



Meeting Minutes

SUBJECT: Seward Highway DOT&PF PN 53577
Public Meeting No. 2

W.O. D59207E

DATE: Tuesday, February 27, 2007

TIME: 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

LOCATION: Glacier City Hall

Below is a summary of the Seward Highway MP 99-105 Public Meeting No. 2. Staff responses to questions or comments are shown in italics.

Steve Noble (DOWL Engineers [DOWL]) opened the meeting by introducing the project team and explaining that the objective of the meeting was to keep the public involved on this project, and present the most current information that is available regarding the studies that have been completed to date.

Steve explained that the scope of this project includes the preliminary engineering work along with the environmental document. After this particular project is completed, State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) will need to find the funding to construct the project.

Steve stated that the purpose of this project is to address the safety concerns on this stretch of the Seward Highway. He explained that there are approximately 30 to 40 driveways located on this stretch of the highway, and this causes cars to be traveling at different speeds. Motorists traveling at different speeds on a highway can contribute to an elevated crash rate.

Steve briefly reviewed the concepts that were shown at the first public meeting, and explained where we are in the project to date. The coastal flats alignment and the shoreline alignment have been dismissed from consideration on this project. Steve explained that there were several factors that led to this decision. Some of these factors included: the cost that would be incurred for constructing either of these options, the greater environmental impacts, relative to the other options, and the impacts on the current railroad alignment. Steve also explained that when the purpose and need of the project is considered, other alignments meet the criteria just as effectively with a reduced level of impact to the factors above.

A question was asked about where the data regarding the number of accidents is taken from.

Steve explained that there are two methods of evaluating the accident data for the project. He explained that the data is taken for the entire length of the Seward Highway, and then it is evaluated in two different ways. The number of accidents that occur per million vehicle miles driven on the entire length of the roadway and the number of accidents that occur on the 6-mile stretch that this project is focused on. Then the team evaluates the circumstances that may be causing these accidents. Factors that may contribute to the number of accidents are also considered. Steve also mentioned that the severity of accidents is considered when looking at the accident data particularly on this corridor where the severity of the crashes is the primary issue from the safety analysis.

A comment was made that eventually a 4-lane facility will be needed, so why is the project team not considering this and planning for a 4-lane, and constructing it in 2-lane phases? It was stated that this would save money in the long run.

Steve commented that this has been something that the project team has heard from the public, but this project is focused on the safety of the roadway, and adding an additional 2 lanes would be more geared towards the capacity issue of the road. He also mentioned that the capacity issue needs to be addressed along the entire corridor, not just this 6-mile section, so another project is needed to address the capacity of the entire Seward Highway.

Steve then discussed the environmental document that will be prepared for the project. He stated that this document will address three alternatives for the project. The first being a no-build option that would leave the entire 6-mile section as it is today. The second alternative would be to upgrade the existing roadway and look for ways to better the safety along the corridor. The third alternative would be to leave the existing alignment close to what it is today, with some possible minor changes, and then add a frontage road near the communities of Bird and Indian to help consolidate some of the driveways from the communities on to the highway. The frontage road alternative will also separate the vehicles that are traveling at different speeds throughout the 6-mile corridor. Turning lanes as well as acceleration lanes can be used at the intersection points to allow cars to join the highway traffic at locations where motorists will have adequate sight distance and where through traffic will expect to encounter entering/exiting traffic.

There were questions regarding the width of the existing highway verse the width of the frontage road, and if there would be a bike lane along the frontage road.

Steve stated that the existing highway has 12-foot lanes with 8-foot shoulders and the frontage road would most likely be 12-foot lanes with 4-foot shoulders. He also explained that there will be some type of trail or walkway near the frontage road.

A question was asked about the amount of additional right-of-way that would be needed if the frontage road is built.

Steve stated that the team is not sure of the exact amount of right-of-way that would need to be acquired, but approximately 150 to 200 feet is needed to build the road. He explained that the right-of-way differs along the corridor, so it is difficult to say how much will need to be acquired from specific sections of the road. He also mentioned that from a safety standpoint, the minimum separation between the frontage road and the highway is 30 feet without a barrier of some sort.

A request was made to extend the existing bike trail under the road along with any other improvements that occur.

Steve stated that this comment has been acknowledged, and trail connections can be addressed, but the project is not at that stage yet.

The funding source was discussed and it was questioned whether or not the funding source will dictate the mandate for grade separated crossings, etc.

Steve explained that there is not a mandate for this type of crossing on this project. He stated that the trail connections may be coordinated with this project to an extent, but the goal of the project is not the trail crossings and connections. Miriam McCulloch (DOT&PF) stated that all of the DOT&PF projects accommodate pedestrians, but that does not always mean existing trails will be extended and continued along new or upgraded road corridors.

It was stated that the trail connections are a safety issue because bikers and pedestrians are using the road rather than a trail or sidewalk.

Steve acknowledged this comment and stated that in the ten years of data that was looked at for this section of the highway, there were no pedestrian/vehicle accidents but that this issue would be considered in the design.

Steve then continued with the presentation and discussed the cost estimates for the two build alternatives that remain under consideration. He explained that the frontage road alignment will cost roughly \$35 million and the rehabilitation option will cost approximately \$17 million. He stated that some of the aerial utilities along the corridor may need to be relocated, but they are not planned to be put underground.

The next steps in the project include submitting the environmental document to address the three options that are now being considered. Steve stated that this document will be available for public review when it is finalized.

A question was asked about lowering the speed limit as a consideration for safety.

Steve stated that none of the alternatives include lowering the speed limit. He explained that the highway is used for multiple purposes, so lowering the speed limit can actually create safety problems with people traveling the highway at different speeds.

It was asked if the double fines that are now in place have helped with any accidents. Sergeant Welch stated that there are still high-priced speeding tickets being issued, but the signs have not been posted for a long enough period of time to tell if they have made a difference.

Steve then went over the environmental studies that have been or will be done for the project. He also reviewed the permits that will be needed in order to complete the project.

A summary of the public comments that have been received to date were then discussed. Steve clarified the fact that this was simply a summary of the comments that the project team has received. This list was in no way an all-inclusive list of public comments on the project.

Steve then reviewed the project schedule. He explained that the preferred alternative will be selected this summer after the Preliminary Engineering Report and the environmental document are finalized. He commented that the actual construction date is not known yet, but is expected to be after 2010.

Steve then thanked everyone for attending the meeting and expressed the importance of having the public involved in this project.

A question was asked about what the intersections would look like if the frontage road option is chosen.

Steve stated that both of the intersections with the frontage road would look similar to the intersection of the Seward Highway and the Alyeska Highway. They would have turn pockets as well as acceleration lanes.

A community member asked if the access to the campground would be changed.

Steve explained that there are no planned changes to the campground access.

A question was asked about when the preferred alternative would be released to the public.

Steve stated that the next public meeting will be used for the formal release of that information. He commented that once the Preliminary Engineering Report and the environmental documents are finalized, they will also be posted on the project website, and they will include information on the preferred alternative.

There was a question asked regarding why the frontage road has to be so far from the existing highway.

Steve explained that this alternative has not been designed yet and the exact locations are not known. He commented that the exact right-of-way is not known, so the alignments may be adjusted at a later date.

It was asked if a representative from the Girdwood Board of Supervisors and the Turnagain Arm Community Council are present at the agency coordination meetings.

Steve explained that they have not been in the past because the agency meetings are typically geared towards the resource agencies. He stated that those representatives can attend these meetings, but it has not been something that has been asked of them in the past.

A question was asked about how the public comments are weighed in comparison to each other.

Steve stated that every comment that has been received is reviewed by the project team and they are all appended to the reports that we submit. Miriam stated that the comment process is not a vote, but that the comments are considered in the project processes. Jennifer Payne (DOWL) explained that when comments are received, the ones that make the most difference are comments that are thought out and give reasons why a certain opinion is being stated.

It was asked what the capacity of this highway is under the existing configuration.

Steve stated that this highway has traffic volumes that have high seasonal fluctuations. In the summer months, the traffic volumes increase to 16,000 to 20,000 vehicles per day and the highway is operating at/over capacity during the peak hours. In the winter months the volumes drop considerably to 3,000 to 4,000 vehicles per day.

Steve thanked everyone for attending again and encouraged people to send in written comments on the project.