

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

CENTRAL REGION DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION
PRELIMINARY DESIGN AND ENVIRONMENTAL

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March 14, 2006

Re: Seward Highway, Bird to Indian
MP 99 to MP 105 Agency Scoping
Project No. 53577

To Whom It May Concern:

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is initiating a project to evaluate proposed improvements to the Seward Highway along Turnagain Arm in the Municipality of Anchorage. The purpose of this letter is to invite you or your representative to an agency scoping meeting, and to request your comments, issues, and agency information related to the proposed transportation improvements.

This project will consider three potential build alternatives (Figures 2-5) for the improvement of Seward Highway from MP 99 to MP 105. Some resources will be impacted by this project and resource permits will be needed. DOT&PF has hired a Consultant, DOWL Engineers, to prepare an Environmental Assessment for this project on behalf of FHWA. This project is currently in the Preliminary Design and Environmental phase of development.

Scoping was conducted for proposed highway improvements to this section of the Seward Highway from July to September 2001 as part of the Seward Highway MP 99 (Bird) to MP 115 (Potter Marsh) project. The portion from MP 105 (Indian) to MP 115 was subsequently broken out into a separate project and approved as Categorical Exclusion by FHWA in June 2004.

This project is located on Turnagain Arm at approximately 60°58'38" North Latitude and 149°28'57" West Longitude (Sections 5,6,8,9,10&15, T10N, R01W, Seward Meridian) (USGS Quadrangle Seward D-7 NW) (Refer to Figure 1).

An agency scoping meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 28, 2006. The meeting will take place from 10:00 AM to noon at DOWL Engineers, located at 4041 B Street, off C Street just east of the intersection with 40th Avenue in Anchorage.

Existing Conditions

The existing Seward Highway between MP 99 and MP 105 consists of two 12-foot lanes and eight-foot shoulders, with a posted speed of 55 MPH. The annual average daily traffic (AADT)

in 2004 was about 7,800 vehicles. The volume during peak hours on summer weekends is much higher. Monthly average traffic volumes from June to August are typically in the range of 14,000 to 16,000 vehicles.

Purpose and Need

The segment of Seward Highway from MP 99 to 105 was last reconstructed in 1983. DOT&PF has identified the Seward Highway from Potter Marsh to Bird Point as being among the top 10 highest corridors for fatal/major injury crash rates amongst Central Region's rural highways. The segment of the Seward Highway from MP 99 to MP 105 has a crash rate of 1.21 crashes per million vehicle miles over the past 10 years. This crash rate is two to three times what would be predicted for a typical segment of rural highway in Alaska. Summer peak period traffic volumes on this segment of Seward Highway exceed the capacity of a two-lane rural highway and turning movements in the communities of Indian and Bird experience significant delays and disrupt traffic flows. The primary purpose of this project is to upgrade the highway to current design standards and to enhance the safety for motorized and non-motorized users.

Preliminary Concepts

Preliminary concepts under consideration by DOT&PF include: 1) a no build option; 2) rehabilitating the highway along its existing alignment; 3) a new alignment along the coastline that would separate the highway/rail facilities from Bird and/or Indian; and, 4) a new alignment that would route around Bird and/or Indian by moving the highway and railroad onto the coastline and tideflats of Turnagain Arm. Associated improvements to the build alternatives may include modifications to the pedestrian facilities to be consistent with the road alignment, and consideration of passing/turning lanes and/or turnouts.

Preliminary Research Results

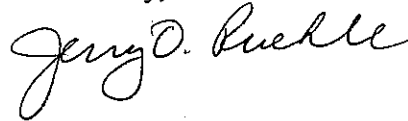
Due to the preliminary status of the project, environmental effects have yet to be identified. Potential issues have been identified based upon the collection of existing data and documented agency comments from the previous scoping efforts. A summary of these resource issues is attached as Appendix A. The project website is www.sewardhighwaybirdtoindian.com. A copy of the November 2001 *Scoping Summary Report* is posted on the website.

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the attached scoping questions identify agency specific information that is requested. You can also go to the website and click on the organization that you represent. This will take you to a list of questions specific to your purview and a link that allows you to provide comments directly to our environmental consultant, via e-mail.

To ensure that all factors are considered in the environmental document, please provide your written comments, recommendations and requested information no later than April 25, 2006. If you have any questions regarding the project feel free to call our Environmental Consultant, Kristen Hansen, at DOWL Engineers, at 562-2000, or by e-mail at khansen@dowl.com. Comment letters can be sent to Ms. Hansen at 4040 B Street, Anchorage, AK, 99503.

We look forward to discussing this project with you at the March 28, 2006 meeting. Should you have any questions on the design of the proposed project, please contact the DOWL project manager, Steve Noble, at (907) 562-2000 or by email at snoble@dowlcom.

Sincerely,



Jerry O. Ruehle,
Regional Environmental Coordinator
DOT&PF Central Region

Attachments: Scoping Questions
Appendix A
Figure 1 – Vicinity Map
Figures 2 through 5 – Project Site Maps

cc (via e-mail): Miriam McCulloch, P.E., DOT&PF Central Region, Project Manager
Steve Noble, P.E., DOWL Engineers, Project Manager
Kristen Hansen, DOWL Engineers, Environmental Planner

Scoping Questions

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. We have researched the ADEC Contaminated Sites, Spills and LUST program databases and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you know of any other confirmed or suspected contaminated sites, spills and any registered underground or above-ground fuel storage tanks that may affect or be affected by the proposed project please provide that information.
 2. Identify any water quality concerns.
 3. Provide information and/or data on existing (permitted or unpermitted) solid waste landfills, dumps, discharges, or sewage lagoons in the project area.
 4. Provide information and/or data on existing drinking water supplies in the project area.
 5. Identify any permits and/or clearances to be obtained from your agency for the proposed project.
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Alaska Department of Fish and Game

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. We have researched the ADF&G's *An Atlas to the Catalog of Waters Important to the Spawning, Rearing or Migration of Anadromous Fishes* and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you have any other information and/or data on anadromous or resident fish streams in the vicinity of the proposed project, including spawning/rearing habitat and migration corridors please provide us that information.
 2. Identify any fish species within the project boundaries that may be used for subsistence.
 3. We have researched the ADF&G *State of Alaska Refuges, Critical Habitat Areas and Sanctuaries* and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If these special areas exist in the project vicinity, would the normal activities of these areas be affected by the proposed project?
 4. Provide information on wildlife other than fish in the vicinity of the proposed project.
 5. Would the project affect wildlife migration corridors or bisect/segment wildlife habitat?
 6. Identify any permits and/or clearances to be obtained from your agency for the proposed project.
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Alaska Department of Natural Resources Office of Habitat Management and Permitting

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. We have researched the ADF&G's *An Atlas to the Catalog of Waters Important to the Spawning, Rearing or Migration of Anadromous Fishes* and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you have any other information and/or data on anadromous or resident fish streams in the vicinity of the proposed project, including spawning/rearing habitat and migration corridors please provide us that information.
 2. Identify any fish species within the project boundaries that may be used for subsistence.
 3. We have researched the ADF&G *State of Alaska Refuges, Critical Habitat Areas and Sanctuaries* and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If these special areas exist in the project vicinity, would the normal activities of these areas be affected by the proposed project?
 4. Provide information on wildlife other than fish in the vicinity of the proposed project.
 5. Would the project affect wildlife migration corridors or bisect/segment wildlife habitat?
 6. Identify any permits and/or clearances to be obtained from your agency for the proposed project.
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Local Coastal District Coordinator (Coastal Zone Management) ADNR OPMP
Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Office of Project Management and Permitting

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. Identify any potential conflicts the proposed project may have with the goals or objectives of the local coastal management program.
 2. At the present time, does your district have any objections to the proposed project?
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ADNR, Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues you might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. State Parks - We have researched the ADNR DPOR *Catalog of the Alaska State Park System* for the project area and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you know of any other existing or proposed State Parks in the vicinity of the project, and can identify any Park objectives or activities that may conflict with the proposed project please provide that information.

ADNR, Division of Mining, Land and Water, Resource Assessment & Development Unit

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues you might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. Land Use Plans - We have researched the ADNR Land Use Plan for the project area and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you know of any other existing and/or proposed land use plans and can identify any land use objectives that may conflict with the proposed project please provide that information.

ADNR, Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation, SHPO

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues you might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. We have researched the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRs) for the project area and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you know of any other confirmed or potential archaeological, historical, and/or cultural sites in the vicinity of the proposed project please provide that information.

ADNR, Division of Mining, Land and Water, Southcentral Region Office

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues you might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. Land Use – Are there any state lands in the project area and if so have any authorizations such as Land Use Permits, Leases, Right-of-ways, Material Site Contracts or ILMA's been issued which would conflict with the project?
2. Permits - Identify any permits or clearances to be obtained from your agency for the proposed project.

Bureau of Land Management

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

3. We have researched the BLM website with respect to BLM Recreation Areas for the project area and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you have any other information and/or data on Recreation Areas or Native Allotments in the project area that might potentially be affected by the proposal, please provide that information.

City, Village, or Borough

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues the city might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. Identify any existing and/or proposed zoning requirements and/or land use controls in the project area. If permits are required, please identify which ones.
 2. Identify any other local improvement project(s) under construction or proposed in the vicinity of the project within the foreseeable future.
 3. Does the community support the proposed project?
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Regional Corporations, IRAs and Traditional Councils

We have researched the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) for the project area and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you know of any other confirmed or potential archaeological, historical, cultural and/or religious sites that may be affected by the proposed project please provide that information.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. We have researched the Federal Emergency Management Agency Flood Maps for the project area and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you know of any other information and/or data with respect to the base floodplains, regulatory floodways, and/or special flood hazard areas of drainages that may be affected by the proposed project, please provide that information.
 2. Are there any navigable waters of the U.S. in the project vicinity over which the COE has Section 10 authority?
 3. Identify any permits and/or clearances to be obtained from your agency for the proposed project.
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US Coast Guard

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. Are there any navigable waters of the U.S. in the project vicinity over which the USCG has authority?

2. Identify any permits and/or clearances to be obtained from your agency for the proposed project.
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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. Identify any sole source or principal drinking water sources that may be affected by the proposed project.
 2. We have researched the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation Contaminated Sites, Spills and LUST program databases and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you know of any other confirmed or suspected contaminated sites, spills and any registered underground or above ground fuel storage tanks that may affect or be affected by the proposed project please provide that information.
 3. Identify any permits and/or clearances to be obtained from your agency for the proposed project.
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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. We have researched the USF&WS website with respect to known threatened and/or endangered species and their habitat for the project area and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you have any other information and/or data on threatened and/or endangered species in the project area that might potentially be affected by the proposal please provide that information.
2. We have researched the USF&WS website with respect to identifying National Wildlife Refuge lands in or adjacent to the project area and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you know of any other existing or proposed refuge lands in the vicinity of the project, and can identify any refuge objectives or activities that may conflict with the proposed project please provide that information.
3. We have researched the USF&WS National Wetland Inventory Maps with respect to identifying wetlands in or adjacent to the project area and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you know of any other wetlands that may be impacted by the project, please provide that information.
4. Provide information or data on important fish and wildlife habitats or migration corridors potentially affected by the proposal.
5. Provide information on known active or inactive eagle nests in the project area.
6. Identify any permits and or clearances to be obtained from your agency for the project.

U.S. Dept. of Commerce
(National Marine Fisheries Services)

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. We have researched the NMFS website with respect to known threatened and/or endangered species and their habitat for the project area and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you have any other information and/or data on threatened and/or endangered species in the project area that might potentially be affected by the proposal please provide that information.
2. We have researched the NMFS website to determine if essential fish habitat (EFH) pursuant to the Magnuson Act will be impacted by the proposed project and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you have any other information and/or data on EFH species or habitat please provide that information.

U.S. National Park Service

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the following information is requested:

1. We have researched the NPS website with respect to National Parks, Monuments, Preserves and Wild and Scenic Rivers for the project area and any findings are identified in the scoping letter and/or Appendix A. If you have any other information and/or data on any of these land use designations in the project area that might potentially be affected by the proposal, please provide that information.
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APPENDIX A

Preliminary Research Results

Air Quality: Anchorage is designated as a maintenance area by the EPA for carbon monoxide, meaning that Anchorage was previously classified as a Non-Attainment area, but that it currently meets the health-based national ambient air quality standards (NAAQ) for pollutants as established by the Clean Air Act but requires continued monitoring and oversight. This project is outside the limits of the nonattainment area and should not have impact on Anchorage air quality.

Coastal Zone Management: A review of the Alaska Coastal Zone Boundaries Atlas found that the project is located within the Coastal Zone boundary in the Municipality of Anchorage Coastal District. A Coastal Project Questionnaire will be completed and submitted to the ADNR during the permitting process.

Land Ownership and Use: The current highway is owned by the DOT&PF and is designated for use as roadway. Adjacent areas are mixed use residential, commercial, railroad and state park land. The bypass concepts would require the acquisition of state lands from Chugach State Park. Other concepts that call for widening of the roadway may require partial or full acquisition of private lands.

Local Land Use Plans, Local Parks: The following local land use plans will be considered in the development of this project:

- Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan (1987)
- Anchorage 2020-Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan (1998)
- Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) Areawide Trails Plan (1997)

State Land Use Plans, State Parks: The proposed project would impact Chugach State Park if one of the bypass concepts were selected. Were this to occur, a Section 4(f)/6(f) evaluation would be performed.

The following state land use plans will be considered as part of this analysis:

- Chugach State Park Master Plan, ADNR (1980)
- Turnagain Arm Management Plan for State Lands, ANDR (1994)
- Seward Highway Alaskan Scenic Byway, Corridor Management Plan, DOT&PF (1997)
- Seward Highway Corridor Partnership Plan, DOT&PF (1998)

Federal Recreational Area: The proposed project will not take place within a Federal Recreational Area.

State Refuges, Critical Habitat Areas and Sanctuaries: A review of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game website (<http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/SARR/SpecialAreas/SpecialAreas.cfm>) found that the project is not located within a refuge, critical habitat area or sanctuary.

National Wildlife Refuges: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife website was visited to determine if National Wildlife Refuges exist in the project area; none are present.

National Parks, Preserves, Monuments and Wild and Scenic Rivers: The project area is not located within any national parks, preserves, or monuments therefore there will be no impacts to these resources. Furthermore, the project area is not located adjacent to a wild and scenic river.

Historical, Archeological and Cultural Properties: An archeological and historic site survey was conducted along the project route in 2001. Eleven known sites were identified along with one new finding. FHWA will conduct a Section 106 consultation initiation with the SHPO and tribal entities for this project.

Anadromous Fish Streams/Essential Fish Habitat: The ADF&G Atlas to the *Catalog of Waters Important to the Spawning, Rearing or Migration of Anadromous Fishes* identified two anadromous streams in the project area. Indian Creek (FDD Code: 247-60-10290) has Chinook, Coho and pink salmon present. Bird Creek (FDD Code: 247-60-10280) is a rearing ground for Chinook salmon, spawning area for pink and chum salmon, and has Coho salmon present.

In addition, the NMFS has determined that this coastal area is essential fish habitat for the following species: sculpin (late juveniles/adults), walleye Pollock (late juveniles/adults) and pacific cod (late juveniles/adults). Construction that could impact tidal waters (e.g. the proposed bypass alternatives) would also require a Title 41 permit as well as a Section 404 Permit from the USACE.

Work within any of these creeks, or within Turnagain Arm, would require an Essential Fish Habitat Assessment and consultation with the NOAA-National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in accordance with the provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. A Title 41 permit would also be needed from the ADNR. Any new stream crossings would need to comply with ADNR guidance for the passage of fish. Best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to minimize disturbance to the streams.

Threatened and Endangered Species: No listed or proposed species occur in the project area, and there is no designated or proposed critical habitat near the proposed project. Based on initial consultation with the USFWS, preparation of a Biological Assessment or further consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act regarding this project will not be necessary. Initial consultation with NOAA-NMFS also indicated there are no listed or proposed threatened or endangered species in the project area.

Bald Eagles: Informal consultation with the USFWS has indicated that there are no known eagle nests within the project area.

Navigability, Floodplain Management, and Wetlands: Neither Bird Creek or Indian Creek are listed by the USACE or the USCG as a navigable water.

This project will impact wetlands that have been mapped by the USFWS-National Wetlands Inventory. Wetlands ground-truthing and mapping will be performed during Summer 2006. This project will require a Section 404 Clean Water Act Permit from the USACE and a Section 401 Water Quality Certification from the ADEC.

The MOA has determined that the existing state right-of-way of the Seward Highway Corridor is an Area Meriting Special Attention (AMSA) under the Wetlands Coastal Management Program.

No specific standards are prescribed for the AMSAs, but the plan states that “the policies which will be applied to these areas must preserve, protect or restore the value for which the area was designated.”

The concept involving rehabilitation of the existing route will impact the floodplains of Indian Creek and Bird Creek, which will require a Municipality of Anchorage floodplain permit. The bypass alternatives would cross an area for which flood hazards have not been determined by FEMA but which lie within the floodplain of Turnagain Arm; a site-specific hydraulic and hydrologic evaluation will be conducted as part of this project to help determine floodplain issues.

Contaminated Sites, Spills and Underground Storage Tanks: A search at the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) databases found one leaking underground storage tank site in the vicinity of this project: a diesel fuel leak at the US Department of Defense – Defense Fuel Supply Center – Indian Pump Station on Turnagain Street at Mile 97. This site is considered open and contamination is being monitored as part of a long-term groundwater monitoring program. However, the groundwater plume does not extend off-site and is distant from the highway route.

Two sites were found in the Contaminated Sites Database. The ACS Indian Substation at Mile 101.5 removed a heating oil tank and the site is now closed. At Mile 98.6 a spill of JP-4 fuel occurred in 1990 from the Whittier to Anchorage pipeline. Discussions with the ADEC determined that this site is actually a duplicate of the Department of Defense site at Mile 97 mentioned earlier; impacts at that site are being addressed and are not likely to affect this project.

A search of the Prevention and Emergency Response Program Database of contaminated material spills indicated that 12 incidents have occurred in this area since July 1995. All of them involved 40 gallons or less of fuel or 200 gallons or less of hydraulic fluid. Only one spill at the Texaco at MP 101 remains open for monitoring as of April 2002 and involved only 8 gallons of diesel fuel. This spill is unlikely to affect the project.

A Phase I ESA will be conducted for this project in Spring 2006.

Material, Disposal and Staging Sites: The borrow areas for fill material for the project have not yet been determined. When the location of borrow areas has been determined, additional assessment will need to be conducted to determine the impacts associated with removal of the material.

Water Quality: A Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan and 401 Certification from the DEC will be needed for project construction.