April 22, 2019
Project: Palmer-Fishhook Road MP 7-17 Pavement Preservation Project
Project No.: CFHWY00405

Re: Request for scoping comments

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is soliciting comments and information on a proposed project, which would resurface Palmer-Fishhook Road from milepost 7 to 17. The proposed project is located within Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 14, 23, 26, 34, and 35 of Township 19 North, Range 1 East, on US Geological Survey Quad Map Anchorage C-6, Seward Meridian and Sections 33, 35, and 36 of Township 20 North, Range 1 East, on US Geological Survey Quad Map Anchorage D-6, Seward Meridian; Latitude 61.74266° N, Longitude -149.2311° W, in Fishhook, Alaska (Figure 1).

Project Purpose and Need
The purpose of the proposed project is to maintain the serviceability and safety conditions of approximately 10 miles of Palmer-Fishhook Road. The existing roadway displays signs of wear and degradation, and safety features such as guardrails and striping need improvement.

Proposed Action
The proposed work would include the following:

- Pavement Resurfacing
- Bridge Work
- Roadside Hardware
- Drainage Improvements and culvert replacements as needed
- Pavement Markings
- Dig Outs
- Utility Relocations
- Vegetation Clearing

Existing Site Conditions or Facilities
The 10 mile stretch of road this project proposes to upgrade extends along Palmer-Fishhook Road from milepost 7, near the intersection with East Edgerton Parks Road, to milepost 17, near the intersection with Gold Cord Road. Although the road surface is still serviceable, preventative projects like this help delay the emergence of structural problems that would require more extensive upgrades. The road is approximately 35ft in width with many shoulder pullouts and parking areas, and descends nearly 2400ft in elevation trending north to south. The road generally follows the north/south trend of the Little Susitna River until the road bears sharply...
west near milepost 14. A bridge is located at the Little Susitna River crossing and guardrails occur throughout the project.

Palmer-Fishhook Road is classified as a major collector road which is the primary surface transportation link for patrons into the Hatcher Pass recreational area. As proposed, this project would mill and replace the top layer of asphalt. Structural repairs, potentially requiring digouts, would be made to sections of road as needed. Drainage work including culvert replacements and erosion control would be conducted as needed.

**Preliminary Environmental Research**

The proposed project is not expected to involve any significant environmental impacts and a Categorical Exclusion document will be prepared (23 CFR 771.117). DOT&PF conducted preliminary research using the most current available data to identify environmental resources within the proposed project vicinity (attached). To ensure that all factors are considered in developing the proposed project, please provide your written comments, recommendations, and the additional requested information to our office no later than May 24, 2019.

If you have any questions on the environmental effects, please contact Theresa Dutchuk, Environmental Impact Analyst, at (907) 269-0524, or via email at theresa.dutchuk@alaska.gov. Questions concerning the engineering aspects of the proposed project can be directed to Kelly Summers, P.E., Project Manager, at (907) 269-0546.

Sincerely,

Brian Elliott
Regional Environmental Manager

Attachments:

  - Figure 1 Location and Vicinity Map
  - Preliminary Environmental Research

cc: Theresa Dutchuk, Environmental Impact Analyst, PD&E
    Kelly Summers, Project Manager, PD&E
    Drew Von Lindern, Environmental Team Leader, PD&E
Air Quality
A search of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) Air Non-Point Source website and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Green Book Nonattainment Areas for Critical Pollutants on April 16, 2019, determined that the project area is not located within an air quality maintenance or non-attainment area.

It is unlikely that the proposed project would contribute to long-term impacts to air quality because it would not encourage increased travel into the area or otherwise alter existing traffic patterns. Anticipated impacts to air quality during construction are expected to be minimal and temporary.

Anadromous Fish Streams and Essential Fish Habitat:
A search of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Interactive Mapper Fish Resource Monitor on April 16, 2019, indicated the project crosses two fish streams in the project area, Fishhook Creek and the Little Susitna River (Table 1).

No adverse effects on anadromous streams or EFH are anticipated as the existing bridge crossing over the Little Susitna River is expected to qualify as exempt under Fish Habitat Case FH-14-IV-0891 for routine maintenance activities, and work over Fishhook Creek will be done in accordance with stipulations of an ADF&G Fish Habitat Permit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stream Name</th>
<th>AWC Code</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Anadromous Species</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fishhook Creek</td>
<td>247-41-10100-2379</td>
<td>~MP 12 of Palmer-Fishhook Road</td>
<td>Chinook salmon rearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Susitna River</td>
<td>247-41-10100</td>
<td>Crossing at ~MP 8.5 Palmer-Fishhook Road</td>
<td>Chum, coho, chinook, pink, sockeye, Arctic lamprey, present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contaminated Sites, Spills and Underground Storage tanks
A search of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) databases on April 16, 2019, indicated no contaminated releases, spills, or leaking underground storage tanks within the proposed project area.

Estimated Ground Disturbance and Clearing Activities
All ground disturbing activities will be confined to the existing road prism and adjacent ditch lines. Additionally, vegetation clearing would occur within the ROW.

Floodplain and Regulatory Floodway
A review of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Maps on January 15, 2019, indicated that there are no mapped floodplains or regulatory floodways within the proposed project area. A portion of the project (milepost 7 to approximate milepost 11.25) is located in Zone X, an area of minimal flood hazard, on the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map Panels 02170C7253E and 02170C7255E. The remainder of the project (north of approximate milepost 11) is located in FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map Panel 0200218075C, which is not currently available.

**Historic Properties, Archeological and Cultural Resources**
A review of the Alaska Heritage Resource Survey database for the presence of historic properties conducted on April 16, 2019 showed one historic property, and 13 previously identified sites with no determination of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. Because the project activities are not anticipated to result in any new ground disturbance and the completed project is expected to conform to existing conditions, no adverse effect to historic properties is expected.

**Invasive Species**
An April 16, 2019 search of the University of Alaska Anchorage Exotic Plants Information Clearinghouse Invasive Plants Mapper indicated that many invasive species are located within and adjacent the project area. The project is anticipated to involve vegetation clearing in some areas and DOT&PF will comply with Executive Order 13112 by ensuring that ground disturbing activities are minimized, and disturbed areas are re-vegetated with weed-free native soil and seed.

**Material and Disposal Sites**
The Contractor would supply material for the road, subgrade structure and surfacing. Similarly, the Contractor would obtain disposal sites. If the Contractor elects to use an undeveloped material site, contract language will require the Contractor to acquire all necessary permits and clearances for the site(s) and provide copies to the DOT&PF Project Engineer prior to development. Per DOT&PF specifications, the Contractor will also be responsible for implementing a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan. Material from a borrow site that has not received the appropriate permits and clearances will not be accepted for project construction.

**Land Use and Transportation Plans**
The proposed project is consistent with the DOT&PF goals for the Central Region in the 2018-2021 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Pavement preservation projects, including the proposed project, are listed in the STIP under Need ID No. 18924.

**Migratory Birds and Eagles’ Nest**
A query of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) Information, Planning, and Conservation System (IPaC) was performed on April 16, 2019. The Olive-sided Flycatcher is bird of conservation concern in the area and observations are documented within a mile of the project area. Clearing activities will be limited to the existing ROW and will follow USFWS recommended time periods to avoid clearing in the Southcentral area (May 1-July 15). Additionally, prior to construction DOT&PF may conduct a survey of the project area to
determine if active eagle nests are found within the primary (330 feet) or secondary (660 feet) protection zones as stated in the Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (2007).

**Navigable Waters**
A review of the USACE and USCG list of navigable waters on April 22, 2019 shows the proposed project does not cross any federally regulated navigable water bodies. According to the ADNR Navigable Waters Mapper accessed April 22, 2019 the Little Susitna River is listed as State regulated navigable water.

**Noise**
The proposed project is not anticipated to result in permanent noise impacts. Since the project is not considered a Type I project, as defined by 23 CFR 772.5 and per DOT&PF’s November 2018 Noise Policy, a noise analysis should not be required.

Temporary noise impacts will result from the operation of heavy equipment, the presence of construction crews, and other associated construction activities. Abatement methods such as proper maintenance of construction equipment would help reduce these impacts. No permanent noise impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposed project.

**Permits and Authorizations**
This project is anticipated to require the following permits:
- ADF&G Fish Habitat Permit
- USACE 404 Permit

**Receiving Waters and Impaired Water Bodies**
The project area exists within the Fishhook Creek-Little Susitna River subwatershed which contains no impaired waters. Project activities are not expected to change the current conditions of adjacent water bodies.

A review of the DEC Drinking Water Protection Area mapper indicates the proposed project does not fall within drinking water protection areas. DOT&PF does not expect the proposed project to impact local aquifers or established drinking water sources.

Water quality degradation during construction may result from sedimentation of storm water runoff. There is no other pollutant input anticipated during construction. This impact is anticipated to be mitigated by the use of Best Management Practices (BMP) and implementation of a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan in accordance with the APDES CGP.

**Right-of-Way**
The proposed project is not anticipated to require right-of-way acquisition.

**Recreational Facilities**
A review of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources Hatcher Pass Management Plan Land Status Map (March 2012) shows the project area is largely located in a Legislatively Designated Area designated for public use, multi-use. Additionally, the corridor passes through the Archangel and Independence management units of the Hatcher Pass Management Plan, both
designated for public recreation. The project temporarily utilize parking lots that extend outside of DOT&PF ROW and into the Hatcher Pass management areas for staging locations, however all work in the parking areas is expected to qualify for a temporary occupancy exception and subsequently no use of 4(f) properties is anticipated.

**Social and Economic**
Because the project is limited in scale and will replicate current conditions, the project is not anticipated to adversely affect neighborhoods, community cohesion, existing travel patterns, or disadvantaged social groups. The proposed project would not alter existing vehicular or pedestrian travel patterns.

**State Refuges, National Wildlife Refuges, Critical Habitat Areas and Sanctuaries**
A review of the ADF&G listing of State of Alaska Refuges, Critical Habitat Areas, and Sanctuaries on April 16, 2019 indicated no State Refuges, Critical Habitat Areas, or Sanctuaries occur in the project vicinity.

A review of the USFWS IPaC system accessed on April 16, 2019, indicated no national wildlife refuges exist within the proposed project area.

**Threatened and Endangered Species**
According to USFWS IPaC system accessed on April 16, 2019, there are no endangered or threatened species expected to occur at this location.

**Wetlands and Other Waters of the U.S.**
A review of the MatSu Wetlands Viewer on April 16, 2019 indicated there are no wetlands present in the proposed project area. At this time wetlands are not expected to be impacted by the proposed project. The project will cross over the Little Susitna River and Fishhook Creek, both designated Waters of the US, however, work on the bridge over Little Susitna River is not expected to require any in-water work and if any culvert work is determined necessary, work in Waters of the US will comply with a Section 404 permit.