



July 17, 2020

To: Corri Feige, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Natural Resources

From: Dr. Patrick S. Druckenmiller, Director, University of Alaska Museum of the North

Re: Disposition of Bus 142 (Stampede Trail Bus)

Dear Commissioner Feige,

Immediately following the removal of Bus 142 (aka, the Stampede Trail Bus) from its long-time resting place 25 miles west of Healy, our museum began considering the appropriateness of this object being preserved and ultimately exhibited as part the historic and cultural collections at the University of Alaska Museum of the North (UAMN) in Fairbanks. I formed a team from relevant UAMN collections to weigh the pros and cons of accessioning the bus, including Angela Linn, Senior Collections Manager of Ethnology and History, Dr. Josh Reuther, Curator of Archaeology, Dr. Steffi Ickert-Bond, Curator of the Herbarium, and myself, UAMN Director and Earth Sciences Curator. We unanimously agreed that UAMN was legally, culturally, and geographically an appropriate repository for the bus. In brief, we based our assessment on several factors, including:

1. It is the mission of our institution to preserve, document, interpret, and provide access to 2.5 million objects and specimens in our holdings.
2. We are accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, which recognizes the professional standards of care and general operations for museums nationwide.
3. We are one of only three official state repositories recognized as able to accept and curate state-owned items of historic importance, and the only one in Interior Alaska.
4. The bus began its life as a part of the Fairbanks Transit system and we are the closest major museum to where the most famous 114 days of its history occurred.
5. We have a successful track record of fundraising, collaboration, and exhibition development for larger projects like this, such as the 1923 Ben Eielson airplane on exhibit at the Fairbanks International Airport.

As a unit of the University of Alaska, our museum supports the rights of free speech and academic freedom. This is particularly relevant given the often strong and diverging reactions that the story of Bus 142 and Christopher McCandless represent to Alaskans. By accessioning the bus into our collections, we feel well suited to incorporate multiple perspectives in developing an exhibition plan for the bus. We embrace collaborative exhibit-making and multivocal approaches that will respect our diverse audiences. We also applaud and embrace your own published statements that it is important to "...prevent the bus and its legacy from being exploited for publicity, profiteering, or any other disrespectful use...".

At this early stage, exhibition plans remain wide open for discussion. As one possible alternative discussed by our team, the bus, once stabilized, could be placed in a quiet, wooded area directly to the north of our museum. Access to the bus would be via a short trail from our parking area. Interpretive signs would help visitors understand its unique history, beginning in Fairbanks and ending with its removal in 2020. A security plan would be developed to ensure the safety and protection of the bus and its visitors. Importantly, the exhibition would be publicly accessible and available to visitors at no cost.

In preserving and exhibiting a cultural icon like Bus 142, collaboration is key. For the preservation/stabilization efforts, we envision developing a team of automotive preservation specialists to ensure its long-term structural integrity, including the talents of organizations here in Fairbanks. We also recognize the importance of working with the McCandless family, who we understand have also been in contact with your office. For outreach and education efforts, our highly interdisciplinary museum team would reach out to the University teaching community to integrate this exhibit and the surrounding history into their educational course offerings, ranging from English, Film, Arctic & Northern Studies, Anthropology, History, Biology, Outdoor Studies, and more.

Understanding the financial constraints of all Alaska state departments, we have minimal expectations from the State in terms of any direct funding to care for this important historical item. That being said, we welcome opportunities to work with DNR and OHA to identify State, Federal, or private funding sources to support the preservation, exhibition, and interpretation of the bus.

For all these reasons, we believe that UAMN is uniquely suited to be the final resting place for Bus 142. It would keep this piece of historical property in State ownership, provide outstanding opportunities to share relevant cultural and historic context, and incentivize visitation to Interior Alaska.

Thank you for considering this proposal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick S. Druckenmiller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "D".

Patrick S. Druckenmiller, PhD
Director, University of Alaska Museum of the North
Professor of Geology, Department of Geosciences
University of Alaska Fairbanks
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Enclosure: Sample MOU/Repository Agreement for the Curation of Historical Materials

Cc: Christianna Coles, Chief of Operations, Division of Mines Land and Water, AK DNR
Judith Bittner, State Historic Preservation Officer, AK DNR
Angela Linn, Senior Collections Manager, Ethnology and History Collection, UAMN
Josh Reuther, Curator of Archaeology, UAMN