



Promoting sensible transportation systems in Alaska

January 10, 2007

Eric Taylor
Transportation Planner
DOT&PF Division of Program Development
PO Box 112500
Juneau, Alaska 99801-2500

Dear Mr. Taylor:

Thank you very much for this opportunity to comment on the draft *2030 Let's Get Moving!* Statewide Long-Range Transportation Policy Plan update. The Alaska Transportation Priorities Project, or ATPP, works with statewide conservation organizations, transit advocates, community officials, engineers, cargo shippers, and others to promote sensible transportation systems and policies in Alaska. I have directed the Alaska Transportation Priorities Project from Anchorage since January 2007 and have been a Professional Engineer for over 15 years, licensed in both Alaska and Maryland.

In general, ATPP supports safe, economic, well-maintained, and environmentally-appropriate transportation systems in Alaska. Along these lines, ATPP believes the state's foremost transportation priority should be to "fix it first" (which does not mean no new system development) including spending adequately on safety, next the state should fund popular and widely-desired projects like the proposed Glenn/Seward Highway to Highway connection in Anchorage, and only last should the state spend money on costly and controversial transportation projects through or to undeveloped areas. ATPP considers these last projects "speculative or less important," a term used in the draft document on p. 27.

In general, the draft *2030* document does a good job describing the tough fiscal circumstances Alaska DOT is facing with respect to declining federal funding. The document could be strengthened, however, if it showed how reliant Alaska is on federal funding compared to other states (e.g., a comparative ranking of non-federal divided by federal funding for state transportation expenditures). The document also proposes sensible policy directions for DOT. Additionally, DOT and its consultants did a good job incorporating public input into the document during its development.

ATPP is concerned that the state's regional transportation plans are not in equivalently good shape, as discussed in Action 3.1. I am most familiar with the Southeast Alaska plan, and that plan contains recommendations that are both out of date and inconsistent with the direction of

this plan. ATPP also is concerned that Southcentral Alaska does not have a regional plan which inevitably will be needed by the 2030 timeframe. Currently the region is broken up into unconnected planning areas, i.e., Anchorage and the Mat-Su Borough, even as the two areas are becoming increasingly interconnected. Without a Southcentral regional plan, there will be inefficiencies in transportation infrastructure development and operation and a likely bias against non-road connectivity between these areas such as commuter rail.

ATPP also would like to see a new Action 2.9 in the 2030 plan which focuses on DOT providing increased information to the public on its proposed projects. This action, ultimately, will help DOT gain public support for its project decisions through open and transparent sharing of information and public feedback. Among the public “right-to-know” data-sharing measures ATPP suggests are:

1. Soliciting public input on all proposed transportation (road, bridge, transit, ferry, and airport) projects on an annual basis, not just federally-funded projects currently listed in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).
2. Posting on DOT’s website estimated costs per lane-mile for new and repaired/reconstructed roads and Average Daily Traffic to allow appropriate project cost comparisons.
3. Listing full (i.e., including past) project costs and revenues in the STIP, including project “cost estimate validation” as practiced by Washington state for projects costing over \$100 million.
4. Including a chart with the draft STIP showing which projects have been scaled back, delayed, and cancelled to assist the public in commenting on the draft.

Additionally, ATPP would like to see the 2030 plan recommend increased investment in public transportation in Alaska. Alaska is one of only two states which does not provide state funds for public transportation, meaning that the state loses out on federal match money as a result. Such a decision will both increase revenues and, if designed well, reduce emissions resulting in climate change. ATPP also encourages DOT to consider including an action item in the 2030 document on development of a public transportation division at DOT to ensure that transit receives sufficient attention in the future.

Along the same lines, DOT should consider including an action item in the 2030 document creating a ferry authority to ensure that the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) receives adequate attention and expertise. AMHS’ marketing and business development needs are different than most other DOT activities, and the current DOT structure appears to inhibit expansion in these critical areas. Public transportation agencies around the country have begun to hire marketing and business development experts to increase ridership and revenue – DOT should consider expanding Action 2.5 to reflect this approach.

With respect to the specific questions DOT asked:

1. Do you think Alaskans are served well by the transportation system today?

No. Alaska needs:

- Better road maintenance and preservation, and safety upgrades,
- Reliable, stable, and affordable ferry operations,
- More public transportation options and investment, including commuter rail from the Mat-Su Borough to Anchorage along existing rail lines,
- More non-motorized (i.e., walking, biking, skiing) transportation options, and
- Culverts repaired and replaced wherever necessary to ensure fish passage.

2. What do you consider the most critical transportation issues facing Alaska – today and into the future?

Two issues:

- Federal funding for transportation is in a steep decline and existing Alaskan transportation infrastructure requires lots of money for repairs, maintenance, and preservation without any dedicated state revenue source devoted to transportation.
- Climate change will require the Alaskan public, including commercial and industrial shippers, to reduce trips using fossil fuel-based transportation, and to make trips less carbon-intensive.

3. Overall, do you agree with the direction set by this plan?

Yes, the plan is a good analysis of the state’s transportation systems and includes sensible actions for setting spending priorities giving the limited funding available for transportation in Alaska.

Because the costs of construction have increased dramatically in recent years (see Exhibit 14, p. 46), however, we support increasing the proportion of transportation funds devoted to routine maintenance, preservation, and life cycle management rather than maintaining funding at current levels and raising or decreasing it proportionately as overall funding changes.

4. Based on the plan, what statewide priorities would you recommend for transportation investments?

In order of priority:

1. Maintenance, preservation, and life-cycle management
2. System development in areas of existing infrastructure
3. (Only if funds available) System development in areas without existing infrastructure

5. Of the actions listed, what would you consider the most important?

Action 1.2 is critically important, however there should be the following modifications:

1. “replacing ferries and transit vehicles that are old and no longer cost-effective” (p. 17) *with fuel-efficient vessels* needs to be added to the list of statewide strategic system development priorities.

2. Action 1.2 states that the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities will “Prioritize resources within categories of need – target system development to meet *Let’s Get Moving 2030* statewide strategic system development priorities” which are:

- Continue the modernization of the National Highway System in Alaska to meet contemporary design standards for mobility and safety.
- Provide demand-driven capacity to accommodate growth.
- Use the regional and Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) planning process to evaluate and propose the most beneficial projects.

The second bullet point should include the following language: “*This must be done using appropriate land use planning and multi-modal transportation options.*” See Action 3.6, p. 32, for more information on this point.

ATPP strongly supports Action 3.4, Reclassify and privatize industrial and resource roads, as an important new direction for DOT.

6. Are there additional actions that would strengthen the plan?

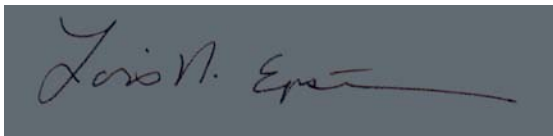
In addition to the proposed actions noted above, an action item recommending fewer state earmarks, especially earmarks with insufficient funding for projects, would be helpful. As discussed on p. 35, federal earmarks are problematic for several reasons.

Last, ATPP suggests that DOT fact-check the following two items:

- p. 22, 36 airports require capital improvements to meet both goals 1 and 2, with four of these airports needing improvements in both goals 1 and 2. Exhibit 6 shows 41 airports not meeting goals 1 or 2, i.e., not 40 as would be expected from the text in the previous column.
- P. 43, 2025 should read 2030.

Thank you again for your attention to ATPP’s comments.

Sincerely,



Lois N. Epstein, P.E.
Director