

# Alaska State Legislature

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## Senate Transportation Committee

**For Immediate Release:** Dec. 3, 2001

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## Sen. Cowdery Calls for a New Long Range Transportation Planning Committee

(ANCHORAGE) - The Knik Arm bridge, a causeway from Anchorage to Fire Island, and expansion at the Anchorage port, are just a few proposed projects promising to benefit Alaska's infrastructure. The problem is with so many groups pushing their project and vying for limited amounts of funding, many wonder if any of the projects will ever be seen to completion.

In a Senate Transportation Committee hearing, attended last week by a standing room only crowd, Sen. John Cowdery (R-Anchorage) introduced his idea of creating a new ad hoc committee to look at the transportation needs in Southcentral Alaska and along the Railbelt. The committee would be tasked with reviewing, prioritizing and moving projects forward. An idea which Cowdery said was embraced by those in attendance.

"Of the nearly 100 people who came to this hearing, some have been long time political adversaries of mine," Cowdery said. "That would not have been evident today though, we all worked together and came up with a plan we think will work."

Sen. Jerry Ward (R-Kenai), Transportation Committee vice-chair, said he too was very pleased that those pivotal to working on transportation projects in Alaska were willing to work together and develop a plan for the future.

"I am very excited that the time has come when we will start planning this state's transportation needs based on a generation-to-generation outlook, rather than a day-to-day approach," Ward said. "The willingness shown by those who attended the hearing to work together, leads me to believe we will soon be able to do away with duplicate studies, and the overlapping bureaucratic clutter that prevents us from meeting the transportation needs of the state."

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Cowdery pointed out that 30 percent to 35 percent of all project funding goes into reports and studies. Cowdery said he hopes this new committee will be able to cut through the process by sharing resources, development planning and prioritizing, and presenting a single unified voice when approaching federal and state legislators for funding.

“I believe we have a real opportunity to achieve many of these projects if we work together,” Cowdery said. “Our congressional delegation wants to see a coordinated approach and an overall plan; so does the Legislature’s Transportation and Finance committees.

Former Governor Bill Sheffield, who is now the interim port director for the Municipality of Anchorage, said that such a committee could share resources to save time and money. For example, an environmental impact study for the Knik Arm bridge could be expanded to include port expansion.

Though details about the proposed committee still need to be worked out, everyone at the meeting seemed positive about this being the right move at the right time, Cowdery said.

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