MEMORANDUM

TO: Kim Kiefer, City Manager

FROM: Ronie Watt, Engineering Director
       Dale Pernula, Community Development Director

RE: Draft Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan Scoping Comments

DATE: July 14, 2009

ADOT has requested comments regarding the Reasonable Range of Alternatives and the Initial Planning Assumptions for the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan Scoping Process. Comments are due by 7/31/09, below are draft comments for review by the Committee of the Whole.

Reasonable Range of Alternatives:
Within the five surface alternatives considered by DOT are a broad range of concepts that encompass many of the transportation improvements discussed and debated over the years. Alternatives exist for the improvement, expansion, reduction or contraction of the Ferry system and alternatives exist for the expansion of the regional road system.

We recommend that the COW consider recommending to DOT the following comments:
1. No one Alternative is likely to be ultimately selected or recommended, the selection is likely to be made up of components selected "cafe style" from the Alternatives.
2. Under the Develop Highways option, Add the following:
   North Douglas Crossing
   West Douglas Extension
   West Douglas Ferry Terminal

With these additions, it appears that the Reasonable Range of Alternatives will include an appropriate array of improvements for consideration.

Initial Planning Assumptions:
First, the planning assumptions paint the gloomiest outlook possible – fuel prices, labor costs, budgeted expenditures for transportation in the region, rates of travel, and construction costs are all projected to negatively impact transportation systems and transportation project funding.

While some of these assumptions may prove to be true, an equally positive outlook could be taken. For example, great energy efficiencies in energy consumption could be achieved for cars and boats, mining development could increase regional population, tourism visitation could grow, property values in some communities could increase due to demand for vacation or retirement homes, and development of smaller scale timber manufacturing could grow. In short, the Initial Planning Assumptions lacks a positive vision for Southeast Alaska.

We recommend that the COW support the provision of comments reflecting a positive vision for the people, economy and transportation network in Southeast.

Second, the scoping document suggests a ceiling on expenditures, and suggests that short and long term transportation planning will become more important in the decision making process. This comment implies a potential short circuiting of the normal political process. Successive Assemblies, Legislatures and Administrations will all want to implement improvements that reflect their priorities, and none will want to bend their wishes to comply with a prior plan. Funding programs may arise that allow for expenditures beyond an estimated cap. For example, the ARRA (Stimulus funds) is an example of where funding expectations changed in a short period of time.

We recommend that the COW support the provision of comments supporting the annual involvement by Southeast communities in the transportation funding process.