

Western Alaska Access Planning Study
Kaltag Public Meeting Notes
November 9, 2010

Presentation	6:00 P.M. – 6:40 P.M.
Question & Comments	6:40 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.

Project Team Representation

AK DOT&PF: Alexa Greene
DOWL HKM: Tom Middendorf, Alex Prosak

Attendance

17 attendees 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

C: The mountains around Nulato are very rough terrain making construction difficult.

C: Don't understand why you wouldn't go through Unalakleet, it is already an identified corridor.

R: Our primary objective was to identify the most beneficial and cost-effective route from Fairbanks to Nome. We are also planning spur roads to communities that want them, but we have not mapped the spur roads. Unalakleet could be considered a pretty long spur road, but we will identify longer connecting links, such as the road to Unalakleet, as a possible future connector in our report.

Q: How far is the preferred route from Kaltag?

R: Approximately thirty-two miles.

C: A big concern of communities within the area is fuel costs. There needs to be a transportation corridor near Galena or Kaltag that can be used to assist with distribution of shared hydro or wind power.

C: I thought the idea of the road was to provide access to the most number of people. It appears that it is really for access to minerals. Doyon has recently discovered a large gold deposit near 22 Mile Mountain, downstream from Kaltag.

R: Route 1 had greater access to minerals but was not recommended because it accessed less population and crossed a wilderness area. The Yukon River Corridor serves more communities and people than the other routes. We will contact Doyon about this gold deposit.

C: Fisheries have become a big resource to Kaltag this past year, the village recently constructed a processing plant and Lynden hauled out ten freezer trailers filled with salmon on the barge. A road connection would improve hauling out fish.

C: Even if there was an access road to Kaltag it doesn't seem that the road will be beneficial. Move the route to actually go to each town without connector roads. This will be far more accessible than needing 32 miles of connector roads.

R: The assumption with the study is that each village would have a connector road to the main road; this just wasn't graphically depicted on the maps. Part of the reason for doing this is that not all of the communities will want to be connected to the road.

Q: A road between Kaltag and Unalakleet would substantially lower all of our costs. Can funding to construct a connector road from the main road be guaranteed?

R: No the connector road funding cannot be guaranteed, but at this point there isn't funding to build the main road either.

C: It seems the road is more of a benefit for tourism and mining but that it isn't really a benefit to rural Alaska.

R: As discussed in the presentation, tourism and mining would provide jobs and help create more sustainable rural communities.

C: The best bet for Kaltag is a road to Unalakleet, not a road to Nome.

C: We really want to develop the local fisheries as it is our best sustainable resource. The US Department of Fish and Wildlife have said that the fish are at their prime at the point where they reach Kaltag. A road would improve hauling fish to market.

C: It costs between \$300 - \$400 to fill fuel tanks; local propane costs are outrageous.

C: The road is not advantageous as it opens our country to outsiders. People already drive their boats from Fairbanks to Koyukuk to access our hunting grounds.

C: The road will open the country to homesteaders and the influx of people will make our subsistence lifestyle only that much more difficult.

C: Many years ago the Kaltag and Unalakleet communities formed a new community boundary on maps. I'm not sure which map the information was included on but there are strong ties between the two communities and we want to keep it that way.

C: How long will it be before a road is built?

R: There is no funding to design or build the project right now. It will be much easier to fund and build it if the project is broken into smaller segments as they would require less funding. Environmental work on the project has not begun yet nor is there currently funding for the environmental phase. If the road were to be constructed all at one time it is very uncertain how long it will take to obtain funding, complete environmental work, design and construct the road.

Q: The first section of the road would probably be from Manley to the Yukon, where is that stage of the project at?

R: There is currently a Tofty Road that exits Manley which the project would partially overlap but beyond that there is nothing at this time.

Q: Who will maintain the road?

R: The road would likely be maintained by the State and we have planned for maintenance stations approximately every 50 miles and at some villages close to the route as well.

C: If none of the corridors go through Kaltag or other villages then just don't build the road at all as it would open the land to homesteaders and hunters.

R: See earlier response about connector roads.

C: We have just enough animals in the area to feed the people who live here.

R: At the Tanana meeting residents discussed developing a management plan to control hunting in the area surrounding their village from outsiders; Kaltag could do the same.

C: How would construction crews get all the steel in that would be needed to construct the many bridges for the road to Nome project? A road from Unalakleet to Kaltag would be a perfect point for staging. You didn't look at the cost benefits of staging areas.

C: Steve Ivanoff is the Kawerak Transportation Director and is the point of contact for what work has been done for the road between Unalakleet and Kaltag.

C: The best place to begin the road to Nome project would be to start from Council and then access the Yukon River Corridor via Kaltag.

C: The topography between Unalakleet and Kaltag is flat which would be cheaper than constructing a road in the surrounding mountains.

Q: What have the communities along Route 1 said?

R: We haven't been to those communities yet but once we have we will post the minutes of the meetings and what they said on the project website. The website address is on the flyers we've handed out.

C: This study is backwards, you should be going to the communities first, and not after the report is complete.

R: *DOT&PF asked us to first get some options identified so the public meetings would have something to start from and comment on. Talking with the communities is extremely important as the project can have a huge impact on the lives of villagers.*

C: You need to develop working relationships with the communities involved. You can't bring a study forward and say this is what you can have, do you want it?

R: *We hope these meetings are a good starting point for those relationships.*

C: You need to have better advertising for the meetings; I sit on the village corporation board (Gana-A'Yoo) and never knew about the meeting I just happened to see it posted on Facebook.

R: *We have tried to contact the village corporation, tribe and community staff prior to each meeting. In some cases we were unable to reach certain people or the information was not passed on to everyone.*

C: It is easier to ship to Seattle from Unalakleet than it is from Fairbanks; we just need a more reliable way to consistently get to Unalakleet whether that is by road or barge.

C: Kaltag has put in a lot of time, effort, and money into opening the fish processing plant. We need to continue to do everything we can to develop this resource.

C: Steve Ivanoff is already well on the way for planning the road between Unalakleet and Kaltag. I don't see any advantage to any of the routes. They are not built around the communities they are meant to benefit.

R: *See earlier response about connector roads.*

C: Many of the main decision makers have no clue about rural, subsistence lifestyles.

C: You need to look for the cheapest way to construct the road and to build it with quality work and materials.

C: The people at the endpoints of the project [Fairbanks and Nome in this case] always want the project because it provides the most benefit to them. There is no benefit to the people in the middle of the project.

C: Your airfare estimates are all off, they are way too low. You need to redo your economic study.

C: Many of the people who were speaking against the road claim to live subsistence lifestyles but when they're hungry they go to the store. We need to get the road built to reduce the costs of living.