



Central Region

Director's Quarterly

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Spring Edition - Anchorage

March 2014

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Rob Campbell, P.E.

Central Region Director, is a life-long Alaskan. He has a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from Oregon State University, and a Master's degree in Engineering Management from the University of Alaska, Anchorage. He has worked at DOT&PF for more than 30 years.

I have a fairly complicated (but interesting) discussion below of how we are striving to communicate road conditions to travelers, leading to the concept of a traffic operations center.

Also, we spotlight a state funded project in the Kenai / Soldotna area and the great success we had in defining the scope of the project.

Both of these stories focus on the emphasis the Department places on communication and our continuing efforts to improve. I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter, and, as always, drop me a line if you have suggestions for future editions.

Comments on the Newsletter
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STATEWIDE TRAFFIC OPERATIONS CENTER

In this world of ever increasing urgency and decreasing patience for less than real time information, how can we keep up with public expectations of instant roadway information? Maybe it's a crash on the Glenn Highway near Birchwood or a snowstorm looming in Turnagain Pass; in both cases travelers are now expecting rapid, accurate, and actionable information in a format accessible anywhere. While Central Region has by far the largest traffic volumes, all areas of the State face similar issues.

Our conundrum and challenge then is how best to gather the information, analyze it properly, and disseminate it rapidly, accurately, and efficiently across several agency lines, updating the information as conditions change.

Let me first define and then quantify the two most obvious types of information requested and discuss the handling of each. (Let us recognize that construction activity notification is handled by the project managers and posted on a site named "Navigator" (<http://www.alaskanavigator.org/>). This type of information is not part of this discussion.)

The first type of information requested can be categorized as "passive system" information. Many drivers are interested in checking driving conditions before embarking on trips they are planning to take: Is the road icy? How is the visibility? Is it snowing or raining? This type of information can be generated with passive systems such as roadside cameras and automated weather stations that can be telephone or web-accessed. This type of information is relatively inexpensive to generate once the capital costs of purchase and installation are paid. Of course there are ongoing maintenance and operation costs, costs for upgrading to new generation technology, and data costs to link to the web, but there are not many people involved, and the beginning capital costs associated with the passive systems are relatively minimal. We currently have these systems in place and continue to expand and improve the amount of road coverage. You can learn about accessing these systems on our 511 web site at <http://511.alaska.gov/alaska511/mappingcomponent/index>.

The second type of information is what I call "active system" information. This type of information is loosely associated with a one-time incident. Say, a vehicle

accident occurs on the Seward Highway during the summer fishing season. This information will not be well captured and disseminated by a camera or a weather station – a person needs to analyze the situation, report on the current condition and expected outcome, and provide the information to the traveling public in a readily accessible format. Of course this type of information is much more expensive as staff must gather and assess the information, analyze it, and communicate it through various channels. While this in itself is a large task, it is further complicated by the many different agencies who may be involved besides

DOT&PF – Alaska State Troopers, local police, fire and rescue; all may have some role to play depending on the incident.

One way to meet this challenge may be the establishment of a Statewide Traffic Operations Center (STOC). This is not a new idea; many States have established Traffic Operations Centers that pool participants from various agencies to promote better coordination of disseminating information about real time incidents. To this end, DOT&PF has engaged a consultant to study our State's current condition and recommend a reasonable path forward for our unique conditions. Preliminary analysis has already identified many benefits to such a center, but the full benefits and cost must be completely understood prior to any definitive action. In this vein, our consultant will continue to refine the STOC concept, and ultimately come to a recommendation that fits within our needs and budget. Coordination with other stakeholder agencies is an active part of the study, enabling all interested groups the chance to participate in its creation and operation.

In the meantime, we continue to look at incremental solutions for some of our busiest highways and increase our "passive system" network. Educating the public on the use of our 511 program, streamlining the flow of information into one easy access point, median cross overs, utilizing portable message signs, and better use of public "reporting" are all ideas that can provide better response to the public without large investments of resources.

In summary, we continue to strive to provide more and better information to our travelers, while respecting our mandate to be cost effective in providing services. A Statewide Traffic Operation Center may be the best next tool in achieving this goal.



"Passive System" cameras can be found at: <http://www.dot.state.ak.us/iways/roadweather/forms/AreaSelectForm.html>.

LOCALLY DRIVEN SCOPING PROCESS A SUCCESS

Most Department projects are driven by an identified need: safety, capacity, surface condition, etc. Recently, a \$20 million state appropriation was dedicated to the Kenai Spur Highway. With no preconceived scope, the Department launched an aggressive campaign to help the community decide what should be done to improve the road. After several meetings with the public, legislators, and city and borough officials, both the City of Kenai and the Kenai Peninsula Borough supported an option to widen the highway to five lanes. While the current funding will not construct the entire length, part can be built, right-of-way purchased and utilities relocated for the remainder of the segment. The process was an example of great communication and coordination between the Department and local stakeholders on a state-funded project.



Kenai Spur Highway

NEW ANCHORAGE AREA PLANNING STAFF AT DOT&PF



James Boyle

James Boyle joined the Department in 2014 as the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) Coordinator. James has a Master of Urban Planning degree from Florida State University and has worked for the Capital Region Transportation Planning Agency (Tallahassee), North Florida Transportation Planning Organization (Jacksonville area), CDM Smith in Atlanta and, most recently, as the regional transportation planner at the Jacksonville Transportation Authority in Florida. James has worked on several Long Range Transportation Plan updates and oversaw the development of a Federal Transit Administration investment-grade travel demand model for the Jacksonville Commuter Rail study.



Aaron Jongenelen

Aaron Jongenelen, employed with DOT&PF Planning Section for over 5 years, was recently promoted to the Anchorage Area Planner position. Aaron now oversees many of the tasks needed to implement the Anchorage Metro Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) plans and programs such as overseeing Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality grant agreements between the Municipality and DOT&PF. Aaron also serves as the Planning Section’s representative for communities along the Turnagain Arm, coordinates with the Municipality on permitting processes and platting actions, and provides GIS and ITS related support. He has a Bachelor Degree in History from Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon.

PROJECTS

Flashing Yellow Arrow Traffic Signals

A new style of left turn signal is popping up across the Lower 48, as well as here in Alaska. A national study demonstrated that flashing yellow arrows are more intuitive and safer than the solid green lights that these signals are replacing for motorists turning left.

The flashing yellow arrow indicates that a left turn is allowed, but drivers must yield to pedestrians and oncoming traffic, as oncoming traffic has a green light and the right of way.

Just remember, a flashing yellow arrow means yield to oncoming traffic and pedestrians. For more on flashing yellow arrows click here: <http://www.dot.alaska.gov/stwddes/dcstraffic/fya/index.shtml>.

- Steady Red Arrow:** Stop. Oncoming traffic has the right of way.
- Steady Yellow Arrow:** Prepare to stop or finish turning if already in the intersection.
- Flashing Yellow Arrow:** Yield to oncoming traffic and pedestrians before turning left. Oncoming traffic has the right of way.
- Steady Green Arrow:** Turn left. Oncoming traffic has a red light and must stop.



West Dowling Phase II

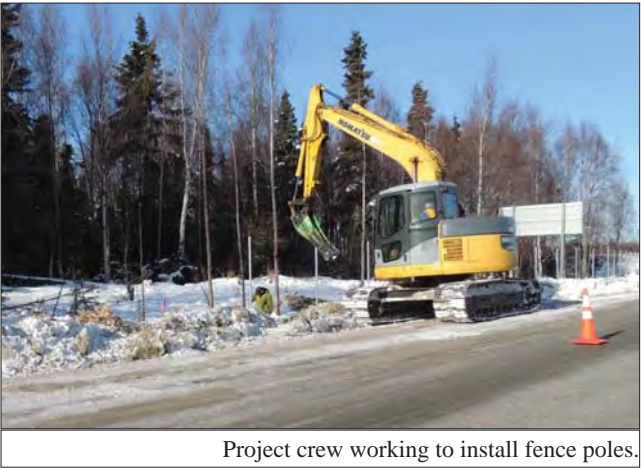


DOT&PF is preparing for construction of West Dowling Road Phase II to begin this spring. The project will fill a significant gap in the Anchorage grid system since there are currently no east-west cross-town corridors between Tudor Road and Dimond Boulevard. The new four-lane roadway is one of the largest transportation projects to be constructed in recent years, including a 200’ bridge over Arctic Boulevard and the railroad tracks and a 150’ tunnel connecting Arctic Boulevard and Electron Drive. The project also includes street lighting, a separated sidewalk on the north side, and a 12-foot separated pathway on the south side.

For more information and project updates go to <http://www.dowlingroad.com/projectDescription.htm>.

Minnesota Drive Moose Fencing

DOT&PF, in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration, is installing fencing near the right-of-way line along both sides of Minnesota Drive between International Airport Road and the Alaska Railroad on O’Malley Drive. The project is funded through the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP). This stretch of roadway averages approximately eight moose-vehicle crashes a year. The proposed fencing will keep moose off the roadway and will have specially designed one-way gates that allow errant moose to exit. Construction is underway and should be completed soon.



Project crew working to install fence poles.

For project updates visit <http://minnesotadrivemoose.com/index.html>.

Glenn Highway/Muldoon Road Interchange Project



Diverging Diamond Interchange in Springfield, Missouri

Alaska’s first highway interchange is set to receive a major upgrade. Originally constructed in 1974, when traffic was a third of the current volumes, the Glenn Highway interchange at Muldoon Road has out served its

life span. Several alternatives were considered, and our engineers have determined that this may be the first location in Alaska to benefit from a new style of interchange known as the “Diverging Diamond” interchange. Traffic on Muldoon Road will be “diverted” to the far left-hand side of the bridge while crossing over the Glenn Highway. The Diverging Diamond has several key benefits such as allowing free-turning left and right turns, more efficient traffic signals, and easy accommodations for bike and pedestrian movements. Overall, the design is less expensive and more efficient than competing interchange designs. Preliminary Engineering efforts are completed, and the project is moving into the final design phase with an anticipated construction date of 2016, if full funding is available.

IMPORTANT LINKS

Where can I go to...

- Find project advertising dates, contract status/award information, or capital projects out for bid?
- Which projects AMATS selected to be funded from 2010-2013?
- Find out who owns a road in the Municipality of Anchorage?
- Find a previous Central Region newsletter?
- Find AMATS meeting schedules and documents?
- Locate the Central Region Public Involvement Calendar?

<http://www.dot.state.ak.us/procurement/index.shtml>

<http://www.muni.org/Departments/OCPD/Planning/AMATS/2035MTP> *

http://www.muni.org/Departments/MOA_Road_Ownership *

<http://dot.alaska.gov/creg/newsletter.shtml>

<http://www.muni.org/Department/OCPD/Planning/AMATS/> *

<http://dot.alaska.gov/creg/calendar.shtml>

*Link will only work in the electronic version of the newsletter