

DOT pushes a Yukon River corridor to Fairbanks

By Sandra L. Medearis

State Dept. of Transportation planning personnel visited Nome Oct. 13 with a road show for folks interested in a plan to link Nome to the interior Alaska-Canada Highway system. The 400-500 mile road would hook up half a dozen villages along the scenic resource-rich route that would put Fairbanks within about a 600-mile drive.

DOT/PF officials met with about 20 citizens at Old St. Joe's Hall and met with some opposition as they presented lay out maps showing preliminary choices for routes. The project is still a twinkle in the determine-the-interest category.

The study encompasses the area west of the Dalton Highway, north of the Yukon and lower Tanana River basins, and south of the Brooks Range.

The legislature provided a million dollars to study the project. No money exists in an account to fund the road.

In 2008, DOT&PF contracted with the engineers DOWL/HKM to analyze potential construction of the road. At its current milestone, that study shows four suggested routes and the impediments and plusses of each. The study came out in January. Engineers on the project are shopping it around to villages that would feel the impacts to get opinions. Steve Titus, DOT&PF Northern Regional Director said the goal was to use the study to recognize a corridor that would promote resource and community development.

Resources and economic activity have been identified and corridor routes evaluated to access the resources and communities.

"While evaluating routes we are taking into consideration the migratory patterns of wildlife, subsistence culture and technical construction challenges," Titus said.

A proposed northern route would open up the Ambler mining district for jobs and a \$27.5 billion in resources at a projected cost of \$2.1 billion, according to the study. A southern route would cost the most, \$3.2 billion and open up Donlin Creek mining area. A couple of alternatives run along the Yukon River. The projected cost of these would be \$2.9 and \$2.6 billion.

The Western Alaska Access Planning Study selected one of the river routes as the most favorable and dubbed it the Yukon River Corridor. This corridor is approximately 500 miles long, roughly parallels the Yukon River for much of its length, and has an estimated total project cost of \$2.3 to \$2.7 billion, or \$4.6 to \$5.4 million per mile. It would leave Elliott Highway near Manley Hot Springs, 160 miles from Fairbanks and parallel the river on the

north as it goes westward by Ruby, Nulato, Kaltag and turn northward at Unalakleet, going by Shaktoolik, Koyuk and join the Seward Peninsula road system with a bridge over the Niukluk River at Council.

The WAAPS study says benefits to the Yukon River Corridor route include:

- Lower passenger transportation costs
- Lower fuel delivery costs
- Lower freight and mail delivery costs
- Lower mining and resource development costs
- Lower energy and power infrastructure costs
- Increase in jobs, income and access to services

Titus said the Yukon River Corridor had fewer environmental and land ownership impacts. The northern route would serve fewer people and communities; the southern route would have greater environmental and habitat impacts.

This month, DOT planners and engineers traveled Western Alaska with the proposed maps and information. Last week the DOT/DOWL team held public meetings some of the towns potentially affected by the road: White Mountain, Koyuk, Elim, Shaktoolik, Unalakleet and Nome. Other villages that could be affected by the Yukon River Corridor include at least Tanana, Ruby and Nulato. A report stemming from the comment period will be due in May. What comes next will depend on cost and other issues combined and public input.

While many have dreamed of a road connecting Nome to the rest of the state, some at the meeting did not think the idea so hot, based on the preliminary study. Others doubted the road would ever be built, but some hoped it would bring supplies into Nome at lower cost. Engineers said with money in hand and permitting hurdles crossed, the road could be built, oh, say, in roughly six years. The favored route crosses the Yukon River and other rivers or streams, meaning many expensive bridges. The corridor crosses 185 miles of wetlands, 135 miles of rolling terrain, and 65 miles of mountainous terrain. Nomeite Sue Steinacher, speaking up at the meeting, said that collecting input from the public who did not have all the information on environmental and social impacts of the road was premature.

"We don't have the whole story," she said. "I don't believe the road is being built to benefit people. It is being built for resources. We need to look at all aspects, how the region would look in 20 to 30 years. We need to get more of the pie so the feedback is more balanced."

The study did look at environmental issues, a representative of DOT Planning Department said. They mapped wetlands, caribou grazing and stellar eider habitat, but did not put these items into the one-hour presentation.

Pearl Johnson noted that the study carefully outlined parks and nature preserves, but did not consult villages about food sources in the areas. "For the breadbasket areas, there is no color [on the map]," Johnson said. "People in the village are minimized."

Additionally, she wanted to know how archaeological sites would be protected. DOT representatives said that if the project went to the design stage and environmental impact studies, once the route was settled, archaeological issues would be investigated.

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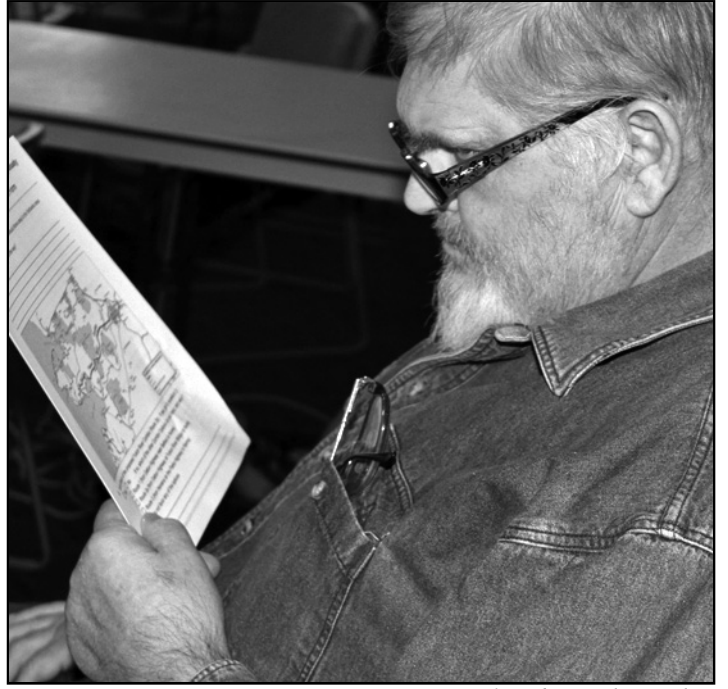


Photo by Sandra Medearis

WHY NOT A RAILROAD?—Garry Hart studies a map showing a proposed road from Manley Hot Springs to Nome, connecting Western Alaska to the Alaska Canada Highway system. Hart and some others favor a rail, not a road connection to control access to the countryside and haul out mineral resources.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Possible effects on children:

- Fear
- Anger
- Feelings of isolation
- Low self-esteem
- Loss of trust
- Intensification of existing learning disabilities
- Intensification of existing behavioral problems
- Child abuse
- Incest
- Increased risk of becoming adult victims or abusers themselves

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• Yukon River corridor

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The study did map and estimate how many miles of the Yukon River Corridor went through village and regional corporation lands, recognizing that there could be positive or negative impact on food sources—for example, more access for villagers but also more access for outsiders.

Some villages may not want to connect. That will be up to individual communities.

Other comment ran to looking at the road access for the future need to get food and supplies into Nome.

"This is about keeping costs down, Gary Hart said. "If costs continue to go up, like gas just went up half a dollar, people can't afford to live here. They're bailing out to Anchorage."

Stan Morgan offered that he saw no benefits of a road within 200-250 miles from Nome.

Just go down the Yukon and end it there," he suggested. From there it would be an intrusion on private lands and Native lands."

Gary Hart was curious as to whether the team had looked at the cost differential in building a railroad instead of a road.

Titus said a railroad would cost four times as much.

Some wondered if there was enough interest in the project to take

it to a higher, more expensive planning level.

What about Ambler and all its mineral resources? The DOT is looking at access to Ambler under a separate project, according to DOT information.

Meanwhile, a reporter said she doubted she would be around to drive the road in her pink Cadillac.

"Your grandchildren will not drive that road," said an innocent bystander.



Photo by Sandra Medearis

CONSIDER THE PEOPLE—Pearl Johnson lambasts the DOT for not considering the impact of a Yukon corridor on the people.

• Sound Off

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sonal saga but because Alaska voters face perhaps their most important U.S. Senate election in history this Nov. 2, after which we will send Joe Miller, Scott McAdams or Lisa Murkowski to Washington to represent us.

The late Sen. Ted Stevens understood Alaskans getting their fair share from Washington to develop basic infrastructure in our young state, including in rural Alaska where a routine medical operation still can make the difference between life and death.

Some Alaskans might be wondering why rural Alaskans might seem "entitled" to improved services. Let us remind our urban Alaska friends, who just received their Permanent Fund Dividend checks, that rural Alaska has been creating wealth and bankrolling Alaska's wants and needs, rural and urban, for decades. Rural Alaska generously shares its resource wealth—from Prudhoe Bay to the Red Dog Mine to tourism, commercial fishing and more—with urban Alaska and the nation.

Let's choose the right senator to send back to Washington who will make sure our children, elders, and others throughout Alaska can depend, for example, on reasonably equal access to health care.

Susan B. Andrews and John Creed are professors at Chukchi College, the Kotzebue branch of the University of Alaska.



Courtesy photo

DOING FINE—Trevor Creed in his hospital bed in Sitka after recovering from appendicitis



Bering Strait School District 2010 Activity Calendar

October 21-23
AFN Elders/Youth Conference
Fairbanks

October 22-23
Kotzebue Bush Brawl Wrestling Invitation
Kotzebue

Norton Sound Seafood Products

NSSP will purchase Tom Cod and other white fish from Nome and Teller area fishermen this fall. They can be caught through the ice or by net. Please contact NSSP at 443-2304 for more information.

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65						66				67			

- Across
- Bust maker
 - Gulf of ____, off the coast of Yemen
 - "That was a close one!"
 - Atoll protector
 - Wombs
 - "I had no ____!"
 - State legislature buildings
 - Exude
 - Type of grant
 - Hose material
 - 24 in a day
 - "The Snowy Day" author ____ Jack Keats
 - Escape, in a way
 - Fabric
 - Ride the waves
 - Bringing to ruin
 - March of ____
 - Drawing
 - Method of military attack
 - "A Nightmare on ____ Street!"
 - "Bill & ____ Excellent Adventure"
 - ___ v. Wade
 - George Burns liked them
 - ___ and outs
 21. Dolly ____ of "Hello, Dolly!"
 - Republic in western Balkan Peninsula
 - Clickable image
 - Masked critter
 - Greenish yellow redder than liqueur green
 - Edible mushroom
 26. Move, as a picture
 - Inclines
 27. Sprinkle
 - Animal house
 28. Soldier's knapsack
 - Cicatrix
 29. Good-for-nothing
 - Clobber
 30. Greek poet
 - Defeating
 31. Language of Bohemia
 45. ____ Wednesday
 32. Farm call
 - Charge
 33. Bad day for Caesar
 - Bring to a boil?
 39. Approach
 - Stones lined with crystals
 41. Type of vine
 - Computer info
 42. "Pipe down!"
 - Restore to good health
 43. Spottier
 - Dry, tuberous plant root
 44. The "A" of ABM
 - Central points
 49. Excitement
 - "-zoic" things
 50. Fiats
 - Cartoon art
 52. Way, way off
 - A chip, maybe
 53. Cram, with "up"
 - Hair goops
 54. Site
 - "M*A*S*H" role
 55. Farfetched
 - Back
 56. "____ quam videri" (North Carolina's motto)
 - Its motto is "Lux et veritas"
 57. Bump
 58. "____ Ng" (They Might Be Giants song)
 59. Ceiling
- Down
- Not yet final, at law

Last week's answers

M	A	N	S	G	O	O	F	F	A	N	U	S		
A	N	E	W	O	V	U	L	E	L	E	V	I		
G	O	R	E	P	E	T	O	R	B	E	E	B		
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C	R	O	S	S	F	E	R	T	I	L	I	Z	E	D
R	O	O	M	I	D	A	H	O	D	I	D	O		
E	S	S	E	G	I	L	L	E	S	E	N	D	S	
W	E	E	N	S	T	A	R	E	S	C	A	T		

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HOROSCOPES

October 21 - 27, 2010

CAPRICORN
December 22 - January 19

Great minds think alike, so don't go it alone, Capricorn. If you do, you will make a mess of things. A major scoop gets the rumor mill going.

ARIES
March 21 - April 19

Your softer side comes out when a friend faces a health crisis. Be there for them in full force, Aries. An announcement gets the party started.

CANCER
June 22 - July 22

You have the answer to a recurring dilemma. You just need to look inside, Cancer. A home improvement plan goes off without a hitch and is picture perfect.

LIBRA
September 23 - October 22

Affairs of the heart are top priority this week, Libra. Find the time to reconnect with your loved ones. You won't believe everything you've missed out on.

AQUARIUS
January 20 - February 18

You're a mover and a shaker this week, Aquarius. There is no stopping you. A relative brings home quite the gift. View it through rose-colored glasses.

TAURUS
April 20 - May 20

You must overcome some serious objections in order to implement a plan at work. Don't worry, Taurus. You will succeed. An old friend drops by for a chat.

LEO
July 23 - August 22

You may feel like your family's punching bag this week, but it won't be for naught. Everyone will recover in time for a pleasant weekend, Leo.

SCORPIO
October 23 - November 21

You're riding high for many reasons, Scorpio. A friend invites you over to try out a new trend. Cast aside your reservations and have some fun.

PISCES
February 19 - March 20

Believe in yourself, and nothing is beyond your reach, Pisces. A breach of confidence turns out to be a blessing in disguise. A new wardrobe calls for a change in accessories.

GEMINI
May 21 - June 21

You must clear the air with a coworker, Gemini. They have pushed your buttons enough. Sit down, discuss your differences and come up with a compromise.

VIRGO
August 23 - September 22

Your intentions are good, so don't fret if others don't realize that. They will come around, Virgo. A special occasion calls for some special activities.

SAGITTARIUS
November 22 - December 21

Travel plans stall, but not for long, Sagittarius. You become the go-to person at work. Don't be shy. A home improvement project concludes.

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