

## **From the 2008 National Rural ITS Conference....**

ANCHORAGE, AK - September 10, 2008

The *2008 National Rural ITS Conference* was an event that will not quickly be forgotten! With record attendance, the conference, held September 3-5, 2008, brought in 275 attendees and 28 guests from 36 states and four countries (Australia, Canada, Colombia, and Korea). The breathtaking landscape of beautiful Anchorage, Alaska and the wide range of rural ITS topics covered combined together to create a professional and scenic learning experience.

The conference used a wide range of diverse approaches to address rural ITS. From the ITS information assembly and mini-training sessions to technology tours and the specialized Commercial Vehicle Operations (CVO) and Transit tracks, there was something for every interest. Topics included, but were not limited to; the impacts of climate change, EMS and ITS, RWIS applications, wildlife-vehicle collision issues, rural transit, and CVO and ITS. Not only did attendees have a full venue of ITS sessions to choose from during the day, evening activities were provided as well.

The group activity at this year's conference was held at the Alaska Native Heritage Center. Visitors enjoyed an evening of traditional native dancing and native artists while also having the opportunity to tour village sites represented by all five of Alaska's cultural groups. Dinner was an Alaskan salmon and halibut bake. On individual activity night, attendees and guests enjoyed an after hours behind the scenes tour of the Alaska Zoo, spotted a pod of beluga whales near the Portage Glacier, or enjoyed an evening of dinner and entertainment at the Sourdough Mining Company.

Conference hosts Jack Stickel and Jill Sullivan of the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities summarized their thoughts about the conference:

"NRITS 2008 addressed key issues facing rural transportation today and how to address them across jurisdictional boundaries and multi-modal transportation services. The ITS Information Assembly clearly was the highlight for me....the opportunity to discuss ITS solutions to meet real-world challenges. The venue, food, and evening activities were excellent," remarked Mr. Stickel. Added Ms. Sullivan, "NRITS 2008 exceeded my expectations...the food was good, the entertainment was wonderful, the venue was wide open for great networking opportunities, and, the concurrent sessions provided so much intrigue that we heard over and over again how difficult it was to choose which session to attend. If I had to pick my favorite part of NRITS, it would be the connections made throughout the entire time with so many ITS professionals. "

Today, rural transportation faces its own set of unique challenges. Higher speeds, longer emergency response times, wildlife-vehicle collisions, outdated roadway design and roadside hazards create the need for rural ITS solutions. The *2008 National Rural ITS Conference* not only addressed these challenges, but created opportunities for networking, developing, and implementing real-world solutions for rural transportation.