Old Steese Upgrade

AKSAS PROJECT # 62487

Comment & Response Log
Last update: February 5, 2015

Date	Comment	Response
October 1, 2014	*It is very hard to make right-hand turns during peak volumes.*	Public input and traffic data confirms the difficulty of right-hand turns as well as left-hand turns, which are typically more difficult. Addressing this issue is one of the main goals of the project.
Dec 2, 2014	*The Old Steese corridor is currently a terrifying ride for a biker. It is also the only access to the big box stores except for the distant, difficult-access Steese pedestrian path. At a minimum any project should build a sidewalk on the left side of Old Steese. Ideally there would be an additional bike corridor past the sidewalk, so that the sidewalk would function as a grade-separated barrier between bike path and road. Another option is turning the currently-blocked-off road towards the new roundabout into a non-motorized corridor and pushing this through to connect with Lowes, Barnes and Noble, etc.*	Providing improved access for pedestrians and bicyclists is a primary objective of this project. The recently blocked off road that you are referring to is on property owned by the Alaska Railroad. This leg was recently blocked by them. Acquiring land from the Alaska Railroad requires approval from the State Legislature. Though, not impossible, if the Alaska Railroad is not in favor of providing additional access because of safety or other concerns it would be unlikely to make it through a legislative process in a timely manner.
Dec 2, 2014	*Combining pedestrian & bicycle streams at crosswalks maximizes the problems caused by different speeds & different relationships to surrounding car traffic, particularly when those crosswalks are standard ADA size without consideration of the straightening of bicycle paths at speed.*	There are industry standards for combined pedestrian and bicycle pathways that will be followed if a shared use path is included in the project. Considerations for intersections and crosswalks will be included.
Dec 2, 2014	*Does this project have anyone who has studied bike transportation?*	Yes, the team includes engineers and planners with statewide and national experience on bicycle facilities. Their input will be incorporated as the project progresses.

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Dec 2, 2014	*Is there any effort to link transportation projects with overall air quality issues?*	The environmental process involves looking at whether a project must evaluate air quality in the design. This project does not meet any of the conditions that require an air quality design evaluation. However, reducing intersection wait times and increasing vehicle capacity is a benefit to air quality. These are both primary objectives of this project.
Dec 2, 2014	*The Intersection of Trainer Gate and Old Steese as well as Sadler Road and Old Steese are both high hazard intersections. I drive through them every day to go to work. I think that putting in roundabouts would eliminate a lot of these accidents.*	The crash data supports that this intersection has an elevated crash rate and we'll be evaluating alternatives (including roundabouts) to reduce the crash rate at this intersection.
Dec 2, 2014	*Move the roundabout [at Trainor Gate] North slightly from the current intersection point to where there is currently parking and [add] a railroad crossing bar then the roundabout could still function and traffic could still flow out and in.*	Adjustments to the roundabout location will be considered as the design proceeds.
Dec 2, 2014	*Something also needs to be done to make the New Steese and Trainer Gate intersection more safe, but I don't know how this could be accomplished short of eliminating the intersection all together. If someone had planned ahead and connected the end of the Johansen by swinging it South after the New Steese intersection right through the residential area then the Trainor Gate and New Steese intersection could have been eliminated easily.*	The project team will be evaluating alternatives in this corridor to improve safety. The Department is working on addressing the long term safety and capacity improvements to the Steese Expressway corridor.

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Dec 4, 2014	*Open House Comment: If you make Trainor Gate Road one-way, you will severely restrict access to Hamilton Acres. Is there a way to maintain two-way access on Trainor Gate Road?*	Based on the results of the corridor modeling, turning Trainor Gate into a one-way road provided for the best through traffic movements along the Old Steese Road and the close-by intersection of the Steese Expressway. In response to the public comments, the project team is evaluating alternatives that would maintain 2-way traffic. Results of these analyses will be provided to the public.
Dec 4, 2014	*Open House Comment: Have you considered making Trainor Gate Road a 5-lane road to accommodate traffic volumes?*	Space is limited for expanding Trainor Gate to 5 lanes due to the narrow right-of-way and the presence of the railroad tracks, but the project team will be reevaluating options for 1 and 2-way traffic on Trainor Gate and will provide results of these analyses to the public. The project anticipates Right of Way acquisition of relatively small partial lots as needed along the corridor, however, the amount of Right of Way acquisition that would be needed for widening Trainor Gate would likely lead to relocation of one or more businesses. In addition, the portion of Trainor Gate between the Steese and Old Steese is actually on Alaska Railroad property and the road is there via a permit. In order to acquire permanent or expanded land from the Alaska Railroad we would not only have to negotiate with them but the railroad can only sell land with the approval of the State Legislature. Obtaining this approval typically causes very long delays to projects.

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Dec 4, 2014	*Open House Comment: Are tunnels or other types of grade-separated crossings for pedestrians being considered?*	At this time, we expect pedestrians to be accommodated at the street level. Construction of ADA-compliant grade-separated pedestrian facilities would require significant right of way acquisition. Winter maintenance is especially challenging on pedestrian grade separations, and drainage considerations and pedestrian security are other concerns associated with tunnels. If grade separations were used, fencing or some other type of physical barrier would need to be used to prohibit pedestrians from crossing at grade level.
Dec 4, 2014	*Open House Comment: Have you considered signals at the Fred Meyer intersection and at Trainor Gate Road?*	Signals are being considered at Trainor Gate Road, the Fred Meyer intersection and the Helmericks/Old Steese intersection. At this point there is not a specific plan, both roundabouts and signals for all of the congested intersections are being considered.
Dec 4, 2014	*Open House Comment: Have you considered a mixture of roundabouts and signals?*	It is generally difficult to mix signals and roundabouts in the same corridor. Signals platoon traffic and roundabouts do not. Where intersections are closely spaced, the queue distances between intersections can be problematic and impact vehicle movements at adjacent intersections. Nevertheless, the analysis is evaluating all options and will determine if a combined set of signals and roundabouts within the project would be feasible.

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Dec 4, 2014	*Open House Comment: Are traffic operations the only criteria being used to select the preferred concept?*	No, although several of the concepts have comparable traffic operations. Safety and capacity are the primary objectives of this project that will impact the final decision. Providing improved access for both bicyclists and pedestrians is a one of the key goals of this project. Other factors such as right-of-way impacts, ease of access for motorists and pedestrians, drainage, and construction phasing will all influence the decision for the preferred concept.
Dec 4, 2014	*Open House Comment: If Trainor Gate Road becomes one-way, there will be much more pressure on the Johansen Expressway and Steese Expressway intersections. If this happens, you should consider adding a pass through lane and/or another right turn lane on the Johansen Expressway at the Johansen/Steese intersection.*	This option will be considered.
Dec 11, 2014	*The "do nothing" alternative must be considered as the proposed upgrades provide dubious improvement to the overall problem.*	The "Do Nothing" alternative is included in the Traffic and Safety Analysis as well as the Design Study Report and will be assessed with regard to long term traffic forecasts as well as other criteria.
Dec 11, 2014	*The elimination of eastbound traffic on the connection between the Old Steese and the Steese Expressway is a big negative, not a positive from a traffic stand point. This is a very important movement for traffic driving north on the Old Steese Highway. This movement not only is the most direct way to access the Steese Expressway as well as Trainor Gate Road it reduces traffic on the Old Steese north of Trainor Gate Road.*	Due to public comments, the project team is reevaluating various on the Trainor Gate including maintaining two-way traffic to the Steese Expressway and to the residential neighborhood to the east. These options with associated impacts will be presented to the public.

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Dec 11, 2014	*The biggest traffic issue in the area is the presence of the at-grade railroad crossing of the Old Steese and the Steese Expressway. Not only are both arteries blocked simultaneously when a train is operating, the presence of the railroad tracks prohibits the construction of needed traffic improvements. This includes additional lanes for the connector as well as needed improvements to the turning radii. This same argument can be made for the at-grade (railroad) crossing of College Road between the Illinois Street Intersection and the Johansen Expressway Interchange. DOT needs to be proposing long term comprehensive solutions for the comprehensive problem, the presence of too numerous at-grade railroad crossings, in a concentrated area. We need to be addressing the cause of problems rather than treating the symptoms as that will be the best and cheapest solution in the long term!*	DOT&PF has met with the Alaska Railroad Corporation several times to evaluate options for reducing at-grade railroad and highway crossings. One solution is a grade separation of the railroad over the Old Steese and Steese Expressway. The project team will continue to press forward towards a long-term, comprehensive solution.
Dec 11, 2014	*Please don't use Roundabouts for high traffic intersections, they don't fit well for that, and it's especially bad to have two-lane roundabouts with our snow conditions which will take them down to 1 lane, and therefore not be able to handle the traffic that was expected.*	If used, roundabouts will be designed in accordance with national standards with modifications to adapt them to the Alaska environmental conditions.

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Dec 11, 2014	*First and foremost, as a resident of this specific area for over 12 years now, it is my contention that the ever increasing heavy traffic levels utilizing this stretch of the OS Highway preclude the safe and efficient use of roundabouts in any capacity and will only impede the smooth movement of vehicles and significantly increase the risk to pedestrian traffic. With more and more businesses projected for this area, these situations will only be exacerbated by the incorporation of roundabouts. Traffic lights at Trainor Gate and Fred Meyer are a much safer and more suitable solution. A 4-way light at with 2-way access at Trainor and OS would allow for a much safer merging and right-of-way of traffic and still allow convenient and practical residential access to the Hamilton Acres/Shannon Park subdivisions.*	Signals and roundabouts will both be evaluated for use in the Old Steese corridor. Both types of intersections have advantages and disadvantages. Roundabouts have been demonstrated to accommodate large truck traffic and high traffic volumes in highly commercialized corridors such as the Badger Road in North Pole and the Huffman Road corridor in Anchorage.
Dec 11, 2014	*Elimination of the 2-way access to Trainor Gate and Old Steese will serve only to further bottleneck traffic at College and Old/New Steese, unduly restrict reasonable, convenient access to and foster greater transient diversion through Hamilton Acres.*	The project team is reevaluating options for keeping Trainor Gate a two-way roadway. The results of the analysis will be presented to the public.
Dec 13, 2014	*For presentations, please show the results of the traffic modeling for each alternative. Could you print the projected Level of Service for each intersection for each alternative?*	This information will be provided in the future.

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Dec 13, 2014	*What is the reason there is no leg to the west at the Old Steese/Trainor Gate intersection? It seems like a west leg to a roundabout there would be an easy way to get in and out of Fred Meyer and to be developed lots.*	The leg to the west at the Old Steese and Trainor Gate intersection is on property owned by the Alaska Railroad. This leg was recently blocked by the railroad because they are not in favor of continuing public use so close to their rail facilities. Acquiring land from the Alaska Railroad requires approval from the State Legislature. Though not impossible, if the Alaska Railroad is not in favor of providing additional access because of safety or other concerns it would be unlikely to make it through a legislative process in a timely manner.
Dec 13, 2014	*How about a right in/right out intersection by extending Sadler Way at the Seekins Drive end to the New Steese Hwy? This seems to me to be an improvement which would be cheap, easy and beneficial.*	The Steese Expressway is a controlled access corridor and it is a safety concern to add low volume driveways to this road due to the cross-town function and higher speeds on Steese Expressway. Only signalized arterials or major collector roads can intersect with Steese Expressway.
January 7, 2015	*The 5 lane is nice. However, if it means closing Trainor Gate to the New Steese [it is] better to just leave it the way it is as you will hurt all the businesses along the way and move your bottle neck to College and 3rd, creating bigger problems than we have now. I feel you need access to the businesses going both directions plus access to Trainor Gate, Hamilton Acres, Shannon Park and the Base.*	Improvements to Trainor Gate are necessary regardless of the 5 lane configuration on Old Steese because the existing road configuration is over capacity and has an elevated crash rate. We will re-assess the viability of 2-way operations and will provide this supplemental analysis to the public.