

# Bridge to Nowhere Backgrounder

## September 11, 2008

### I. Legislative History

#### August 10, 2005

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Act: A Legacy for Users (otherwise known as SAFETEA-LU, the transportation authorization bill), was signed into law on August 10, 2005. SAFETEA-LU earmarked \$225 million for the city of Ketchikan, Alaska to construct a bridge to the Island of Gravina.

Link to SAFETEA-LU: [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109\\_cong\\_reports&docid=f:hr203.109.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_reports&docid=f:hr203.109.pdf)

The bill provided the funding through several different earmarks over various years, as follows:

- \$75 million – \$18.75 million per year between 2006 and 2009 for “construction of a bridge joining the Island of Gravina to the community of Ketchikan in Alaska.” (P.L. 109-59, Sec. 1114)
- \$100 million – Funding for the planning, design, and construction of a bridge joining the Island of Gravina to the Community of Ketchikan (P.L. 109-59, Sec. 1702).
- \$48 million – Funding for “earthwork and roadway construction Gravina Access Project” (P.L. 109-59, Sec. 1702).
- Designating the bridge as the Ralph M. Bartholomew Veterans Memorial Bridge (P.L. 109-59, Sec. 4410).

Who was Ralph M. Bartholomew?:

[http://www.sitnews.net/JuneAllen/Bartholomew/082003\\_ralph\\_bartholmew.html](http://www.sitnews.net/JuneAllen/Bartholomew/082003_ralph_bartholmew.html)

#### October 20, 2005

During Senate floor consideration of the fiscal year 2006 appropriations bill for the Departments of Transportation, Treasury, the Judiciary and Housing and Urban Development, Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) offered an amendment to strip \$75 million from construction funds for the Bridge to Nowhere and the Knik Arm Bridge in order to redirect the funding to reconstruction of the Twin Spans across Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans, which was severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Sen. Coburn’s amendment would also have allowed the State of Alaska to take the remainder of the money otherwise directed to the bridge and spend it on more worthwhile projects.

The Senate defeated the Coburn amendment by a vote of 82-15. Sens. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) and Joseph Biden (D-Del.) voted against the Coburn amendment; Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) was not present for the vote.

Vote tally:

[http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll\\_call\\_lists/roll\\_call\\_vote\\_cfm.cfm?congress=109&session=1&vote=00262](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=109&session=1&vote=00262)

### **November, 2005**

The fiscal year 2006 appropriations bill for Transportation, Treasury, the Judiciary and Housing and Urban Development was approved with a provision (Section 186) that said, “any amounts made available previously to Public Law 109-59 for the Gravina Island Bridge and the Knik Arm Bridge shall be made available to the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities for any purpose eligible under section 133(b) of title 23, United States Code.” Since the eligible funding could include the bridges or other surface transportation projects, this left the decision to build the bridge entirely up to the state.

Bill Language:

[http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/t2GPO/http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109\\_cong\\_bills&docid=f:h3058enr.txt.pdf](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/t2GPO/http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_bills&docid=f:h3058enr.txt.pdf)

Description of How The Money Can Be Spent:

[http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode23/usc\\_sec\\_23\\_00000133----000-.html](http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode23/usc_sec_23_00000133----000-.html)

## **II. The State of Alaska**

### **September 27, 2006**

An *Anchorage Daily News* editorial on the candidacy of Sarah Palin discussed her views on the Bridge to Nowhere. The editorial stated “Of the proposed bridge to the Ketchikan airport, she said in May it's hard to believe the bridge is the best use for all the money it will cost. Then, at an Aug. 8 meeting with *The Anchorage Daily News*, she said she would love to see the Ketchikan bridge constructed, though she also acknowledged Alaskans need to be realistic about where the money would come from.”

<http://nl.newsbank.com/nojavascript.html>

## **October, 2006**

Gov. Frank Murkowski included \$91 million for the Gravina Island Bridge in his proposed 2007 budget. He spoke about the budget at a December 15, 2005 Commonwealth North Forum.

Proposed Capital Appropriations Bill, p. (page 34):

[http://www.gov.alaska.gov/omb/07\\_OMB/budget/index.htm](http://www.gov.alaska.gov/omb/07_OMB/budget/index.htm)

Gov. Murkowski: “But the biggies that I did want to mention before I turn it over to Cheryl is the priorities and the gas pipeline negotiations. And over the last three years, you know, we invested a great deal in the state's infrastructure from addressing the congestion along Anchorage streets to providing access to the state's natural resources. The FY '07 budget continues to build on that investment and, of course, the two projects that have attracted much of the nation's attention, as well as yours and mine, are the Knik Arm Crossing and the Gravina Island bridges. And I have a little plural there 'cause I happen to know the territory.

Our state rules -- we have rules relative to both federal and state spending of highway funds. They have basically come up with a formula on how we can allocate those funds towards the projects in any one year and I want to emphasize one year. But within this budget I am proposing we spend the maximum allowed and that maximum means that the capital project will include \$94 million for the Knik Arm Crossing and \$91 million for Gravina. So, that's \$94 for Knik, \$91 for Gravina.

Now we can turn around and blame it on Katrina or anybody we want, but these projects obviously are gonna move more slowly as a result of the congressional action. But I intend to support both of them, I will move them along as fast as I can.”

Transcript of the Speech:

<http://www.commonwealthnorth.org/transcripts/murkowski05.html>

## **January 17, 2007**

Gov. Palin reversed the plans of former Gov. Murkowski and submitted a budget to the state legislature that did not contain any funding for the bridge.

[http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/08\\_OMB/budget12.15.07/index.htm](http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/08_OMB/budget12.15.07/index.htm)

[http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/08\\_OMB/budget12.15.07/bills/Cap\\_letter\\_Sen.PDF](http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/08_OMB/budget12.15.07/bills/Cap_letter_Sen.PDF)

[http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/08\\_OMB/budget12.15.07/bills/SB53Capital\\_all.pdf](http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/08_OMB/budget12.15.07/bills/SB53Capital_all.pdf)

[http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/08\\_OMB/budget12.15.07/bills/OP\\_letter\\_Sen.PDF](http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/08_OMB/budget12.15.07/bills/OP_letter_Sen.PDF)

[http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/08\\_OMB/budget12.15.07/bills/SB50\\_Operating\\_all.df.pdf](http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/08_OMB/budget12.15.07/bills/SB50_Operating_all.df.pdf)

**July 21, 2007**

The Associated Press reported: “The state of Alaska on Friday officially abandoned the ‘bridge to nowhere’ project that became a nationwide symbol of federal pork-barrel spending.

The \$398 million bridge would have connected Ketchikan, on one island in southeastern Alaska, to its airport on another nearby island.

‘Ketchikan desires a better way to reach the airport, but the \$398 million bridge is not the answer,’ Gov. Sarah Palin said in a statement.”

[http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5j\\_uAaHzwQn-O9TZHU3j0maSkmkoA](http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5j_uAaHzwQn-O9TZHU3j0maSkmkoA)