



SEWARD HIGHWAY
MP 105-107



Scoping Summary Report

May 2013



SCOPING SUMMARY REPORT

**SEWARD HIGHWAY MILEPOST 105 TO MILEPOST 107,
WINDY CORNER**

DOT&PF Project No. 56631

Prepared for:

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Appendix C	Agency Scoping and Meeting Materials
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Appendix E	Agency Scoping Comments
Appendix F	Additional Agency Coordination Regarding Summer 2013 Geotechnical and Survey Work

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARRC	Alaska Railroad Corporation
CE	Categorical Exclusion
CSP	Chugach State Park
DOT&PF	State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
MP	milepost

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

The State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is initiating the Seward Highway Milepost (MP) 105 to MP 107, Windy Corner Project, to realign and construct safety improvements to this segment of the Seward Highway.

Seward Highway is a National/State Scenic Byway and an All-America Road that provides sole overland access to communities south of Anchorage, the Kenai Peninsula, and the Alaska Marine Highway System at Whittier. The highway supports heavy commercial, recreational, and residential traffic. The DOT&PF 2012 Annual Traffic Volume Report reported annual average daily traffic volumes in the corridor at 10,156 vehicles, with heaviest daily traffic volumes exceeding 22,000 vehicles during peak periods in the summer months. The highway segment from Anchorage to Girdwood is one of four designated Safety Corridors in Alaska due to its elevated rate of high severity (e.g., fatal/major) injury crashes. Traffic operations between MP 105 and MP 107 are frequently disrupted by motorists slowing and parking along the highway shoulder to view wildlife, creating a high differential in speeds between average motorists traveling through the corridor and those that are sightseeing. This differential in speeds combined with the uncontrolled movement of traffic entering and exiting the highway contributes to the elevated crash rate in the corridor (DOT&PF, 2009; DOT&PF, 2012).

The project, located within the Municipality of Anchorage between Indian and Rainbow, involves realigning and constructing a divided 2-lane highway from MP 105 to MP 107. In order to create space for the road realignment, relocating and realigning the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) tracks is also needed. The space created by the road and rail realignment would accommodate improved parking/pullout facilities on both sides of the highway with new auxiliary lanes to accommodate traffic entering and exiting the highway.

Scoping is used to gather information from the interested public and potentially affected agencies on the proposed project and preliminary environmental considerations. This scoping summary report summarizes the public and agency process for this project and comments received.



Figure 1: Project Location and Vicinity Map

1.2 Project History

The proposed project is being developed with a combination of State and Federal funds. In 2004, FHWA approved a Categorical Exclusion (CE) for the proposed Seward Highway Safety Improvements, Indian (MP 105) to Potter Marsh (MP 115) Project. Recent consultation with FHWA concluded that a re-evaluation of the 2004 CE was appropriate for this project area (MP 105 to MP 107).

2.0 PROJECT TEAM

DOT&PF

- Tom Schmid, P.E., Project Manager
- Quinten Arndt, Consultant Coordinator
- Mark Boydston, Environmental Impact Analyst

DOWL HKM

- Steve Noble, P.E., PTOE, Project Manager
- Aaron Christie, P.E., Project Engineer
- Maryellen Tuttell, AICP, Public Involvement Task Leader
- Kristen Hansen, Environmental Manager
- Erin Gora, Environmental Specialist

Brooks and Associates

- Anne Brooks, P.E., Public Participation Coordinator
- Camden Yehle, Public Involvement Associate

2.1 Public Involvement Method

A public involvement plan was created outlining methods to be used to reach the interested public, local, state and federal resource agencies, to gather information and to encourage project participation. Methods included:

- Chronological list of scoping and public involvement activities
- Public and agency scoping meetings
- Comment and response summary
- Informational flyers and newsletters
- Mailing list
- Print media and press releases on project for *Anchorage Daily News*, *Turnagain Times*, *Seward Phoenix Log*, *Peninsula Clarion*, *Homer News*, *Homer Tribune* and other regional publications
- State of Alaska online notices
- Routine communications through project email: *windycorner@dowlhkm.com*
- Girdwood Board of Supervisors, Turnagain Arm Community Council, and other interest group meetings
- Project website: *www.windycorner.info* and Facebook site

2.1.1 Mailing List of Potentially Affected Interests

Contact lists have been developed for the project and include a postal mailing list and an email list. The initial postal mailing list includes agencies, public officials, residents, property owners,

businesses, and others within the zip codes 99587 (Girdwood) and 99540 (Rainbow and Indian). In total, these lists contain approximately 1,500 addresses.

An email list has been developed to provide notice to stakeholders of input opportunities, website updates, etc., via email. This list includes about 141 addresses.

Both lists will be continually updated throughout the project.

2.1.2 Outreach Methods for Public Scoping Meeting

Meeting outreach included newspaper advertisements across Southcentral Alaska, a project website, a mailed postcard, an email notice, radio public service announcements, and a post on the State of Alaska Online Notice site. A table outlining specific meeting outreach methods is summarized in Appendix A, Table 1.

2.1.3 Project Website

A project website was established at, *www.windycorner.info*. The website was developed to provide specific information regarding the project area, objectives, schedule, project documents, and team members in addition to providing an opportunity for the public to submit comments. A copy of the website content is attached as Appendix B.

2.1.4 Project Email Address

Comments about the project could be sent to the project-specific email address, *windycorner@dowlhkm.com*. This address was included on all outreach materials including the project fact sheet and on a comment sheet handed out at public meetings.

2.1.5 Comment Sheet

A project comment sheet was developed and made available at the public meeting. The form included designated sections for the commenter to provide input and opinions, and to provide contact information so that they could be included on the project distribution list.

3.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

3.1 Public Meeting

A public meeting was held at the Girdwood Community Center on Monday, March 4, 2013, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Community members signed in and met with project staff one-on-one to discuss individual issues and concerns. Boards with project information were displayed around the meeting room. At 6:30 p.m., project staff gave a 45-minute presentation. The topics included in the presentation are listed below:

- Meeting purpose
- Project description
- Project purpose and need
- Project history
- Existing conditions
- Project schedule
- Public involvement process

Following the presentation, an open-house format allowed for questions and comments. Public input was recorded on flip charts and incorporated into the meeting summary. At the end of the question and answer period, the one-on-one discussion with individuals resumed and lasted until 8 p.m. Thirty-seven people signed in at the meeting.

The team also presented project information at the following community meetings:

- Girdwood Board of Supervisors - February 18 and April 15, 2013
- Turnagain Arm Community Council - May 9, 2013

General questions and comments included concerns about potential materials sites and aesthetic impacts caused by material excavation, enhanced recreational and emergency access to Turnagain Arm, roadway lighting, accidents, and fatalities on the roadway, Falls Creek Trail access, bicycle facilities, impacts to beluga whales, and the future of Gorilla Rock. Notes from the public scoping meeting are attached as Appendix A.

3.2 Documentation of Public Comments

Comments have been received by mail, telephone, email, in person, and on written comment sheets. A summary of the comments and the team's response is provided in Appendix D. Key issues are listed below:

- Material sites
 - Location
 - Mining practices and reclamation
 - Balancing needs versus design
- Turnagain Arm access
 - Recreational
 - Emergency response
 - Facilities
- Railroad extension
- Gorilla Rock preservation and access
- Lighting
- Project short term and long term goals
- Rock slides
- Funding
- Engineering design
- Maintenance

4.0 AGENCY PARTICIPATION

4.1 Agency Scoping Letters

Agency scoping letters containing preliminary environmental research were sent on March 5, 2013, to potentially affected resource agencies. Letters requested agencies to provide feedback on available resource information and potential environmental impacts to resources under their jurisdiction prior to April 1, 2013.

4.2 Agency Scoping Meeting

An agency scoping meeting was held at DOWL HKM on March 20, 2013, from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. This meeting provided agency staff an opportunity to discuss project issues and concerns

with the project team after a brief presentation. Representative from eight agencies attended the scoping meeting. The agency scoping letters and meeting materials are located within Appendix C.

Topics covered within the presentation are listed below:

- Overview of the project purpose and need
- Overview of the project history
 - 2004 CE covering MP 105 to MP 115
 - 2007 Preliminary Engineering MP 105 to MP 107
 - 2011 Value Engineering MP 105 to MP 107
- Proposed action
 - Preliminary design details
 - Potential rock cut areas
 - Preliminary material source investigations
 - Agency consultation and permitting
 - Previously raised issues/concerns
- Environmental documentation and permitting

In addition to the agency scoping described above, DOT&PF consulted with the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Chugach State Park (CSP) staff regarding current design plans for the project, as well as proposed material site investigations and other issues relevant to the Land and Water Conservation Act conversion process. Meetings were held with State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources on March 6 and March 12, 2013. The DOT&PF also consulted with other state and federal agencies specifically regarding their upcoming geotechnical and survey fieldwork. All agency correspondence to date related to the proposed summer fieldwork is included in Appendix F.

4.3 Documentation of Agency Comments

Four agency comments were received during scoping and reviewed by the project team. A detailed comment summary is located within Appendix E of this report. Key issues are listed below:

- Impacts to mudflats, essential fish habitat, and designated critical habitat for beluga whales
- Location of material sites
- Consideration of geometric design, stability, and maintenance of realigned railroad track
- Consideration of impacts to CSP

4.4 Technical Advisory Group

A Technical Advisory Group will be convened to provide information to agencies with direct authority over specific jurisdictional resources during project development. The first Technical Advisory Group meeting is scheduled for May 28, 2013, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at DOWL HKM. Agency representatives from ARRC, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Alaska State Parks Department are expected to attend.

5.0 REFERENCES

DOT&PF. 2009. *Seward Highway Motor Vehicle Crash Statistics and Evaluation, 2009*; Ron Martindale.

DOT&PF. 2011. *Safety Corridors Annual Review, 2010, 2011, and 2012*.