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News from Patrick Flynn » Firewall doused?

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It was fascinating to read a recent [article](#) regarding funding for KABATA, the state-sanctioned organization committed to building a Knik Arm Crossing without regard for its effects – financial, traffic or otherwise – on Southcentral Alaska. Even those who might be expected to tout development at any cost, like the Anchorage Daily Planet, are casting [doubts](#). But what's most interesting to me is the dichotomy between various representatives of our governor.

Let's start with his spokesperson's quote from the above-mentioned article, in response to legislation that would would commit another \$150M to the project, while also placing the state on the hook for cost overruns and revenue shortfalls:

“The pending legislation needs more public scrutiny to determine whether it is a wise way to finance the Knik Arm Crossing,” Parnell's spokeswoman, Sharon Leighow, said this week.

That sounds pretty reasonable, especially if it were true.

Unfortunately the governor's representatives on [AMATS](#), from DOT & DEC, harbor no such reservations. Instead they, with the help of the mayor, are advancing a new [Metropolitan](#)

[Transportation Plan](#) for Anchorage (slated to replace the existing Long-Range Transportation Plan) that includes a total reversal of state and local policy. Here's how their consultant's presentation described it:

The "firewall" for KABATA receiving additional State funds for construction has been removed.

This, despite a resolution passed by the Assembly back in 2007 [AR 2007-46(S)], signed by then-chair Dan Sullivan, which read, in part:

B. No funding currently planned for implementation of the existing Long-Range Transportation Plan shall be used to support construction or maintenance of any element of the Knik Arm Crossing, beyond that which is currently authorized. In addition, no local funds will be used for construction or maintenance of any element of this project.

Put another way; that was then, this is now; so KABATA should be free to suck up as much state and local funding as they can and, if other Anchorage-area projects suffer, such is life. Oh, and another thing in that same resolution:

E. Recognition that the highway-to-highway project and the Ingra-Gambell connection across Ship Creek are critical complementary projects linked to the Knik Arm Crossing. As part of this effort, it is understood that KABATA will fund the design and construction of the Ingra-Gambell connection in such a manner as to open by 2017. This process would require the reconnaissance/environmental phase of Ingra-Gambell connection to start in 2008.

That's also pretty interesting, particularly since the MTP process has revealed the previously-unannounced cessation of the planning process for the highway-to-highway project. In DOT's eyes it's flat dead, though the latest MTP draft has it (somewhat) resurrected only because I badgered the consultants so relentlessly that at least the planning phase is back (for now). Otherwise they were happy to continue dumping more traffic into downtown and Fairview without any realistic plan to handle that added volume.

So here's the question the governor should be expected to answer – if additional scrutiny is truly necessary (yes) will he act to ensure his representatives on AMATS restore the “firewall” in the pending MTP, thereby protecting funding for Anchorage-area transportation projects other than the Knik Arm Crossing?

It's a pretty easy question, and I'd like to think the answer would be yes, but life is rarely that simple. Last month I happened to run into a former public affairs consultant to KABATA and she had nothing good to say about either KABATA or the governor's hands-off approach. Unless and until the governor forcefully intervenes in this matter KABATA's inertia will continue, which means the remaining \$40M (of an original \$93M) will only be a fraction of the dollars spent on this boondoggle.

Finally, for those who recently asked why the MTP appears to be rushing through the public hearing process at Anchorage's Planning & Zoning commission, the answer is that this update is woefully behind schedule. No real conspiracy there, just a lack of focus on the fundamentals of the governing process. To the extent I played a part in those shortcomings please accept my

apologies.

Regards,

Patrick

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