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## **Fairbanks residents view options for proposed road to Nome**

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**FAIRBANKS** — A public hearing on a proposed road connecting Fairbanks to Nome drew about 50 people to the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center on Monday night.

The Alaska Department of Transportation is on its final round of public hearings in 30 communities ranging from Western Alaska to the Interior seeking public comment on the proposed 500-mile road.

People were asked to fill out a questionnaire and comment form about the Western Alaska Access Planning Study and mail it back to Tom Middendorf, of DOWL HKM, who led Monday night's meeting.

Maps on tables detailing four proposed routes drew the crowd's attention.

"We're now collecting public comment to further study and further refine (options)," Middendorf told the audience during a slide presentation of the four routes included in the study.

Route 1 begins near Jim River on the Dalton Highway and trends southwest, accessing some northern communities and the mineral district near Ambler.

Route 3 begins near Nenana on the Parks Highway and sweeps to the south to avoid mountainous terrain and federal conservation land before turning north to connect to the Nome-Council Highway.

Detailed in dark red were the Yukon River Corridors with two starting points listed as Route 2a and Route 2b.

Both Yukon River corridors, Middendorf said, would access river communities and resources.

The first, 2a, starts north of the Yukon River on the Dalton Highway, runs to Tanana and then west to to the Nome- Council Highway.

The second, 2b, begins at Manley Hot Springs, running west mostly along the Yukon River to Council which connects to Nome via a gravel road.

The study recommends the 2b Yukon River Corridor plan for a number of reasons including fewer land and environment impacts, shortest travel distance between Fairbanks and Nome, the absence of federal conservation land crossings, serves the greatest population and has potential to link mining districts. The proposed 500-mile road would be built in stages and is estimated to cost more than \$2.5 billion.

Among the positives a road west could bring are mining and tourism jobs, fuel,

travel and food savings, medical and disaster relief, and less expensive shipping.

Among the negative effects a road could bring are changes in village lifestyle, the environment, an influx of hunters, drugs, alcohol and disruption of caribou migration and calving grounds.

Mittendorf said in the communities visited, residents were about 65 percent in favor of a road.

Before closing the meeting, Mittendorf emphasized the importance of hearing individual voices from the questionnaires. A report on public involvement in this phase of the planning process will come out in April, he said.

Tanana Chiefs Conference President Jerry Isaac attended.

“At last year’s annual meeting, TCC approved the study of the road to Nome,” Isaac said. “My job is to take information back to the villages for their direction.”

Isaac said Yukon River communities are are concerned about the impact a road would make on their lifestyles, both positive and negative.

“It’s a tough decision. They’re not ready to jump in and agree to a road construction,” he said.

Information and a map of the route is available at [www.westernalaskaaccess.com](http://www.westernalaskaaccess.com).

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