



Seward Highway: MP 105-107 Windy Corner

Project No. 56631/NH-0A3-1(34)

MEETING NOTES

SUBJECT: Seward Highway: MP 105-107 Windy Corner

PROJECT NO.: DOT&PF: 56631/NH-0A3-1(34)

GROUP: Public

DATE: Monday, March 4, 2013

TIME: 6 pm to 8 pm, presentation at 6:30 pm

LOCATION: Girdwood Community Room

MEETING OUTREACH: See Table 1. Meeting Outreach

MEETING ATTENDANCE: 37 people signed in

MEETING MATERIALS: Aerial photo with proposed project overlay, comment sheets, fact sheets, crash statistics posters, cut and fill posters, overall Seward Highway improvement schedule poster, PowerPoint presentation, project area slideshow

STAFF PRESENT:

ADOT&PF: Tom Schmid, P.E. Project Manager, Quinten Arndt, Mark Boydston, Al Burton

DOWL HKM: Steve Noble, P.E. Project Manager, Aaron Christie, Rachel Steer, Kristen Hansen, Bill Evans, Terry Schoenthal

Brooks & Associates: Anne Brooks, P.E., Public Involvement Lead; Camden Yehle, Public Involvement

MEETING INFORMATION:

Attendees were greeted at the door, asked to sign-in, and briefed on the meeting format, location of materials, and availability of project staff to answer their questions. An in-depth overview of the project was given in the format of a PowerPoint presentation. A project area slideshow before the presentation gave a photographic outline of Windy Corner. Questions were taken before and after the presentation.

The following written comments were on the aerial photo with the project overlay:

- Seems like the southbound parking would be more popular than the northbound parking due to tourism from Anchorage. If one lot should be larger, shouldn't it be the southbound lot?
- Gate or tunnel for AFD access (referring to space in between the proposed roadways)
- Good place for wind boarding/kite surfing access (referring to space in between the proposed roadways)

- This is very unique hard pack sand/mud that is very valuable for recreational activities. We should do our best not to push the tracks too far into the arm, eliminating this beach (referring to space in between the proposed roadways)
- Gorilla Rock has already been blown up by ARRC. Get rid of it, move the road and tracks in so that the beach is not eliminated.

The following written comments were submitted at the meeting:

- Has there been any consideration for sea level rising in the coming years?! Particularly the lower-level railroad tracks and the road itself once it's put into place.
- Southbound lane outside Gorilla Rock would affect large eddy used for feeding by belugas. Are there hydraulic studies of eddy in post-construction alignment? This seems like potentially fatal conflict.
- I like the future improvements you discussed. There is a huge problem with being able to see the highway on a dark night. Is there a way to place lights? I don't think they would need to be close together but an occasional light would be so helpful. Honestly it's hard at times to see your lane. Someone mentioned we wouldn't see the stars at night. I would rather be safe and see the stars somewhere else. At least better reflectors, etc.
- Please include bike path or easement for future bike path. Please make sure these improvements will play into future improvements (divide all the way?!) With good agreement. Please include anti-U turn elements for those who missed the turn out. In general, looks good, thanks!
- You need to extend the bike path like Bird–Gird. This corridor is heavily used by cyclists trying to get from Anchorage to the Bird–Gird trail.
- Good presentation – thank you. What improvements are planned for the Falls Creek trailhead pullout/parking? What happened to the mile 79 area realignment to make ingress/egress to the railroad and the wildlife park safer?
- 65 deaths in 36 years and 221 major injury crashes in 25 miles of road. 286 crashes within 25 miles of road. What other 25 miles Alaska Highway has this many accidents? Where is the bike path in this plan? Make your PowerPoint presentation shorter/allowing more contact with project people and local commuters. Can you contact Girdwood 20/20 and the Seward Highway Safety Council? They are Larry Daniels 229 – 2550 and Hank Hosford 317 – 9909. They have been working on the Seward Highway safety issues for a couple of years. It would be a good political move to check in with these folks. They have organized communities all along the Seward/Sterling highways.
- You mention recreational access on separating different uses of the corridor. During the summer months there are many bicyclists including organized rides. The organized rides occur on the weekend usually. Even though this section doesn't directly connect to existing bike paths, it would be great to at least provide for a bike path easement for future improvements. I feel that separating cycles from the motorists is not only safer for the cyclists, but also safer for the motorists. The cyclists can be distracting to the motorists and

cause motorists to drift into on-coming traffic, which is known to be one of the major causes for significant injuries and fatalities due to head-on collisions. In addition it may stimulate the desire for some to cycle to Anchorage rather than drive, therefore decreasing vehicles on the highway.

The following comments and responses were captured on flip charts during the question and answer session following the presentation. Questions are in regular type with the responses in *italics*

- Did you consider leaving the ARRC track where it is and move outside with the southbound road?
- Have there been 286 crashes and 36 years on any other Alaska Highway? *We do not have that information at this time.*
- How many crashes occurred at Windy Corner before 1983? *We don't have this information available at this time.*
- Will you be able to balance the cut and fill needs of the project within the project area? *This is not very likely as we estimate we will need as much as 2 million cubic yards of fill material for the project.*
- How much money is appropriated already and how much federal dollars will be leveraged with that funding for this project? It would be good to use a portion of the appropriation and then leverage Federal highway dollars to it. *We have approximately \$42 million in state dollars appropriated for the project. The DOT&PF is leaning towards funding this project to the greatest extent possible with state funding. It may allow us to deliver the project in a more timely fashion.*
- One commenter was concerned that the Seward Highway is being improved in a piecemeal fashion. He would like to see the state funding used to leverage federal dollars as a way to expedite improvements to more of the Seward Highway.
- *Supplemental information: Typically National Highway System (NHS) routes are funded with 90% Federal Funding and 10% state match. Alaska has needs on all the NHS routes – the Sterling Highway, Parks Highway, Glenn Highway and others. The amount of Federal funding allocated to Alaska is not sufficient to meet all our needs. State funding will be required.*
- What will be placed between the northbound and southbound traffic lanes? Will this area fill with water? *The short answer is maybe. The details will be sorted out in design. There may be opportunities to do something in that area.*
- Will Gorilla Rock be impacted? *No, under the current scenario Gorilla Rock will not be impacted.*
- During periods of rising tide at Windy Point [Windy Corner] a large eddy is created that is used by beluga whales. The southbound lane may be in conflict with this eddy. *The team indicated that cross sections would be taken into the inlet for hydrologic assessment and for*

railroad design. In addition LIDAR mapping at extreme low tide will help determine how the inlet is changing over time and will also help with design.

The team includes Beluga whale biologists who will look at the Beluga whale use of the project area and will coordinate this assessment with the National Marine Fisheries Service and others in completing the environmental analysis of the project.

- It's important to acknowledge that Turnagain Arm recreational use is expanding with kayakers, windsurfers, and others using the area. Currently their access is limited and it means that waverunners and jet skis are being dragged over the railroad tracks. The lack of water access to Turnagain Arm also lengthens response time for emergency responders. We suggest a tunnel or ramp or some type of launch for the fire department and others that want to access Turnagain Arm. We need access to this area. It's not as dangerous as it is made out to be. The Windy Corner area has some nice sand beaches. Make this an accessible place and give access to the fire department and others.
- What is the current curve radius at Windy corner compared to the 1330 feet that is needed for the design speed? *The current radius of the curve at Windy Corner is 1000 feet.*
- I commute to Anchorage and the road striping is nonexistent in the presence of blowing snow and dark, wet pavement. On wet days it's difficult to find the road.
- I also commute every day and want to know if there's any interest in commuter rail. *The ARRC personnel in attendance indicated that they are trying to find a funding source for operations because public transportation systems need operating subsidies. The ARRC has been upgrading track and making changes to make commuter rail work.*
- What about highway lighting? *Maintenance is an issue with lighting—who maintains and pays for the power to light the system. In addition, lighting typically needs to be continuous or not at all. Studies have shown that intermittent lighting causes more safety problems than continuous lighting. We will take a look at lighting during design, however for this short section, it is likely not to be recommended. The desire for continuous lighting is a good comment to pass on to the Seward Highway Long Range Transportation Plan planning process that is about to begin as noted on the Fact Sheet.*
- I want to comment on the last comment regarding lighting. I appreciate the scenic attributes of the Seward Highway and prefer zero lighting. A lot of people prefer maintaining the ability to watch the night sky and stargaze in this area.
- Please plow the slow vehicle turnouts.
- Is this the largest single highway project that DOT&PF has ever undertaken in terms of dollar amount? *No, I think projects like the Whittier Access project were more costly.*
- What is the total DOT&PF budget for Central Region for highway work? Our annual budget ranges from \$135-\$150 million federal funding. The amount of state funding depends on the level of bonding and appropriations from the state legislature.

- What is the slope on the railroad embankment? *Typically the railroad slope is 1.5:1 (horizontal:vertical). A railroad's slope can be steeper than a highway embankment because it doesn't have to be designed for vehicles running off the road.*
- Consider a bridge under the southbound road and railroad to allow access to Turnagain arm instead of a tunnel. At high tide, recreational users could float out.

Email comments within one week of the public meeting.

There have been a number of projects proposed for Seward Highway improvements. I am wondering what is the status of the project that was outlined from about the base of Turnagain Pass (I think about M72 to just before Girdwood)? This was to add some passing lanes and pullouts on both sides of the road in that area. Also what is the status of the project that was proposed from about Bird Creek to Potter weigh station? Is this that project and has it been since pre-2004 that I have been following this progress? The map showing the Windy Corner project includes some of that area and these may be some of the suggestions that have been made during those scoping meetings. Is the Windy Corner project the first step to get other improvements or is this the only part that has been funded? I will be unable to attend the meeting in Girdwood but looking forward to viewing the materials on-line as they become available.

I would like to say how glad I am to see a proposal for a divided highway at Windy Corner. Having lost a family member in a crossover crash near this area, I know what a difference this will make in bad winter weather and in summer for passing/overtired drivers. This will save lives.

I thank you for the excellent presentation on the project this past Monday in Girdwood.

Our family lives in Girdwood and so we are most interested in improvements to the highway to improve it's safety. My wife and I and kids are on that highway day after day after day. Our family is also an active user of the Windy Point-Gorilla Rock pullout for windsurfing (for the past 26 years) and access to the hiking trail. I estimate that we use the Gorilla Rock pullouts an estimated 200 times a year for hiking and windsurfing access. We are in support of the proposed pullouts on both the mountain and the arm side of the proposed highway realignment. When people ask about windsurfing I frequently say I have been windsurfing Turnagain Arm for 26 years and: "The two most dangerous parts about Windsurfing Turnagain Arm are: 1) driving that highway and 2) climbing up and down the rocks from our parking spot to get in and out of the water". The realignment will of course improve the driving part. My comments pertain to the safe water access issue.

Specifically: Access up and over (or under?) the railroad tracks to the water side is. Please consider a reasonable rock slope and rock placement to provide a path to the water. Over the years us Arm Windsurfers have gained pride in being self sufficient by sailing with partners and carrying signal devices, fins to perform self-rescues or rescue each other. But we also realize that access to enable emergency rescue equipment to put in the water from Windy Point-Gorilla Rock would enhance the capability of the Girdwood or Anchorage Emergency Rescue Departments to meet situations arising from the growing recreational community of windsurfers,

kite surfers, standup paddle boarders, kayakers, and surfers. The only current access points are from the Anchorage boat harbor and Twenty Mile River-both of which are tide dependent in their ability to move up or down Turnagain Arm.

Minimizing the railroad extension out into the water and the loss of the sandbar is desirable to minimize costs and marine life impacts. Could the railroad stay where it is or consider locating between the two lanes with tunnel crossings? Of course there is a cost tradeoff to this option so I suggest it for consideration and evaluation by the project team. The planned studies on the extension and impacts to the Belugas will have to provide input to this.

Gorilla Rock is one of two primary Turnagain Arm windsurfing spots because of it's relative safe access in and out of the water (compared to other locations), the waves that form there against the incoming tide, and because the wind that is concentrated there.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Table 1. Meeting Outreach

Date	Outreach method	Description
2/11/13	Project website	Project specific website hosted on the DOWL HKM server and formatted in accordance with DOT&PF specifications.
2/12/13 and 2/13/13	Display advertising in <i>Anchorage Daily News</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
2/14/13	Display advertising in <i>Homer News</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
2/14/13	Display advertising in <i>Peninsula Clarion</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
2/14/13	Display advertising in <i>Seward Phoenix Log</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
2/13/13	Display advertising in <i>Homer Tribune</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
2/14/13	Display advertising in <i>Anchorage Press</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
2/21/13	Display advertising in <i>Turnagain Times</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
2/20/13	Display advertising in <i>Seward Journal</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
2/21/13-3/3/13	Public service announcement request sent to: KAFC-FM, KASH-FM, KBBO-FM, KBRJ-FM, KEUL-FM, KNBA-FM, KSKA-FM	Sent with request to broadcast announcement inviting public to meeting.
2/21/13-3/3/13	Public service announcement request sent to: GCI Cable, KACN-LP, KAKM-DT, KCFT-CA, KDMD-DT,	Sent with request to broadcast announcement inviting public to meeting.

Date	Outreach method	Description
	KTBY-DT, KTUU-DT, KTVA-DT, KYES-DT, KYUR-DT	
2/13/13	Postcard	1,469 postcard invitations mailed to local businesses, residents, and agencies
2/21/13	State of Alaska Online Notice	Inviting the public to the open house
3/1/13	Constant Contact email	Provide email invitation to the meeting to project stakeholders

Related documents on file:

- Sign in Sheets
- Handouts (Comment Sheet, Fact Sheet)
- Comment Sheets received at meeting
- Postcard Mailer
- Public Service Announcements
- Advertising
- PowerPoint presentation
- Slideshow