

**Western Alaska Access Planning Study
Bettles Public Meeting Notes
February 1, 2011**

Open House	5:30 P.M. – 5:45 P.M.
Presentation	5:45P.M. – 6:25 P.M.
Question & Comments	6:25 P.M. – 7:00 P.M.

Project Team Representation

AK DOT&PF: Alexa Greene,
DOWL HKM: Tom Middendorf, Alex Prosak
Tanana Chiefs Conference: Jerry Isaacs, Tony Delia

Attendance

11 attendees counted and 9 recorded on the sign-in sheet (not including those from the project team).

Presentation

AK DOT&PF and DOWL HKM set up for the public meeting in the National Park Service, Bettles Ranger Station and Visitor Center Conference Room. 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

C: If you are going through a wildlife refuge for Route 1 and not a wilderness area then it is actually feasible to do a land trade. It is certainly difficult, but not impossible. If you are crossing a wilderness area then it will be impossible to cross.

R: *Thank you for the comment.*

Q: Who has mandated the project? What is the project status?

R: *The project was mandated by the Governor. The current status is that we are in the very beginning stages to determine if there is public interest to move forward with the project. The corridor report itself was completed in January of 2010 and we will be submitting our report to the State in the March/April timeframe.*

Q: So it hasn't actually gone through the Legislature yet?

R: *No, but they are being kept apprised of the project status.*

Q: So there is a possibility that the project may not happen?

R: *Correct.*

Q: Did the cost of the route take into consideration migration routes and animal overpasses and underpasses?

R: *It did not assume underpass or overpass construction. That would be something more for the next phase of the study should it continue.*

C: Transportation projects in the Lower 48 must now account for overpasses and underpasses, not only for migratory purposes, but also for roaming animals.

C: We've the community of Bettles, lobbied before the United States Congress before and I can tell you that you will run into some strong opponents to this project.

Q: Have you considered ecosystem changing plant species? This has only become a problem more recently, but there are some plants that have been moving slowly up the Dalton Highway, largely being spread by being blown from truck traffic. These plants have become invasive and are killing natural vegetation.

R: *We did not realize this. This will be something that the environmental study will evaluate.*

C: Personal use of the haul road in conjunction with the ice road into Bettles saves me between \$7,000-10,000 dollars per year in fuel savings.

C: Constructing a winter ice road will have the least socio-economic impact.

Q: Where does the data come from? As an engineering firm you may be overlooking some very important aspects.

R: *The information comes from studies that we've researched, research performed by our subconsultants, and analysis of the data accumulated. Please realize that this is intended to be a very high level feasibility study. We realize that if the project is to go forward that there is a significant amount of work yet to be done.*

Q: So this isn't an EIS (Environmental Impact Statement)?

R: *No. If the project goes forward an EIS will definitely be needed.*

Q: How long before the road is constructed?

R: *That depends on many factors. First, the project would need to show sufficient interest by communities for the Legislature to move forward with the project. Since the overall project size is so large, the project will need to be broken down into segments which would be more feasible and the environmental process would be more manageable.*

Q: Would the road be owned by DOT?

R: *Yes.*

C: Who pays for the road has a lot to do with what the purpose of the road is.

C: Why not look into rail?

R: *Rail costs between 4 to 5 times as much as a road and it is restricted by grades and would therefore need to be longer than a roadway, further adding to the cost. In terms of maintenance it is again approximately 4 to 5 times as expensive as a roadway.*

Q: What about fuel along the route? That is a very long way to travel.

R: *This has not yet been worked out. However, it is anticipated that there will be maintenance stations located every 50 to 70 miles. It could also provide opportunities for entrepreneurs.*

C: Villages will likely have to provide the vendors. Small businesses in remote locations without additional support will likely fail. The truck stop at the Yukon is now only open during the summers and is still very near to closing down.

Q: How do villages along the corridor feel?

R: *That is what we're attempting to quantify with these meetings. We do not yet have a breakdown available by individual villages but as a whole 60% of people favor the project. The remaining 40% either do not support it or are undecided.*

Q: What about if you take Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Nome out of the numbers?

R: *We do not yet have numbers for Anchorage and Fairbanks. However, the numbers from Nome mirror the overall numbers.*

Q: Doesn't the project go through Doyon lands? Might it be necessary to acquire some of the necessary lands through eminent domain?

R: *It does go through Doyon lands; it goes over land owned by many different owners. Best efforts would be made to avoid an eminent domain situation, but if necessary that is a possibility.*

C: Our ancestors were successful in getting the pipeline moved away from this area.

Q: Of the communities that you've been to so far, how many have concurred that Route 2B is the best route?

R: *We have not yet quantified that. We should have that information available in April.*

Q: Will you be contacting us with the final results of the report?

R: *Yes, everyone who provides contact information on the sign in sheet will be notified of the completion of the study and where the results can be found.*

C: Will the study discuss winter access?

R: *Yes.*

Q: Is this study your only involvement or could you be involved in additional phases?

R: *We are only under contract for the current phase, we may do additional aerial mapping work. As far as the design contract goes we would have to compete for that work with other consultants.*

Q: What is the biggest issue of the project so far?

R: *By far the biggest issue is subsistence.*

C: If the subsistence issue is not resolved it could be a disaster for the villages.

C: At this point I would have to say that I am in favor of the project, but that I need to see some big issues get resolved before I would completely agree to it.

R: *Thank you for the comment. Through this process we are identifying the big issues that should be considered.*

Q: Is there a possibility that the route could change based on the public input received?

R: *At this point, the route is a living/moving object. There will be many refinements to the route should the project go forward.*

Q: Is there a way to build public input into the outcome of the study?

R: *Yes. That is exactly what we're attempting to do with our community presentations.*