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Gravina Access Project Redirected

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September 21, 2007, Juneau, Alaska - Governor Sarah Palin today directed the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to look for the most fiscally responsible alternative for access to the Ketchikan airport and Gravina Island instead of proceeding any further with the proposed \$398 million bridge.

"Ketchikan desires a better way to reach the airport, but the \$398 million bridge is not the answer," said Governor Palin. "Despite the work of our congressional delegation, we are about \$329 million short of full funding for the bridge project, and it's clear that Congress has little interest in spending any more money on a bridge between Ketchikan and Gravina Island," Governor Palin added. "Much of the public's attitude toward Alaska bridges is based on inaccurate portrayals of the projects here. But we need to focus on what we can do, rather than fight over what has happened." The Department of Transportation has approximately \$36 million in federal funds that will become available for other projects with the shutdown of the Gravina Island bridge project. Governor Palin has directed Commissioner Leo von Scheben to review transportation projects statewide to prepare a list of possible uses for the funds, while the department also looks for a more affordable answer for Gravina Island access.

"There is no question we desperately need to construct new roads in this state, including in Southeast Alaska, where skyrocketing costs for the Alaska Marine Highway System present an impediment to the state's budget and the region's economy," said von Scheben.

"The original purpose of this project was to improve access to Gravina Island, and we will continue to work with the community to help them attain that goal," von Scheben said.

The commissioner said his department would continue to work with local officials to discuss future plans for development of Gravina Island.

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