

Proposes Road Between Bethel, Anchorage

Alaska House Majority Leader Charles J. Sassara has unveiled a plan to connect the Bristol Bay area and eventually Bethel with Anchorage by road.

The Democratic leader says the project would result in a greatly lowered cost of living in Southwestern Alaska, while stimulating increased employment and income there.

"The road would link an area of almost 20,000 persons with the economic heartland of Alaska," Sassara said in a statement prepared for the Tundra Times.

"Had this road been in place during the peak of the Bristol Bay salmon run, the fisherman there could have as much as doubled their incomes. Refrigerated trucks could have saved thousands of fish that the canneries were unable to process in time and were thrown away."

There are presently nothing but local roads in Southwestern Alaska, so the people there have to depend on barges or high-cost air transportation for the delivery of food and supplies.

"I'm proposing that we take some of our petroleum money and put it to work improving the lives of our people," Sassara said.

There is an existing road on the west side of the Cook Inlet that would form the eastern segment of Sassara's proposed road when extended to connect with the Glenn Highway north of Palmer.

The new road would cut west from the existing one at Lake Clark Pass, and proceed through

Lake Clark and Lake Illimna, and from there to Dillingham.

"There would be some 250 miles of new construction, which would cost \$100-\$200 million depending on the engineering problems encountered," Sassara said.

"This is the kind of investment the state should be making even at the full price. But the federal government will pick up 95 per cent of the cost, so Alaskan taxpayers will pay \$10 million or less."

Sassara, who is seeking the Democratic nomination to be secretary of state, said the state should be designing the road now, and programming construction to begin within three years.

"This is something I'll be fighting for from now on," Sassara said.