. BOX 3-2000
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99902
PHONE: 907 / 465-4100

February 26, 1985

Mr. John Manly
Committee Aide
Senate Transportation
Committee
c/o Senator Coghill
Alaska State Senate
Pouch V
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Mr. Manly:

This letter is in response to your request dated February 9, 1985, that the department prepare a brief statement on the fish and wildlife values and potential impacts associated with an extension of the state highway system to Kantishna via three alternative routes from the Parks Highway. It is our understanding that the three alternatives under consideration include access:

1. Via the Stampede Trail to Stampede then through the foothills to Kantishna;
2. Via the Rex Trail to the Kantishna River then upriver to Kantishna;
3. Via the proposed Nenana-Totchaket Agriculture access road to the Kantishna River then upriver to Kantishna.

Our Habitat Division has performed a review of the alternatives. An abbreviated summary of the fish and wildlife values and the department's recommendations relative to the three alternative routes follows.

Alternative #1 - Stampede Trail: Wildlife values adjacent to this route are moderate to high in importance. Black bear, grizzly bear, moose, caribou, and a variety of furbearers are present. Dall sheep are present along the north flank of the Alaska Range to the immediate south. The McKinley Caribou Herd historically utilized this area as prime overwintering and limited calving habitat. Although population abundance is currently low, an expansion of the herd size will necessitate use of this historic range. The

DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME

proposed route also transects important moose fall and winter concentration areas. Recreational and subsistence use is moderate and occurs predominately along the Stampede Trail. Trapping intensity is moderate to heavy.

Alternative #2 - Rex Trail: Fish and wildlife values adjacent to this route are moderate to high in importance. Black bear, grizzly bear, moose and a variety of furbearers are present in moderate numbers throughout most of the area. Significant populations of these species, however, are present within the Nenana, Teklanika, Toklat, and Kantishna River riparian corridors. Recreational and subsistence use is moderate to heavy within these river corridors. Human use outside of these corridors is limited.

The portions of the upper Kantishna River and Bearpaw River drainages affected by this route are considered critical waterfowl habitat areas, providing nesting and molting habitat for high concentrations of several species of waterfowl and stopover sites for cranes and other species that utilize the western Interior.

The Toklat River Springs located at the confluence of the Toklat and Sushana Rivers supports the largest known population of fall chum salmon in Alaska and is estimated to contribute 27% of the commercial and subsistence fall chum salmon harvest in the Yukon and Tanana River fisheries downstream from the mouth of the Kantishna River. The spring's area also supports a small population (500-600) of overwintering mallards which is believed to be the northern-most freshwater waterfowl wintering area in North America. The Toklat River Springs' fall chum salmon spawning area is considered critical habitat and has been nominated for legislative designation.

Alternative #3 - Totchaket Agriculture Access Road and Extension: Based upon the limited data presently available, most of the area adjacent to this route appears to have moderate to low fish and wildlife habitat value. Recreational hunting, subsistence use and trapping also appear to very light in the area. There are no critical habitat areas yet identified. From the standpoint of potential impacts, the department's primary concerns are related to those portions of the route which are (1) adjacent to the Kantishna River (which is a designated anadromous fish stream) or (2) require crossings of resident fish streams. Rather than influencing route selection, these concerns are normally addressed by the department, via its AS 16 authorities, through the provision of adequate mitigating measures as a component of route design and construction.

Mr. John Manly

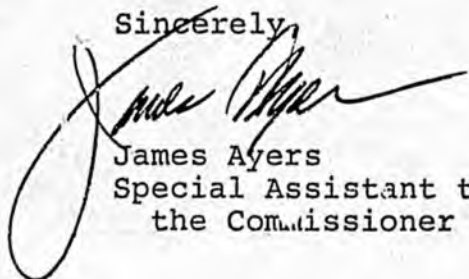
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February 26, 1985

Recommendations: From the sole standpoint of minimizing impacts to fish and wildlife or their habitats, the department prefers that any extension of the state highway system to Kantishna be aligned along the Alternative #3 - Nenana-Totchaket Agriculture Access Road and Extension route.

The department appreciates the Senate Transportation Committee's solicitation of our concerns and recommendations. We remain available to provide additional information as may be needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Ayers", with a large, looping flourish extending to the left.

James Ayers
Special Assistant to
the Commissioner



February 26, 1985

MAR 4 1985

Senator Jack Coghill, Chairman
Senate Transportation Committee
ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
Pouch V
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Senator Coghill:

I have read your Senate Bill #49 and agree wholeheartedly that now is the time to aggressively pursue the development of a road to Kantishna. Mt. McKinley is one of Alaska's greatest assets, however, many people have a disappointing experience in the Park because of inadequate facilities and limited viewing opportunities. Although we will never be able to guarantee a view of the mountain, increased access and facilities would provide us with an increased opportunity to satisfy the Alaska visitors.

We greatly appreciate your interest in this vital segment and fully support the efforts to begin this project.

If we can be of any further assistance please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tom Tougas".

Thomas C. Tougas
Vice President
TRANSPORTATION DIVISION

TCT/ss

BILL SHEFFIELD, GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE &
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE OF MINERAL DEVELOPMENT

POUCH EE
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811
PHONE: 465-2023

March 4, 1985

MAR 4 1985

The Honorable Jack Coghill
Chairman
Senate Transportation Committee
Pouch V
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Senator Coghill:

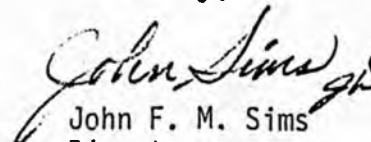
The Office of Mineral Development has reviewed SB 49 calling for a feasibility study on building the Kantishna access highway.

The Kantishna area has long been recognized for its substantial gold resource. Numerous mining claims have been patented. In addition to gold, significant deposits of strategic metals such as tungsten and antimony have been discovered in the area. With access, the region has much enhanced potential to become once again a significant productive mining region.

Currently, traffic on the Denali Park road is restricted by the National Park Service which severely limits mining activity at Kantishna. This restriction also limits Alaska's rapidly growing visitor industry. Access would allow entry to Denali National Park to many more people now unable to visit because of the severe travel restrictions in effect on the Denali Highway. The Kantishna access would enable firms in the travel industry to construct additional hotels and visitor facilities on privately held land at Kantishna. Additionally, it would greatly facilitate the expanded use of the Stampede Mine as a training property for mining students from the University of Alaska.

Of the three alternative routes being considered, this office supports the Old Stampede Road route. This is the shortest of the options being considered. It makes use of a long established trail to Stampede and requires a relatively short extension through the foothills connecting Stampede to Kantishna.

Sincerely,


John F. M. Sims
Director

JFS/cwREGLR3/Coghill
3485a

DIVISION OF MINERALS

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

POUCH Z
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811
PHONE: (907) 465-3300

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

January 28, 1985

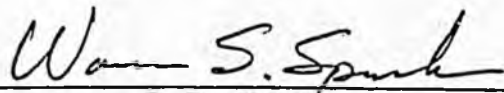
Re: SB 49; Feasibility of
Building a Road to
Kantishna

A road to Kantishna would have two major economic advantages. First, it would provide a northern access for tourists into Denali Park. The Interior Transportation Study estimates that within twenty years such an access could generate 5,000 vehicles a day in the summer months. Secondly, the road would provide access for mining in the Kantishna area, and possible future extension to the Kuskokwim Valley.

The possible benefits to be derived from this project compare favorably with other major system extensions, such as extension of Chena Hot Springs Road to Twin Mountain, construction of a road to the Slate Creek asbestos deposit or a major rail extension.

Provided we receive the cooperation of the National Park Service, the feasibility study through location approval is expected to take about 27 months to complete. Because of this timeframe, we recommend that the lapse date be extended to June 30, 1987.

The amount of \$500,000 for the study is adequate.



R.J. Knapp
for Commissioner

STATE OF ALASKA

BILL SHEFFIELD, GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

POUCH E
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811
PHONE: 465-2010
TELEX: 45331

DIVISION OF TOURISM

February 25, 1985

The Honorable Jack Coghill
Chairman
Senate Transportation Committee
Pouch V
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Senator Coghill:

Since statehood, Denali National Park and majestic Mt. McKinley have been one of Alaska's major travel attractions. A recent research report released by our Division of Tourism and compiled by the Department of Labor entitled "Alaska Traveler Survey and Visitor Industry Analysis 1983" shows that more than 70 percent of summer highway pleasure visitors indicated they had visited Anchorage and Fairbanks and 60 percent of these visitors reported they had visited Mt. McKinley/Denali.

Certainly a growing need for access into and through the park suggests that alternative access be explored. The legislation you have proposed in SB 49 calling for a feasibility study of building the Kantishna Access Highway would be a step in this direction.

Because traffic to the park continues to grow and considering the time needed to conduct a feasibility study, the sooner the necessary engineering and cost information is compiled, the sooner our State can move to have some control over the traffic flow to this unique vacation destination. The more visitors who can view the mountain and enjoy our wildlife, the more who will return home with an unequalled vacation experience.

Best regards,



Don Dickey
Director

DD/wfs1752W
22585a

Senator John B. (Jack) Coghill
Alaska State Legislature

Box A
Juneau Alaska 99811
(907) 465-1715

Box 158
Sitka Alaska 99701
(907) 855-1711

April 3, 1985

The Honorable Frank Murkowski, *Stevens, Young*
317 Hart Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Frank:

During this legislative session, the Senate Transportation Committee, of which I am chairman, has considered a proposal to construct a Kantishna access road north of the Alaska Range to connect the Kantishna area with the Parks Highway.

Our State's most popular tourist attraction, the viewing of Mt. McKinley, has disappointed many tourists because inclement weather conditions prevent adequate viewing of the mountain. Summer tourists plan well in advance to visit our great state and the continent's highest mountain. According to Denali Park officials over 50% of the visitors do not even get a glimpse of Mt. McKinley because crowded conditions on the park road and at park facilities do not allow them to stay until the weather clears.

The proposed highway will help solve this problem by providing access to many excellent viewpoints of the mountain. The road will also allow access to private property in the area which can be used by individuals for the construction of new hotels and tourist facilities. Tourists can then be assured of a more satisfying visit to the park, and therefore, a more pleasurable trip to Alaska.

I have received correspondence from a variety of interested groups, including private tour groups and the Alaska State Division of Tourism recognizing the need to develop this project.

Tourism is Alaska's second largest industry. In light of the State's declining oil revenues, it seems prudent to me that we invest in this growing sector.

LETTER TO ALASKA DELEGATION

The proposed road to Kantishna would not only have positive effects on the Denali National Park and Alaska's tourist industry, it would also benefit the mining industry.

The Alaska Miners Association and its 2000 members have extended their support. Many rich mineral deposits are being worked - or have been identified - in the Kantishna area, and the existing access road is limited for miners to certain nighttime hours in the summer.

Presently, mining trucks cannot compete with tour buses which use the road all day long. A new highway will solve this problem and should enable further mining development.

The agriculture industry will also share the benefits of construction of a highway. Rich agricultural land exists in the area. Easy access to these lands will be of value.

The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities is in the process of adopting a five-year plan to answer our highway problems. Construction of the Kantishna Highway is part of that answer; particularly when we consider the growing pressure of visitors on Denali and the pivotal role such a road would play. Federal funding will be necessary to study and implement this project. I urge you to consider the construction of the Kantishna Access Highway and look forward to your reply.

Enclosed with this letter is a synopsis of the Kantishna Access Highway and various correspondence in support of this proposal.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jack". The signature is written over the typed name "JBC:mcm" and the word "Enclosure".

JBC:mcm
Enclosure