



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

**Department of Transportation and
Public Facilities**

SOUTHCOAST REGION PLANNING

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June 15, 2015

Mark Gorman
100 Lincoln Street
Sitka, Alaska 99835

Dear Mr. Gorman,

This will reply to your letter dated May 15th, 2015 regarding the Needs List, establishment of a Regional Transportation Planning Organization, and aviation planning.

As you are aware from our March 16, 2015 letter, Southcoast Region is updating the Needs List. The Needs List is a list of many transportation needs that have been identified by staff, community representatives, and the general public. A project must be added to the Needs List before it can be included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). However, there is no priority ranking in the Needs List and a project can be added at any time, even concurrently with a STIP request, therefore there is flexibility in managing the Needs List. For this update, Southcoast Region staff chose to review the list and remove those Needs which may be completed, outdated, or redundant to allow a cleaner and shorter list to be sent out for community review. This is likely why many of the projects from the City's Resolution 2010-22 were no longer on the Needs List that was sent for review. Our Highway Planner, Marie Heidemann, has contacted you to determine which projects from the Resolution 2010-22 the City would like to have re-activated in the Needs List. She will also add the FY2016 priorities that were sent and delete the two projects that are successfully moving forward. Thanks for helping us with this update of the Needs List.

In your letter you also re-iterated your request for establishment of a Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO). The decision to establish an RTPO would not be made at the regional level and would require devoted planning funds. Such funds would come from the State's transportation allocation and would reduce the amount of funds going directly to projects. The Southcoast Region currently looks to several groups that help to facilitate an open forum for seeking and provision of advice regarding transportation in the region. These groups include the Marine Transportation Advisory Board (MTAB), Southeast Conference, Prince of Wales Community Advisory Council (POWCAC), Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference (SWAMC), and the Kodiak Archipelago Rural Regional Leadership Forum. We encourage the

"Keep Alaska Moving through service and infrastructure."

City to stay involved and bring transportation needs and concerns to the appropriate groups for your area.

While this is not a decision that lies with Southcoast Region, I would like to touch on the subject and some of the complexities associated with such an action. In the lower 48, an RTPO's focus is typically on strategizing how to use funds on the established federal aid system which often connects the communities together. Therefore projects may provide a mutual benefit to all or many communities within the RTPO. In the Southcoast Region, with the exception of Prince of Wales Island, the only connecting highway between communities is the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS). As a result, transportation needs among communities, even for the AMHS, are often competing, rather than of mutual benefit. Furthermore, for an RTPO to effectively debate and prioritize project selection, a determined funding allocation would likely need to be established. Currently, Statewide Program Development does not set regional allocations and this has historically been beneficial to our region with lower population and total road miles. We are able to promote projects based on individual road pavement or traffic needs for the National Highway System or Alaska Highway System. For projects not on these systems (lower functional class and local roads), project nominations must go through a formal nomination process and be ranked by the Project Evaluation Board. This practice would likely continue despite the establishment of an RTPO because federal funded projects in Alaska are prioritized on a statewide basis.

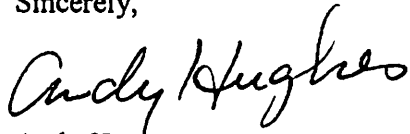
All of this said, we are concerned that you feel your communication with us is inadequate and that the City does not have a "seat at the table". We attempt to maintain positive and frequent communication with all communities within our region. To do this efficiently, we send out mass mailings for topics that affect the region at large and use personal emails and phone calls for community or project specific issues. Those project specific communications have been frequent in the past few years because of the multitude of active projects in your area. Please know that you are always welcome to call or email us with any concerns. Additionally, if the City would prefer regular scheduled teleconferences, we can set up such meetings per your desired frequency.

The city's concerns about development at Sitka Rocky Gutierrez Airport were discussed in recent meetings in your offices attended by staff from our Airport Leasing section and the Southcoast Planning section. The airport master plan, terminal area plan, airport parking, and lease lot development were covered in some detail. Additionally, Lynette Campbell, the Regional Leasing Chief provided a white paper concerning the management of parking on the airport – a subject that seems to be at the center of the city's concerns.

Unfortunately, while the City asserts the need to manage development in accordance with the airport master plan – which is always our intention – the most troublesome issue at present seems to be the potential loss of long-term parking on a trespass lot that is not part of the master plan. We have discussed a variety of solutions to the perceived parking problem that would be in accordance with the master plan, but none seem acceptable to the City. Because our mandate is to manage our airports for aviation uses, and because the currently proposed use for the lease lots in question is direct aviation, that use must take precedence over an ad hoc parking use. This is in accordance with the master plan. If the City has suggested changes to the airport master plan, we would be happy to consider them; however, the priority of aviation uses over all others, and the extremely limited amount of property available for development will continue to inform land use decisions in our planning process.

Thank you for taking the time to help us with our Needs List update and for relaying your City's transportation needs. I will follow up with a phone call to discuss the level and frequency of communication the City would like to have with Southcoast Region Planning and to schedule a meeting to discuss the Draft 2016-19 STIP which is expected to be posted for public notice within the next month.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Hughes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andy Hughes
Southcoast Region Planning Chief

cc:

Rob Campbell, Southcoast Region Director
Marie Heidemann, Southcoast Region Highway Planner
Verne Skagerberg, Southcoast Region Aviation Planner
Mike Vigue, Statewide Program Development Division Director
Lynette Campbell, Southcoast Region Leasing Chief