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Senator Jerry Ward
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Ward Looks Outside the Box for Fiscal Fixes

(JUNEAU) – Sen. Jerry Ward, (R-Kenai) introduced legislation today that would create a combined “Alaska Marine and Rail Transportation Authority.”

According to Ward, [Senate Bill 271](#), when passed, would immediately save the state a minimum of \$15 million the first year and a potential for increased savings in the future.

Ward says SB 271 would allow the Alaska Marine Highway System, which is currently operating in the red, to become a self sufficient entity and would give the system the opportunity to fully fund itself without placing increased fiscal burdens on the state’s general fund.

“In this time of concern over the state’s fiscal situation we need to look at fresh ideas,” said Ward. “Any state funded entity(s) that can be structured to be self-sufficient, thus reducing the strain on the general fund, should most certainly be given that opportunity.”

Ward’s legislation would merge the Alaska Marine Highway system, currently operating at a deficit, with the Alaska Railroad, which annually generates large surpluses. Ward says by placing both state transportation systems under a single new authority, the people of Alaska would benefit through more efficient management and operation, as well as reduced costs. The end result is better coordination of the state’s transportation needs.

“One of the main goals here is to help the Marine Highway become self-sufficient,” said Ward. “Self-sufficiency would give the Marine Highway System a vehicle to improve services and fully fund itself, without placing undue burdens on the general fund. Who better to pair the Marine Highway with than another transportation mainstay, the railroad, which has already demonstrated that self-sufficiency does work.”

Such a move could save the general fund millions of dollars almost immediately, as well as promote development of our land.

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