

**Western Alaska Access Planning Study
Nome Public Meeting Notes
October 13, 2010**

Open House	6:00-6:30 p.m.
Presentation	6:30-7:15 p.m.
Question & Comments	7:15-8:00 p.m.

Project Team Representation

AK DOT&PF:	Jeff Roach
Kawerak, Inc.:	Pearl Mikulski
DOWL HKM:	Tom Middendorf, Steve Noble, Brandon Telford

Attendance

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

Open House

Attendees were able to visit project display stations, view project information, ask questions, and share comments on the Western Alaska Access Planning Study.

Presentation

Jeff Roach, AK DOT&PF, opened the meeting, welcomed those in attendance, introduced the project team representatives, and introduced the purpose of the public meeting, the project goals and objectives, and schedule.

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

Questions & Comments

Q = Question R = Response C = Comment

Q: What are the cost differences between developing a road corridor versus developing a railroad? Shouldn't long term maintenance costs be lower for a railroad?

R: ***Railroads generally cost approximately four times as much as highways to construct and maintain. Having a highway corridor in place would reduce the cost of future railroad development.***

Q: What route will the road take as it leaves Council? There are right of way issues and a stream crossing.

R: ***That level of detail has not been determined at this stage of the project. That would be determined if the project progresses to a preliminary engineering and environmental documentation phase.***

Q: Would the road be maintained year-round?

R: *We are planning it for year-round use with maintenance stations every 50 miles or so, but decisions about year round maintenance would be determined later.*

Q: Where were the timber oil and gas resources in the study area?

R: *Tom showed maps of these areas, primarily the gas exploration west of Nenana and timber along sections of the Yukon River. The maps are available online in the appendices of the March 2009 Inventory Report at www.westernalaskaaccess.com.*

C: All three route options bisect major caribou migration corridors. The environmental assessment should have been done prior to the public comment period so you could have informed people about the affect the road will have on the caribou herd. I believe people who support the project because of the economic benefits would not support it if they knew the environmental impact of the project.

R: *Caribou migration routes were shown in the open house graphics. Detailed environmental studies would be completed later if decisions are made to continue planning.*

C: I support just building the eastern 2/3 where you provide access to most of the villages and mineralized areas, timber and oil/gas and get most of the benefits. There are fewer community and resource extraction benefits of going all the way to Nome. It will still be cheaper to get our materials from ocean barges if a road is built to Nome. We don't want the affect on our lifestyle.

C: I have mixed feelings about the road. I am concerned we don't fully understand the social effects. But there are enough potential benefits that it would be worth continuing studying the route and its potential benefits and social and economic costs.

Q: The study and presentations should include detailed studies describing how the road could potentially change village lifestyles. People need to have a more complete picture of the affects before weighing in on if it's a good idea. One way to do this might be compare lifestyles at villages with existing road access versus without road access (Teller versus a remote village).

R: *We will try to include more information about this in future presentations. More details would also be addressed in the future if this project moves to an environmental and design phase. Before we go to the expense and time of more detailed studies, we want to get public input on whether the idea of a road should be considered further and what you think the potential lifestyle changes would be.*

C: Some potential social effects include crime, influx of outsiders, and drugs.

C: You could look at how the Alaska Highway or other previous road construction affected the lifestyle of rural people.

C: The study and presentations should define potential environmental impacts and ways to mitigate those impacts.

R: *We have included environmental impacts in our report, but have only glossed over it in the presentation. We will include more information in our future presentations. Before we go to the expense and time of more detailed environmental studies, we want to get public input on whether the idea of a road should be considered further and what you think the environmental affects would be.*

Q: Have archeological sites been determined?

R: *No, they are not currently mapped. If the project moves ahead, an archeologist would have to determine if the route would affect archeological sites, and if so, the route may have to be shifted.*

Q: How quickly could the road be built?

R: *This would depend on many factors such as funding amount and source, environmental impacts, how much of the road is being built at one time, etc. If State funding were in place, and environmental permits were approved, an initial road segment would take from 5 to 7 years to build.*

C: It's not just road access; it has a lot of other effects on the region.

R: *We agree.*

Q: The road should be built sections at a time, with initial sections being where there are greatest benefits.

R: *We agree construction in sections is likely, and we will be giving DOT&PF some ideas of sequencing the sections of construction. If you have some suggestions, we would like to hear them.*

Q: The mining benefits analysis said it could connect to Ambler. Is that practical given the distances to Ambler?

R: *A new project has been initiated by DOT&PF to evaluate access to the Ambler Mine now that the recommended alignment for Western Alaska Access has been selected.*

Q: What is the distance between the Ambler Mining District and the Yukon River Corridor?

R: *Between 200 and 300 miles.*

Q: Have you contacted mining companies with claims in the Ambler area to determine if they will develop their claims if the road is constructed?

R: *We have had preliminary discussions with the mining companies. No commitments have been made, but they do support the road and indicate that the likelihood of mine development will increase significantly.*

Q: Where were the 10 placer mines located that were studied for economic benefits?

R: *There are many potential placer mines in the vicinity of the proposed corridor. The analysis was not looking at any particular placer mines, it was looking at a hypothetical 10 mines to provide a general sense of economic benefits.*

Q: The study referred to difficulties of crossing federal lands, but ignored the affect of crossing village lands we depend on for food.

R: *The study did measure the number of miles of crossing of various kinds of land ownership, including village owned land. We understand the importance of protecting a village's ability to get food from its lands. The road could improve a village's access to its lands, but it may also make those lands accessible to outsiders. Some villages may not want a road extended to their village lands or they may want to develop and control their own road access.*

Q: Regarding benefits for passengers, is it realistic for someone to drive from Nome to Fairbanks and wouldn't it be cheaper and faster to fly?

R: *As a general rule, the greater the distance the more likely someone would fly, particularly if they don't have a lot of time. Over a longer distance, such as Fairbanks to Nome, air fares could be lower than driving, unless there were many passengers in the vehicle or the passenger trip included hauling large amounts of cargo.*

Several comments about potential trespassing on private property.

Q: How would the road affect air fares?

R: *We have not studied this.*

Q: Who would pay for the road?

R: *This has not been determined. Most likely the State, federal government, private sector, or a combination of them.*

C: This road will take a long time to get funded and built. By the time it is completed we will really need the road as well as other transportation alternatives. It will not hurt barge service or air service in the long term. We need to plan for the future.

C: A road will make villages more sustainable and keep village costs down. This could cause people to move back to the villages.

Q: Will truck hauled goods really be less expensive than barged goods?

R: *Yes, according to our study, they will. Truck hauled goods can also be trucked over a longer time of the year than barges.*

C: The primary benefits of the road are for mineral development. It's being proposed for minerals, not for people.

R: *Route 1 had significantly more mineral development potential than the Yukon River Corridor. We selected Route 2 for both community access and mineral development benefits.*