



March 13, 2017

Mr. Mike Vigue, Director  
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities  
Division of Program Development  
P.O. BOX 112500  
Juneau, AK 99811-2500

Mr. Vigue,

The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce (GFCC) currently represents over 750 businesses throughout Interior Alaska. The success of our members is directly linked to their ability to do business in an environment that has the necessary infrastructure to support and promote economic development. Our work on behalf of the business community is primarily supported by the volunteers that serve on the Chamber's public policy and advocacy committees.

The GFCC's Transportation Committee, one of the Chamber's longest-standing committees, advocates for improvement and growth in transportation infrastructure for the Interior and Northern Region. This includes the development of roads, rail, aviation, terminals, water access, pipelines, and communication/transmission lines, with the goal of enhancing Fairbanks as the Alaska and Northern Region transportation hub, and increasing the capability to service international traffic.

The GFCC is pleased to utilize this opportunity to provide comment on your recently released draft of Amendment #2 of the 2016-2019 State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). As expressed in our comments on Amendment #1, we continue to encourage the Department and the Administration to capture every last dollar of the federal funds available by having a viable list of projects to which the State can appropriate the necessary funds for the required State "match". Transportation spending is absolutely critical to the ongoing health of our infrastructure, is a crucial component of our economy, and helps to ensure the continued availability of qualified construction contractor and supply businesses.

With regard to the many program changes and/or additions made to the Northern Region's portion of the statewide STIP, we have the following general thoughts:

## EXECUTIVE PARTNERS

### DIAMOND

Alaska Airlines  
ExxonMobil  
Fairbanks Memorial Hospital & Denali Center  
Lockheed Martin  
Mt. McKinley Bank  
Ravn Alaska  
Vivlamore Companies

### PLATINUM

Alyeska Pipeline Service Co.  
ConocoPhillips  
Doyon, Limited  
Fred Meyer Stores  
GCI  
Golden Heart Utilities  
Kinross Fort Knox Mine  
Wells Fargo Bank Alaska

### GOLD

Alaska Communications  
BP Exploration  
Carlson Center  
Denali State Bank  
Design Alaska  
Doyon Utilities LLC  
First National Bank Alaska  
MAC Federal Credit Union  
Sumitomo Metal Mining Pogo LLC  
TOTE Maritime Alaska  
Usibelli Coal Mine  
WAL-MART Stores, Inc.  
Westmark Fairbanks Hotel & Fairbanks Princess Riverside Lodge

### SILVER

Alaska USA  
Alaska Railroad  
Everts Air Cargo, Everts Air AK  
Exclusive Paving/University Redi-Mix  
Fairbanks Daily News-Miner  
Fairbanks Natural Gas  
Flowline Alaska  
Gene's Chrysler, Jeep & Dodge  
Golden Valley Electric Association  
Hale & Associates, Inc.  
Hilcorp Alaska, LLC  
JL Properties, Inc.  
Key Bank  
Lynden  
Northrim Bank  
PDC Inc. Engineers  
Personnel Plus  
Sam's Club  
Seekins Ford Lincoln  
Sourdough Fuel  
Spirit of Alaska Federal Credit Union  
State Farm Insurance  
Tammy Randolph, Agent  
Ed Randolph, Agent  
Tanana Valley Clinic  
TDL Staffing  
Teamsters Local 959  
Tower Hill Mines-Livengood Gold Project  
University of Alaska Fairbanks  
Verizon Wireless  
Yukon Title Company

### Richardson Highway:

Amendment #2 moves \$93,300,000 in phase 4 money for the Richardson Highway from the current STIP to beyond 2019. In the past 2 years there have been 6 oil spills reported to the DEC resulting from trucks accidents on the Richardson Highway, in addition to the tip-over of the RR bridge girder load in an area where this proposed amendment has removed construction dollars meant to widen and realign the highway. Within the Northern Region, it pulls \$42,600,000 in phase 4 money from the Parks Highway, a major intrastate highway and the link between the Port of Anchorage and Prudhoe Bay. Within the Fairbanks North Star Borough, Amendment #2 pushes \$44,200,000 in phase 4 money beyond 2019, yet Fairbanks is about to experience an influx of new permanent residents and workers as a result of the significant military projects on Ft. Wainwright, Ft. Greely, Eielson AFB and Clear Air Force Station.

### Fairbanks Area:

We appreciate that University Avenue Widening project, Need ID 29655 and 31155, is moving to construction this year. This is a very high priority for Fairbanks, especially in light of the frequency of crashes at the University/Johansen/Geist Road intersection and concerns about the pedestrian facilities on the bridge. However, several other Northern Region projects are not even displayed as Illustrative or AC through FFY19. These projects are nearly ready to construct and include the following Need IDs: 2118- Richardson Highway MP 159-167, Need ID 2119-Richardson Highway MP 167-173, and Need ID 2130- Richardson Highway 353-357 Access and Safety Improvements. Other projects that should be included are Need ID 3843, Airport Way/South Cushman Intersection Reconstruction. It is important that this project continue to move forward, as this intersection had 103 crashes in the most recent five years of crash data, including one fatality. The crash rate is also very high, 1.94 compared to a statewide average of 1.47.

The Airport Way West, Need ID 15685, intersection improvement project has been in design for over 15 years and will be ready for construction funding in FFY18. The project would complete the Airport Way rehabilitation work through the full corridor, with the exception of the intersection at Cushman, and address additional access and pedestrian issues near the Fairbanks International Airport.

DOT has put forth significant effort and resources towards “One DOT”, emphasizing a focus on the State as a whole and de-regionalizing dollars and personnel. We have heard many times that there are no longer “regional allocations” for projects. Therefore, it is concerning to note the significant allocation of regionally unrestricted earmark dollars being returned to the regions of mega projects that are no longer being built, based on a political promise. These funds should have been distributed through the full project vetting and scoring process, as it is unlikely that the numerous projects funded in the STIP hold their own against the many deficient roads in Fairbanks and other areas of the State.

We recognize the FHWA guidance to reduce the Illustrative component of the STIP, however we continue to encourage the State to maximize the illustration of projects so that the shelf is stocked for future opportunities. This keeps projects on the books for the project design teams,

and can allow us to maximize our construction program if other projects fall to right-of-way or environmental permitting/authorization complications. Please continue to keep a workable portion of these illustrative projects “in play”. Overall, the STIP includes significantly larger projects, which historically “slip”. Reducing projects assumes that each remaining project is likely to be on schedule, with potential impacts to the ability to actually have projects available to obligate dollars. Without enough project starts there may be gaps in construction, which represent a loss of opportunity to the economy of the State in the use of all available federal money.

We continue to encourage DOT&PF to beware of too much emphasis on “shave and pave” projects. These projects can tend to move up in the STIP and construction process because other projects with better, more in-depth solutions aren’t ready to move beyond the design phase due to their complexity, causing them to remain in idle. Furthermore, when allocating funds to project design, consider the impact to construction in 2020 and beyond of not having enough design and right-of –way dollars in the process in the near years.

In light of the prior comments regarding projects in process - at a time when more Federal dollars may become available due to the President’s intention to invest in infrastructure, we are concerned that the State of Alaska may not be well prepared to receive available monies and seize the opportunity. Please maximize this in the next amendment to the greatest extent allowable within the Federal Highways parameters.

Again, the draft Alaska State Rail Plan identifies, as its most cost effective priority, a Fairbanks Area Rail Plan to address the road/rail conflicts within the Fairbanks area. The Chamber continues to request that the State prioritize this plan and include it in the STIP.

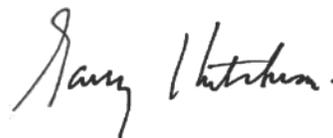
We would like to address one issue of process and convenience instead of funding amounts. The DOT&PF NR planning staff have been a marvelous resource in understanding the details of the STIP and additional information regarding the details of projects, but it would be easier to work through the dozens of projects if the website included a downloadable Excel presentation on the entire statewide bundle of projects, so that comparisons could be made and the regional packages more “transparent” in terms of year-to-year summations and region-to-region comparisons.

Finally, we again want to state that the current Federal focus on safety and congestion is important, but we remind DOT&PF to continue to consider the importance of access to lands, possibilities, resources and opportunity as the STIP moves forward through the amendment process.

Respectfully,



Marisa Sharrah  
President/CEO  
Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce



Garry Hutchison  
Board Chair  
Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce