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United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Alaska Region
240 West 5th Avenue, Room 114
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

IN REPLY REFER TO:
D18(AKRO-PART)

DEC 27 2005

Jeff Ottesen, Director
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Division of Program Development
3132 Channel Drive, Room 200, Mail Stop 2500
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RECEIVED
DEC 30 2005
DOT & PF DIVISION OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Dear Mr. Ottessen:

This letter is in reference to the DRAFT 2006-2008 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, Alaska Highway APLIC and Rest Area.

We noted that the new visitor center planned for Tok, previously included in the 2004-2006 STIP as the *Alaska Highway APLIC and Rest Area,* is not included in the Draft 2006-2008 STIP.

As one of the partner agencies involved in the cooperative Alaska Public Lands Information Centers, we are concerned about the future of the Tok project. The design for this facility is near completion and funds are available for land acquisition. The project is poised to enter the construction phase, but in order to be eligible for funding it needs to be identified in the STIP.

The *Alaska Highway APLIC and Rest Area* has been a cooperative planning effort among the state and federal agencies involved in the operation of four Alaska Public Lands Information Centers pursuant to ANILCA. In particular, the State of Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have worked collaboratively to plan and design a facility of high quality that will provide needed services to independent travelers. Significant funds and effort have already gone into this project and tremendous progress has been made.

The existing Tok facility, operated by the Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development, is an important rest stop and trip planning facility for travelers along the Alaska Highway. However, the facility is presently lacking in the space and amenities it needs to provide visitor services of the caliber found in other Alaska Public Lands Information Centers. Alaska offers visitors unparalleled recreational opportunities, a rich cultural history, and magnificent natural resources. Our visitors deserve a facility that mirrors the opportunities available to them in our magnificent state.

Staff at the new facility will convey to visitors the most current traveler's information related to road construction, wildfire conditions and weather to assist them with safe travel. These personal services will be complemented by exciting, participatory exhibits that invite visitors to explore Alaska and gain an appreciation and understanding of the resources that make our state unique in the world. We see this new facility as a vital and intricate part of tourism infrastructure in Alaska and would like to see this project included in the 2006-2008 STIP.

This project will also have significant economic benefits for Tok and will increase the momentum of regional efforts to promote tourism in the Eastern Interior. The *Alaska Highway APLIC and Rest Area* serves as an excellent model of federal/state/local cooperation. Additionally, the project enjoys broad support from local communities, business, State and Federal agencies.

We urge you to reinstate the *Alaska Highway APLIC and Rest Area* into the 2006-2008 STIP. We remain committed to this tourism infrastructure project and its potential to serve as a world class welcome to thousands of visitors traveling to our great State.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marcia Blaszak

Marcia Blaszak
Regional Director

cc:
Charley Money, Executive Director, ANHA
Mike Barton, Commissioner, AKDOT