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Senator John Cowdery

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Committee Urges Knik Arm Crossing Study Link Would Improve Access, Open Land, Testimony Shows

(ANCHORAGE) – Members of the [Senate Transportation Committee](#) heard testimony today from engineers, developers and citizens who said a bridge linking Anchorage with Point MacKenzie is both beneficial and feasible, and that the Legislature should do all it can to support the project.

Sen. John Cowdery (R-Anchorage), chairman of the committee, said he called the meeting to facilitate progress on a long-discussed proposal that is drawing increasing attention with the growing ability of Alaska's congressional delegation to secure federal transportation funds for state infrastructure projects.

"The benefits of a bridge across Cook Inlet have been plain to see for decades," said Cowdery. "It would mean new land for homes and businesses, reduced travel times from Anchorage to the Mat-Su Valleys and the Interior, and improved public safety in terms of alternative transportation links. Given these benefits and Alaska's current strength in Washington, the real question is not whether to build it, but why hasn't been built yet?"

Cowdery said Rep. Don Young, chairman of the U.S. House Transportation Committee, could help secure up to \$2 million toward the estimated cost of updating environmental impact studies done on earlier project crossing proposals. If the permitting and construction were fast tracked, the crossing could be open for traffic as soon as 2006.

[Senate Bill 45](#), sponsored by Sen. Jerry Ward (R-Anchorage) calls for the state to appropriate \$1 million to help fund the studies, and to establish a causeway authority to issue bonds to pay the expected 20 percent state match of the project. SB 45 is currently before the Senate Finance Committee.

More than 80 people packed the hearing room, most of them voicing strong support for the Knik crossing project. Dennis Nottingham, a long-time Alaska engineer, said Alaska already has the in-state engineering expertise to build an earthquake-safe bridge using ice- and ship-resistant pilings driven into solid rock underlying Cook Inlet's mud, similar to those used for oil and gas platforms.

Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna Borough officials, developers, shippers, environmentalists and others called for thorough study and planning of any eventual Inlet crossing project, to provide the maximum possible accommodation of car, truck, rail, pipeline, and communications links across Cook Inlet. Cowdery said he plans to invite representatives of marine, rail and truck shippers; port and development directors, and other interested parties to another committee meeting in a few weeks to continue coordinating efforts to support and plan the project.

In addition to Cowdery and Ward, other legislators attending in person or by teleconference included Reps. Joe Green (R-Anchorage); Fred Dyson (R-Eagle River) Vic Kohring (R-Wasilla); and Sens. Gary Wilken (R-Fairbanks) and Robin Taylor (R-Wrangell.)

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