

Gravel Moves to Improve Rural Roads

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The opportunity now exists for Alaska to alleviate many of the problems caused by unimproved roadways in rural areas, according to Senator Mike Gravel.

During an interview with the Tundra Times last week, Gravel discussed a new congressional appropriation which would make 40 million dollars available for construction of major thoroughfares in Alaska villages.

The Federal - Aid Highway Act of 1970, which achieved final passage in December, auth-

orized additional funding for Alaska in the amount of 20 million dollars each year during fiscal years ending in 1972 and 1973.

These funds could be used

to provide paved roadways in villages from the village to the airport or water transportation terminal, said Gravel.

A standard requirement of
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federal highway assistance legislation stipulates that the State of Alaska must provide planning responsibility and five per cent of project costs.

Although the state must designate projects and contribute toward costs, Senator Gravel is hopeful that the assistance appropriation made by the Congress will be used for construction of paved roadways in villages.

"This is an opportunity to take the villages out of the mud. It is the most significant project in each one of the villages," stated Gravel.

He noted that the villages had never before been included in such federal highway appropriations.

The Alaska Senator envisioned usage of the roadways for other purposes in addition to their role as thoroughfares.

"Part of the pavement could probably be used as the village airport itself in some cases," added Gravel.

"Perhaps a cul de sac could be incorporated into the design to allow for a village square. Now we can at least build a road so that they can be dry," he said.

Gravel indicated that a massive construction program could also be instrumental in creating employment in rural areas.

The decision, he said, to seek the funding came last August during a tour of the villages.

After landing at the airport at Quinhogac, located near Bethel, Gravel and his party difficultly negotiated the path between the strip and the village. Breathing laboriously, he then announced that roads would have to go into the villages.

The Senator indicated that the appropriation was largely a result of hearings held in Alaska last July by the Public Works Committee.

"If anyone questions the value of holding public hearings in Alaska. . . let me point out that the transportation hearings held in Alaska last July were in large part responsible for our success in getting the extra \$40 million in road building funds," stated Gravel.

Senator Gravel said that State officials have indicated to him that pilot projects in villages would be announced shortly. The Senator was hopeful that every village would be able to benefit from roadways construction projects.