

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



SENATOR JOE THOMAS

March 8, 2011

Commissioner Marc Luiken
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
P.O. Box 112500
Juneau, AK 99811-2500

Dear Commissioner Luiken,

I am writing to you in your position as a member of the board of the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority as well as Commissioner of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. Construction of the Knik Arm Bridge is a very significant transportation decision, and the expertise of your department is essential to evaluate Senate Bills 79 and 80, and to anticipate the impact of the bridge on our transportation system.

During the Senate Transportation Committee hearing on SB 79 and SB 80, Division of Program Development director Jeff Otteson testified in support of the legislation. Mr. Otteson stated that construction of the bridge would reduce the amount of money the state would otherwise have to spend on the Glenn Highway.

If this is the department position, please describe the Glenn Highway maintenance or expansion projects the department anticipates will not be undertaken if the bridge is built, and their estimated cost. I would like to know the department's current count of vehicles crossing the Glenn Highway bridge, your future traffic projections for the Glenn, and how they compare to the estimates in the Authority's February 25, 2011 Traffic and Toll Revenue Update Study prepared by WilburSmith Associates.

I would also appreciate an estimate of the cost of constructing, improving and maintaining the connecting roads carrying vehicles to the bridge, such as Knik Goose Bay Road, Burma Road, South Big Lake Road, and the phase 2 connection across Ship Creek to Ingra-Gambell, or other infrastructure the department thinks will be necessary to generate the bridge traffic anticipated in the toll revenue estimates or to respond to area development.

HTB

I read in the Authority's February 25, 2011 Traffic and Toll Revenue Update Study prepared by WilburSmith Associates (page 16) that the traffic demand model assumed the traffic network would include, "All projects listed in the official transportation planning documents" which included the AMATS TIP, the STIP, the Mat-Su Borough Long Range Transportation Plan and the Anchorage Bowl 2025 Long-Range Transportation Plan. It has been my experience that there is often not sufficient funding to complete all projects appearing in those transportation planning documents as scheduled. If toll revenue is dependent on their timely completion, it will be essential to anticipate and plan for those costs.

Please confirm with WilburSmith which road projects they assumed in their model and estimate the amount of state and federal funds the legislature will need to appropriate each year to meet those expectations.

Finally, I would appreciate your assessment of the impact on other department projects, of directing that amount of federal funding to connecting roads. In other words, what percentage of Alaska's anticipated federal highway funding will be needed to complete the traffic network on which toll revenue is based, and will that reduce the amount available for roads in the Northern and Southeast Regions and elsewhere in the Central Region?

I realize that these are not simple calculations, but I believe it is important that the legislature has the information necessary to understand the implications before acting on legislation.

Thank you for your assistance, Commissioner.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Senator Joe Thomas

Cc: Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority Chairman Michael Foster and Members,
Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority Executive Director Andrew Niemiec,
Senate Finance Committee