

Department of Highways This Week Offers Bids to Build Road to Slope

JUNEAU— Gov. Walter J. Hickel announces that the Alaska Department of Highways will issue bid invitations this week to build about 360 miles of winter resource road from Interior Alaska to the Arctic North Slope.

The road was proposed by the Governor to extend from Livengood, about 80 miles northwest of Fairbanks, on north and west to Stevens Village on the Yukon River, and from there on up through Bettles and Anaktuvuk Pass to the North Slope.

The Governor announced plans to build the winter road earlier this week after receiving verbal assurances from the trucking industry that it would be used to haul supplies for North Slope oil drilling operations.

Hickel received wires today from 15 representatives of the Alaska Truckers Association, independent truckers, and related industries, pledging that they will haul a minimum of 36,000 tons of supplies to the North Slope over the winter road upon its completion this winter.

In addition, the truckers said they should be able to haul substantially more than 36,000 tons this winter if they can secure additional truck rigs.

The Governor said, "Since my election two years ago, we have insisted that the trucking industry had to produce some firm commitments that such a road would be used before we could authorize such a project.

"Now that this assurance has come, we can take another important step to open up the Arctic. The events of the past days, and the backlog of tonnage on hand, proves that economical, year-around transportation to the Arctic is needed.

"This winter road will be a move in that direction—a move toward a year-around transportation corridor."

Highways Commissioner Cosby Steen told the Governor he expects the road to be finished by mid-January, cold weather permitting.

Paradoxically—unlike the Lower 48—cold weather is needed for winter road construction because of the necessity of building ice bridges. Such bridges will be used to cross both the Yukon River at Stevens Village, and the Koyukuk at Bettles.

Steen said he expects eight to

ten bidders on the project.

The bids will be issued in three, roughly 120-mile sections between Stevens Village and the road terminus on the North Slope.

The competing contractors will be free to bid on any or all of the three construction sections.

In order to get the project under way as rapidly as possible, the Governor said, the Alaska Department of Highways will begin immediate construction on the initial section of the winter road on the 60-mile leg between Livengood and Stevens Village.

Steen has estimated that it will take about ten days to complete this portion of the road. At the same time, using native workers from the Stevens Village area, the state will begin construction on the first ice bridge across the Yukon.

The highways chief said he expects six to eight native Alaskans will be employed as equipment operators on the Livengood-Stevens Village road work,

and an additional 10 to 15 men from the area will be employed on the ice bridge construction.

Reporting to the Governor, Steen said, "By starting right today on the first leg of the road from Livengood, we can get a jump on the weather. By the time we reach Stevens Village, the ice bridge across the Yukon should be well under way."

Steen said the bids on the major portion of the road—the 360-mile section on northwest from Stevens Village—will be opened on Dec. 10.

The Governor has placed a ceiling of \$350,000 on the winter road project, and a majority of the membership of both houses of the next Alaska Legislature have approved the plan in telegrams to the Governor.

In an earlier wire to the legislators, Hickel asked for their support for a supplemental appropriation to the highway department budget for fiscal 1968, up to \$350,000, to fund the winter road.