

## **THE TRUTH ABOUT THE LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

After reading so much misinformation and some outright fabrications in the media and elsewhere and in hopes of setting the record straight, the following information is provided for those of you who truly want to know what the Assembly did with regard to the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and why the Assembly made the recommendations that it did.

### **THE PROCESS:**

By Law, the Assembly is charged with reviewing the Long Range Transportation Plan and, within 45 days of it being presented to the Assembly, making recommendations to the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions working group which consists of the Mayor, two (2) representatives of the State of Alaska (Department of Transportation Commissioner and Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner) and two Assembly Members (Debbie Ossiander and Chris Birch).

By Law, the Assembly is an integral part of the process of adopting a new Long Range Transportation Plan. To say that the Assembly violated the process is either a total misunderstanding of the process or is a fabrication.

### **THE DRAFT LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN:**

The Begich Administration is responsible for preparing the draft Plan. After the Administration finished drafting the Plan, it was presented first to the Planning and Zoning Commission for hearing and then to the Assembly.

Planning and Zoning Process: After a public hearing before the Planning and Zoning Commission, the draft Plan was sent to the Assembly along with dozens of proposed amendments made by P & Z. These amendments were reviewed by staff and by the AMATS technical people. There were literally 15 pages of proposed amendments which were submitted to the Assembly from P & Z and the technical staff, a total of 85 proposed amendments.

The Assembly Process: The Assembly held two (2) public hearings. One public hearing was held in conjunction with the Planning and Zoning Commission. The other was an Assembly only public hearing. In addition, the Assembly held a lengthy work session on the draft Plan.

After the two public hearings, individual Assembly Members, myself included, talked with and listened to the transportation experts from the City and from the State Department of Transportation. The proposals for each Assembly Member's District, as well as the area wide proposals, were reviewed by Assembly Members. During this same 45 day review period, most Assembly members were also discussing issues with their constituents.

After the two (2) public hearings and the work session, the Assembly met in public session on two (2) nights to discuss the draft Plan. During the deliberations, less than 50 amendments were proposed by Assembly members as compared to 85 proposed by P & Z and the technical staff. These amendments were discussed and debated for over eight (8) hours in public session.

Answering the Allegations that the Assembly "Violated" the Public Process: With regard to the "public process" which the Assembly allegedly "violated", I heard from several people who were involved personally in the process. These people complained about how the special interests dominated the process to the exclusion of other views. One of those participants sent me a letter, a copy of which is set out below:

October 27, 2005

Assembly Members  
Municipality of Anchorage  
632 W. 6th Avenue Suite 160,  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Re: Long-range transportation plan

Dear Assembly members:

As a member of the Anchorage Long Range Transportation Plan Roundtable Committee, I commend you for your recent actions changing the proposed transportation plan for Anchorage.

When the process was started in 2003, the Committee was evenly balanced between business and community representatives. After a few meetings, many business representatives quit attending because it was apparent that a few individuals had a separate agenda and basically high-jacked the meeting agendas. While I endured meetings longer than most business representatives, I'm ashamed to admit that I also withdrew in frustration prior to the development of the final report.

I take exception to the Mayor's comment that the changes you adopted "go against the public's wishes" and "it's eight assembly members against the community." I hope you realize that a substantial portion, if not a majority, of the community support your actions.

I recognize that some individuals play the game of serving on advisory boards better than I do, but the process that developed the long-range plan was a sham and should be closely examined before it is followed again. It was almost as if someone preordained the outcome through the selection of committee members.

On behalf of ----- and our more than 600 member firms, thank you!

I HAVE LEFT OFF THE SIGNATURE LINE OUT OF RESPECT FOR THE PERSONS PRIVACY, BUT THE LETTER IS ABSOLUTELY REAL.

My conclusion, after hearing so many comments about how the special interests took over the process and after receiving this letter, was that the Administration presented the Assembly with a flawed, politicized document that did not reflect the views of the vast majority of people in Anchorage. That conclusion greatly influenced the recommendations that I supported.

Answering the Allegation that the Public Supports the extension of the Coastal Trail: I have read the Craciun Research poll which is cited as "proof" of the public's support. 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 don't know if you have any familiarity with polling, but I have some experience as well as a degree is in Economics. Statistics and polling were part of my college education. This question is close to being one of the worst I have ever seen insofar as it absolutely fails to determine

public opinion accurately.

I would suggest a series of questions as follows if one truly wants to know public opinion.

1) Are you aware of the proposed extension of the Coastal Trail?

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?

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

Finally, the Assembly did not say "No" to the Coastal Trail. The Assembly said "No" to a \$24 million dollar plan which would take parts of 90 parcels of private property and would, for over 40+% of its route, not even be "Coastal".

The City and the State need to work out a way to build the trail at the "toe of the bluff". However, according to Fish and Game officials, the refuge is so sacred that not even an exchange of 100 acres of tidelands owned by the MOA for use of 10 acres of refuge can be permitted. So, instead of using public land, the Assembly was asked to support the taking of private land for a public recreational purpose and paying over \$24 million to build this project. The Assembly said "No" to this project.

**THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ASSEMBLY:**

The Assembly adopted those recommendations that it believed to be in the best interests of the City of Anchorage. Generally, those recommendations are as follows:

1) ROADS: The Assembly recommended, as its number one priority, building new roads to complete the City's road grid system. This is the same priority that the draft Plan established. The draft Plan called for us to complete, in

the words of the Plan, the "missing links".

The draft Plan states that over 95% of the travel in Anchorage is by the Automobile. Of course transit buses use the same roads so completing the grid helps transit too.

The maps submitted with the draft Plan delineated the gaps in our road system and identified the best ways in which to address those gaps. The Assembly supported those projects which completed the "missing links".

2) TRANSIT: The Assembly recommended, as its number one transit priority, that the Transit Restructuring Plan which started in 2003 and is to end in 2007 should be completed. This is the same priority that the draft Plan established.

Transit serves approximately 1% of our citizens. The draft Plan said it would require a three-fold increase in the annual budget (from \$8.6m to \$26.5m) to increase rider ship from 1% to 3%. Under the existing Restructuring Plan, rider ship is expected to double.

The taxpayers of Anchorage currently subsidize transit to the tune of \$2.77 per ride. This means that every time someone rides the bus, it costs the taxpayers \$2.77. The draft Plan projected the subsidy to rise to \$3.09 per ride under the highest cost alternative or drop to \$2.64 per ride under the Restructuring Plan.

Transit is slated to receive \$500,000,000.00 over the next 20 years from a total projected 20-year transportation budget of \$3,000,000,000.00. That's 17% of the total transportation budget.

The draft Plan stated that Anchorage does not have the population density or the dominant central business district that makes mass transit successful (Page 87 of the draft Plan)

The draft Plan stated that even if the 2020 Comprehensive plan were fully implemented with 80% of new housing being in town centers, employment centers and along the transit corridors, "roadway traffic volume difference would be] virtually imperceptible". (Page 75 of the draft Plan). In other words, a basic flaw was identified in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan when it comes to mass transit.

3) TRAILS: The Assembly believes that building new trails when the existing trails are not maintained and repaired is not good public policy.

The Assembly supports the building of new sidewalks, pathways and/or trails that are associated with the building of new roads.

The Assembly did not support the construction of the coastal trail extension at a cost of \$24,000,000.00 requiring the taking of 90 parcels of private property.

4) COSTS: The Assembly believes that examining the costs of various projects and transportation alternatives is absolutely essential to an effective Transportation Plan.

The LRTP is a policy guide, not a funding guide. While budgets and funding are discussed in the Plan, these decisions are made on a project-by-project basis either by AMATS, by the State of Alaska or by the Municipality of Anchorage. The Plan DOES NOT provide any funding for any project.

**DAN COFFEY'S PERSONAL EFFORTS:**

I would like to inform my constituents what I did personally when I was presented with the draft LRTP in late August and given 45 days for review and recommendation.

When I got the Plan, the first thing I did was read the 174 page document and make notes on issues. I re-read the draft Plan several times over the next few weeks. In short, I studied the draft Plan in detail.

I began talking and listening to people in the City Government, the State Government (traffic engineers, planners, financial people) and those in the private sector who were knowledgeable about transportation. I read additional materials submitted by various special interest groups. I read additional materials provided by staff. I read the Planning and Zoning Commission recommendations.

When the Assembly held public hearings, I participated in those hearings. During the hearings I told people about my concerns (the north access into the U-Med District, the

over emphasis on transit and trails at the expense of roads, maintain the roads and trails we have, etc.). I asked questions of the participants in the public hearings on these issues.

After the hearings, I conducted outreach to people and institutions that I knew would be impacted by my proposed amendments to the draft Plan. This included discussions with Providence Hospital, UAA and APU on the north access to the U-Med District. All three (3) institutions supported my amendment to conduct a study to determine the best north access to the U-Med District.

I spent more time reading more material and more time talking and listening to more people before I prepared the amendments that I submitted.

Finally, I listened to my colleagues on the Assembly when the Administration and the individual Members they presented their amendments.

My votes on the amendments and the draft Plan reflect my studied opinion as to what is in the best interests of the City of Anchorage.

**THE REASONS FOR MY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

In addition to my conclusion that the draft Plan did not represent the views of most citizens, my efforts at understanding transportation issues for our City led me to conclude that much of the draft Plan was flawed. The emphasis in the draft Plan on transit, on trails and on the walkability coupled with the anti-automobile rhetoric, all seemed to me to have little or nothing to do with the City as it exists today or as it will exist into the foreseeable future.

I worked for a Plan based on both reality and on foresight. I opposed that I saw as a flawed vision of what our City is and what it ought to be; a flawed vision brought forward by a special interest group with an agenda which includes, among other things, the idea that government knows best, that government should coerce citizens into behaving in ways they believe they know better than the rest of us; and that views personal choice and personal freedom as suspect ideas.

To me, the reality of Anchorage is that we are not a compact, high population density city with a dominant core where the primary means of transportation should be mass transit.

We are spread out from Knik to Girdwood in the largest City in America in terms of area.

We have 3 or 4 core areas of high employment, places where people have to go to work. These are Downtown, Midtown, the U-Med District and the Dimond Center Area.

We are a winter City where it is cold and dark for 5 months out of the year. We use the automobile as the primary means of transportation and will do so for years to come. As noted in the draft Plan, we are going to be dependent upon the automobile for transportation for the foreseeable future.

We must plan and provide for this reality.

To me, personal choice and personal freedom without harming ones neighbors in their choices and their freedoms is what our Country is all about; a "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" point of view. I support that ideal.

As a result of these facts and my personal beliefs, my efforts were focused on making sure the Plan was reality based, not based on some fictionalized, idealized, behavior modified, dream of what we should be. This does not mean we don't have trails, sidewalks, transit, etc. These transportation alternatives are important, but they are not primary.

The reality is that people go work, go to church, go shopping, go to movies, sporting events, and visit their friends, etc by use of the automobile. While there are problems that are clearly caused by automobiles, we need to address those problems, not adopt a Long Range Transportation Plan that condemns the automobile. As a result, my focus was on building new roads, keeping the transit Restructuring Plan in place, repairing and maintaining our existing trails before we build new ones. In my view, these are the priorities for a transportation plan that works.