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Knik Arm Bridge project goes forward | Juneau Empire

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ANCHORAGE - The proposed \$700 million Knik Arm Bridge project is moving forward after clearing an important hurdle Wednesday.

The Federal Highway Administration signed an official record of decision, essentially allowing the proposed 3-mile span from Anchorage to Point Mackenzie to proceed.

"This has been a long time coming," said Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, who got a \$228 million earmark in 2005 for the project when he chaired the House Transportation Committee.

In 2008, when another Alaska bridge project - the so-called "bridge to nowhere" - became an example of out-of-control federal spending, funding for the bridges was stripped by Congress.

However, a deal was worked out that let the state keep the transportation money.

Former Gov. Sarah Palin killed the Gravina Island project because of the cost. The Knik River Bridge project remained alive.

The Federal Highway Administration needed to sign off on the project's environmental review by Dec. 20. In doing so, it also approved construction of 19 miles of access roads.

Lois Epstein - a member of Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions, an advisory committee on Anchorage's long-term transportation needs - said the project is not a slam dunk. She said big questions remain, including how the bridge will be funded.

More study needs to be done of whether revenues from the two-lane toll bridge can cover operating costs, Epstein said. And she said there needs to be consideration of what transportation projects won't get funded if the bridge is built.

"We don't have a lot of spare federal dollars. We are barely able to keep up with our needs before," Epstein said.