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Representative William K. Williams

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Williams Secures \$40 Million for the Marine Highway \$8 Million Increase For Vessel Operations

Representative Bill Williams (R-Saxman), Co-Chair of the House Finance Committee, today proposed an amendment to the Governor's Fiscal Year (FY) 2005 Operating Budget to increase funding for the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) by 25 percent beyond the Governor's request. "The ferry system is our highway in Southeast, and I wanted to ensure that our highway is adequately funded through next year," Williams said.

The Governor's proposed budget included \$32 million of state funding for AMHS operations. The state funds are combined with the previous year's AMHS revenue to pay for the total authorized budget for system operations. Representative Williams' amendment, which passed the House Finance Committee this afternoon, will increase state funding to \$40 million. "During my 12 years in Juneau, I have become very familiar with the ferry system's budget," said Williams, who is completing his 4th year as Co-Chair of the House Finance Committee. "Since the Governor introduced the budget in December, AMHS projections show increased fuel costs of at least \$3.5 million. I want to be absolutely sure the ferry system has enough resources to operate next year without having to reduce service to our communities," Williams said.

The House Finance Committee today began considering amendments to the FY 2005 operating budget. Representative Williams says he expects the Committee will move the budget to the House Floor by early next week. Once the operating budget passes the House, it goes to the State Senate for consideration.

"I've talked to many of my colleagues in the House, from Anchorage and around the state, and I'm very happy that they agree with me that adequately funding ferry service is an important priority," Williams added. "I wasn't going to let the operating budget pass out of House Finance without taking care of our transportation system."

A thriving Marine Highway System is a key component of Representative Williams' continuing effort to make Ketchikan the maritime center for Alaska. Shipyard completion, Ward Cove redevelopment, the AMHS headquarters move to Ketchikan, and well maintained harbors are other key elements in making this vision a reality.

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