

Response from Gary Damron

1. What is your level of concern for the safety and financial impacts to Alaskans with the model of using our public road system for Direct Shipping Ore (DSO) by mining companies, especially in light of the reduced federal highway funding?

I have a very high level of concern about this issue. This project was never properly vetted by the state or the municipalities along the route. 90,000 pound trucks on icy roads through 600 bus stops, in my opinion, is not a particularly smart move. There has already been one tragic accident that resulted in death. While it was the other driver's fault and the truck was empty, it shows the fact that these huge, oversized trucks cannot stop on a dime. I firmly believe that a northern rail extension to Delta and eventually connecting with Trans-Canada is a better way to go. This project is very feasible with rights-of-way and planning mostly completed. I believe it would also be better for the environment. This would lead to an "opening up of the country."

- 1a. Please explain how expanding industrial use of public infrastructure is or is not a legislative priority for you.

Public infrastructure is a priority for me, just not for industrial uses. The roads in Alaska are already in need of repair and redesign. The public part of infrastructure is failing and as Alaskans we need to get it fixed. Our highways should be the best in the nation because of our climate. Driving overweight trucks on them just destroys them faster than otherwise would be the case. The Dalton Highway is a case in point where public infrastructure is being neglected to help support the ore haul from Tetlin/Manh Choh.

2. Are you willing to speak directly with the governor and the DOT&PF commissioner to request immediate release of the Alaska-Richardson-Steese Highway Corridor Action Plan promised March 8, 2022?

Yes. It is a public document.

- 2a. How will you ensure the recommendations from the pending independent study on the impacts of the ore haul are implemented and adhered to by the state?

The Legislature is responsible for making law and the Governor is responsible for carrying out those laws. It may be time for the legislature revise the motor standards and enforcement requirements. The Federal Annotated Regulations govern motor carriers. The State needs to look at the federal regulations and make sure Alaska is adhering to them or writing new code based on Alaska's Unique conditions. The Legislature should incorporate those recommendations into a new motor vehicle code.

2b. Are you willing to push for committee hearings to achieve this and strengthen overall accountability?

Absolutely. When I was a Law Enforcement Officer I consistently pushed management to follow up on violations of the Alaska Administrative Code and Alaska Statute. If there are weaknesses in either code, those need to be rectified as soon as possible.

3. There is rapidly increasing industrial use of Alaska's public infrastructure for mining and other resource extraction operations. Are you willing to look at and work towards legal changes to definitions of "commercial" and "industrial" transportation with the goal of requiring heavy industrial users to share the financial burden for their use of public infrastructure?

The burden should not be borne solely by the public. If a company is profiting handsomely by using public infrastructure, that company should help pay for that infrastructure. Public monies going to corporate shareholder is simply wrong. I recently drove up the Steese Highway to Cleary Summit and the road, after only one season of hauling ore is falling apart. The pavement is cracking and come spring it is only going to get worse. The residents of Alaska should not be on the hook for the needed repairs.

3b. Are you willing to pursue imposing and enforcing weight limits on vehicles using public highways and bridges?

The State has always had weight restrictions for commercial traffic. Those weight restrictions need to be enforced. The Division of Weights and Measures should be enforcing these standards to the letter of the law. The state has widely used weight restrictions to prevent excess damage to roads in the past, going all the way down to 25% of maximum axle load. I remember as a young man growing up in Salcha where in spring the axle loads were usually reduced to 50% of maximum axle loads. My friends and I lived right on the Richardson Highway, and we would sit in the front of our parents homes and watch the trucks roll by. We could generally pick the overweight and less than weights by watching the trucks push waves of water that was trapped between the pavement and the road ballast. That wave caused a lot of damage to the road surface. Alaska State Troopers would often carry portable scales in their patrol vehicles to enforce weight restrictions. That needs to be reinstated.

3c. Are you willing to pursue clarifying and improving the permit system for oversized vehicles?

Absolutely. There is always a need to keep up with advances in technology and other advances. Things become outdated over time and need to be updated regularly.