



# Participating Agency Kickoff Meeting Notes 06/25/08

Subject: Participating Agency Kickoff Meeting	
Client: Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities	
Project: Highway to Highway	Project No: 80510
Meeting Date: June 25, 2008, 10:00am-11:45am	In Attendance: See below.
Notes by: Erin Begier	

## Attendees:

- Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation: Rich Sundet, Cindy Heil
- Alaska Department of Health & Social Services, Division of Public Health: Beverly Wooley
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources, State Historic Preservation Office: Doug Gasek
- Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Division of Habitat: William Frost
- Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (ADOT&PF): Jim Childers, Brian Elliott, Jerry Ruehle, Ken Morton
- Alaska Railroad Corporation: Barb Hotchkin
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA): Mike Vanderhoof via phone
- HDR Alaska, Inc: John McPherson, Sandra Cook, Julianne Hanson, Erin Begier, Leslie Robbins
- Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority: Andrew Niemiec
- Municipality of Anchorage (MOA): John Tolley
- National Park Service: Lisa Fox
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Mary Lee Plumb-Mentjes
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Jennifer Curtis
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: Maureen Dezeeuw

## Welcome and Introductions (10am)

A round table of brief introductions was made. Jim Childers (ADOT&PF project manager) gave a synopsis of the meeting; briefly describing the project background and the importance of the project. The main goal of the meeting was to familiarize potential participating agencies with the project and potential roles those agencies might have. In particular, the project team wanted to inform agencies about a federal transportation bill passed by Congress in 2005 called SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation, Equity Act – A Legacy for Users of 2005). SAFETEA-LU will affect agencies' involvement in the environmental review process of this project.

## Project Background

John McPherson (HDR Alaska, Inc. project manager) continued the presentation, beginning with discussing the history of the project over the past three decades. The basic concept of the project is to connect the Glenn Highway to the Seward Highway. Intersection traffic congestion data show how the large freeway flows overload the capacity of the local street network, particularly between the areas of the ends of the Glenn and Seward Highways. This creates a number of problems, such as: gridlock; neighborhood cut-through traffic; poor air quality; increased minor accidents; slow speeds; lost time; driver frustration; reduced safety; and deteriorated neighborhood quality of life. These are previously identified problems from the MOA Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTP).

There are more than 50,000 trips a day in the problem area. Intersection level of service (LOS) are graded on an A to F scale, much of the existing NHS is in the D-F range.

In the LRTP, the 2000/2001 traffic data shows that many accidents occur on the NHS, mainly from rear end collisions due to unexpected traffic lights or a severe back up in traffic. The idea in the plan is to have system continuity, linking both highways together to create better flow.

Growth is predicted to come from both south and north Anchorage and the Mat-Su Borough, which will dump more traffic into the area.

The project has been discussed in the MOA LRTP as early as 1972.

- In 1972, a continuous highway system was proposed.
- From 1972-1984, more and more congestion was occurring within the route, specifically along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.
- In 1984, the concept of a 'continuous highway plan' was adopted in the LRTP.
- In 1987, an environmental study was initiated.
- Sometime from 1987 to 1991 controversy halted the environmental study.
- In 2002, the East Anchorage Study of Transportation (EAST) was conducted, which included a lot of public involvement and looked at transportation problems in East Anchorage. That study recommended a continuous freeway
- From 2003 to 2005, AMATS (Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions) revised the LRTP, which included more analysis and public input on the idea of a continuous freeway. The plan was adopted in 2005.
- The LRTP was revised and again re-adopted in 2007.
- In March 2008, ADOT&PF initiated project development, in accord with federal regulations, such as SAFETEA-LU and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

## Agency Involvement

**Overview of SAFETEA-LU:** For purposes of the environmental review process of a federally-funded transportation project, there are three underlying goals for Section 6002 of SAFETEA-LU:

1. Streamline the environmental review process and expedite project delivery
2. Focus on early and frequent public involvement
3. Limit the potential for project delays

SAFETEA-LU establishes/changes 11 key components of the environmental review process, as outlined in Section 6002:

1. Initiate the environmental review process – ADOT&PF is required to notify the FHWA that an environmental review will take place and that a notice of intent will be submitted for publication in the Federal Register.
2. Invite participating agencies – A participating agency candidate is any agency having “an interest in the project”.
3. Establish a coordination plan – The lead agency (FHWA) in cooperation with ADOT&PF (in this case, the joint lead-agency) will coordinate with participating agencies on purpose and need as well as the range of alternatives. Both parties will agree upon review timelines, schedule and milestone dates, as well as establish lines of communication.
4. Include a project schedule in the coordination plan – A project schedule will be included in the coordination plan.
5. Set comment deadlines – Agencies and the public will have at least 45 days but no more than 60 days to review the draft environmental impact statement (EIS). For all other reviews the lead agency will set deadlines for no more than 30 days, this includes the final EIS.
6. Provide an “Opportunity for Involvement” in developing the purpose and need and range of alternatives – This establishes the opportunity for input for purpose and need and range of alternatives ‘as early as practicable’.
7. Define the purpose and need – The statement includes a ‘a clear statement of objectives that the proposed action is intended to achieve’.
8. Determine the methodologies and level of detail for alternatives analysis – This component defines the process for ‘collaboration’ regarding methodologies and level of detail of alternatives analysis.
9. Resolve issues of Concern – Agencies should identify and resolve early on any issues so as not to delay the process/timeline.

10. Develop the preferred alternative to a higher degree of detail (optional) – If desired, FHWA can pursue a greater level of detail and analysis on the preferred alternative during the environmental study.
11. Report delays in permit decisions – A report will be presented to Congress detailing the success or failure of the process as well as issue resolution brought on by possible delays.

There are three levels to the hierarchy of the SAFETEA-LU process in terms of agency involvement:

- Lead Agency – FHWA is the lead agency. ADOT&PF is a joint lead agency. *Responsibilities:* ultimate decision makers, will guide all involved through the process and make sure that all requirements are being met as well as distributing information in a timely manner for review.
- Cooperating Agency – The MOA has been identified as a cooperating agency. *Responsibilities:* have special expertise, are required to attend all scoping and coordination meetings, review and comment on pre-draft and pre-final environmental documents, this agency may also need to prepare or provide analysis.
- Participating Agency – See the potential participating agency list that was included as a handout in the binder that was given out at the meeting. In addition to the agencies who attended the meeting, several other agencies will also be asked to become participating agencies; these include: U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, National Marine Fisheries Service, Federal Aviation Administration, Alaska Department of Corrections, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Alaska Department of Natural Resources-Division of Coastal and Ocean Management)  
*Responsibilities:* participate in scoping process (this will allow for all ideas and issues to be aired, it will be a 10-12 month process), input will be timely and meaningful, identify issues, participate in the purpose and need as well as range of alternatives, methodologies and level of detail.

All potential cooperating and participating agencies will receive, via mail, an invitation letter to become a cooperating or participating agency for the project. The agencies will have 30 days to respond. SAFETEA-LU sets up guidelines/rules for the agencies to follow throughout the reviewing processes of the project.

Federal agencies must reply if they choose to decline and must adhere to the three requirements of declination: Lack of expertise, no intention of submitting comments and having no jurisdiction by law. Otherwise it will be assumed that the federal agency will be a participating agency.

For non federal agencies, a reply is necessary if they choose to become a participating agency, otherwise it will be assumed that they decline the offer.

### **Project Schedule**

NOI (notice of intent) – A draft NOI was submitted to the FHWA. The NOI is anticipated to be published in the Federal Register within the next two to three weeks.

FHWA will send an invitation letter to potential cooperating or participating agencies, inviting them to the project. This will go out shortly after the NOI.

Agency and Scoping Meetings – one-on-one meetings (bring questions to these meetings), public scoping meetings (tentative for last week in July, Sept/Oct and Jan.) bring up problems of the corridor as well as issues/concerns as this will help to create a firm purpose and need statement.

### **Other Questions or Comments**

- Make sure to fill out and return the green slip (located in the front pocket of the binder). The green slip will give us an indication of your initial interest in becoming a participating or cooperating agency.
- It is anticipated that participating agencies will meet every other month or so, at least for the next six to eight months.
- All materials handed out to the agencies at the meeting will be sent to the agencies. This includes the slides of the presentation.

### **Questions regarding agency's participation**

John McPherson **question**, "is anyone wondering why they were included as Participating Agencies?"

**Question**, Maureen Dezeeuw, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said she "didn't know why her agency was involved?"

**Response** McPherson stated that "since the study area or alternatives have not been defined, there is the possibility of affecting wildlife habitat, wetlands or migratory birds. The project is all inclusive until alternatives are identified."

**Question:** Mary Lee Plumb-Mentjes also questioned why the USACE was involved.

**Response:** "We might need permits for the project and at this point we don't know that the project could go through the Sitka wetlands or around east Anchorage through the military reserve."

John McPherson said that "the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, the Department of Corrections, are not typically involved in transportation project development, but because ADHSS serves the Mountain View and Fairview areas, they may have special expertise regarding low income populations. Because of that, their involvement is important, the same with Corrections, the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue jail might be affected by the H2H project. FAA is not usually involved in highway projects, but Merrill Field is in the area and there are past alternatives that have run through or near Merrill Field so FAA's participation is needed. At this point we don't know if we will affect the airport or airspace. SHPO's participation is evident, because much of housing in Mountain View and Fairview areas are turning 50 requiring Section 106 study."

**Comment:** Beverly Wooley stated "Division of Public Health is concerned with the ability for residents to walk safely with this project. Air quality is another concern."

McPherson agreed and reiterated that it is important to be inclusive at the beginning of the project, and asked if there were any agencies missing, if so, let the Team know.

Participants were asked to fill out the green sheet that was included in the notebook they were given and to return it to Leslie Robbins at the back table.

**Meeting adjourned 11:45am**