

# **Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan 2014 Update**

## **Haines, Alaska / Meeting Summaries**

### **Introduction**

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) issued a Draft update to the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (SATP) in August 2014 for public review. DOT&PF held an open house at 5:30 pm and a public meeting at 6:30 pm on September 10, 2014, at the Haines Assembly Chambers to discuss the Draft SATP. A combined total of 51 people signed in as attending the open house or public meeting, although a room count tallied about 58 people. In addition, DOT&PF staff met at 10:00 am with the Haines Borough Mayor, Manager, two Assembly members and staff. (See attached attendance lists for the public and Borough meetings.)

### **DOT&PF Presentation at Open House/Public Meeting**

The public meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed:

- The DOT&PF statutory obligation to develop and maintain the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan, as a component of the Alaska Long Range Transportation Plan. The SATP directs investment in the regional transportation system over a 20-year period, identifying current priorities and guiding development of projects.
- The SATP was first published in 1980 and was updated and revised in 1986, 1999, and 2004 as an approved component of the Statewide Transportation Plan. To prepare the current update, DOT&PF conducted a scoping process in 2011, which led to development of the Draft SATP document in 2014.
- The comment period for this Draft SATP document is open until September 30, 2014. Written comments can be submitted to DOT&PF via email, mail or fax.
- There are also current National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) processes for several projects that have separate comment periods and official administrative records. These include the proposed East Lynn Canal Highway, the proposed road connection from Kake to Petersburg, and construction of the Angoon Airport. Comments intended for consideration by an EIS must be submitted to the project manager of each EIS during its open comment periods.
- Trends for the Existing Transportation System – The Draft SATP analyzed and responds to trends that show a *decrease* in Southeast Alaska population, traffic on the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) and funding for transportation projects, coupled with *increases* in operations, maintenance and construction costs.
  - Since 2006, AMHS Southeastern Alaska annual maintenance and operation costs have increased from about \$110M to nearly \$140M, while ferry sailings have dropped from about 6,500/year to 6,000 year in that period.
  - From 1991-2012, passenger ridership has declined from approximately 370,000 to 310,000/year, with vehicle traffic holding fairly steady at approximately 100,000

vehicles/year. Over that time, the ferry fleet has increased from six to ten ferries (including ferries operated by the Inter-Island Ferry Authority [IFA]).

- The SATP considers many factors: three aging mainline ferries, comments received on the Scoping Report, interest in continuing existing ferry routes, cost to maintain the existing transportation system, regional transportation needs, current priorities and projects, and funding forecasts.
- Recommendations – The Draft SATP recommends maintaining all existing highway and ferry routes and provides improvements that will further increase the mobility of people and goods, such as new road links. It also includes measures to help reduce some system costs, such as retirement or replacement of aging mainliners and use of day boats. It recommends the following specific changes to the transportation system, that would (1) better match capacity to demand, (2) keep ferry service to Bellingham, (3) keep cross Gulf ferry service, and (4) emphasize labor and fuel efficiency:
  - 2016 & 2017 – Use new Alaska Class ferries to service Lynn Canal
  - 2018 – Angoon Airport completed
  - 2020 – Lynn Canal Highway to Katzechin and ferry terminal completed
  - 2020 – Haines-Skagway shuttle ferry service initiated
  - 2020 – Kake-Petersburg Road (gravel single land) and Wrangell Narrows shuttle ferry terminals completed
  - 2025 – New mainline ferry on-line; potential for a second mainline ferry to follow
  - 2028 – Fast ferry replacement
  - 2033 – Sitka-Warm Springs Bay road initiated (planning, environmental, design). Construction is not anticipated during the 20-year planning period.
- Capital costs over the next 20 years to maintain and implement the preferred alternative total \$1.3B for system refurbishments and \$1.2B for major projects (construction, procurement), respectively. The Plan reduces the annual operation and maintenance expense of the overall regional transportation system three percent. (Noted that the preferred alternative is not the least expensive alternative, as maximizing the use of existing roads or constructing Highway Route 7 would reduce annual costs by 15% to 16%, respectively.)
- The Draft SATP document also includes information about continuing efforts to maintain and improve the transportation system in Southeast Alaska, provides an overview of the existing system, identifies undeveloped essential transportation and utility corridors in the region (App. A), describes the scoping process and public comments (App. B), compares the four planning alternatives (App. C), and provides public and government involvement plans (App. D).
- The Draft Plan recommendations would have the following impacts on Northern Lynn Canal (Haines and Skagway):
  - (1) Completion of two Alaska Class Dayboat (ACD) ferries, operating as day boats, in 2017 (now 2018)
  - (2) One mainliner is replaced; road and ferry terminal anticipated completion in 2020.
    - One ACD ferry Skagway-Katzechin

- One ACD ferry Haines-Katzehin
  - Shuttle ferry Haines-Skagway
- (3) Greater opportunity to travel between Haines, Skagway and Juneau at a reduced travel cost.
- DOT&PF will release the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the Juneau Access Project soon for public review. There will be another series of public meetings and public comment period for the SEIS. It is important that the public also participates in that process and submits comments during that comment period for inclusion in the administrative record for the Juneau Access project.

## Questions & Answers, Comments

### Key

- Comment or Question
  - DOT&PF Response

### Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan Preparation & Updates

- The draft SATP says it is a “guide” for the future, but then also says it is required by law. What is its legal status?
  - Clarification that the SATP is required by Statute to be developed and regularly updated.

### Proposed East Lynn Canal Highway (Juneau Access) – Opposition to the Road

A very strong majority of public meeting participants spoke in opposition to the construction of the East Lynn Canal road and in support of ferry service in the upper Lynn Canal, offering the following questions and comments.

- In 2004, 90% of the scoping comments opposed the East Lynn Canal road. Frustration that DOT&PF is not listening to the majority of the public, which opposes the road.
- What would it take to change DOT&PF’s plan to construct the Juneau Access Road?
  - Clarification that a decision on the Juneau Access project will not be made until the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process is completed. The SATP will be revised, if necessary, to match the outcome of that decision.
- Walk-on passengers - many comments were made regarding lack of provision for passengers traveling without vehicles, getting to/from Katzehin/Juneau. No confidence that the private sector will step up to provide cost-effective commercial services (noted that taxi would be unaffordable and infeasible). Comment made that the City and Borough of Sitka’s and Marine Transportation Advisory Board’s past scoping comments highlighted the need to provide for foot passengers.
- Safety concerns – particularly related to winter road conditions, avalanches, geological hazards, potential stranding of passengers and vehicles at Katzehin or along the roadway, and accidents. Particular concerns expressed for safety of elderly, students, families, and emergency responders that would be required to assist with accidents. Comment made that this route is much different and less safe than the Seward Highway, due to its cliff-side

location.

- Winter road closures – Concern that it will not be possible or affordable to keep the road open for travel in winter conditions. Comment that in December-January 2013-2014, it snowed every day for a total accumulate of ten feet. Public would not and could not travel that 80-mile road in such conditions. Concern that it will not be feasible for the Alaska Class Ferry to be used to move passengers/vehicles to Juneau in case of a road closure. Noted that when the North Cascade Highway was built in Washington, the State intended to keep it open in winter, but this has not been the case due to winter road conditions and high costs. Noted that DOT&PF is not even able to adequately plow snow in the community of Haines, much less on this type of regional road. What if this is a winter “road to nowhere” and we still need regional ferry service?
- Utility to the public – Connecting to the continental road system through Haines or Skagway is not a true benefit to the public. Expect that public use will not be high for this purpose, due to the length of travel and road conditions, particularly in winter. The presumption that people will heavily use a connection to the continental road system is not accurate. People will generally choose to fly when they travel farther distances. DOT&PF needs to gather data on actual travel routes used by residents of Haines and Skagway, who already have this connection to the continental road system.
- Expense - The road will be too costly to build and to maintain, and drains resources from other transportation projects that are needed and supported by the public.
- Engineering feasibility – Ten years ago, a speaker for DOT&PF at a public meeting admitted that there were engineering challenges for this road for which there were no current solutions, but said that solutions would be “forthcoming”. Since the draft SATP says the road will be constructed by 2020, what engineering solutions have been discovered?
- The Haines Borough passed a resolution in 2007 opposing the road. The resolution noted that the cost of the road alternative would be twice as expensive as ferries. Noted that ferries are safer as the EIS indicated there would be 600 non-fatal and eight fatal accidents on the road over a 40-year period.
- Concern about impacts to the environment and to scenic values, with resultant loss of tourism (e.g., small cruise ships that now visit Haines would be dissuaded by the impacts to the natural environment/scenery).
- View the reliance on a road and reduction in ferry service as a reduction in safe and certain access in and out of Haines.
- Concern about impacts of rock disposal (during construction) on sub-tidal marine environment and fisheries resources.
- Cost estimates for road construction, maintenance and operation seem much too low. Expect that the construction cost will go even higher after the road is fully designed and engineered.
  - The SEIS will provide additional details regarding these costs.
- The road proposal has been evaluated for a very long time. People don’t want it. Why doesn’t it go away? What is its purpose?
  - The SEIS will fully evaluate the purpose and need for the project. The road would provide greater mobility for Juneau and other Southeast residents to access the continental road system and the Interior of Alaska.

### Proposed East Lynn Canal Highway (Juneau Access) – Support for the Road

Two meeting participants spoke in support of construction of the East Lynn Canal road, noting the points below.

- Increased opportunities to travel; convenience – better access to Juneau Airport
- Reduced travel times & costs (including reducing costly overnights in Juneau)
- Reduced fuel consumption, with use of efficient cars
- Financial benefit to businesses and communities (e.g., reduced freight costs, increased tourism)
- Improved access to medical and other services
- Walk-on passengers should not expect the government to provide for their transportation; expect that private transportation services will be provided and can be used
- Noted that majority of the travel need is in summer, when road will be easily traveled
- This will be a sea level highway and the snow accumulation will not be as great as people are stating. It will be possible to keep it open in the winter.

### Katzehin Ferry Terminal

- Katzehin Terminal will need to be open and provide a safe place for travelers 24-hours/day and 7 days/week, to ensure safety (especially in winter/inclement weather).
- What would be the future use of a Katzehin Terminal, if the proposed East Lynn Canal Road ends up going all the way to Skagway?
  - The Draft SEIS evaluates the route from Juneau to Katzehin, not to Skagway.
- Construction of the terminal will be difficult and costly, due to depth of the water at that location (600’).
- The project summary does not show a design step for the Katzehin terminal. Why not?
  - The design of the terminal is included within the construction cost included in the draft plan and would require about 20% of that cost estimate.

### AMHS Ferry Service

- The loss of ferry service in upper Lynn Canal would be tragic for the communities.
- Ferries are what we have always known. Using the ferry for transportation is a part of our way of life; we are proud of it and don’t want to lose it.
- Residents of Haines “love our ferries”. There have been many resolutions passed over the years by the Haines Borough, Chamber of Commerce and other organizations expressing this support.
- Would rather have good, efficient ferry service in Lynn Canal than a road connection.
- Ferries (and rail) are the most cost-effective ways to move people and freight.
- Current ferry schedules are not convenient for travel to Juneau. The travel time is too long, which requires overnights and adds to expense.
- Ferry service is important to Haines residents for access to Juneau and the Airport.
- Haines does not need ferry service 7 days/week; just need 3-4 days/week that they can count on service.
- Suggest that the ferry schedule be adjusted so that the vessels travel full, even if that means less frequent service.

- Ferries = jobs for Alaskans.
- Members of the public believe that these ferry routes provide more revenue than other routes in Southeast Alaska.
- The community relies on ferries to supply our economy, including tourism. The State doesn't promote the use of ferries for tourism.
  - Response that the AMHS does market the use of ferries for tourism.
- Where can the public find origin and destination data for ferry use?
  - This information is on the AMHS website, under the sequential tabs "Ferries", "Documents", "Annual Traffic Volume Report".
- Concern that the State has difficulty controlling the costs of the ferry system due to negotiated labor agreements.
  - Noted that Union work rules do require more crew than non-union operations (e.g., IFA) for a similar vessel size.
- Is the State still working toward a spoke-hub ferry/road configuration?
  - No, not really. Noted that the proposed Kake-Petersburg road is not a regional transportation element; it will be a single-lane inter-community connection.

#### Haines Ferry Terminal

- Will the new transportation system proposed in the SATP lead to congestion at the Haines ferry terminal and/or impact operations at the Lutak freight dock?
  - Ferry terminal improvements are planned that will be adequate to handle the traffic without impacting service or use of the Lutak dock. In addition, the State is proposing a new float at the Haines terminal to increase loading facilities, to be constructed by 2016.
- AMHS should coordinate ferry terminal improvements and repairs with the Borough, as they also need to repair and improve the Lutak dock (particularly to be ready for possible expanded use due to proposed mine development in the Yukon).

#### Alaska Class Dayboats (ACD) and HNS-SKG Shuttle Ferry

- Concern about safety and comfort of smaller vessels, particularly in higher waves and winter conditions (ice, spray).
  - DOT&PF clarified that the ACD is designed to have a closed deck. It is in the size range of the MV Tustamena, which transits big water in Southcentral Alaska.
- Concern that the ACD day boats will not have sufficient capacity to handle demand, so cars will have to wait at Katzehein for space to travel.
- Concern that converting from mainliners to day boats will reduce employment.
- On p. 28, the draft SATP says that with the addition of two ACDs providing year round service, Lynn Canal might see an increase in traffic. Where is the data to support this statement?
  - This will be fully addressed in the SEIS.
- What is the current status of negotiations regarding construction of the ACDs?
  - Still in negotiation with Vigor Shipyard in Ketchikan.
- How long will it take to build each ACD?
  - Do not have that time estimate, but recognize that the timeline in the draft SATP is optimistic.

- How do the ACD ferries and road system interact?
  - The first ACD (expected end of 2016) will initially transit from Haines to Skagway and return, and will be home-ported in Haines (about 20 jobs). The second ACD (expected in 2017) will transit from Haines to Auke Bay and will be home-ported in Juneau. Once the East Lynn Canal Road is completed, the two ACDs will move up to the upper Lynn Canal; one will connect Haines to Katzechin, the second will connect Skagway to Katzechin. A third “shuttle ferry” will connect Haines and Skagway.

#### Non-State-Run Ferry System

- It seems that the State doesn't want to own and operate ferry service in upper Lynn Canal. What if the municipalities were willing to take it over and run it like the IFA. Would that be acceptable to the State? If the municipalities did this, it would take the necessity of building the road off of the table.
  - DOT&PF presenters did not know whether the State would be interested in an IFA-type ferry system in upper Lynn Canal.
- The Juneau Access SEIS should provide a cost analysis that compares the State-run ferry service, with the Juneau Access road, and with operating the ferries through a public/private partnership like the IFA.

#### New Transportation modes not evaluated in SATP

- Younger people are moving away from car ownership. Suggest that the SATP look at alternatives that build on car-sharing programs, to reduce the number of vehicles that need to be accommodated.

#### Demographic Trends

- The number of people in the region (compared with Southcentral region), should not determine how much transportation infrastructure and service it receives.
- Haines is not declining in population. It is working to keep its elder population in Haines, which requires safe and certain access to medical services. Good ferry service is required.
- The Haines Borough does not agree with the Alaska Department of Labor's (DOL) population forecasts for Haines.
- DOT&PF noted that DOL does not factor in any new economic stimulus and effects into its forecasts, so that could affect future population and transportation use trends.

#### Data Regarding Ferry Use

- The draft SATP is based on ferry travel data/trends that show level to declining ridership. However, these declines are due to the poor scheduling that discourages ridership of regional residents and independent travelers, and reduced use by businesses for freight.

#### Funding Sources

- Can the State use federal funding for major maintenance, such as projects listed under “refurbishment” in the SATP?
  - Yes, that is a major source for refurbishment of infrastructure.

- What are the funding sources for projects identified in the plan and what is the level of certainty that there will be funding?
  - Federal transportation funds, State General Funds, and perhaps State bond funds. State funding is generally declining due to declines in oil revenues to the State. Federal funding is very uncertain.
- Noted by the Haines Borough that its investments in transportation projects is affected by the State's actions.
- Will ACD construction be entirely state-funded?
  - Yes.
- At recent conference in Nome, US Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx said there is a commitment to create a separate federal funding source for ferries. Senator Patty Murray of Washington is in strong support. Is DOT&PF aware of this?
  - The most recent federal Surface Transportation Act of 2012 (MAP-21) set up a separate funding program for construction of ferry boats and ferry terminal facilities. It is formula-based (passenger numbers, vehicle traffic, route miles served). The IFA has already gotten some funding from this source.

#### Prioritization of Upper Lynn Canal Transportation Projects

- Where do projects that affect Haines and the Upper Lynn Canal fall in the overall priority? The Borough needs to know with some certainty what projects will likely be done in the near-term.
  - DOT&PF is preparing a ten-year statewide capital improvements program (CIP) that will prioritize all projects (new construction and refurbishment). The projects listed in the SATP will be addressed in that prioritization. Expect this CIP to be done by end of 2014. DOT&PF is also preparing a regional four-year CIP that will prioritize projects and help predict future funding certainty.

#### Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

- It is difficult to track the STIP and its frequent amendments.
  - The STIP implementation is affected by the amount of federal funding available to Alaska for transportation each year, as well as the emphasis provided in federal transportation bills. For example, the STIP may need to be adjusted in response to the amount of federal funding available, to a change in federal emphasis from community transportation needs to projects on the national highway system (roads of national rather than community interest). It is also adjusted when cost estimates for projects are updated (e.g., after environmental analysis and design is done for a project).

#### Coordination with Local Municipalities on Transportation Projects / Improvements

- It is important that the DOT&PF coordinate with municipalities early in project planning. Haines Borough would like to be contacted early since it takes a long time to bring local funding to a project and it would help to identify opportunities for collaboration, shared investment, or leveraging as early as possible.
  - The State brings projects to local planning commissions for concurrence. Some planning commissions prefer to have that step occur later in the project planning (e.g., at 90%



design), when there is more certainty about design, costs, etc. However, DOT&PF would be receptive to moving that consultation with Haines Borough to a time earlier in the process (e.g., at 30% design). Suggest that Haines contact the Southeast Region Director with this request.

#### Additional Information Needed for Public and Borough Review / Consideration

- The plan should determine the cost to travelers for each transportation alternative, per “guaranteed travel day” (that is, discount the number of days expected to be lost due to road closures).
- Present detailed information about costs/revenues for ferry service provided in northern Lynn Canal.
- Present design details for the Katzehin ferry terminal.
- Provide information about the proportion of statewide transportation funding that is coming to Southeast Alaska.

#### SATP Public Process and Decision-Making

- Public meeting should have been recorded for a complete and accurate record.
- Noted that a change in the Governor could result in a change in the projects recommended in the SATP. (Noted that Governor Knowles listened to the public and selected a “No Build” alternative in the past.)

#### Other Transportation Infrastructure of Interest to Haines Borough

- What is the status of the Haines Highway realignment?
  - The project is still in the environmental analysis process. Expect an approved Environmental Assessment (EA) in January 2015, then will proceed to final design (note that design has been completed for the first segment, closest to Haines). The project has been split into three segments for funding purposes. DOT&PF’s first priority for construction is mile 21-25.3, which includes the second slide and the Chilkat River bridge. This segment is important to use by heavy loads. In the Southeast Region, this project is the first in line to receive “contingency funding”. It is also on the National Highway System, which may make funding more likely.
- Do not see Klehini Bridge replacement on projects listed in the SATP. This project is important to the Borough, as it will become Borough property once it is replaced. It is important to potential industrial transportation from the Palmer mine site outside of Haines, which may begin production in 3-4 years.
  - That is considered a “refurbishment” project. These types of projects are not listed in the SATP, but it is counted in the estimated cost of \$1.3M for refurbishment. The Klehini Bridge replacement is in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) and is currently under environmental analysis. The Region has recommended it for construction in FY 2015 or 2016.
- Repaving of the Haines Highway is needed; it has been 30 years.

**Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan – Draft Plan  
Attendance at Haines, Alaska public meeting  
September 10, 2014**

**Open House and Public Meeting**

- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Alan Epremesnil   | 26. Jim Norton           |
| 2. Aly Zeiger        | 27. Karen Garcia         |
| 3. Anne Boyce        | 28. Katya Kirsch         |
| 4. Arthur Woodard    | 29. Laurie Mastrella     |
| 5. Bart Henderson    | 30. Leigh Horner         |
| 6. Bill Herman       | 31. M. Sizemore          |
| 7. Bill Kurz         | 32. Margaret Friedenauer |
| 8. Burl Sheldon      | 33. Mark Zeiger          |
| 9. Carlos Jimenez    | 34. Melissa Aronson      |
| 10. Carol Tuynman    | 35. Meredith Pochardt    |
| 11. Cynthia Adams    | 36. Michelle Zeiger      |
| 12. D. Wenner        | 37. Nancy Berland        |
| 13. Darwin Feakes    | 38. Nick Jackson         |
| 14. Deborah Marshall | 39. Patty Brown          |
| 15. Diana Kelm       | 40. Paul H. Swift        |
| 16. Diana La Course  | 41. Ron Jackson          |
| 17. Diana Lapham     | 42. Russ White           |
| 18. Elizabeth Lyons  | 43. Scott Carey          |
| 19. Eric Kocher      | 44. Scott Sundberg       |
| 20. George Figdor    | 45. Shel Scarrott        |
| 21. Heidi Robichaud  | 46. Stephanie Scott      |
| 22. Jay Deller       | 47. Steve Smith          |
| 23. Jean Deller      | 48. Tom Lana             |
| 24. Jean Scarrott    | 49. Tresham Gregg        |
| 25. Jesse Kiehl      | 50. Walt Betz            |

**Haines Borough Meeting**

1. Stephanie Scott, Mayor
2. Diana Lapham, Borough Assembly
3. George Campbell, Borough Assembly
4. David Sosa, Borough Manager
5. Carlos Jimenez, Borough Facilities Manager

**DOT&PF Team**

Andy Hughes, DOT&PF

Jim Potdevin, DOT&PF

Jan Caulfield, Jan Caulfield Consulting