

**Western Alaska Access Planning Study  
Anchorage Public Meeting Notes  
February 10, 2011**

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|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Open House          | 6:00 P.M. – 6:30 P.M. |
| Presentation        | 6:30 P.M. – 7:10 P.M. |
| Question & Comments | 7:10 P.M. – 8:45 P.M. |

Project Team Representation

AK DOT&PF:                   Alexa Greene  
DOWL HKM:                   Tom Middendorf, Steve Noble, Alison Lohrke

Attendance

45 recorded on the sign-in sheet (not including those from the project team).

Presentation

Alexa Greene, AK DOT&PF, opened the meeting, welcomed those in attendance, introduced the project team representatives, and introduced the purpose of the public meeting.

Tom Middendorf, DOWL HKM, presented an overview of the Corridor Planning Report.

Questions & Comments

Q = Question   R = Response   C = Comment

Q:     I have a question about maintenance and repair – where would the money come from?

R:     *The money used to maintain the roadway would probably come from the State's general fund.*

Q:     With all the trucking firms using the new road if it was built, would they pay into it?

R:     *As of now, there would not be a tax for trucks to use the roadway, but things could change.*

Q:     It looks to me that Route 1 would be the shortest, cheapest route and it crosses only one piece of Federal Land. Route 1 would also be the most beneficial to the mining industry. Where does the mining industry stand on this?

R:     *There is a separate study that has begun that is looking at access to the Ambler Mining District. The objective for this study was for community access, to create jobs, and to connect Fairbanks and Nome.*

Q:     So have you had any input from the mining companies?

R:     *We have not received a comment sheet from a mining company. We have had some conversations with mining companies and corporations such as NANA and Doyon, Inc. which have rights to land in the area.*

Q: Which route would attract more of the mining companies?

**R: *Route 1, because of the Ambler Mining District, would attract the most mining attention according to our estimates and studies so far.***

Q: I live in western Alaska and was wondering if you have looked at any military aspects of this road?

**R: *We have looked at the issue of national defense and the Bering Sea becoming more active in shipping and in oil and gas development. There is currently a considerable amount of activity going on in the Bering Sea near Russia.***

C: On your map, I didn't see the Native lands shown on your maps. What I see and hear from the Native and Tribal people, especially from Ambler, does not agree with a road or railroad to Nome due to subsistence issues.

Q: Who will get the benefits of the road if it goes through? Big corporations, mining companies, rural Alaskans, who?

**R: *The primary benefits we were trying to measure was access to communities. When we looked at the alternatives, we looked at the population of each community and the distance to the roadway. The second thing we looked at was mineral access, and certainly the mining companies would benefit from this, and hopefully people in communities would benefit by obtaining jobs provided by either constructing or maintaining the roadway or by mineral development.***

Q: So who would get more benefits - the mining companies or the Natives who live in the villages? How do you know that the Alaskans are going to get the jobs?

**R: *I do know in the NANA region, they do hire a lot of people from the NANA region for jobs.***

Q: I would like to know why Council was not contacted about a road being punched through our community.

**R: *We did contact Council in the beginning, but did not receive a response. However, after contacting the community again, we are meeting with Council on Saturday, February 26, 2011.***

C: ***We are holding meetings in over 30 communities in Western Alaska. We have not had a sit-down meeting with any mining companies since we began the public involvement process. It has been strictly about gaining input from the communities that would be affected.***

Q: What kind of standard will the road be built to? Will it be built like the haul road? Will it be highway standard and paved?

**R:** *It is envisioned that the road would be similar in cross-section to the existing haul road. This is what we have assumed in a cost-estimating perspective. It is still early in the process, but it is what we have used in estimating for the cost of the project. It would most likely be gravel top with the design speed being 40 mph.*

*The roadway will be money dependent, environmental dependent, etc. We are also currently looking at ways to reduce the costs. It could be a one-way road with pull-outs, ice roads, etc. There is plenty of room for more dialogue on road standards before it actually happens.*

Q: You go 100 miles west of Manley Hot Springs. Do you know the total population of the total villages covered for the entire route?

**R:** *Not counting Nome, it would be about 2,900 people.*

C: What I find frustrating about this process, is that it asks whether people are in favor of this road project or not, rather than if they would rather have the money spent on this or that. What is not laid out is that this road is the most expensive road project that the State is proposing. Basically, I think we have to think long and hard about funding this project. There is no financial plan for this project.

Q: If you were to do this in phases, is there any sort of projection for how long this would take to complete the project?

**R:** *We don't have a firm answer on how long it would take to build the entire road. It would depend on the funding and where the money is coming from.*

C: It makes no sense to throw away \$3 billion dollars down the drain to build a road that only 2,900 people, if that, will use.

**R:** *That is why we are here, to gather your opinions and comments on if you favor or do not favor a roadway to Nome.*

C: I support Route 1, simply because it is cheaper, a flatter surface, it is shorter route, and it involves more mining industry development. I believe also that as a facilitator, you should have invited mining representatives to the meetings, since they are the ones that will fund the roads.

Q: Did you prioritize your route selections, other than impacts? Route 2b already has a navigable waterway. Route 1 would potentially provide more transportation options to more people than Route 2b.

**R:** *We did look at how many people would be affected. Route 2b did have more population in a radius of 25 and 50 miles than both Route 1 and Route 3.*

C: When I look at the Yukon River Corridor, there are a lot of contentious issues along the route because of the Yukon River so that we can appease Canada. So the Native people are suffering because they are unable to get their subsistence living. I think that Route 3 would be the better option, because you would then avoid the Yukon River and Route 1 supports the mining routes, and you really don't want to put more mining up north.

**R: *These are many good issues. This is just the start of the dialogue and certainly not the end of discussions for the road. There will be an environmental process and engineering phases where more meetings will need to be held.***

C: I think it is really important to ask the question of what will happen if we don't build the road. Western Alaska is in desperate times right now. We have the highest suicide rates currently in the US; our children have lost their hope. If we want to keep people in Western Alaska, we must have a type of surface transportation. Route 1 looks like it would be the least expensive. I like Route 3 because you could run a spur road to McGrath and float things down the Kuskokwim.

C: I still say the best bet for this corridor is a railroad. It would be more economical by moving freight, propane, people, mail, and would help with tourism.

C: A road brings nothing, but goods and services being shuttled.

**R: *Thank you for your comments, they have been noted.***

Q: There has been discussion in Galena about a regional nuclear generator to provide energy for their community. Was this addressed?

**R: *I believe this has been considered, and it is no longer being discussed. When visiting Galena, there were discussions about regional power and connectivity between the regions. They talked about hydro power connections between villages, geothermal power connectivity, etc. I don't know if it has played into our routing, but having power would make building a road cheaper to build.***

Q: What is the process for contacting your Legislator to voice your opinion about this project?

**R: *First off, if you would like to have your comment in the public record, you can write it down and submit it. We do not place names in the record, but we do ask that you write down where you are from. We thought it would be good to show the Legislature what opinions are coming from what communities. If you want to contact your legislators directly, their contact information can be found on the State website.***

Q: How does this fit into a more long-range decision making process?

**R: *In the near term, decisions will be made whether there is any value in moving forward with further studies. If we go any further, we would need to hold more public meetings. We have also barely touched the surface on environmental, engineering, topography, and more. If the government would like us to do more work, it would have to be approved by the Legislature. It could be stopped right now, or it could be stopped further along the process, or it could be built.***

C: This is such an important milestone for this State. Taking a road to Western Alaska would open up opportunities for young Alaskan natives. I was part of the mass exodus that left Western Alaska because there were no jobs and there were no opportunities. Opening up the Road to Nome, would open up the world.

Q: The point of the road is for the mining companies, correct?

**R: *When we looked at the different routes, we could have picked Route 1, which had better access to mineral access. However, we selected Route 2b which reaches more communities. Mining is not the top priority.***

**C: *I want to address a comment that keeps coming up. A decision has not been made about building a road. No route has been chosen.***