

COASTAL TRAIL EXTENSION

GENERAL STATEMENT:

While I firmly believe that Anchorage must build new roads and connect its road system, I support the construction of trails, sidewalks and/or pathways, as appropriate along those roads. However, I also believe we must repair and maintain the trails we already have before we build new trails, including the Coastal Trail.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS:

In October, 2006, the Mayor made a new proposal for the Coastal Trail. He pegged the cost at \$24 million dollars. Frankly, I do not believe we can afford the Coastal Trail extension as the Mayor has currently proposed, particularly when we do not repair and adequately maintain for our current trail network.

TAKING OF PRIVATE PROPERTY:

Money aside, I do not support taking private property or building this trail across residents' back yards. The current proposal would require condemning parts of approximately 90 parcels private property. I oppose taking private property for recreational uses, particularly to this significant extent.

TRAILS IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS:

Some suggest building a series of trails through our neighborhoods to avoid taking people's property. They say this option would save money and serve more people. This option would not be a "coastal" trail. However, an inland series of trails is another issue altogether. As stated above, we should be building trails, sidewalks and/or pathways when we build new roads. However, if we decide to build a Coastal Trail, it should be located along the coast and not inland as currently proposed.

ALTERNATIVES:

I have met with engineers and other who have suggested an alternative route along the coast, at the "toe" of the bluffs. This route would avoid taking private property. However, this route would require small changes in the boundaries of the existing tidal wildlife refuge. The

changes would reduce the refuge by approximately 10 acres. However, this loss of refuge acreage could be replaced by a transfer of Heritage Land Bank land (also, tide lands) immediately adjacent to the existing refuge to the refuge.

By eliminating some access points, by not condemning 90 parcels of private property and by exchanging a small portion of refuge land for heritage land bank land, the cost of the project is estimated at less than \$15 million dollars. The proposed construction schedule, over ten (10) years, would probably make the project feasible financially (\$1.5 million per year for 10 years).

I have also discussed this alternative with opponents of the coastal trail. In those discussions I have learned about the cost and engineering issues which still need to be addressed. It is not entirely clear that the trail can be built solely at the "toe" of the bluff due to serious engineering considerations. However, this alternative needs to be explored.

PUBLIC SUPPORT:

We are being told over and over by the advocates of the Coastal Trail that the public overwhelmingly supports the trail. They rely for that claim on a recent survey by Craciun Research Group.

I have read the Craciun poll on this subject. The question on Coastal Trail was written as follows:

"Assuming the details could be worked out to your satisfaction; do you favor or oppose....extending the Coastal Trail?"

I have some considerable experience with surveying. In addition, my undergraduate degree is in economics. Statistical analysis and polling were part of my education. The question as posed by Craciun is close to being one of the worst questions I have ever seen if the intent of the survey is to truly gauge public opinion. If all the details of anything are worked out to my satisfaction and no one mentions any costs, probably I going to be in support. The Craciun survey is simply not polling and the answer does not gauge the public's opinion.

If one truly wants to know the public's opinion on the Coastal Trail, I would suggest a series of questions as follows:

1) Are you aware of the proposed extension of the Coastal Trail from Kincaid Park to Potter Marsh?

2) Do you support or oppose the extension of the Coastal Trail?

3) If you knew that the extension of the Coastal Trail involved the taking of portions of 90 parcels of private property, would you still favor/oppose the extension of the Coastal Trail?

4) If you knew that the cost of the extension of the Coastal Trail is projected to cost \$24,000,000.00, would you still favor/oppose the extension of the Coastal Trail?

5) If you knew that 45% of the trail was inland and not on the coast, would you still favor/oppose the extension of the Coastal Trail?

These questions are just off the top of my head, but if asked of a truly random sample of citizens (as was also not done in the Craciun poll), one would get a much truer picture of the support for/Opposition to the Coastal Trail.

MY POSITION ON THE ISSUE:

Polling aside, given all of the considerations discussed above, my position on the coastal trail extension is as follows:

1) We should not condemn private residential property for recreational purposes as the current proposal requires;

2) We should not intrude into people's yards and homes as the current route requires;

3) We should build only what we can afford to build and what we can afford to maintain and we should repair and maintain what we have first before building new;

4) If we can do all this, then we should build the coastal trail at the toe of the bluffs so that it is truly coastal and we should do so using existing public lands.

REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/INFORMATION:

As this is an ongoing unresolved issue, I would appreciate being educated further on this matter. If anyone has any comments about the trail or about what I have outlined above, please let me know. You can e mail me at dancoffey@gci.com.