

Responses from Joy Beth Cottle:

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?

Commercial endeavors in the state are an important component of our financial wellness as individual citizens, business owners, and state residents. I approach complaints, issues, and problems objectively and actively strive not to make decisions out of fear, but rather to evaluate and take measured risks based on available data. My decision-making behavior is based on consulting industry experts as well as those most directly impacted by those decisions. I work hard to avoid coming to conclusions prior to having all of the facts available and I'm still learning about these operations. That being said, your concerns are my concerns. If constituents in District 34 are being impacted (and it seems that they are given the complaints I've seen), I'll work to solve those issues. The recent fatality and problems with federal funding that have become apparent in the last month help create strong arguments for reducing those impacts to the residents and roads. Over the last decade especially, car safety has improved drastically, but car safety systems have limits, and being hit by a truck that size far exceeds those limits.

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

I think expanding the infrastructure itself has merit. I'm not an engineer, but it seems like a passing lane or alternative route in the more populated areas would generally decrease frustration with the trucks while allowing for more room to maneuver when things go wrong. My dad used to own a sawmill/logging/firewood business and believes the state charged him per axle or weight or by some measure per mile when he was driving trucks in Alaska. Although that could be a way to recover road repair costs if it's not still occurring, I don't know that money is going to allay safety concerns throughout the corridor. So "expanding" industrial use is not a priority. I want to ensure the permitting process is fair, equitably enforced, and takes into account environmental and safety concerns without creating unreasonable barriers to entry for companies looking to start or grow in Alaska.

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?

Absolutely. I think the governor assisting with my opponent's campaign means I'm not his favorite, but I'm no stranger to working with people with whom I'm not completely aligned. Going into such a meeting, I'd want to be prepared with the specifics of names, dates, documentation of what exactly was promised and a list of desired outcomes. I'm not someone to go into meetings in attack mode, but I'm not afraid to ask the hard questions.

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?

I would consult with the organization directly and the permitting authority, and find out what requirements Black Gold is willing to adhere to voluntarily and discuss cost-saving measures they'd be authorized by the state to use to minimize impact to overall revenue and operations. And if there are areas where compromise is possible, work towards win-win solutions. Direct supervision of implementation will fall on the permitting authority, but I want to see industry work with and for the good of Alaskans at the end of the day.

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

As I've said, your concerns are my concerns. Whatever the course of action is necessary to build a path forward is where I'll be forging ahead. I'm supportive of safer more environmentally sound practices, and hope such meetings would be solutions-focused and not a venue to air grievances without solutions.

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?

As far as terminology, maybe, if there is benefit in it when considering different types of traffic. A quick google search did not turn up substantial terminology differentiation in the lower 48 roads, but I could have been off in search key words. It's important to remember that this hauling operation is still in it's first year and it's generally bad practice to overly-penalize a business during it's startup. I think the financial impact of this operation collapsing entirely would be felt locally at a fairly large scale. But I do like the idea of a "tipping fee" or "axle tax" if DOT is able to give data over the course of some time about the changes in road repair rates. I'd be interested in the change in road repair costs and frequency that have been experienced in other areas of the state with other hauling operations.

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

I'm not planning to personally pursue an overweight truck and trailer as my expertise is in firefighting and EMS, not commercial vehicle enforcement. But I do support weigh station operations and am grateful for the weight restrictions implemented on the Steese Highway at CHSR. I don't know enough about bridge construction to be able to speak to this issue, but weight restriction signs in advance of significant bridges might help.

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

I'd like to consult with commercial enforcement experts and trucking industry experts to learn more about the ways the current laws are being thwarted or if they are truly inadequate. As I said earlier, I'm not a person who likes to jump to conclusions. If that's a concern, I'm willing to look into it, but not with the intention of coming to a certain solution from the start.