

Fairbanks-Nome Ferry-Highway On Legislation

Legislation has been introduced in the State House of Representatives that would initiate a Fairbanks-Nome Ferry Highway system.

The concept is to build a transportation system that would cost only about a third as much as an all-land highway between Fairbanks and Nome that has been under proposition for some years in the past.

Under the plan, a 30-mile highway would be built out of Fairbanks as an extension of the Elliott Highway to a suitable ferry landing on the Yukon River above the town of Tanana.

From there, a ferry route for 200 miles to the village of Koyukuk at the confluence of the Koyukuk and Yukon Rivers would continue the route where it would connect with a 170-mile highway at Koyukuk to the old ghost town mining community of Council to which a road has been built out of Nome.

As a primary sponsor of the proposed legislation, Rep. Mike Bradner, with co-sponsorship of Reps. Tom Balone (D-Nome), Willie Hensley (D-Kotzebue), Terry Miller (R-Fairbanks), Don Young (R-Ft. Yukon), George Hohman (D-Bethel), and Ed Orbeck (D-Fairbanks), introduced two bills, HB-396 and HB-395.

HB-396 calls for an appropriation of \$50 thousand for a route study for the highway between Koyukuk and Council.

HB-395 calls for \$500 thousand for construction of the 30-mile highway from the Elliott Highway near

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Manley Hot Springs to the ferry landing on the Yukon.

Additional legislation will be introduced relating to the development of the ferry concept. The ferry itself is expected to cost about \$400,000.

Rep. Bradner formerly worked as a pilot on heavy tow vessels operating on the Yukon River.

He takes the position that a ferry system would be feasible if the vessels do not have to enter the shallow and difficult Tanana River.

He contends that the deep drafts allowable in the deeper Yukon would permit designers to build vessels with power units capable of providing optimum speed and efficiency.

A ferry with proper power units, he said, would make the 200-mile downstream run in 14 hours with upstream running time of about 24 hours. Such a ferry could easily make thrice weekly schedules.

The information sheet on the proposed Fairbanks-Nome Ferry Highway said:

"The ferry route is an 'economy class' alternative plan to the all-land route which gives the probability of a far earlier completion and a far lower construction cost.

"The ferry proposal is a reasonable alternative for the Nome Road that could be accomplished now...not ten years from now."

On the other hand, the all-land route to the Seward Peninsula would cost in excess of \$50 million dollars and which would require construction of two expensive bridges across the Yukon and the Koyukuk Rivers.

The bridges, Rep. Bradner said, could total as high as \$20 million of the \$50 million that has been estimated to be the over-all cost of the all-land route to Nome from Fairbanks.