



# Seward Highway: MP 105-107 Windy Corner

Project No. Z566310000/0A31034

## MEETING NOTES

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**SUBJECT:** Seward Highway: MP 105-107 Windy Corner

**PROJECT NO.:** Z566310000/0A31034

**GROUP:** Public

**DATE:** Anchorage, Tuesday, April 19, 2016  
Girdwood, Wednesday, April 20, 2016  
Online at [www.windycorner.info](http://www.windycorner.info) from April 5 – May 13, 2016

**LOCATIONS:** Anchorage: Crowne Plaza Hotel, 109 West International Airport Road, 3 to 7 p.m.  
Girdwood: Challenge Alaska Chalet, 426 Crystal Mountain Road, 6 to 8 p.m.

**MEETING OUTREACH:** See Table 1. Meeting Outreach

**MEETING ATTENDANCE:** 46 people signed in at the Anchorage meeting  
21 people signed in at the Girdwood meeting  
32 people submitted comments at the online open house

**MEETING MATERIALS:** Aerial photo with proposed project overlay, comment sheets, fact sheets, sign-in sheet, informational boards

**STAFF PRESENT:** *DOT&PF:* Tom Schmid, Quinten Arndt  
*DOWL:* Steve Noble, Aaron Christie, Pat Whitesell, Nick Fama, Bob Wright  
*Brooks & Associates:* Anne Brooks, Camden Yehle

### MEETING INFORMATION:

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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. The format of the events was open house style, allowing people to attend as fit their schedules. The team answered many informal questions throughout and encouraged people to provide written feedback. Concurrent with the open houses in Anchorage and Girdwood, an online open house was held at the project website <http://www.windycorner.info/>.

Many people supported the project primarily for the increased safety on the highway, wildlife viewing opportunities, water access, and passing lanes. Many opposed the project sighting concerns about fiscal responsibility, speeding, impacts to wildlife, impacts to the Goat's Head Soup rock climbing area, material site aesthetics, and impacts of material extraction to residents of Rainbow Valley. Other major topics discussed included the age of the crash data used to show project need, why concrete dividers were not a safer option, why bike facilities were not included



- Yes. [3]
- Yes, very well, particularly with the passing lanes.
- This is a beautiful well thought out plan, except for the Northbound Parking details. There needs to a slow down or gradual right turn into the parking area. What I see, is a sharp right hand turn that is going to require a vehicle or motor home to almost stop in order to turn in to the parking area. As well as pulling out of the parking area there is no acceleration lane or area. These are the same issues that we have at the Bird Creek camp ground and all of the pull outs on the new stretch from Beluga Point to Girdwood. Which has caused many accidents and fatalities. It would not take much at this point to add a better thought out turn into and out of the Northbound parking area.
- The design of the road, pedestrian improvements address my concerns. A separated roadway is especially welcome as is the separation of pedestrian from road traffic. I had a head-on in 2010 at 206.5 and am thankful to see the planned changes.
- I support highway safety improvements. However, please make the work aesthetic, in particular the material site. Turnagain Arm holds immense natural beauty; lets uphold this beauty while also making the highway a safer place. I spend time on both of the proposed material sites. Of note: the mile 104 site contains an often-traveled trail which accesses the old Turnagain Arm Trail, the slopes of Indian House Mountain and continues to Falls Creek. The mile 109 site does not contain a regularly traveled trail. It is also less visible from the town of Hope. I strongly prefer the use of mile 109 site for fill.
- It appears to do so, am especially glad the dangerous situations created by people stopping to view wildlife will be mitigated. This will be more beneficial to the animals, too.
- Yes, thank you for not blasting away the Dall sheep or their PRIME habitat in that area.
- Yes. It's an awesome design. It addresses every area of concern for most every user group. Great job!
- Mostly.

#### Opposition to Project

- No. [5]
- No the current design will remove the rock climbing area at Goat's Head. Please spare! Unfortunately, part of your design eliminates the climbing at Windy Corner.
- No. Extra passing lanes won't help – people still speed and wind up behind a different RV instead of the one they just passed. This is an eyesore, and will make traffic worse for a long construction without benefits thereafter. Making Alaska roads just like the lower 48 will help keep the tourist away though once we get everything fixed up to look just like it does "down south." Leave it alone, or if you have to spend money, just widen the existing pull offs.

- NO! The current design involves destroying one of the best climbing areas along the Turnagain arm.
- This project as is will blow apart one of the best climbing areas on the Seward highway. A lot of time and effort have gone into making that area a fun and safe environment. People have been climbing there for more than 20 years. Please consider altering your plans.
- I am viewing your plans on my phone. Not ideal. I just want to make sure that bicycles will have continued SAFE access to ride from Anchorage TO Girdwood.
- We have concerns that the current design would destroy established climbing routes at MP106.8, known to climbers at Goats Head Soup. Currently on the section plans, station 1015+50, a proposed sliver cut would remove two established routes on the outer portion of the cliff. We would appreciate all attempts be made to avoid destroying existing rock climbs in the area.
- No - it removes the climbing area - one of the best ones along the Seward highway and one of few that are actually off the road.
- No. Our concerns are primarily with development of the proposed material site, its location and size. We are concerned about scenic values along the highway, which was included in the State Scenic Byway system in 1993 and became part of the National Scenic Byway program in 2000. The existing Bird Creek material site is a highly visible scar that significantly impacts scenic value. While the proposed design for the Windy Corner project would provide a narrow screen in front of the material site, the back wall of the site will remain visible at some distance from the site. The existing analysis of alternative material sources is focused entirely on monetary costs and does not address impacts on park values.

The proposed material site is a new element in the project plan that will significantly affect Chugach State Park. Thus, your previous assessment of the project's impacts under Section 4(f), which requires avoiding transportation projects in publicly owned parks unless there are no feasible or prudent alternatives, is outdated. Please note that we do not object to the Windy Corner project per se, but primarily the proposed material site in the park. Similarly, the newly proposed material site will require a new assessment under Section 6(f), which requires National Park Service approval to substitute lands that were developed with funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act if those lands are converted to a non-recreational use.

The final evaluations for the project and specifically for the material site need to include a balanced evaluation of impacts to park values in addition to project costs. The higher cost of an alternative does not necessarily mean the alternative is not feasible and prudent. Furthermore, the alternatives should include the option for mixed sources with the goal of minimizing the amount of material required from the park. If the Federal Highway Administration finds no feasible or prudent alternatives to the proposed material site, a final design for site reclamation will be needed that includes measures to minimize the scar and its long-term visibility and ensures the safety of public users of the material site.

We do not have concerns about the road design. We also appreciate the proposed turnout and parking area to enhance viewing opportunities in a safe setting. We note, however, that the proposed turnout and parking area are not completely intended as park assets, but were also designed to reduce the public hazard of motorists slowing and pulling onto the highway shoulders to view wildlife.

### Construction

- Noise to residences of Rainbow for the 2 to 3 years of material acquisition and construction. Told that no traffic stopping will occur for rock transport trucks. It seems stops are usually likely.

### Data

- No, I'm dismayed by the dearth of up-to-date data. For example, crash data ended at 2007! That's nine years old! No one could tell me the size of the proposed material site compared to the one that currently exists at Bird Creek.
- Graph/data on crashes is outdated, stops at 2007. Only two deaths at Windy corner in last 12 years.

### Design

- To modify the curve is reasonable for safety. In order to limit unsafe driving, center lane solid separators must be considered with appropriate turning, with electronic signs. To add the expanded Chugach State Park parking and viewing on the southside only is reasonable. What is not acceptable is to carve out/blast the northbound Chugach State Park to create an extensive pull out, parking, and viewing area. Currently, given our fiscal calamity, Alaska must not add these many millions/many tens of millions to our crisis. For safety, 55 mph max plus strong enforcement. Create several smaller slow traffic pull outs on the northbound side without massive excavations and defacing, degrading Chugach State Park. As has been noted, appropriate rock and gravel can be transported via rail by the Alaska Railroad. Why must the lane separation extend so far - to before milepost 107 and to milepost 106. Shorten the four lane schema to further limit the massive fill requirements.
- Having a safe place to park and walk is imperative (yes).
- Issue with turnout to parking lot at mile 106.5. Turning left into the parking lot (from west to east) or left to go back east out of the parking lot will be dangerous! Look to put in grade separation and merge lanes for turnout into the parking lot.
- I believe it has been addressed to "divide the highway" with concrete barricades to avoid head-on collisions. I think that is a good idea. I like the proposed project.
- This is a beautiful well thought out plan, except for the northbound parking details. There needs to be a slow down or gradual right turn into the parking area. What I see, is a sharp right hand turn that is going to require a vehicle or motor home to almost stop in order to turn in to the parking area. As well as pulling out of the parking area there is no acceleration lane

or area. These are the same issues that we have at the Bird Creek camp ground and all of the pull outs on the new stretch from Beluga point to Girdwood. Which has caused many accidents and fatalities. It would not take much at this point to add a better thought out turn into and out of the northbound parking area.

- It may or may not. I understand that reparations must be made and I rely on those. I hope that the design will accommodate all usage of the land, particularly those for recreation.
- The design could be better, but what you have planned is unacceptable. The McHugh Creek trail head is extremely popular and the proposed design doesn't take into account the traffic coming from Anchorage trying to make a left turn into the parking lot. Your design didn't even include a left turn pocket to try to minimize the danger and make a safe exit into McHugh. Without a designated turn pocket, there could be high speed rear-end accidents as well as head ons if this issue isn't addressed.
- The highway improvements look great. The materials sites do not.

#### Environmental

- The scale/scope of this project merits a full EIS [Environmental Impact Statement] and it specifically should include how construction impacts could impact/affect Dall sheep. Mineral salt licks need to be preserved. Gravel excavation out of the park is not something I support. However, if it is inevitable, the idea to leave a significant treed buffer between mine area and railroad/highway to provide visual relief, should be mandatory – even if it cost more. Not sure why one section of larger parking area is paved and another is gravel. Please use vegetation, natural boulders, etc. to "soften" the parking areas. Use preformed rock walls instead of poured concrete as much as possible. Don't elevate railroad higher than highway, as was done farther south – visual should be retained from highway. Please do not scar the rockface with blasting rods as was done at Bird Creek area. So unsightly! Like the pedestrian tunnel for safer pedestrian access. Seward Highway along Turnagain Arm is so scenic. It's critical to minimize construction impacts to maximum extent possible – even if it costs more there's high-value to protect this view shed/natural environment.
- The scale of the current design seems to me excessively expansive, intrusive, far larger than needed to enhance public safety. I have traveled Turnagain Arm thousands of times and ever get tired of the place. It is a gem of South Central Alaska. Making the road bigger and faster will not improve the unique opportunities to see Beluga Whales swim along the highway, bore tides, rare flora, and mud flat reflections of mountains to the South. Why tear apart the place we all love so much, especially now in a time when we have no money and so many other priorities?
- I often hike at Windy Corner for the unique flora of the region. There are at least four plants found very near the highway officially designated rare by the UAA Alaska Natural Heritage Program, Yellowstone Draba, (*Draba incerta*), Rattlesnake Fern (*Botrychium virginianum*), Licorice Fern (*Polypodium sibiricum*), and Creeping Juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*).

#### Material Site

*Seward Highway: MP 105-107 Windy Corner – April/May, 2016 Meeting Notes*

- The rock quarry at 109 should be set up right against the road as in the Bird Creek quarry. The overall plan looks good!
- Commenter told the project team that, as a Rainbow area resident, the material site at MP 109 was concerning. She said she is afraid it would have the best material.
- Mitigate blasting to avoid the same look that happened at Bird Creek parking lot (it is ugliest area along the revamped road). Avoid timing to disturb Dall sheep and their salt lick areas. I did like the mitigation plan for the mine at MP 109. Leaving the 85-foot false front would be a good plan.
- No. Nowhere do I see concerns about the unacceptable noise and dust level that will affect the lives of Rainbow Valley residents from the proposed gravel extraction from 20 acres of Parkland near mile 109. Your maps fail to show where people live. Your discussion omits mention of the disruption of the lives of people who have chosen to live in a quiet inholding. DOT planners are ignoring individual rights as well as State Park values. Blasting away 20 acres of the State Park is not okay even if the State Park ""gives permission."

Are there studies of what the invasion of Turnagain Arm will do to tides, fish, Beluga Whales? Such studies are essential before any project is begun.

- I don't believe the project is necessary to start with, and I am VERY concerned about the rock quarry this project will produce (visual aspects). I have to pick my battles here, so if you go ahead with this project PLEASE mitigate the effects of aggregate acquisition on the scenery. I have heard the quarry may be set back from the road. That may help, but what about landscaping that hole there? (To hide any angular/obvious shape of the hole. May need blasting? Smooth it out?) Please don't make another Bird Point parking lot.

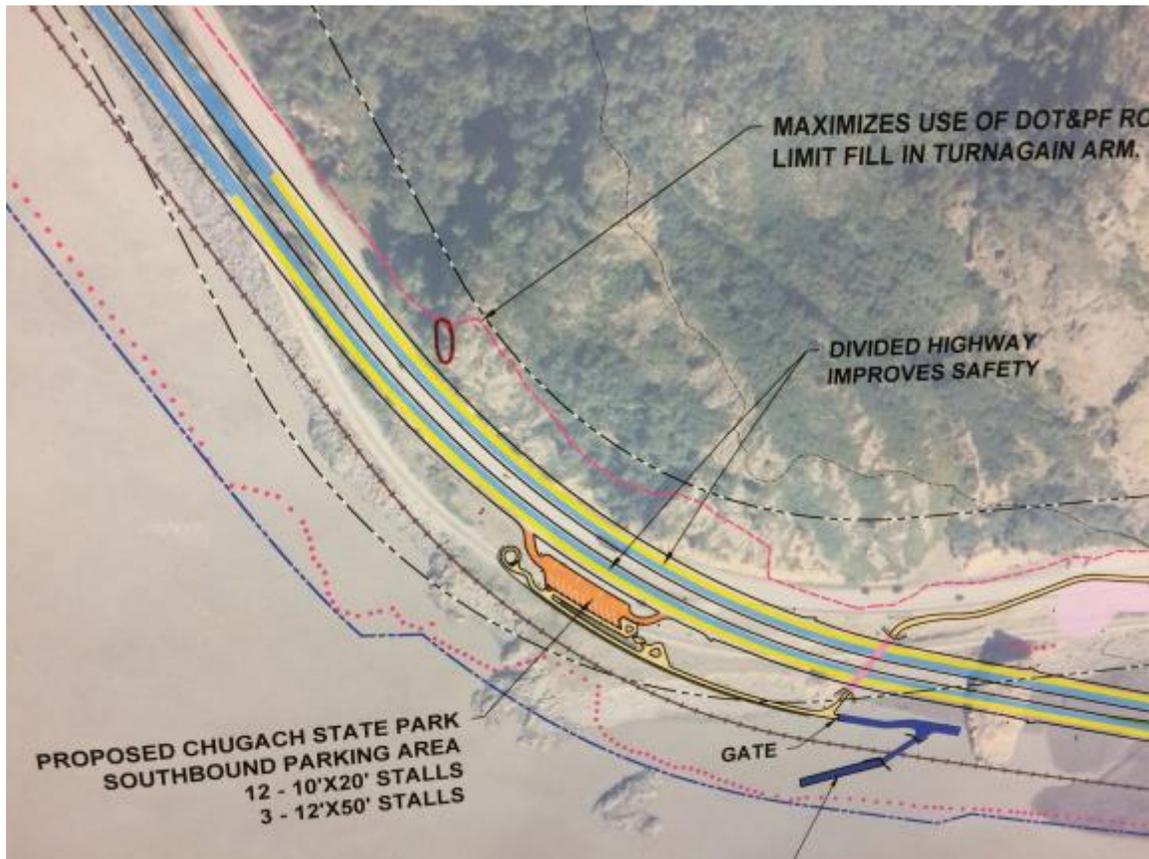
### Rock Climbing

- Windy Corner offers some great climbing, the climbs get nice late sun exposure making it a great place to hit right after work on a nice summer night. It'll be a shame for that to go away.
- Other considerations: Windy Corner offers some of the safest climbing along the highway because of how it's tucked back a little and has the trees for a sound barrier. This makes it much easier to hear each other (thus safer) when giving commands while climbing. Most of the highway climbing doesn't offer this luxury.
- Hoping it is possible to reduce the amount of destruction to the existing environment both terrestrial and marine. Typically the rock out crossing of the mountain side is the first thing to go in these highway expansions. Probably making the construction process easier. In this specific location that would have more effect on the climbing community here in Anchorage than on other location.
- Please spare the local rock climbing cliffs on the apex of the corner, they are used and loved by many, many folks.

- I want to voice concerns over the redesign of the windy gap section of the Seward Highway. This area is a phenomenal place to rock climb and view wildlife and I would be crushed to see it lost. I hope that efforts will consider the value of this area as a recreation area as you proceed with design efforts.
- Consider sparing rock climbing routes at Goats Head.
- I'm concerned that the rock climbing area near mile marker 107 known as "goats head soup" will be destroyed with the expansion. Also concerned about cost in these fiscally tight times. Could the area be made safer by concrete divider between the north and south bound lanes?
- The Anchorage climbing community hopes that existing rock climbing routes along the highway will not be affected by any future construction, other than that it would be nice to see some development done to the Seward to help make it a safer drive.
- I am concerned about the destruction of a climbing area called "Goat's head soup"
- Yes, in terms of trail access at Windy corner. The rock formation at MP 106.5 is of high concern to the rock climbing community and proposed road cuts in this area are concerning. The area offers variety of high-quality rock climbs that should be preserved.
- I have serious concerns about the blast lines on the northern end of the project. Goats Head is a historically important rock climbing area in south-central Alaska and has some of the safest, best quality, and most popular climbs in the Anchorage area. This project would more than likely destroy this area. Any mitigation to this destruction of this area should be taken into account. Additionally, I have concerns about the fill use and the quarry areas. The Bird Ridge parking lot is an eye store and represents a poor precedent for Seward Highway projects. I would hate to see more inappropriate quarries dotting this scenic Highway.
- Request you minimize cut at the north end of the cut at Windy Corner. If the cut were adjusted 10 feet or so, a difficult sliver cut would be avoided and our existing rock routes would be saved. See cut at station 1015+50. If the cut is needed at this area, please try to preserve as many routes as possible. See The Scar, Southcentral Alaska Rock Climbing, pages 46 and 47 for the routes that are in the proposed cut. Looks like routes 178 to 182 could be preserved. [See image below.]



- We are long-time rock climbers and use a small area within the Windy Corner project site for recreation. The area is called “Goats Head Soup” by local climbers and is located at about MP106.8. It is slated for blasting during the Windy Corner project to widen the highway setback. At the February 2016 Transportation Fair, we talked to the engineer present and drew the spot on the wall map. This is a photo of that map - the red oval marks the location of the Goats Head Soup cliff:



- Presumably the pink dashed line marks the eastern edge of the highway setback. This line would only need to be moved a couple hundred feet to the southeast to preserve this popular climbing area.
- Goats Head Soup also has some geological features of interest that are worth preserving for scientific or educational purposes:

Curved features can be seen in dark rock at the base of the central portion of the cliff that appear to be pillow lavas or cross-bedding. Because the rock formations are steeply dipping in this area, these features may not be traceable to other outcrops along Turnagain Arm.

In summary, the Goats Head Soup location is important to preserve for both recreation and scientific reasons. Enhancing recreation is one of DOT&PF's stated objectives of the Windy Corner project, as well as a key goal of Chugach State Park. A slight modification of the highway setback at this location would support this goal. We believe it is possible to achieve the safety aspects of the project without ruining this popular recreation spot.

- No, the "Goats Head" climbing area is at risk of getting demolished.

The “**Other comments?**” provided on the comment sheet included:

- Wonder how the repositioning of the railroad out into Turnagain Arm will affect tidal currents and patterns for salmon and belugas as belugas cruise close to shore.
- I feel very strongly that Chugach State Park should not be used as a material fill site. I understand the costs go up significantly to bring it by train, however, I feel this is unequivocally the better choice. Finally, no one could answer my questions about potential impact to beluga whales, an endangered species. I received different info from representatives at the open house regarding cost of bringing fill in. One person said \$20 million more. One person said \$43 million more! \$20 million more is a lot but in 20 – 30 – 15 years it's a small price to absorb to maintain the scenic quality of the highway and park.
- Finding material in a way that doesn't retract from the amazing view sheds is the challenge. I am in support of the project. Safety is my main concern. This project appears to do this very well.
- I hope the state gets enough money to help with the project because as of right now we are broke!! I know that federal monies are involved but because of this I hope the state can come up with the funding to even improve this proposed project (for safety).
- I'd like to know more about the material site(s) and how they would look after removing the rock.
- Worked in Alaska for several summers and traveled this route weekly, the whole highway needs to be widened from Anchorage to Seward/Sterling, but this is a great start. Still visit as a tourist every summer.
- Adding a comment link on the main [website] page would be helpful.
- I am excited for this work to start and be completed.
- I feel very strongly that the borrow site at MP104 is the preferred location for Highway safety. I have had two friends and former employees die at MP104 due to oncoming vehicles in their lanes. Opening up the site line at this corner could substantially improve the safety of this corner.
- The most effective improvement would be separated lanes of traffic to extend through this corner. Removal of the material would make that more possible.
- Please have designated BIKE lanes in this project. SAFE bike lanes.
- I am writing on behalf of the Access Fund. The Access Fund is a national advocacy organization whose mission keeps climbing areas open and conserves the climbing environment. A 501(c)(3) non-profit and accredited land trust representing millions of climbers nationwide in all forms of climbing—rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering, and bouldering—the Access Fund is the largest US climbing advocacy organization with over 13,000 members and 100 local affiliates. The Access Fund provides climbing

management expertise, stewardship, project specific funding, and educational outreach. For more information about the Access Fund, visit [www.accessfund.org](http://www.accessfund.org).

Many of our Alaskan members have contacted the Access Fund about this proposed project voicing their concerns about losing this climbing area. The area is called "Goats Head Soup" by local climbers and is located at about MP106.8. It is slated for blasting during the Windy Corner project to widen the highway setback.

Goats Head Soup is an important recreational area to the climbing community for the following reasons:

- The routes are well established and easy to find. They are featured in the following guidebooks: Thin White Line: A Climber's Guide to the Seward Highway by Denkwalter and Whitelaw (1990), The SCAR: Southcentral Alaska Rock Climbing by Kristian Sieling (1998), and Alaska Rock Climbing Guide by Kelsey Gray (2009).
- It is a particularly popular area for Anchorage climbers, using the existing pull-out on the east side of the highway for parking.
- The location is shielded from the prevailing southeast wind, and catches a lot of sun on a clear day. It is a fun place to climb in spring, summer, and fall.
- It is quick to access, that is, a short walk from the car, as compared to other areas that might require a long hike and get less use.
- The routes are what climbers refer to as "moderate," that is, a challenge for those with experience, but still accessible to advanced beginners.
- The routes are relatively high quality for Turnagain Arm. While most of the rock along Seward Highway is called "Chugach Crud" by climbers due to poor rock quality, Goat's Head Soup is an exception, being a natural cliff requiring a variety of interesting moves with low potential for pull-outs or rock fall.

In closing, the Goats Head Soup location is important to preserve for recreational reasons. Enhancing recreation is one of AKDOT&PF's stated objectives of the Windy Corner project, as well as a key goal of Chugach State Park. A slight modification of the highway setback at this location as well as efforts made to adjust the proposed sliver cut at station 1015+50 would support this goal. We believe it is possible to achieve the safety aspects of the project without destroying or altering this popular recreation and climbing spot.

Thank you for your efforts and consideration. Please feel free to contact me directly with any further questions.

Sincerely, Access Fund [contact name redacted]

- The "Goats Head" climbing area is perhaps the most popular and iconic crag in AK. It's one of the few places on the hwy sheltered from the typical SE winds. It would be a HUGE loss to the climbing community if it is destroyed by the DOT. The climbing community has invested a lot of time, money, and love developing the routes in this area the past few decades.

- Safety is a real concern but scale this project way way down. A couple of modest turnouts and a slight straightening of the road by shaving off a bit off Windy Corner seems reasonable. More state troopers on the road would cost way less than this gigantic project.
- Having toilet facilities on the highway in another maintained place will be a huge asset. Taking construction material from dangerous curves in the highway will benefit all highway users. Strongly urge moving forward with this project as soon as funding permits.
- The project negatively impacts safety because it will increase the speed of drivers by providing for two lanes in each direction. As a practical matter you will create a high speed passing zone with the current design. Furthermore, despite underpasses for pedestrians, people will still run across the highway to view the Dall sheep. The project negatively impacts the beauty of the highway because it requires massive mining of rock, to be crushed and used for fill. The project will probably negatively impact the wildlife viewing, thus defeating the alleged purpose of the project itself, which as I understand it is to facilitate wildlife viewing. Wildlife viewing will probably be negatively impacted for two reasons: first, there will be a lengthy period of time when there will be the dynamiting of rock at the material sites adjacent to the prime wildlife viewing habitat; and second, the project will alter some of the landscape itself which is prime habitat for the Dall Sheep. My view is that the entire project should be scrapped, and instead strict traffic controls implemented at Windy Point. Those controls should focus on reducing the danger of motor vehicle accidents. Some limited parking improvements might be beneficial, but not nearly on the scale suggested by the current plans.
- I strongly oppose this project. I would not object to the two sharp curves being made a little less sharp - but I strongly oppose this project's magnitude. In these times of climate change and pressing budgets, \$80 million is way too much. Considering the need to reduce emissions due to climate change, State matching monies designated for this project should be used towards commuter rail along Turnagain Arm.

As a 44 year resident of Rainbow Valley (Mile 108.5) I have been commuting on the Seward Highway for over 40 years. I bought my property in 1972 after a trip to the Alaska Railroad offices, where they assured me and I assured another prospective buyer (former Fairbanks Symphony Conductor Gordon Wright) that commuter rail was realistic and possible: indeed, Rainbow is on old maps as a Railroad stop.

In my experience, what makes the biggest safety difference is the presence or absence of State Troopers/Anchorage police. When no law enforcement is present, that's when we get crazy, unsafe driving. I am extremely worried about the decreased public safety presence after McHugh Creek beginning July 1st. To me this is an emergency. State matching money for the Windy Corner project should be diverted to pay for this police protection.

I would like to see an analysis of the numbers of fatal accidents per mile on the improved stretches between Potter Marsh and Girdwood, as well as for the Windy Corner area. In my experience, when the road is widened and improved such as between Bird Point and Girdwood, people just drive faster and there are more fatal accidents.

Finally, even if this project receives a go ahead, please do not blast at Mile 109 or Mile 104. The Seward Highway is a Scenic Highway, and blasting for a quarry on any Scenic Highway should be against the law. Thank you.

- Thank you for keeping the public WELL informed about your plan.
- Please spare the goats head soup rock climbing area if possible. It is one of the few high quality rock climbing areas on the Seward Highway. Thanks.
- Blasting the hills along the Turnagain Arm to acquire fill for this project is totally unacceptable. This section of highway is designated as a Scenic Road! Demolition of the mountain will leave ANOTHER huge, ugly scar along the road! This is Chugach State Park land, not general state land. It is a park and should be protected from this very thing, it is not a rock quarry! It is a park! The wildlife and the beauty of this area needs to be protected. It is a park.
- Please document a range of alternatives (with costs of both materials and transport) for using materials from other sites. If Chugach State Park denies the materials permit, what is the alternative plan? The use of CSP rock should not be the deciding factor in this project, so I recommend extensive research into alternatives. There is public value in leaving Chugach State Park lands as they are. The park is not designated as a quarry. The scar from the new quarry (at mile 109) will be very visible from the Hope (where I can view Rainbow Valley from my property) and the Six Mile areas. It will be visible along the Gull Rock trail, the Turnagain Arm trail, while hiking South Suicide Peak, from the Hope Point trail, and from much of the Hope Highway. It will also be highly visible while driving from mile 110 towards mile 109 on the Seward Highway by thousands of locals and tourists. This is a scenic highway. It is admirable to improve the highway safety, but it should be done without ruining the scenic values of the park, especially when the project, as designed, could be completed without obtaining materials from within the park. According to planning documents CSP will take ownership of the quarry area. This seems like a liability to the park, where it once had an asset. If materials must be taken from this site please reduce the volume taken from the mp 109 material site. Perhaps a smaller quarry could be done here and a some more material could be brought in from a more remote site. Reduce the height of the cliff on the back side of the materials sight. According to your documents one side of the quarry would have a 70 foot cliff, and the other would have a 230 foot cliff. The front buffer is inadequate to hide the scar on the back. In other words, minimize the impact to the park lands. A smaller quarry here may be acceptable. While the proposed material site at mp 109 might seem like a small part of the park, each section of highway is eroding the scenic qualities enjoyed by so many people. There is blast rock along Bird-Gird, the horrific quarry that desecrated Bird Ridge, the proposed materials sites at mp 104 and mp 109 will change the views near Falls Creek and Rainbow Valley. Please consider the cumulative impacts to the park of all the road improvements between Potter Marsh and Girdwood. Chugach State Park is not a designated quarry for road improvements, it is a park. Some material use from the park may be acceptable, but not huge, visible scars like the one proposed at mp 109.

- Has shifting the North side parking lot/improvements further north to use the already filled/improved existing highway and rail track bed for construction costs savings? What are the plans for the old highway? (Trail/walking) - could be much narrower and the area re-improved for the walkways/parking. Maybe consider additional parking- I suspect this will be a very popular stop.

From the North Parking Lot - when turning back onto the highway headed south- the center looks like it needs to be longer/wider to the south to improve access onto highway traffic. Has a merging lane been considered here- When making this entrance onto the highway headed south, you will be merging/yielding to the fast/passing lane on the highway.

Looking forward to enjoying this project.... Good job!!!

- Chugach State Park should not be used as a gravel pit. This is a clear violation of the Land & Water Conservation Act and requires Department of the Interior review for replacement lands. Why not consider options that do not require such extensive fill material such as viaducts, pilings, elevated structures, etc.?
- The previous Categorical Exclusion did not include the new material site within the evaluation. As the material site is integral to the project, it should be included in any analysis and a clear explanation provided as to how the impacts to park values meet the exclusionary requirements.

The final analysis should also include a cumulative effects analysis of all material sites along this corridor. There are several old material sites, including the highly visible site at Bird Creek. The sum total of all sites affects the scenic impact of the highway and consequently the values for which the highway was designated for inclusion as a National Scenic Byway.

The following **verbal comments** were recorded in Girdwood as no written comments were submitted.

- A stakeholder who travels the corridor for work 4-5 times a week on different days and at varying times observed poor behavior of other drivers in the area. Lots of speeding and aggressive driving. He also noted that he began to modify his speed and anticipate potential “wildlife viewers” as he approached MP 105. He has seen people abruptly pull to the shoulder in the area to view the sheep.
- Commenter was concerned about the road safety. While not entirely in favor of the improvements, felt that something needed to be done to create a safer corridor. Wanted information on crash data for the project area and Seward Highway Safety Corridor. The team shared the 2013 Safety Corridor Audit with the stakeholder.
- A Rainbow resident was disappointed to hear that the material site at MP 109 had the better material. She wasn't happy about the prospect of blasting near her residence and was interested in knowing the duration of potential blasting and mining of the site.

- A former State Trooper who lived in the area indicated that only three troopers are currently slated to patrol between Anchorage, Seward, and Cooper Landing. He pointed out to another attendee that when major events are happening, such as the Mount Marathon race, few troopers, if any will be patrolling the highway. He said that drivers are increasingly aggressive, are aware of the lack of enforcement, and drive any way they want.

The following comments were **received by email**.

Hello ... my name is [redacted]. I should already be on your mailing list for this project. I drive this stretch of highway 20-30 times each year and have stopped numerous times in many locations for sheep viewing. I also hike on the trails along Turnagain Arm.

I attended the recent open house you sponsored in Anchorage. I was unable to provide comments at the open house. So here they are...

1) Categorical Exclusion (CE). I am quite amazed that this project could be accomplished with a CE, given the impact to and elimination of wetlands, potential effects on threatened or endangered species, safety for humans, potential effects to sheep and their habitat, effects related to material sites (including scenery), cumulative effects relating to this and other projects along Turnagain Arm, fairly substantial change in the Right of Ways (including removing ROW from the State Park and moving the Alaska Railroad tracks) and particularly the overall intensity of development. I don't think use of the CE is consistent with the requirements of 23 CFR 771.117.

2) Sheep viewing. I am unclear whether this project will result in humans being able to view the wild sheep from the best area. I have not been on-the-ground with the materials available at the meeting, but if I remember correctly the best sheep viewing is further east (south) of the area that would be developed for sheep viewing. If that is the case, this project will not have the desired result of dealing with vehicle / pedestrian issues at the best sheep viewing locations. If this project were developed with an EA (or EIS), this issue would likely be addressed through a resource report and would be quite clear. A resource report would also better address potential displacement of the sheep resulting from this project.

3) Parallel paths. My understanding is that no exclusive use path/trail would be developed for bicycling, running or walking associated with this project, as further east along Turnagain Arm. I have mixed feelings about that. The Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan (2009) states: "The partially completed Seward Highway bike trail will eventually extend along the road from Potter Marsh to the south boundary of the Municipality at Ingram Creek. New state highway projects generally consider plans to extend new sections of this trail corridor." The document refers to the Areawide Trails Plan.

I recognize that this section is not connected to the other parallel paths/trails along the highway, such as from Bird to Gird. However each section of reconstructed road should anticipate that this path will eventually be built, connecting Kenai to the Mat-Su. Nothing should be done to impede such a trail and everything should be done to encourage such a trail, even though it may not be

economical at this point. Please also recognize that quite a few bicyclists ride this portion of road now, despite there not being a dedicated path.

4) Design of the roadway. The roadway is being designed with two lanes each direction. Two pull off areas would be included ... one on the southside and one on the northside of the highway. Under the current proposal, the only slow-down, turn lane would be for those vehicles traveling southbound and turning left into the northside pull off. I really don't think that this has been thought through as carefully as it should be, based on my discussion with the engineers at the open house (and other discussions at the Transportation Fair at UAA a couple of months ago).

The Seward Highway during the summertime, and especially associated with weekend travel, has a tremendous amount of traffic ... literally bumper to bumper ... often traveling at near the speed limit. Recognizing the high number of serious accidents, the State put in place the Road Safety Corridor. Drivers go berserk when they suddenly have the opportunity to pass other vehicles, no matter how fast they're traveling. With many miles in both directions to four-lane passing areas, drivers will be eager to pass. Given that this is such a short passing area, I would anticipate that drivers will accelerate to speeds WELL OVER the posted speed limit. And there will be multiple vehicles lined up and passing simultaneously. Those being passed and those passing will be of diverse size, including motorcycles, passenger vehicles, pickups, small and very large RVs, and commercial vehicles including huge buses and super-long double trailer trucks. This is important because it can be very difficult to see what is happening and appropriately reacting with a variety of vehicles entering and exiting on both sides of the highway, as well as drivers and passengers looking for sheep. In my opinion, if this traffic situation is not mitigated, the resulting situation could easily result in safety issues greater than the current situation.

Safety improvement is the overall objective of this project. But in the end safety may be compromised. As I think about this project, I have a few options for you to consider.

- a) deceleration (turn) and acceleration lanes for both pull out areas. This may be the most practical, since it allows for two lanes both directions for passing. More pavement is required.
- b) add an acceleration lane in the median for those turning left from the north pull out area. This would correspond with the deceleration lane for those going southbound and turning left into the north pull out. This helps mitigate the danger, but maybe marginally.
- c) eliminate the crossing from the southbound lane to the north pull out. Those traveling southbound would park on the south side pull out and walk to the north pullout.
- d) like (a), add deceleration (turn) and acceleration lanes for both pull out areas but eliminate the crossover.
- e) eliminate the two-lane passing areas entirely. The second lane would entirely be used for deceleration / acceleration lanes, including for the cross over. Perhaps this would be the safest? Flashing no passing signs would be needed at the beginning of each section of 4-lane highway.

If I remember correctly, the acceleration/deceleration lanes for you to consider are similar to those now in place at the Turnagain Pass rest areas. I hope these comments help in your final design.

*Team response: Thank you for taking the time to join us at the public meeting this week. We appreciate your thoughtful comments and I will work with the design team to review and consider them. The DOT&PF's number one priority is to improve safety for the traveling public. As you are keenly aware, this area of the Seward highway is physically constrained and is of great importance to many user groups. The design team is striving to understand all who use it and how. Thank you for your time.*

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I have reviewed the project website and attended the Anchorage public meeting on May 19 [April 19] and offer the following comments:

### SAFETY

This very expensive project is being justified on the basis that this is the most dangerous section of the Anchorage to Girdwood highway (according to the graphics presented at the open house). However the period cited (1977 through 2007) is not the most representative time frame for an analysis to prioritize safety improvements, given the more recent “safety corridor” speed limitations and signage. Examining the two accident graphics on the project website leads to a very different conclusion - that this section of highway is far from the most dangerous. Although the “project area” is cited as being milepost 105-107, the actual area being affected is really milepost 105.7-107. The graphic for 1996-2006 only shows two major accidents and one fatality in this area. The reason given for the fatality is “inattention” leading to impact with the guardrail. The proposed improvements would not stop this type of accident from occurring. (Reasons for two major accidents weren’t given.) The graphic for 2006-2009 shows no accidents in the actual project area. This period is the most representative for gauging safety because it is subsequent to the safety corridor designation with its speed reduction and signage. **Before moving forward with this project, the project team should update the accident history by including the most recent data available and then use the most representative time frame (subsequent to the safety corridor designation) for an analysis to prioritize safety improvements.** What I believe this will show is that there are areas of the highway that should be improved before the Windy Corner project occurs. My experience driving the highway for many years is that there are frequent and very dangerous situations that occur when vehicles heading south stop in the middle of a single lane to turn left into a trailhead parking area or a road intersecting the highway. I believe a careful analysis will show that adding a turning lane to some of these points along the highway could be done at far less cost than the Windy Corner project and would result in a greater reduction in accidents. There is very limited state funding available for the time being and I believe there could be a much bigger “bang for the buck” by first making improvements elsewhere along the road.

### MATERIAL SITES

Judging from the people I've spoken with, the major public concern with this project is the prospect of leaving a gaping hole in the ground from borrow material removal along an otherwise spectacular stretch of road. I haven't spoken to anyone who does not consider the existing quarry near Bird Creek to be an eyesore. Yet the only supporting documentation on the project website to justify removing even more material from a nearby site in Chugach State Park is a two-page memo (*Appendix C - Cost Comparison of Borrow Material Sources*) describing the difference in costs of fill material from a very few sites (Palmer, Portage, on-site and within three miles of the site). The costs given in this memo vary hugely from those told to me by a project engineer at the public meeting. And there are no graphics or size comparisons with other sites such as the Bird quarry that gives the public a good idea of what the resultant hole in the ground will look like. **The project team should make a much more thorough analysis of material borrow sources and costs given the public concern. It should provide graphics and size comparisons so that the public can understand the magnitude of the resultant changes to the landscape.**

Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

*Team response: Regarding safety, the purpose and need for the project, and the safety corridor designation; you are correct that the data was out of date. We have updated the information on the website to the most recent crash data we have available, 1977 to 2012. You may be also interested in the Safety Corridor Audit, which breaks down the data in other ways.*

*Please keep in mind that safety corridor designation is not meant to be a permanent fix. It requires substantial financial commitment from law enforcement and others to continue to successfully reduce crashes in the corridor. Once other measures are taken to improve highway safety the designation should be removed and the funding used to improve safety elsewhere. The temporary nature of the designation is what prompted DOT&PF to use a longer span of years to analyze the performance of the highway, instead of only after the designation was made. We are aware that this project will be only one of many that is needed to improve safety on the Seward Highway. DOT&PF is already completing some of these other projects, including Seward Highway MP 75-90 Rehabilitation and Bridge Replacement and the Seward Highway 100-105 Improvement project. Both of these projects will be adding safety features such as turn lanes and passing lanes.*

*Material sites are an important aspect of this project and we have heard many comments about them. Unfortunately, it is not possible to build the project and meet the safety improvement goals without a large quantity of fill material. We have determined that it is cost prohibitive to bring material in from further away from the project, however, the project will need to get a Special Use Permit (SUP) from the Department of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) to use the material site at MP 109. DPOR plans to hold an additional public review as part of the permitting process. Furthermore, the design team intends to reduce the visual impact of the material site from the road by leaving a buffer of intact hillside between the road and the proposed quarry area. The team has created a rendering of the concept design to illustrate our intent.*

*There will be other opportunities to comment as the design and permitting progress.*

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I attended the Anchorage open house held April 19th and wish to make the following comments as I understand the project to date: IT NEEDS TO BE CUT BACK IN SIZE.

a) One of your staff estimated that the fill would extend 600' into the inlet. Such a change in the shoreline would drastically change the flow of the tide, affecting both the fish and shoreline to say nothing about the changes to the Beluga Whale Critical Habitat. Do you have definitive information on such effects and have concluded that it will not harm the whales, erode the shoreline, impede the fish? Have you done studies that show how smaller projects could meet safety needs and reduce the adverse effects on the above resources or have you only information on the project as currently designed????

b) It is too large for state parks to manage the maintenance once the project is completed and given to the Park. Chugach State Park already has an enormous backlog of maintenance; it gets insufficient funding to keep up with day to day maintenance much less pick up new responsibilities like plowing the parking lots in winter and cleaning any and all restrooms. Moreover, there are insufficient rangers to occasionally check on the facilities.

c) The fill required, 1.8 million cubic feet, is simply too enormous to consider seriously. From the preferred borrow site would require an estimated 150,000 truckloads or 300,000 truck trips from the area to the site. Will these trips not profoundly increase the traffic accident rates this project is premised on. I understand the highway will not be allowed to be closed which means mixing those trips into both summer and winter traffic. The 2013 study shows that conveying the fill by train would require only 90 days unlike the 275 days required if conveyed by truck. Is it not much cheaper as well as safer to build a rail spur to convey the fill for 90 days rather than run 300,000 truck trips over 275 days?

d) The amount of fill will require round the clock blasting for months and the huge pit left after extracting 1.8 million cubic feet will adversely affect the scenic drive down the Arm, and the park's scenic beauty. What happens to the moose, bear and Dall sheep in the area? I see no way that the devastation left after that amount of blasting can be hidden from the highway.

e) What provisions will be made for the two property owners who live in sight of the highway, just off the Rainbow Road? They clearly will hear all the blasting and all the truck trips for what, a year, around the clock? I suggest you trying to buy them out outright or at least pay their costs for temporary, alternate accommodations for the amount of time they will need to relocate to avoid all the blasting and truck trip noise, compensate them for their relocation costs and pay for the troubles this project will cause them.

In short, this project needs to be cut back substantially. And, of course, the obvious, cheaper way to make the highway safer at this place is to provide around-the-clock trooper coverage and build several small pull-out areas for traffic to stop at to view wildlife. Thank you for this opportunity to comment. I would appreciate being added to your email list for notices.

*Team response: [Redacted] - thanks for attending our open house in Anchorage and submitting these detailed comments. We will take these comments into consideration at*

*we continue our work on the project. I do feel it necessary to correct one item in your email. The fill requirement is in cubic yards, not cubic feet. The difference is significant. I will add your email address to our project outreach list so you receive notice of future comment opportunities, website updates and meeting notices.*

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I object very strongly to this project for many reasons, which I list below. I did attend the Anchorage public information open house on this project.

First, the project will not improve, but will instead decrease safety because it will increase the speed of drivers by providing for two lanes in each direction. The current design simply creates a high speed passing zone, regardless of whatever "speed" is set for that area. As well, since the state troopers have, for budget reasons, had to close their Girdwood station, the ability to enforce highway speeds has been reduced. So, these additional and straighter lanes will certainly increase illegal speeding. Safety decreases for pedestrians as well. Despite pedestrian underpasses, people will still go across the highway to view the Dall sheep.

Second, the project also negatively impacts the beauty of the highway because it requires massive mining of rock, to be crushed and used for fill. This is a national Scenic Byway; this project as proposed would decrease the scenic qualities of this highway, much as the Bird Creek project has, and perhaps more so, given plans for rock quarries. It is entirely inconsistent with a Scenic Byway.

Third, the project will negatively impact the wildlife viewing, thus defeating one of the alleged purposes of the project. Wildlife viewing will obviously be degraded during construction--especially the lengthy period of time of rock dynamiting at material sites adjacent to wildlife viewing habitat. The project will remove some of the wildlife-viewing habitat itself--which is prime habitat for Dall Sheep. As well, smoothing the coastline and removing promontories and indentations will negatively affect beluga whales, therefore negatively affecting wildlife viewing. Furthermore, these whales are listed as endangered.

Fourth, this project will most certainly obliterate wildlife habitat and degrade Chugach State Park. This park is extremely important to the quality of life for tens of thousands of Alaskans and visitors. The proposed rock quarries (whether one or both would be used) would add to the loss of habitat, degradation of natural beauty, and recreational use of Alaska's most popular and heavily-used state park.

Fifth, existing recreational uses, such as rock climbing, will be lost with this project.

Sixth, this project is extremely expensive at a time when the state can ill afford such expenses. Cutting a few minutes off of a commute or transport simply isn't reason enough for all the damage and cost. This money would be better spent on more pressing state and national needs.

This entire project should be scrapped, and instead strict traffic controls implemented at Windy Point. Those controls should focus on reducing the danger of motor vehicle accidents. There are better and far less expensive ways of increasing safety, and this project simply isn't one of them. Sincerely,

*Team response: Thank you for your comments.*

*Seward Highway: MP 105-107 Windy Corner – April/May, 2016 Meeting Notes*

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Greetings, I'm commenting as a longtime resident of Anchorage, a regular visitor to Chugach State Park for more than three decades, a member of the group Friends of Chugach State Park (though I speak here for myself, not the group), and an advocate for the protection and maintenance of the park's wilderness and wildlife and other wild values. I have several concerns about the Windy Corner project, chief among them the negative impacts on parklands in the project area and the unknown or uncertain effects, possibly harmful, that it will have on the Dall sheep that inhabit the area, as well as opportunities to view those sheep. It's my understanding that the work to expand the highway, including and especially the blasting and removal/relocation of rock, will be done in areas that are important sheep habitat. I don't know how project managers can be certain that this won't have both short- and long-term harmful impacts on that sheep's use and dependence on that habitat. Certainly the sheep will be affected (driven away?) by the construction/destruction work as it's happening, as will those who wish to see the sheep. As others have noted, the highway redesign might actually harm wildlife viewing, rather than improve it.

Another concern: the increased speed of drivers along the straightened/expanded highway may very well increase the risks of accidents and injuries, rather than reduce them. Will this actually be a safer place to drive and/or watch the wild sheep? I'm not convinced.

I also am alarmed by the prospect of a rock quarry that, as I understand it, would be cut into parklands in the Rainbow area. Given the huge and appalling rock cut left near Bird Creek by previous DOT highway "improvements," it's hard to accept the agency's word that this will have less negative visual impacts, especially when the Rainbow cut is apparently going to be higher than the one at Bird Creek. How, exactly, is this massive cut going to be shielded from view? Some have also raised the question of whether such a rock quarry on Chugach State Park land is legal, under either state or federal law.

In short, from the perspective of the park's lands and wildlife—and arguably for sheep watchers as well—the DOT's proposed Windy Corner "improvements" will harm, rather than help, Chugach State Park, while also raising serious new highway safety questions, with faster traffic in an area where it should be slowed, given its known popularity as a wildlife-viewing area; a place where sometimes large numbers of people move around on foot without necessarily paying close attention to vehicle traffic. Count me among those who argue that the project as it's now envisioned should be halted and other approaches taken to address highway safety and wildlife-watching concerns in the Windy Corner area. Thanks for considering my comments and perspectives,

*Team response: [Redacted] – Thank you for your detailed comments. We would like to offer a response to several of the points you raised. You were concerned about the Dall sheep that frequent the area and that construction noise might drive away the sheep.*

*DOT&PF experience in the corridor has shown that while the sheep may leave an area temporarily during construction, they return to the area once the construction is complete. We believe this will be the case as the area of sheep habitat adjacent to the Windy Corner project area will see little hillside change and the road will move away from their habitat. Also, DOT&PF met with the Alaska Department Fish and Game*

*(ADF&G) in a series of meetings from 2013 to 2015 concerning potential project construction impacts and the constructed project impacts to Dall sheep at Windy Corner. ADF&G has indicated specific blasting restrictions for distance and time period would be required during the Dall Sheep lambing season and for blasting outside the lambing season.*

*Sheep viewing will be limited during construction for safety reasons but the additional parking areas and pedestrian underpass should make viewing the sheep after construction is completed much safer for the sheep and park visitors. The design also includes a viewing shelter and a viewing platform intended to keep people a safe distance from sheep while providing a better view.*

*The speed limit of the highway will remain the same and the passing lanes will help separate slow sightseeing and turning traffic from faster through traffic. Speed differentials on the current one-lane section contribute to increased crash levels.*

*Material sites are an important aspect of this project and we have heard many comments about them. Unfortunately, it is not possible to build the project and meet the safety improvement goals without a large quantity of fill material. We have determined that it is cost prohibitive to bring material in from further away from the project, however, the project will need to get a Special Use Permit (SUP) from the Department of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) to use the material site at MP 109. DPOR plans to hold an additional public review as part of the permitting process. Furthermore, the design team intends to reduce the visual impact of the material site from the road by leaving a buffer of intact hillside between the road and the proposed quarry area. The team has created a rendering of the concept design to illustrate our intent.*

*We share your concerns for people and wildlife and are working to make the project as beneficial to all who use the area as possible.*

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NO MONEY HONEY

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Great online meeting!

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I have lived along Turnagain Arm since 1990, driving this vital and beloved corridor everyday of the week in both directions, in all seasons. The Seward Highway is one of the most notable in the state, bestowed with the triple designation of being a National Scenic Byway, USDA Forest Service Byway and All American Road. With these designations we are mandated to preserve the special intrinsic qualities of the lands while making good decisions to improve safety, access and education along these roads. I have been following the Windy Corner project with interest and have the following comments at this time.

1. The Windy Corner project is prohibitively expensive at 80+ million, particularly with regards to our economic times and its touted safety mitigation value.

Review carefully Alaska Safety Corridors MVA/fatalities sites as project information was not so clear. The project segment does not appear to be “the most dangerous” of the corridor. Since

Traffic Safety Corridor Designation in 2006, there has been significant improvements in safety and highway efficiency. We can continue to employ actions that are working and in addition, add some more affordable improvements such as;

Turn lanes at McHugh Creek, Indian, Bird, and Portage, mainly Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center.

Keep the AST on this highway segment- they have made a difference. Unfortunately, this may be difficult with budget cuts.

Utilize video cams to enforce speed limits, headlights on law, and slow drivers who refuse to utilize pullout lanes. Drones?

Additional flashing speed and pedestrian signs.

Consider slower speed limits in more dangerous areas.

2. Material sites within the Chugach State Park will grossly detract from the intrinsic value of the highway corridor and the park. A major concern for many people is where the 1.8 + million cubic yards of material estimated for the project will come from. I was not clear or satisfied with any answers or depictions of these large mining sites, though I was told they were much larger than the Bird Creek quarry. Some type of virtual depiction would be more helpful. What I do know is that Material site #1, at 22 acres, at the edge of Rainbow Valley, has an astonishingly rich and productive ecosystem of sheltered, rolling bench lands embedded there, home of numerous bear and moose. Check it out. Material site #2, at 18.3 acres, near the edge of Indian Valley, abuts the Falls Creek-Indian section of Turnagain Trail and mentioned in project information as not passable. In actuality, it is well travelled to Falls Creek and also accesses Indian House Mtn via an old sheep trail, long shared by humans, which rivals Bird Ridge trail. Needless to say, there are many sheep in the rocky areas of this segment.

With all that said, I feel strongly that mining materials from the Chugach State Park on this particular corridor is complex with regards to wildlife habitat and the diverse recreational users that seek these special places. Material sites should come from the Portage area or perhaps continue excavating at the Bird Creek quarry to avoid a string of disruptions as we rework the highway.

3. The Windy Corner viewing platform and parking area at its current design is too large and may negatively affect the habits of the animals we love to see. Not to mention, the long period of construction may negatively affect their habits of being there.

4. Perhaps AKDOT should find/ fund creative projects involving railway travel to get folks off the highway.

In all honesty, I believe we should hold off on the Windy Point Project until more sustainable financial times. The days of Alaskans dismissing “federal funding” as something we don’t pay for is erroneous thinking, like printing money we don’t have. We all pay federal funding and must think critically and carefully when choosing to fund our necessities and our dreams.

Sincerely,

*Team response: [Redacted] – Thank you for your detailed comments. We would like to offer a response to several of the points you raised.*

*Material sites are an important aspect of this project and we have heard many comments about them. Unfortunately, it is not possible to build the project and meet the safety improvement goals without a large quantity of fill material. We have determined that it is cost prohibitive to bring material in from further away from the project, however, the project will need to get a Special Use Permit (SUP) from the Department of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) to use the material site at MP 109. DPOR plans to hold an additional public review as part of the permitting process. Furthermore, the design team intends to reduce the visual impact of the material site from the road by leaving a buffer of intact hillside between the road and the proposed quarry area. The team has created a rendering of the concept design to illustrate our intent.*

*DOT&PF experience in the corridor has shown that while the sheep may leave an area temporarily during construction, they return to the area once the construction is complete. We believe this will be the case as the area of sheep habitat adjacent to the Windy Corner project area will see little hillside change and the road will move away from their habitat. Also, DOT&PF met with the Alaska Department Fish and Game (ADF&G) in a series of meetings from 2013 to 2015 concerning potential project construction impacts and the constructed project impacts to Dall sheep at Windy Corner. ADF&G has indicated specific blasting restrictions for distance and time period would be required during the Dall Sheep lambing season and for blasting outside the lambing season.*

*Sheep viewing will be limited during construction for safety reasons but the additional parking areas and pedestrian underpass should make viewing the sheep after construction is completed much safer for the sheep and park visitors. The design also includes a viewing shelter and a viewing platform intended to keep people a safe distance from sheep while providing a better view.*

*There will be other opportunities to comment as the design and permitting progress.*

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Thanks Anne. Great that you extended comment period! There are soo many people who don't know.

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The Rainbow Valley Homeowners Association submitted the following letter.

We are taking this opportunity to comment on the proposed development in the Windy Corner vicinity on the Seward Highway (Federal Project 0A3134; Alaska Project Z566310000).

As President of the Rainbow Valley Homeowners Association, Inc. (RVHA), I want to advise you of several concerns of our 18 households that access the Seward Highway at Mile 108.5. RVHA, Inc., is a private inholding in Chugach State Park.

Most importantly: we believe the scale of the Windy Corner project is far too grandiose and far too expensive.

We recommend you scale back this plan limited to the minimum needs of more gentle curves at Windy Corner, and a larger pullout at the sheep lick.

You should avoid extra lanes or realignments that encourage higher speeds on slick winter roads, or involve extensive fill, including realigning the railroad.

As daily commuters, what we really need are the immediate safety improvements you can make in the short term. For example, the high-intensity reflectors were a great help. Putting another string of them on the mountain-side could better define the roadway and turnouts. Better signage also helps. Keeping current Trooper patrols would be the best thing, but not your department.

Secondly: We are opposed to Material Site 1 as proposed in the current project flier.

- The shape and depth of the pit will invite camping and trash. This has been a growing problem along Turnagain Arm for some years. Who will manage it, and clean it up? State Parks is over-committed, State Transportation won't take responsibility, and we have no police coverage.
- Blasting will take place a few hundred feet from our neighbors, and less than 2200' from our members' homes. Is there the potential for structural damage to buildings? For our homeowners without homeowners insurance, will DOT&PF compensate them for any damages caused by blasting?
- We also believe more rock quarries along the Seward Highway are not in keeping with its status as a National Scenic Byway, and it will encroach on Chugach Park.

We strongly recommend that all future development along the Turnagain Arm National Scenic Byway portion instead use material brought in by rail which is immediately parallel to the road and has access to much more material along its corridor.

–We also suggest that continued blasting immediately along Turnagain Arm is potentially detrimental to the Cook Inlet beluga population.

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Finally, I want to reiterate our request in our last letter to DOT&PF regarding this project (July 23, 2013) that DOT&PF contact RVHA directly and take our community and its interests seriously, regarding review of this and future Seward Highway projects planned between Potter and Indian.

Thank you for your consideration, Bob Childers, President, Rainbow Valley Homeowners Association

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I support the proposed project at Windy Corner. This safety improvement is needed to upgrade this important infrastructure that will support commerce and tourism as our state economy diversifies. Don't waste the opportunity to take advantage of federal transportation dollars to benefit Alaska. Don't be swayed by those who claim the impacts are too high or it must be delayed. This project in its various forms has been proposed to the public for more than 25 years

and there has never been a compelling reason to stop the project for environmental or other reasons. Please build this project. Thank you.

*Team response: Thanks [redacted].*

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The windy corner as designed should be adopted. My addition would be to open the view corridor at MP104 to reduce this major safety concern as part of Windy Corner. Diane Bahnson and Jason Small parishes at MP104 and using the work at MP107 to improve MP104 by removing fill material would be a win-win.

*Team response: Thanks [redacted].*

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Dear Ms. Brooks and other DOT officials,

As a past President of Girdwood Rotary and longtime Girdwood resident, I am in favor of the Windy Corner improvements. There is too much traffic on that little highway as it is. We need a safe place for people to pull off.

I'm still angry with former Governor Murkowski for removing all of our carefully cobbled together DOT monies to be used to straighten the highway. He just dumped the money in the lost cause Knik Arm Bridge and that bridge was never a good idea. The Knik Arm bridge project is the one that should have been buried, and our highway should have been straightened long ago.

Thanks for attending to our Girdwood opinion as I am confident I speak for most of my Girdwood neighbors,

*Team response: Thank you for your comments. If you would like to read what other people are saying about the project, the April-May open house summary is posted on the website. The notes include all the input we received in Anchorage, Girdwood, and online.*

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To Ann and any concerned parties, I am writing to express support for the upcoming Seward Highway improvements. The perceived inconveniences caused by road construction are outweighed by the needed safety improvements. If these improvements save a single life (and likely numerous lives) all inconveniences will have been worth it. This should be the most significant priority in assessing the viability of the planned improvements. Thank you for any consideration,

*Team response: Thank you for your comments. If you would like to read what other people are saying about the project, the April-May open house summary is posted on the website. The notes include all the input we received in Anchorage, Girdwood, and online.*

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I would like to briefly state that I support the project proposal for Windy Corner on the New Seward Hwy. I like many Alaskans would like to see habitat protected for our sheep so they can safely graze and enjoy the view... as we do :) but at the same time I would like the highway improved to make the drive safer. I support having a wildlife viewing area established with safe access to the parking area. Thank you for improving the safety of our roads.

*Team response: Thank you for your comments. If you would like to read what other people are saying about the project, the April-May open house summary is posted on the website. The notes include all the input we received in Anchorage, Girdwood, and online.*

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Thank you. I'm so happy there is a plan to make this dangerous part of the Seward Highway safer.

*Team response: Thank you for your comments. If you would like to read what other people are saying about the project, the April-May open house summary is posted on the website. The notes include all the input we received in Anchorage, Girdwood, and online.*

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As the owners tour company that travels the Seward Highway almost every day in the summer and very often in the winter, we have witnessed and have been involved in too many dangerous driving incidents from Anchorage to the Portage Valley Road.

We strongly support the Windy Corner project.

Safety needs to be the number one priority over saving some rocks. People's lives and well-being are at stake. Thank you,

*Team response: Thank you for your comments. If you would like to read what other people are saying about the project, the April-May open house summary is posted on the website. The notes include all the input we received in Anchorage, Girdwood, and online.*

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I am writing as an individual, no council discussion or action has occurred about this topic.

I believe that road design safety improvements with a pedestrian underpass and increased, separated parking are long overdue. This is a hazardous area of the Seward Highway, and also one with spectacular and interesting views.

*Team response: Thank you for your comments. If you would like to read what other people are saying about the project, the April-May open house summary is posted on the website. The notes include all the input we received in Anchorage, Girdwood, and online.*

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I support the Windy Corner project. I have traveled and commuted through this area for a long time and the "Sheep" viewing tourists have created a serious road hazard that is leading to accidents and eventually fatalities. I believe this project will make a much safer area for highway travel. Sincerely,

*Team response: Thank you for your comments. If you would like to read what other people are saying about the project, the April-May open house summary is posted on the website. The notes include all the input we received in Anchorage, Girdwood, and online.*

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Hi Anne, Could you please tell me how much of the DOT Windy Corner project funding will be coming from state funds, and how much from federal funds? Thanks,

*Team response: [Redacted]- The funding for the project is identified in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The STIP programs funding for*

*transportation projects throughout the state. The full document can be found here:  
<http://www.dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/cip/stip/index.shtml>.*

*I've attached the page showing the funding for the project which includes Milepost 105-107 from the current 2016-2019 STIP. The funding is planned with a mix of funds. I have included the fund descriptions from the STIP. Keep in mind that the STIP is amended periodically and funding sources can change.*

*We currently estimate the project cost around \$70 million. Assuming the bond, and line items for state match (OSF, SM) are all the state contributions, as currently funded, the state match is around 60 percent. Keep in mind that the estimate is refined as the detailed design is developed and the Department has great flexibility in how projects get funded. Depending on Statewide priorities, a greater share of federal funding may be used on this project. Most DOT&PF project are matched with around 9 percent of state funding.*

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Hi Anne, Could you please tell me the estimated total cost of this project and what percentage is being paid for by the State of Alaska. Thank you.

*Team response: [Redacted]: The funding for the project is identified in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The STIP programs funding for transportation projects throughout the state. The full document can be found here:  
<http://www.dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/cip/stip/index.shtml>*

*I've attached the page showing the funding for the project which includes Milepost 105-107 from the current 2016-2019 STIP. The funding is planned with a mix of funds. I have included the fund descriptions from the STIP. Keep in mind that the STIP is amended periodically and funding sources can change.*

*We currently estimate the project cost around \$70 million. Assuming the bond, and line items for state match (OSF, SM) are all the state contributions, as currently funded, the state match is around 60 percent. However, the Department has many funding options available and may ultimately choose some other funding combination. For an example, most transportation projects are funded with a 95/5 split of federal and state funds respectively.*

*Keep in mind that the estimate is refined as the detailed design is developed. Thanks for your interest in the project. Let us know if you have additional questions.*

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Hi Anne, Hope all is going well.

I've moved to Indian and drive this road frequently. Of course I'm always thinking what could help and what's working, especially every time I hear an accident. And I'm a big supporter of improving what makes sense along this safety corridor. I was looking through this data and didn't notice a graph/stats reflecting the # accidents by causes & location. Is that a part of information you have? Or shall I contact the State DOT safety folks?

I didn't make it to your public meeting, but did the online outreach and commented on line for the Windy Corner project. BTW nice work on the outreaches & information. Thanks

*Seward Highway: MP 105-107 Windy Corner – April/May, 2016 Meeting Notes*

*Team response: [Redacted] — Thank you for your comments and complements on the open house outreach. In your email you mentioned you were looking for crash data with causes and locations. You would need to contact Scott Thomas, DOT&PF Safety Office, (907-269-0639, scott.thomas@alaska.gov) for the information. Have you looked over the 2014 Safety Corridor Audit? It provides other information about number and severity of crashes over time.*

*To answer your questions about design features from the online comment sheet, the parking areas and underpass will be built where the highway and railroad are now, therefore would not require additional fill on their own account. Try comparing the right-of-way map with the improvements graphic. The section in orange labeled “ROW to be converted to Chugach State Park” is where the parking lot and other viewing amenities would go. The gravel parking area would be for overflow parking. Traffic counts and analysis showed that a merge lane is not warranted for the south-bound exit from the north parking lot. It is DOT&PF’s policy to not add extra lane miles unless the analysis shows it is necessary in order to keep maintenance costs down.*

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The Chugach State Park Citizens Advisory Board has been attempting to keep abreast of the Windy Corner project planning effort for several years. We remain as confused as ever because the project keeps morphing and we feel that the public has had little opportunity to review and comment on the project as it ticks off the design milestones.

We note that the Windy Corner project website says a third round of public meetings is tentatively scheduled for the first week of April 2016. We strongly encourage the project team to hold those meetings, in Anchorage and Girdwood at a minimum, as soon as possible. Also, it is important that the public and agencies see the plans as soon as possible, even before the meeting, so that you can collect informed comments.

We note, in particular, the shifting nature of the material sites, which are rumored to be different from the ones shown on the project website and potentially much larger. We anticipate there will be considerable public resistance to any more large material sites in Chugach State Park.

*Team response: [Redacted]: – Thank you for your comments. Material sites are an important aspect of this project and we have heard many comments about them. Unfortunately, it is not possible to build the project and meet the safety improvement goals without a large quantity of fill material. We have determined that it is cost prohibitive to bring material in from further away from the project, however, the project will need to get a permit from the Department of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) to use the material site at MP 109. DPOR plans to hold an additional public review as part of the permitting process. Furthermore, the design team intends to reduce the visual impact of the material site from the road by leaving a buffer of intact hillside between the road and the proposed quarry area. The team has created a rendering of the concept design to illustrate our intent.*

*There will be other opportunities to comment as the design and environmental permitting progress. The Federal Highway Administration is currently reviewing DOT&PF’s*

*application and will determine what the environmental class of action (Categorical Exclusion, etc.) will be for the project.*

Hi, I appreciate you providing more recent crash data but you really should replace the old crash data you still have in the online open house with the newer data.

One can't help but to think that you are keeping the old data in the online open house because it shows Windy Corner as the most dangerous spot whereas the newer data does not.

The designation of the Seward Hwy MP87-117 as a Safety Corridor in 2006 reduced the fatal and major injury crashes by 36%. You really shouldn't be using data before the designation since that is no longer relevant. According to one of your graphics there were no accidents of fatalities between MP105-107 between 2006 - 2009. The most relevant data would be from 2006 to the present and you need to present that information.

*Team response: [Redacted] - As for safety information, I'd refer you to the DOT&PF website for Safety Corridors. DOT staff analyze the crash data annually to audit the effectiveness of the safety corridor designations. Annual audits can be found at the following link: [http://www.dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/hwysafety/safety\\_corridors.shtm](http://www.dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/hwysafety/safety_corridors.shtm)*

*I recognize that all the data you are requesting is not available in the annual audits. The audits provide an overview and analysis on a broad scale to show safety corridor performance and consideration of the E's — education, engineering and enforcement. The audits also include a summary of the many mitigation measures being deployed to reduce the crashes on the highway—including construction projects and design projects, like Windy Corner.*

*To get to the level of detail you are requesting, you will need to contact the Central Region Traffic & Safety Engineer, Scott Thomas. Scott can be reached at 907-269-0639 or via email at [scott.thomas@alaska.gov](mailto:scott.thomas@alaska.gov). The data may not be available for the most recent years 2013-2015 because it takes some time to process.*

Table 1. Meeting Outreach

Date	Outreach method	Description
03/25/2016	Meeting notification on project website	Meeting notice on home page <a href="http://www.dowlhkm.com/projects/windycorner/index.html">http://www.dowlhkm.com/projects/windycorner/index.html</a>
03/31/2016	Mailer	Approximately 1,470 invitations mailed to local businesses, residents, and agencies
03/31/2016	Online community calendar	Request sent to post the event on the <i>Alaska Dispatch News</i> online calendar
04/05/2016	Display advertising in <i>Alaska Dispatch News</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
04/05/2016	Email notice and reminder	Provide email invitation to the meeting to project

Date	Outreach method	Description
04/18/2016		stakeholders and Anchorage Transportation Fair list
04/05/2016	Facebook ad campaign	Sponsored Facebook posts to invite people to the meeting and increase likes for the project Facebook page, grew page likes by 44 to 372 total page likes, drove several new comments on the page
04/05/2016	Facebook event	Inviting the public to the open house, 4 people RSVP'd, 14 expressed interest in the event
04/07/2016	Display advertising in <i>Turnagain Times</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
04/08/2016 04/17/2016	Federation of Community Councils notification	The Federation of Community Councils sent a meeting notification to their subscriber list
04/11/2016	Public service announcement request sent to: KBBO-FM, KNBA-FM, KWHL-FM, KEUL-FM, GCI Cable	Sent with request to broadcast announcement inviting public to meeting
04/12/2016	Display advertising in <i>Peninsula Clarion</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
04/12/2016 04/19/2016 04/20/2016	Facebook update	Post about the meeting on the project Facebook page <a href="https://www.facebook.com/pages/Seward-Highway-MP-105-107-Windy-Corner-Project/450234331728338">https://www.facebook.com/pages/Seward-Highway-MP-105-107-Windy-Corner-Project/450234331728338</a>
04/13/2016	Display advertising in <i>Glacier City Gazette</i>	Inviting the public to the open house
04/14/2016	Print community calendar	Calendar event in the <i>Alaska Dispatch News</i>
04/15/2016	State of Alaska Online Notice	Inviting the public to the open house
04/15/2016	DOT&PF online calendar	Meeting listed on the DOT&PF online public meeting calendar <a href="http://dot.alaska.gov/creg/calendar.shtml">http://dot.alaska.gov/creg/calendar.shtml</a>
04/18/2016	Announcement at GBOS meeting	Inviting GBOS members to the open house
04/18/2016	Announcement at Alaska Trails and Chugach Trails Committee meeting	Inviting attendees to the open house
04/21/2016	Article in <i>Turnagain Times</i>	Article in <i>Turnagain Times</i> provided questions and answers about the project.
04/21/2016	Girdwood Rotary Club meeting	Rotarian Hank Hosford distributed meeting handouts at the Rotary club meeting. He reported the information was well received.

**Related documents on file:**

Sign-in sheets

Handouts (comment sheet, fact sheet)

Informational boards

Comment sheets received at Anchorage, Girdwood and online meetings

Mailer

Public service announcements and advertising

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