

AIR FARES SEGREGATE BUSH

40 Per Cent Higher Rates Than Elsewhere Effectively Cut Off Bush

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Air travel between Alaska's cities and rural areas is at least 40 per cent higher than intra-state travel in the lower 48 and more expensive than air service between Alaska and outside areas.

What does this do?

High fares affect the people least able to pay them—the Alaskan Native people in the rural areas.

It effectively discourages Native Alaskans from moves to the cities to attempt upward mobility.

It prevents contact between Native and white Alaskans, effectively segregating the two groups.

It prevents tourists from seeing any more of Alaska than they can reach via the highway system.

High air cargo rates raise the cost of living in Alaska's rural areas, acting to help prevent rural families from bettering their standard of living.

These are the conclusions presented by Walter B. Parker, Transportation Planning Officer for the Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska in a study produced last summer on the effects of high

bush air fares on areas where cash income is low.

The report was produced as source material for the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) hearings this year on the intra-Alaska route structure and fares.

The study found that efficient scheduled jet service has been extended to most of Alaska's population centers.

"All in all," the report says, "the jets have brought a tremendous increase in mobility for many Alaskans; namely, those who can afford frequent use of the system."

Yet, the highest air fares in Alaska are between the cities and rural villages—the routes patronized by the Alaskans least able to pay the high fares—40 per cent higher in cost per mile than air fares between cities and rural areas in the lower 48.

Cargo rates between city and
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bush are also high—acting to raise the cost of living to unbelievable heights in areas where the average cash income is under \$3,000 per year.

The high transport tariffs charged bulky objects, such as automobiles and boats, "constitute a definite factor in the ability of a rural family to improve its local transportation and generally upgrade its living conditions."

A snowmobile may be 25 per cent or more expensive in rural areas than in Fairbanks or Anchorage. Oil and gas fuels are difficult to transport, expensive to buy in the villages, thus limiting their use of heating, lighting and operating vehicles.

The Federal Field committee report foresees no decrease in these costs in the near future due to technical improvements, since most villages do not use bulk shipments.

What the high air fares have done in rural Alaska is to leave to government agencies selection of which persons shall travel out of the villages.

This selection normally falls to students, who travel to high school, and to sick persons being taken to hospital facilities.

Reduced fares are given to military, who rarely use intra-Alaskan services and businessmen and government officials who use three to five day excursion fares.

"That segment of the community which would normally have the most need for mobility, the young adults, are the most disadvantaged by this system. They are out of school and still healthy, therefore must pay the standard or tourist fare to travel unless some special program is created."

The system tends to discourage the villager from making the move to the city to find work. A one way trip to an urban area may utilize the family's entire cash resources. If he fails to succeed on his first try at upward mobility, the villager may never again have the funds to attempt a second try.

"There is a myth current in Alaska and the United States in general that Alaskan Natives and other American Indians are not interested in upward mobility within the larger society, but desire to exist as an ethnographic enclave within the nation.

This thesis does not take note of the desperate efforts that are made by many families to provide a chance at such mobility for at least one member of the family.

Such efforts involve the sacrifice of equipment that would provide an easier life in the village in order that a chance for betterment may be given a son or daughter.

The barriers imposed by high transportation costs, preventing any reasonable frequency in trips between the village and the city imprison Alaska's village people either as "a dissatisfied villager or an unsuccessful adapter to the larger society."

What Alaska lacks, is low cost alternative means of transportation between village and city. Without highways, there is no bus service or hitchhiking, the transportation that eased the gap between village and

city in the lower 48 and many European countries. Water transport is impractical for long distances.

Low cost transportation allows the prospective city resident to make the trip from home to city several times before a final decision is reached.

Transportation costs and problems effectively segregate the rural Native and urban white. The great bulk of Alaska's suburban citizens have no empirical knowledge of Native life.

The urban Alaskan does not know his state, except for the small areas of Anchorage and those areas connected to it by highway.

Before the fur and mining industries in Alaska declined, many villages in Alaska had mixed white-Native populations. Now, these are few, with the only major source of white resident government employees.

Unless some means is found to bring white people back to the villages, either on a full or part time basis, there is no basis for political unity in Alaska, this report proposes.

The gap between living standards of urban whites and rural Natives is so wide that it can hardly be bridged.

Compare the plush subdivisions of suburban Anchorage with the log cabins in Bethel and other villages.

What can be done to remedy this situation? How can communication be improved between the urban and rural Alaskan—the Native in the village and the city dweller in his suburban subdivision?

Solutions, the Federal Field Committee report proposes, must be related to social or economic goals. Little improvement can be expected from improvement in air facilities and bulk transport, in either passenger or cargo rates. Only by providing significantly lower air fare rates per mile can some improvement be made in decreasing the economic disparities between Alaska's regions.

The present high fares or a fare increase, means improvements in air service will be financed by the state and federal health and education budgets—the agencies that send the children to school and the patients to hospitals.

The transportation report makes several suggestions for reduced fares. Among these are: student and adult stand-by fares on all intra-Alaskan routes, family plan fares on all such routes, and a general reduction in standard fares to more approximate those available in the contiguous states.

The report proposes that savings in government travel budgets will partially offset increased air subsidies.

The report also calls for special provisions for Western Alaska. Air rates adjusted to a reasonable percentage of income would increase social mobility and standards of living.

The goal of these provisions would be an increase "in the unprogrammed interaction between rural and urban, Alaska; for the Natives, for those urban Alaskans who have no concept of the extent and diversity of their state and for tourists who make the long drive to Alaska and never see the places beyond the roads."