

Mountain News



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Junior Ski Jumper



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## Governor announces highway safety improvements

### 2 Seward Highway projects slated for this summer

By Ken Smith  
Turnagain Times

Gov. Sean Parnell visited the Alaska State Troopers post in Girdwood, Thursday, Feb. 14 to announce highway improvements along safety corridors including two Seward Highway projects planned for this summer.

Gov. Parnell, Transportation and Public Facilities Commissioner Pat Kemp, and Public Safety Commissioner Joe Masters were all on hand for the announcement.

There are presently four designated safety corridors in Alaska: the Seward Highway from Potter Marsh to Girdwood, the Parks Highway from Wasilla to Houston, the Sterling Highway from Sterling to Soldotna, Knik-Goose Bay Road and the Palmer-Wasilla Highway to Pt. MacKenzie.

There have been 30 fatalities on the Seward Highway between Potter Marsh and Turnagain Pass from 2000 to 2012 according to DOT statistics. However, statewide



Photo courtesy of the Governor's office

**Gov. Sean Parnell visited Girdwood, Thursday, Feb. 14 to announce highway safety corridor improvements.**



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statistics indicate serious crashes are down 53 percent within highway safety corridors.

“Our mission is to reduce the accident and injury rates to zero,” Gov. Parnell said. “This initiative is a step toward making Alaska’s highway system safer.”

On the Seward Highway, five additional slow-vehicle turnouts will be constructed this summer at mileposts 75, 76, 108, 111 and 115. Modification and guardrail work at milepost 88, which is a high accident location two miles south of Girdwood, is also scheduled for this summer.

A \$5.7 million paving project between Girdwood and Bird Point will be completed this summer and a \$10.7 million project to construct slow vehicle passing lanes between mileposts 75 to 115, and realignment of the highway at milepost 88 along with guardrail work is planned.

“They’ll probably try to do the construction to prevent delays, working at night and during early mornings,” said Jeremy Woodrow, spokesman for the Alaska Department of Transportation. “It probably will create some delays, but it’s a temporary inconvenience for a long-term solution. These are incremental measures to make the highway safer.”

The slow vehicle turnouts planned for the Seward Highway are additions to the current traffic patterns allowing a motor home to pull over, which will require some widening of the highway at the designated mileposts.

“For the milepost 88 project they got highway safety improvement funds,” said Woodrow. “They had to supply crash data to show that modifications were needed for that area. They used crash data from 2001 to 2006 and that was used to justify to doing work to the turn. The last 10 years from 2000 to 2009 there have been 19 accidents at milepost 88, and of those accidents three resulted in five fatalities.”

The highway improvements took three to four years of planning after federal funds were received in 2009, Woodrow said. The long-term goals of the DOT would be major reconstruction projects in designated safety corridors, which include adding traffic lanes and realigning curves. In total, the estimated cost would be over \$1 billion to address long-term solutions for the state highways.

“While construction continues to be planned, the state will continue to apply cost-effective approaches and look for new opportunities and partners to address the immediate need for safety,” Kemp stated.

The initiative establishes an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) which includes a centralized highway safety operations center, integrates real-time speed sensors, weather sensors, message boards and avalanche detection systems, adds call boxes, and improves cell coverage.

“By introducing improved Intelligent Transportation System operations, the program creates a fifth “e” that we now have in our toolbox, and that is e-information,” said Kemp. “With e-information we hope to reduce the accident rate even further with such systems as electronic message boards, enhanced cell and data service in dark areas, better weather predictability and a variety of other new technologies designed to save lives.”

The Department of Public Safety will procure two 3-D laser measuring and mapping instruments to reduce highway closure times during accident investigations.

**The state will receive approximately \$150 million in federal highway funds over three years specifically designated for safety improvements.**

**“Safety has been and will continue to be a primary objective for the Department of Transportation,” said Kemp. “This is another intermediate step in safety as we incrementally build new projects to mitigate dangerous areas.”**

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