

Seward Highway Corridor Study, MP 0-90

Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) Kickoff Meeting

See also accompanying meeting packet and presentation.

Participants (alpha by first name):

First Name	Last Name	Entity/Community
Brian	Lindamood	Alaska Railroad Corporation
Bruce	Jaffa	Moose Pass Advisory Planning Commission
David	Phillips	Chugach Alaska Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) – Central Region
David	Post	DOT&PF – Central Region
Eric	Miyashiro	United States Forest Service/Chugach National Forest
Griff	Berg	Girdwood Board of Supervisors
Jerry	Fox	Hope/Sunrise Advisory Planning Commission
Jim	Skogstad	DOT&PF – Central Region
John	Linnell	DOT&PF – Central Region
Joselyn	Biloon	Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Kurt	Hensel	Kenai Peninsula Borough
Marcus	Mueller	DOT&PF – Headquarters
Marie	Heidemann	Girdwood Board of Supervisors
Mike	Edgington	DNR
Rob	Earl	

Project Consultant Team:

- PDC Engineers: Pat Cotter, Keith Hanneman, Alex London, Heather Estabrook
- Agnew::Beck Consulting: Shelly Wade, Molly Mylius

NOTE: Additional community and entity stakeholders have been contacted to gauge their interest and capacity to participate in the Stakeholder Working Group but have not yet responded to the project team. This includes: City of Seward, CIRI, Portage Valley Community Council.

Welcome, Land Acknowledgement & Introductions

- Shelly introduced participants, conducted a land acknowledgement and gave a short orientation to the purpose of today's meeting.

Project Background, Purpose, Expectations and Schedule

Expectations

Responses to the following questions: How can this process/the final study benefit your community/agency? What outcome would make this process/the final product worth your (your entity's) participation?

- Shelly shared an example expectation that came from interviews: formalize the stakeholder working group as an ongoing group that meets regularly to promote partnership coordination toward a common vision for the corridor.
- Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) expectations:
 - Hoping this will result in a shared understanding of what the corridor is. Up until now DOT has worked project to project, but not at a corridor level. How can the whole corridor function better? What is it, what should it be, and what will it NOT be? What other transportation needs cannot be met by the corridor?
 - Would like to see Memorandums of Understanding that establish partnership agreements around joint priorities to increase collaboration.
 - Maintain connectivity with Kenai Peninsula communities. All these communities are dependent on proximity to Anchorage. If traffic is not well managed, that really impacts those communities along the corridor. Make sure the corridor functions efficiently for the benefit of all those communities as well as the traveling public.
 - Defining a shared long term vision. Are there areas that need to be modernized?
 - At a statewide level, DOT&PF is working on project selection criteria. It will be helpful to categorize corridor projects into the following categories:
 - Projects along sections of the highway that are generally sufficient but in need of minor maintenance
 - Projects to update outdated characteristics or features along the highway
 - Projects that increase capacity through sections of the highway
- Community expectations:
 - Bruce (Moose Pass) – Identify and compile data that is necessary to make informed decisions. What are load requirements? What changes can we anticipate in 15-20 years? Identify what is needed to handle critical user needs while also preserving a certain lifestyle. Moose Pass is unique; we have a bottleneck based on geography and are unlikely to see a bypass like Cooper Landing; the road will probably continue to be filtered through our community. The people who live here realize the highway is the lifeblood and are willing to tolerate reasonable changes/sacrifices to make improvements.
 - Jim (Hope) – The community of Hope relies on connectivity to both Seward and Girdwood for supplies, education, employment, etc. Any further projects along this corridor need to seriously consider 3-4 lane travel, along with a bike path. This may be a unique year, but overall Hope has seen nothing but growth (fishing, recreation, tourism) along the corridor, especially in summer.
 - Jerry (Girdwood) – My biggest concern is safety. I know how unsafe the highway is; anything we can do to make it safer is forward progress. Even though we're not expanding population, the road is seeing more traffic every year. We need to keep people moving.
 - Mike (Girdwood) – Volunteer first responders see traffic challenges firsthand when responding to accidents. Girdwood residents also use the corridor to access recreation space for personal use, and via tourism businesses that take patrons into the backcountry.

- Department of Natural Resources (DNR) expectations
 - Rob (DNR planner) – Supports everything that has been said so far. Supports bike paths, connectivity, increasing safety, establishing MOUs. Overall DNR wants to remain neutral, hear different perspectives and see how their agency can help.
 - Kurt (Chugach State Parks) – Looking forward to learning who the different contacts are for the different agencies; still somewhat new to this role and building relationships. State Parks has a lot going on. Chugach State Park starts at the end of this corridor boundary (MP 90) but is impacted by what is happening along the corridor. Safety improvements are the top priority. Also support expanding opportunities for recreation and tourism, when it can be done safely. That is a challenge along other segments of the highway, like the turn-in at the McHugh trailhead. Also sit on the Chugach State Parks Advisory Board; that group has indicated a lot of support for a bike path along the highway.
- Other landowner expectations:
 - Marcus (Kenai Peninsula Borough) – Excited about the prospect of cross-pollination between agencies and collaborative work on projects like trailheads, bathrooms. Advocate for best arrangement of resources. Looking forward to doing development forecasting to anticipate needs, services and gaps. Communications infrastructure is still in development. Since this is a very rural area there is a different tax structure than you would see in a populated area, so it takes a different strategy to provide services along the corridor.
 - Dave (Chugach Alaska) – Our priority is keeping traffic flowing in a safe manner. This is one of the most dangerous roads in the state; how can we improve safety? Also need to ensure the road is built for the capacity of commercial traffic such as big busses and commercial equipment.
 - Griff (USFS Chugach National Forest) – Access for recreation and subsistence are both important, we well as safety.
- Alaska Railroad expectations:
 - The Railroad and DOT&PF share between one third and one half of the corridor, so it is important to coordinate. The Railroad has both freight and passengers, some seasonal and some not. The Railroad wants to make sure their plans integrate and are complimentary to DOT's plans. In addition, the Railroad has many folks using the highway every day to get to/from work and move between destinations, and their agency worries about them getting through the corridor easily and safely.

SWG Member Roles, Responsibilities, Potential Meeting Dates/Topics

- Reviewed SWG member roles, responsibilities and tentative meeting dates/topics.

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

- No questions or discussion on the stakeholder engagement plan.

Interview Themes by Key Topic

- Addition to the user needs and conflicts summary:
 - The corridor is basically a park. There are people who want to enjoy the visual aspects of the park, and those who want to move efficiently through it.
- Addition to collaboration summary:
 - Shelly noted the collaboration slide did not mention one additional theme we heard: interviewees expressed the importance of long-term interagency planning, not just short-term project-based or sometimes reactive coordination.
- Addition to stakeholders summary:

- Re: Department of Public Safety/Troopers – They should be on the Stakeholder Working Group. They have a unique, critical perspective on the corridor.
- City of Seward – Bruce emailed the Seward city manager and city mayor to encourage them to participate in this process. He was surprised they were not represented in this meeting.
- Kenai Mountain Arm Heritage Group has partnered with DOT&PF. It was a difficult project to get all the rules covered to help with signs, but it did eventually happen. When considering trailheads and signage, the Heritage group has unique funding sources and should be involved. The group’s Executive Director, Jessica S. should be brought into this effort.
- Department of Defense – The strategic nature of this highway is not often discussed. This is also a civil defense corridor. Department of Defense should be contacted – how do they think about the corridor? They might be able to offer some insight or have unique needs.
- Add the City of Whittier; they are contracted to provide some public services along the corridor.
- Ensure Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Visitor’s Bureaus; Tourism and Marketing Council are represented on the stakeholder list.
- Include telecommunications providers.

Emerging Maps

- Introduction to map design:
 - These are preliminary versions of the maps.
 - The project team recognizes using 10 mile intervals may not be the best way to segment, map and plan along the corridor; open to input about whether there are better ways to create planning segments with similar characteristics.
 - One possible output could be a map of the corridor highlighting key issues along the way.
- Discussion on mapping accident data:
 - It is important to distinguish between accidents with property damage, those with injuries, and those with deaths.
 - Amount of traffic vs. incident reports is important. Look at the percentages of accidents relative to traffic volumes; we would expect more accidents along segments with more traffic. Some agencies have acceptable percentages for accidents per a certain volume of traffic.
 - The state has a calculation – an estimated number of traffic accidents that will result in a death. That metric could help inform planning and risk mitigation.
 - Injury accidents may be a better indicator than just accidents. One of our first responders says, “The difference between an injury accident and a fatality is often response time.”

Next Steps and Meeting Date

- Question: Between now and August, are there certain conversations stakeholders should be having in their circles?
 - Okay to share interview questions; ask stakeholders their thoughts on needs, desires, improvements, vision for the corridor?
 - Okay to share the slides.
- Stakeholder working group members are welcome to share other data or inputs that could help inform the process.

Follow up steps for the project team:

- Distribute meeting notes.
- Develop a simplified question list that SWG members can share with other audiences.
- Create and send out a Doodle poll for an August SWG meeting.
- Compile and share ideas for engaging other stakeholders and get input from SWG members.