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Legislature Gets Seats on MPO's

(JUNEAU)— The Alaska Senate passed a bill on Wednesday that gives the Legislature a voice in large urban transportation planning.

Senate Bill 88 would require metropolitan planning organizations for communities with more than 200,000 residents to include one state Senator and one state Representative whose districts fall wholly or partially within the area. The Senate President and the Speaker of the House would appoint the two legislators, respectively.

If passed, the new statute would cover the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS), a federally mandated system under which the state prioritizes funding for transportation construction and maintenance. The AMATS Policy Committee presently includes three people from the Municipality of Anchorage, the Mayor and two assembly members, and two from the governor's office, the Commissioners of the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

The policy committee makes the final decisions on transportation projects in the Anchorage area. Although the Legislature is required to partially fund projects approved by the committee, it has no input in the decision making process. Under the statute proposed in SB 88, two lawmakers would be added to the voting members of the policy committee.

"Legislators have a direct link to the constituents and community councils where many of the needs are initiated, and therefore, should have more input into the AMATS Policy Committee," said Phillips.

"The way the policy committee is set up right now, most of the people making decisions on Anchorage's transportation projects are not directly accountable to anyone," said Phillips. "Adding legislators to the committee will serve a dual purpose: adding accountability of elected officials and giving the Legislature some say in the projects it funds."

SB 88 passed the Senate with a vote of 15-4, and a notice of reconsideration was filed.

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