



January 27, 2021

Governor Michael Dunleavy  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 110001  
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

Dear Governor Dunleavy:

**RE: Tongass Highway Pedestrian Safety Improvements**

On December 31, 2020 at 1:30 pm, the community of Ketchikan experienced its second pedestrian fatality in three years at a State of Alaska highway intersection. Ketchikan resident Charan "Birdie" Bird was struck by a vehicle while using a crosswalk transiting Tongass Avenue at Heckman Street and later died of her injuries. In 2017, a pedestrian was struck in a highway crosswalk at Stedman and Deermount Streets and also died due to injuries sustained in the collision. Both Tongass Avenue and Stedman Street are part of the Tongass Highway corridor and are controlled and maintained by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF). Since 2017, a total of 16 vehicle-pedestrian collisions have occurred along the Tongass Highway corridor within the Ketchikan City limits resulting in these two fatalities.

Following the 2017 death at the Stedman-Deermount intersection, the City of Ketchikan identified three crossings as being the most dangerous for pedestrians to cross the state's highway: Stedman-Deermount, mid-block at the Ketchikan Medical Center, and the Tongass-Heckman crossing. The City requested ADOT&PF install push button actuated signs at these crossings to improve pedestrian safety, which ADOT&PF did not act upon despite the initial pedestrian death. Through its own expense and initiative, the City installed push button actuated crosswalk signs at the Stedman-Deermount intersection and the crosswalk at the Ketchikan Medical Center. The City also installed a radar speed feedback sign at the southbound approach to the Tongass-Heckman intersection and two at the Stedman-Deermount intersection for both directions of traffic in an effort to curb speeding and raise pedestrian awareness at these critical crossings. Due to ADOT&PF's inattention to its own obligations, the City was left with little choice but to pay for, install and maintain these pedestrian safety enhancements.

After identifying the three key crossing and numerous discussions with ADOT&PF, it became clear that the department was resistant to implementing safety improvements at its pedestrian crossings and intersections along the Tongass Highway corridor. In an effort to address the Tongass-Heckman crossing, the City engaged Vigor, who operates the Ketchikan Shipyard in the vicinity of this intersection. Jointly we developed a mid-block crosswalk plan to create a safe crossing to the Alaskan & Proud grocery store by Vigor, Public Works and Ketchikan Public Utilities employees working in this area. ADOT&PF subsequently rejected this idea. As the City of Ketchikan continued to observe the intersection, it became apparent that traffic patterns and volumes as well as pedestrian safety issues would justify the installation of a traffic signal. At the City's repeated requests, ADOT&PF used a very limited number of traffic counts in January 2020 in lieu of a full signal warrant analysis in order to decide whether a traffic signal should be pursued. Based on this rudimentary analysis, ADOT&PF determined that a signal warrant analysis was not needed because, in their experience with the information available, a study was unlikely to conclude that a signal was

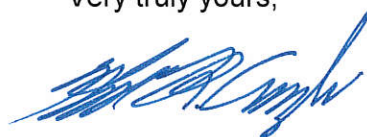
necessary. The City of Ketchikan continues to believe that a traffic signal should have been installed at this location and that a signal would have prevented the December 2020 fatality. Ultimately, the City was left with little choice but to attempt to improve pedestrian safety by paying for and committing to maintain its third push button actuated crosswalk sign at a state highway crosswalk (installed nine days prior to the tragedy at Heckman Street). The efforts made by the City should have been implemented through ADOT&PF's own initiative and not imposed upon the City.

The City believes that ADOT&PF has talented employees that are very capable of implementing the full gamut of safety improvements available. The responses ADOT&PF have issued to the City's pedestrian safety concerns have frequently put the onus for State Highway safety improvements back onto the City, or have been dismissive and minimizing, or try to point to project requirements imposed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as justification for inaction. Waiting for accidents in order to make a case for funding from Federal Highway Safety Improvement Project grants or waiting for the State Transportation Improvement Program to fund pedestrian safety improvements in order to minimize ADOT&PF's expenditures results in unacceptable delays. Not considering improvements that may increase ADOT&PF's maintenance responsibilities limits creative and effective options for improving safety. ADOT&PF's reliance on FHWA grants and overemphasis on future maintenance costs perpetuates Southcoast Region's very limited and reactionary approach to these issues. We believe this approach will result in further vehicle-pedestrian fatalities along the Tongass Highway corridor and points to the need for a more proactive approach.

To date, the City has expended in excess of \$100,000 in materials to improve pedestrian safety along the Tongass Highway corridor, which does not take into consideration staff time and wages as well as additional annual maintenance responsibilities. The Tongass Highway corridor contains 30 established crossings both mid-block and at arterial street intersections within the commercial areas of the City where pedestrian activity is highest. Taken in the context of the aforementioned risk factors, this high number of crossings increases the likelihood of more pedestrian fatalities. On behalf of the residents of Ketchikan, the City requests timely intervention from your office to address pedestrian safety improvements before another tragic and preventable pedestrian death occurs in crossings falling under the responsibility of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. We ask that you assist us in this critical matter and thank you for your prompt attention.

Should you have any questions on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,



Karl R. Amylon  
City Manager

Cc: City of Ketchikan Mayor Sivertsen and Councilmembers  
U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski  
U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan  
U.S. Representative Don Young  
Alaska Senator Bert Stedman  
Alaska Representative Dan Ortiz  
Lance Mearig, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Lacey Simpson, Assistant City Manager  
Mark Hilson, Public Works Director  
Joe White, Ketchikan Police Chief  
Ray Matiashowski