

Northway telegram brings promise of road improvements

Displeasure over a rough and allegedly dangerous road has prompted community, business and school leaders from Northway to send an angry telegram demanding action to state leaders. Apparently, an effort is underway to improve the situation.

The telegram, sent to Gov. Jay Hammond, State Sen. John Sackett, and State Rep. Pappy Moss, contends the Northway road situation is critical. "There have been three accidents on the road in the last 10 days which were caused primarily by road conditions. All state agencies have been contacted constantly by us, but we have seen practically no effort on their part to maintain the road at a safe level."

This, the telegram alleged, endangers daily the lives of 100 students at the Walter North-

way School who must take the bus from the village to the school.

Lorraine Felix, president of the Northway Village Council, says that the road stretches nine miles from the Alaska Highway, going through the airport, school, and village. "Every summer for the past 12 years surveyors have come out to the road. When we ask why, they tell us it is for the new road, but in all that time," she stresses, "no new road has ever been built." Nor has the old road been properly maintained.

"If I was the owner of the school bus, I wouldn't be driving!" Felix stated. "The depreciation and maintenance caused by the road is terrible. A lot of the time you're going sideways down that road. It is full of chuckholes. It is a real

washboard road."

Felix alleges that two of the three accidents were caused largely by a narrow, one-lane bridge at Fish Camp. "When you are approaching the bridge, there is so much brush that you can't see it until you're right on it. There is a bad curve there. It was slippery. It wasn't graveled or anything."

Felix also complained that the state set up a traffic count machine on the road at the junction where it branches off of the Alaska Highway. "This is not where the traffic is," she said. The traffic is between the community, the stores, school and airport, all of which can be reached by residents without them ever driving over the counter."

John Horn, Director of

Maintenance and Operations for the Interior Region of the Alaska Department of Transportation, said he is very aware of the situation, and that work is being done to alleviate it:

"I'll be the first to admit that some of the complaints are valid," said Horn, who took over the directorship in September. "This summer we had such a terrible problem with the Alaska Highway from Tok to the border, that we admittedly did not get as much work done in Northway as we would have liked to."

"We have heard the dissatisfaction of the Northway people," Horn said. "Our brush cutter broke down, but it is fixed now and we are cutting the brush." Horn said the department also is sanding the road and bringing gravel in to fill the low spots. As for the

narrow bridge, he claims that although it is hard to see from one direction, there are warning signs well in advance, and a posted speed limit of 15 miles per hour. In at least one accident, Horn said the state trooper report indicated the driver admitted going 35 miles per hour before having the accident.

"The main problem is it is an old road built to an old standard . . . it is less of a maintenance situation than one calling for the road to be rebuilt."

This is just what Horn says the department plans to do. They have asked the state for \$6,260,000 to rebuild and widen the road, \$790,000 to replace the bridge with a wider, two-lane structure, and \$4,360,000 to upgrade the airport.