

[adn.com](https://www.adn.com)

Knik Arm bridge critics renew efforts to get long-awaited studies

Pat Forgey

4-5 minutes

Alaska Dispatch News

JUNEAU -- Sketchy Knik Arm Crossing traffic projections stalled the controversial project in the Legislature in 2013, and supporters rushed to promise new, more credible numbers that they said would prove the bridge viable.

More than a year later, studies that were to have taken a few months to complete are still not being released by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. But project skeptics continue to push for information to be made public.

The department has rejected public records requests for the studies from the Government Hill Community Council, which hoped to protect its neighborhood from the effects of the billion-dollar project by showing that it didn't pencil out.

DOT Regional Director Rob Campbell said it is too soon to release studies by consulting firms Cardno/Agnew::Beck and

CDM Smith, and that doing so would risk "misleading" the public with numbers that may change.

"In its current state, none of the work product provided to date by Cardno or CDM Smith provides information that might be useful to the public," said Campbell in his denial letter to the community council.

Elsewhere, Campbell said the studies weren't yet done, though the project team was working hard to complete them.

The state paid CDM Smith more than \$800,000 and Cardno nearly \$100,000 in the last fiscal year, according to the council.

So far, keeping the studies secret hasn't hurt the bridge project's prospects. Gov. Sean Parnell and the Alaska Legislature took over the stalled project from the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority and assigned it to the Transportation Department, which is still pushing it forward without getting the information.

The bridge would be partially funded with federal bonds, but it is not yet clear that anticipated tolls would be sufficient to pay off those bonds.

The action by the Legislature last session came despite warnings from economist Scott Goldsmith that acting without better information would put state finances at risk.

"Unfortunately we have no credible project analysis against which to measure the toll projections of project advocates or to evaluate the financing proposal," Goldsmith told the Legislature.

The community council is now appealing Campbell's public records decision, and saying that the "deliberative process"

exemption from disclosure requirements doesn't apply. That "exemption isn't for data or factual information, just for internal discussions and opinions," said Jamie Kenworthy, who has studied the project on behalf of the council.

In Campbell's rejection letter, the department simply claims the deliberative process exemption applies but provides no information why, the critics said.

"The conclusory statements in Director Campbell's letter do not support application of the deliberative process privilege, nor does he make the case that AKDOT&PF's interest in confidentiality outweighs citizens' right to know," wrote Stephanie Kesler, president of the council, in an administrative appeal of Campbell's denial sent Tuesday to DOT Commissioner Pat Kemp.

Kesler said they were disappointed that the transfer of the project to the Transportation Department didn't result in more openness with the public.

"I think we were all thinking that when it moved to DOT the process would become much more transparent," she said.

During his March testimony, Goldsmith said the studies were six months late, though deadlines vary; KABATA last year said they'd be done by end of 2013.

Now Campbell is saying that they'll be made public soon but acknowledged that statement may sound like "the check is in the mail."

Local news matters.

Support independent, local journalism in Alaska.

0 Comments

Alaska Dispatch News uses Civil Comments. Please keep your comments on-topic, focus on the issue and avoid personal insults, harassment and abuse. [Read the user guide.](#)