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Kawerak Transportation Program

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Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Attn: Comments to the Draft Northwest Alaska Transportation Plan
VIA E-mail

Dear NW Alaska Transportation Planning Team:

As a member of the NW Alaska Transportation Plan Advisory Committee I want to start with some general comments. First, the efforts initiated in the development of this plan including the extensive level of community meetings were outstanding. Second, I think the plan is a fairly accurate representation of many of the meetings that I personally participated. Third, I feel that the advisory committee was lesser involved as the process continued. Fourth, in Nome, it seemed, that once the state determined that we, the Bering Straits Region, did not constitute a major and significant economic benefit area for the state, the major effort for the plan was focused in those areas where economic benefit had been identified by the resource evaluation portion of the plan, which indicates that the State planners had over-riding directions that were not expressed either at the advisory committee meetings or at the numerous public meetings that I attended. Fifth, I believe the DOT&PF should have included other State and Federal agencies in their planning process, for instance Division of Community and Economic Development as well as Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (federally funded).

Kawerak, Inc., the Bering Straits Region tribes, as well as many tribes in throughout the state of Alaska have been working with funds provided by the Federal government to help identify transportation needs. Identifying needs is an ongoing effort and in Alaska research is often required because our conditions are dramatically different from those in other parts of the United States. For instance, we are currently developing a dust control research project. This project is meant to identify products and application methods that will meet the needs of our local communities, especially the need that any products used must not only be environmentally safe, but so safe that the product can be ingested. This because of the subsistence way of life valued and utilized by our indigenous residents, and the subsequent methods they use to preserve their food including meat racks for drying game and fish.

With the high cost of living in NW Alaska it is imperative that resources be conserved anyway possible. Because of this we strongly support structured infrastructure coordination. This is needed for many obvious and in many cases non-obvious reasons. Unlike urban Alaska, rural Alaska lacks infrastructure. When the DOT &PF has a project identified on the STIP what effort is made to coordinate with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, Village Safe Water, Alaska Village Electric Cooperative, the municipalities, etc? And I don't just mean in the project engineering stage but in the planning stage. We need to be developing a method for batching respective community projects. Most of us have a certain level of federal funding; this means that we are all required to meet various federal standards. We need to be coordinating our efforts and sharing work and results whenever and wherever possible. The plan is missing a planning coordination component. This needs to be addressed and included as part of the plan.

In addition, the plan would benefit from including any pertinent state policies and explanations of the processes for nominating and prioritizing projects for construction.

To viably meet the needs of Alaska, the plan must take into consideration the opportunity for viable economic development. In many ways the draft plan has just scratched the surface of what needs to be a far more in-depth investigation. As I indicated earlier, this is an effort that must be coordinated with other state and federal agencies. What is needed is a comprehensive plan that has transportation as one of its components. If this were done, I believe the current draft would require a greater level of comprehensive research and evaluation. With this said, I believe the current draft provides an excellent base for future efforts.

Should you have any questions regarding my comments please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

{s – Julianne E. Baltar}

Julianne E. Baltar, Director