



Central Region

# Director's Quarterly

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

## Spring Edition - Matanuska-Susitna Borough

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 511web 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

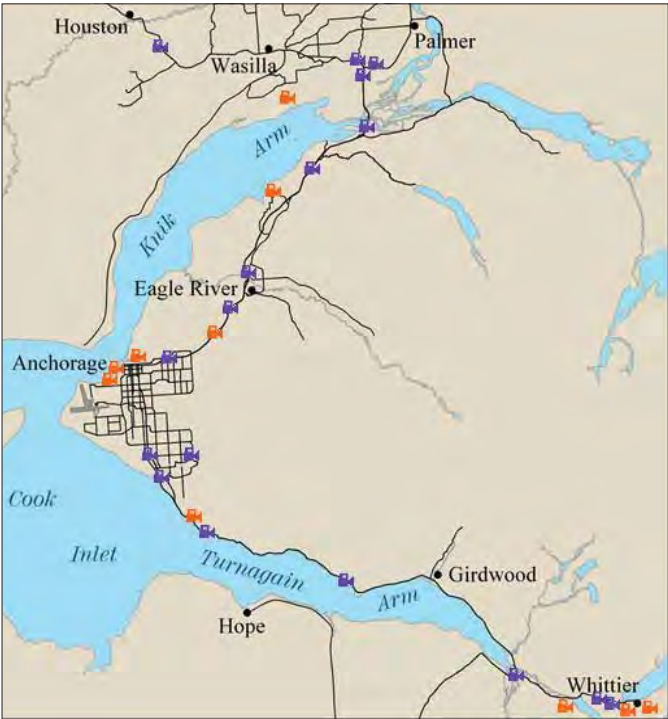
accident occurs on the Seward Highway during the summer fishing season. This information will not be well captured and disseminated by a camera or a weather station – a person needs to analyze the situation, report on the current condition and expected outcome, and provide the information to the traveling 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



# UPCOMING CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

## Special Focus on the Parks Highway in 2014

The Department will have nine active construction projects underway this coming summer in both Central and Northern Regions. It is estimated that travel from Anchorage to Fairbanks could be extended up to two hours due to flagging operations. The Department has prepared a special website just for the Parks Highway projects at [www.dot.alaska.gov/parks2014](http://www.dot.alaska.gov/parks2014) to help keep the traveling public and local businesses informed. Each project will be shown in terms of scope, impact to traffic, schedule of work, contractor name, contact information, and why the project is underway. Alaskans are encouraged to visit the website specific to the Parks Highway but also to check the Alaska Navigator website (<http://alaskanavigator.org/>) for day-to-day traffic updates for all DOT&PF construction projects.

### Parks Highway Projects in Central Region:

#### Parks Highway MP 43.5 - MP 44.5 Reconstruction from Lucas Road to Church Road:

Project will improve capacity by extending westward the existing five-lane (four lanes with a two-way center left turn lane) from Lucas Road to Church Road. Illumination and improvements to the existing pedestrian pathway are also included. Look for clearing crews to begin in April with utility work in May and road work from June through the end of fall.

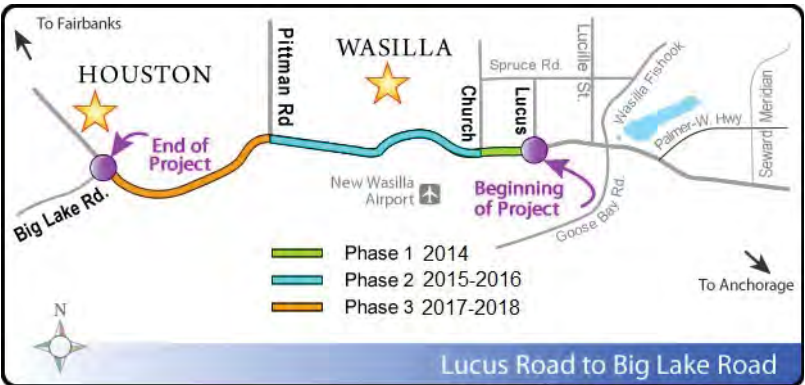
**Parks Highway MP 123.5 - MP 146 Resurfacing:** Project will rehabilitate the existing base with a foamed asphalt section that will be surfaced with up to four inches of asphalt concrete. Selected areas may require digouts. Drainage, clearing, signing, guardrail and other miscellaneous items of work will be done as necessary. Striping and rumble strips will be replaced. Project is expected to advertise in March with construction beginning in June.

### Other Central Region Projects:

**Palmer Wasilla Highway Extension, Parks to Knik-Goose Bay Road (KGB) Resurfacing Project:** Mill and resurface the travel lanes for this 1.3 mile segment. Project will also include, as necessary, improvements to guardrail, guardrail end treatments, digouts, drainage, signs and striping. All work is expected to be completed this summer.

**Glenn Highway MP 106.1 Emergency Erosion Repairs:** Project will install erosion protection to prevent further embankment failure at the base of the retaining wall supporting the highway. Work is expected to be completed early summer.

**KGB Road and Fern Street Signalization:** Project consists of constructing intersection improvements and installation of a new traffic signal. Intersection is anticipated to be operational by June 2014.



### Did you know...?

- The Mat-Su Borough is the size of West Virginia
- Central Region owns, operates and maintains 1,600 lane miles in the Mat-Su with only 35 equipment operators

**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 that are turning left.

The new signal, a flashing yellow arrow, indicates that a left turn is allowed, but you 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. Click here for more on flashing yellow arrows: <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.



## COOPERATIVE PLANNING

### Regional Transportation Strategy Workshop

Central Region staff participated in a week-long Borough-led initiative from January 20-24 to discuss the scale and scope of transportation challenges in the rapidly growing Mat-Su area.

The Cities of Houston, Wasilla and Palmer as well as the Mat-Su Borough were well represented by their elected officials and staff. They were joined by representatives from the Wasilla Planning Commission, Borough Planning Commission, Platting Board and Transportation Advisory Board. The open discussion between governmental entities allowed for a clearer understanding of some of the complex problems and issues pertaining to development of a transportation system capable of handling projected population growth.

The Department is committed to continued dialogue on this important subject and meaningful participation in on-going cooperative efforts.

### Partnering on LRTP Update

The Department has signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Mat-Su Borough to jointly fund a cooperative effort to update the Borough's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) beginning Spring of 2014.



Participants share ideas at the Mat-Su Borough Regional Transportation Strategy and Development Workshop.

## IMPORTANT LINKS

How do I...

- Find general information about Central Region?
- Get more information about active Central Region Projects?
- Find websites for Central Region Projects?
- Get MAP 21 information?
- Locate the Central Region Public Involvement Calendar?
- Find project advertising dates?
- Find key Department contacts?
- Find previous Central Region newsletters?

<http://dot.alaska.gov/creg/>  
<http://dot.alaska.gov/projects-status/index.cfm>  
[http://dot.alaska.gov/creg/project\\_info/](http://dot.alaska.gov/creg/project_info/)  
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/map21/>  
<http://dot.alaska.gov/creg/calendar.shtml>  
[http://www.dot.state.ak.us/apps/Project Advertising Date](http://www.dot.state.ak.us/apps/Project_Advertising_Date) \*  
<http://www.dot.alaska.gov/comm/contacts.shtml>  
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\*Hyperlink will only work in the electronic version of the newsletter