



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
ASSEMBLY MEMBER GEORGE MCKEE
DISTRICT 3

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MEMORANDUM

To: Borough Mayor
All Members of Borough Assembly

From: George McKee, District 3 Assembly Member

Subject: Reconsideration of AM 21-077

Date: August 9, 2021

I exercised the motion for reconsideration of AM 21-077 (remedial road work in conjunction with the intersection of the Historic Iditarod Trail and Burma Road) which was awarded to K&H Civil Constructors in the contract amount of \$740,000. My reasoning for the reconsideration was that the project had not been subjected to any form of analysis or engineering due diligence. According to the RFP solicitation, the contractor was to determine the scope of work and design (no offense to these particular contractors, but this is analogous to having the fox guard the henhouse!) The following information should be considered by the Assembly in the reconsideration process.

1. The Borough Manager acknowledges that there was no preparatory data gathered in conjunction with this project (notwithstanding that it was such a contentious issue that the trail that deviated from the Historic Trail went before the Alaska State Supreme Court). I personally would like to have been able to review traffic counts on Burma Road (particularly during the three shift changes at Goose Creek Prison that were repeatedly cited in testimony given in May of this year as being a particularly hazardous situation), the number of employees at Goose Creek prison that utilize the road, what speed limits have been established as prudent. None of this was presented to the Assembly). The only warning signs posted on the road on either side of the crossing are so close to the crossing itself that the vehicle would be upon the team by the time the signs are visible.
2. I have personally driven the entire length of Burma Road twice in the past two months, and the "Historic Iditarod Trail Crossing", is totally unidentifiable and senior members of the administration don't know where the road and the trail meet; however, the "new" trail site has been under court dispute and is clearly marked. All testimony taken from mushers during the August 3rd Assembly meeting appeared to deal NOT with the Historic Iditarod Trail crossing but with the "new" site. The recent State Supreme Court decided that the trail south of the road is not available to mushers because it is private property. It is worth noting that the public testimony taken from approximately 26 people in May also

dealt with the “new” trail so any of this previous testimony is really moot because it has no bearing on the Historic trail. I am curious as to how many other borough Assembly members who are voting on this have actually visited the site in question.

3. Burma Road is essentially a one- to one and a half-lane road its entire length and any speed above 25 miles per hour in either summer or winter would be wrecklessly unsafe. If the Historic Trail crossing has been surveyed, why isn't it marked? This should be a major consideration in any solution to a road crossing.
4. I have received telephone calls from residents in the area who have lived there quite a period of time. I will not indicate their names to the general public but one is a licensed architect that was a member of the borough planning commission and another is an individual who was employed by the borough in their planning division. They have a wealth of knowledge relative to the issue which goes beyond a simple road crossing; there are two other trails in the area that have been used for recreational purposes and no one has really investigated whether these trails are on borough property or private land.
5. An engineering analysis of the proposed road crossing might well find that an underpass is not the best solution; perhaps simply straightening the road and the installation of two electronic eye warning signs, tripped by a musher approaching the road crossing would be more than sufficient and cost far less than three quarters of a million dollars. There are a variety of other electronic safety guards that could be installed that are well within the scope of current technology, e.g., electronically activated railroad crossing type guardrails.
6. The information sheet provided to the Assembly during the August 3rd meeting stated that the four bids received for this project had been evaluated by three Borough Public Works staff members. Their evaluation consisted of six questions comparing the technical abilities of the RFP submissions - those three staff members did not evaluate any engineering or construction factors. In fact, it is questionable whether those three employees actually visited the Historic site.
7. The dog mushers are a fairly unified community – in this instance, they are a special interest group on the order of skiers, trail riders, snow machiners, etc. If that community had geared up as volunteers and done any work on the proposal leading up to the road crossing, it would have added legitimacy to the property taxpaying public throughout the borough who are being asked to finance this worthwhile but obviously “special interest” problem.
8. When I was elected almost six years ago, I pledged to property taxpayers of the borough that I would do my best to ensure that the expenditure of their tax funds would be transparent and prudent. At this point, I readily acknowledge there is a problem for dog mushers on the Burma Road crossing; however, I do not believe that what the Assembly has done is in the best interests of the public. The project is currently scheduled for an overpass over the top of an eight-foot culvert. One would have thought that that could have been priced by borough engineers – but it wasn't. Let's simply delay the project, gather the appropriate information and analysis, and put the matter again on the agenda in a defensible fashion.
9. It is pertinent to note that the borough is in line to receive several hundred million dollars from the federal government for infrastructure. The Burma Road crossing will very likely qualify for such funding, which would mean that the local taxpayers would not be paying the freight.
10. This project is funded by public money and, if the contractor employs anyone other than him/herself, the Davis-Bacon (prevailing wage obligation) kicks in, substantially

increasing the costs. I will vociferously oppose any contract change orders increasing the cost of this project!!

Having been in Alaska since 1961, I am not anti-dog mushing - in fact, I enjoy the sport. At one time, my wife and her brothers delivered their newspaper route by dog team in Fairbanks and members of her family were involved in competitive and recreational dog mushing. As well, it is important that we do all that we can to ensure the safety of mushers, dogs, and vehicle drivers for obvious humane reasons and also to prevent any involvement or publicity from PETA.

cc. Mike Brown, Manager
Nick Spiropoulos, Attorney
Lonnie McKechnie, Clerk
General Public