

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is investigating alternatives to improve O'Malley Road between the New Seward Highway and Hillside Drive (Figure 1). O'Malley Road is located in the southeast portion of Anchorage, Alaska; an area known locally as the "Hillside". O'Malley Road connects the upper Hillside area in Anchorage to three major north-south roadways (Lake Otis Parkway, Old Seward Highway, and New Seward Highway). It also channels traffic directly into the Minnesota Bypass facility that provides convenient access to the Anchorage International Airport and the downtown area. Because it is a major link to many routes, Hillside residents find O'Malley Road to be an important facility providing access to the entire Anchorage area. The road also provides access to the Alaska Zoo and the Anchorage Golf Course.

O'Malley Road has not been reconstructed since 1962, except for adding turning lanes and other safety projects at major intersections. Current and future traffic levels require a larger facility, left turn lanes, and pavement improvements.

The project corridor extends east from the New Seward Highway for 6.0 kilometers (3.7 miles) and ends just uphill of the Hillside Drive/O'Malley Road intersection. The 1.21-km (0.75-mile) section of O'Malley Road between the New Seward Highway and Lake Otis Parkway is characterized by rolling terrain with grades ranging between 4.5 and 7.0 percent. The road rises approximately 35 meters (115 feet) to an elevation of 85 meters (279 feet) at Lake Otis Parkway. The existing road width varies between 8.54 meters (28 feet) and 9.75 meters (32 feet) except at the New Seward and Lake Otis intersections where additional turning lanes widen the roadway. Drainage is conveyed by V-ditches and cross culverts. A detached 2.3-meter (7.5-foot) asphalt pathway exists along the entire north side of this section of O'Malley Road.

The 1.61-km (1.0-mile) section of O'Malley Road between Lake Otis Parkway and Elmore Road climbs an additional 35 meters (115 feet) above Lake Otis Parkway to an elevation of 120 meters (394 feet) at the intersection with Elmore Road. The terrain is generally rolling with grades ranging between 1.0 and 7.0 percent. This section is strip paved with V-ditches and cross culverts to convey runoff. The average pavement width is approximately 9.3 meters (31 feet). No dedicated pedestrian facilities exist along this section. Driveways and streets occur along this section at an average rate of about 14 access points/km (22 access points/mile).

The last 3.2-km (2.0-mile) section of O'Malley Road begins at Elmore Road and ends just above Hillside Drive. From Elmore Road to the east, O'Malley Road climbs an additional 137 meters (449 feet). O'Malley Road reaches its final elevation of approximately 257 meters (843 feet) at the eastern most intersection of O'Malley Road and Hillside Drive. For approximately 880 meters (2,886 feet) between Rock Ridge Drive and Stony Brook Drive, the road grade is 7.0 percent. This section is paved with V-ditches and cross culverts to convey runoff. The average pavement width is approximately 9.0 meters (29.5 feet). This section provides lower traffic mobility and places an increased emphasis on access to driveways and side streets. Driveways and streets occur along this section at an average rate of about 24 access points/kilometer (38 access points/mile). No pedestrian facilities are provided along the section (Lounsbury, 2001).

In recent years, public transportation to the Hillside area has been intermittent due to low ridership and operational funding constraints. The People Mover, the local transportation service operated by the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), resumed service January 2, 2001 on O'Malley Road at Lake Otis Parkway and Hillside Drive. The current People Mover public transportation stops on O'Malley Road include Hillside Drive and the Alaska Zoo.

DOT&PF initiated this Environmental Assessment (EA) to study the impacts of various alternatives to upgrade O'Malley Road and solicit comments from the public and resources agencies. Several detailed studies were conducted in support of this EA. These included the Conceptual Stage Relocation Study, a Wetlands Functional Analysis, Phase I Environmental Site Assessment, a Traffic Noise Analysis, an Air Quality Analysis, a Hydrology Study, and a Preliminary Engineering Report.

The supporting studies for the EA were completed prior to the approval of Senate Bill 226. The bill amended Alaska Statute 19.10.160, and became effective in January 2003. The amended statute requires, "...design for proposed major upgrade and new construction projects for highways in federally recognized metropolitan areas...provide for capacity that will adequately serve planned future traffic..." and, "...projects that are estimated to cost...more than \$10,000,000 must be designed to adequately serve planned future traffic for at least the next 25 years after construction of the project." The O'Malley Road Reconstruction project is estimated to cost in excess of 10 million dollars, and must be designed for a 25-year life to comply with the amended statute. The supporting studies were originally based on a 2005 construction year and a 2015 design year or a 10-year life and many had to be updated to comply with the new statute. The EA has in turn been updated to reflect a 2006 construction year and a 2031 design year, or a 25-year life.