



WESTERN ALASKA ACCESS PLANNING STUDY

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT REPORT

May 2011



**Prepared for:
The State of Alaska
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

DOT&PF.....State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
FAQ..... Frequently Asked Questions
PSAs..... Public Service Announcements
WAAPS..... Western Alaska Access Planning Study

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) initiated the public involvement phase of the Western Alaska Access Planning Study (WAAPS) in October 2010 to gather community comments on the Western Alaska Access Corridor Planning Report, published in January 2010. This report evaluated four east-west corridor options between Fairbanks and Nome, and recommended the Yukon River Corridor.

Public meetings were held in 31 communities across Western Alaska from October 2010 to March 2011 to gather feedback on the corridor options. Other formal and informal meetings and feedback opportunities were provided at conferences and meetings during the public involvement phase with various regional organizations and stakeholders.

This Public Involvement Report documents the process used to solicit public input and the comments received. A companion *Public Involvement Report - Executive Summary* recaps the process in a more condensed report.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the public involvement phase was to gather input from stakeholders along the WAAPS preliminary corridors. The aim of the proposed WAAPS corridors was to connect the Fairbanks area to the Seward Peninsula and provide benefits that include:

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

1.2 Need

There is currently no road system connecting western Alaska to the rest of the state. Persons, freight, mail, fuel and services, must be flown or barged in and out, due to the remoteness and expansiveness of Western Alaska. A transportation corridor would help to drive down the costs for goods and services, while providing Western Alaskans access, opportunities for resource development, and increased employment opportunities.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Various public involvement activities were held to determine how the general public and stakeholders felt about the corridor options, including the recommended Yukon River Corridor.

This Public Involvement Report provides a detailed recap of the completed public involvement process and public sentiments collected over a 5-month period. The collection method was via public meetings with 31 communities, information booths at conventions and conferences, and one-on-one stakeholder outreach.

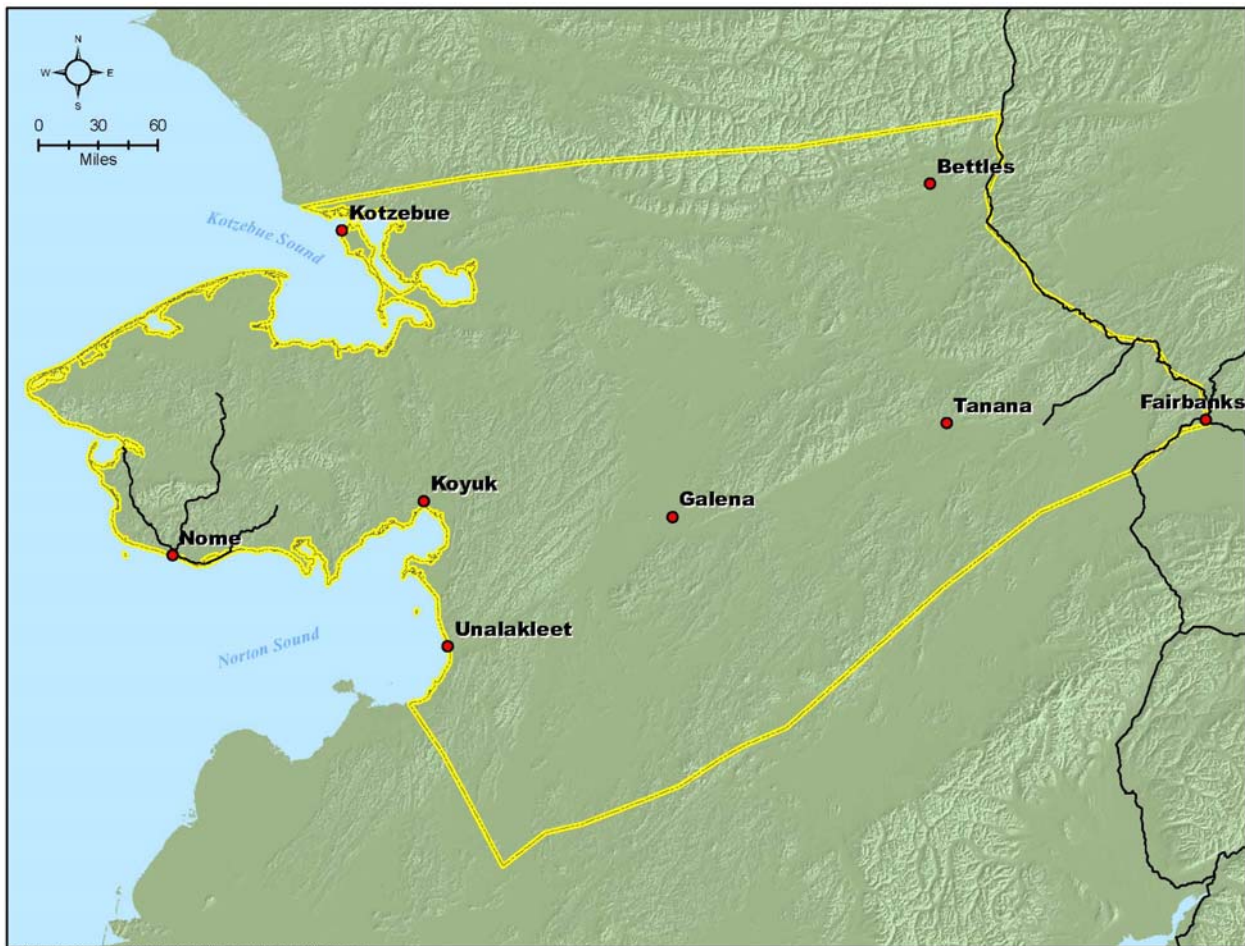


Figure 1: Western Alaska Access Planning Study - Project Study Area

2.1 Corridor Planning Report

A WAAPS Corridor Planning Report was completed in January 2010 to evaluate the feasibility of a road corridor from the Fairbanks area to the Seward Peninsula. This study was initiated in August 2008 by DOT&PF with the purpose of facilitating community and resource development in Western Alaska.

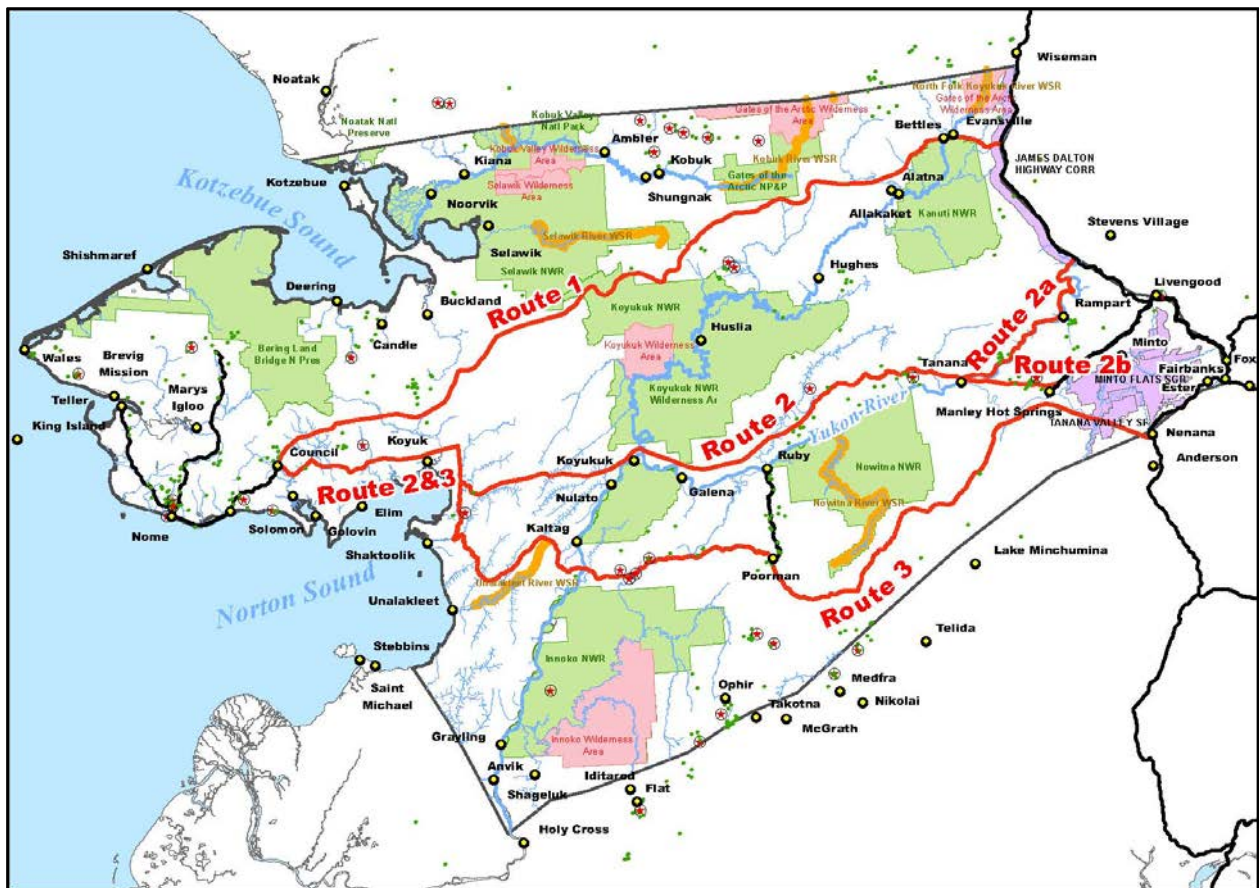
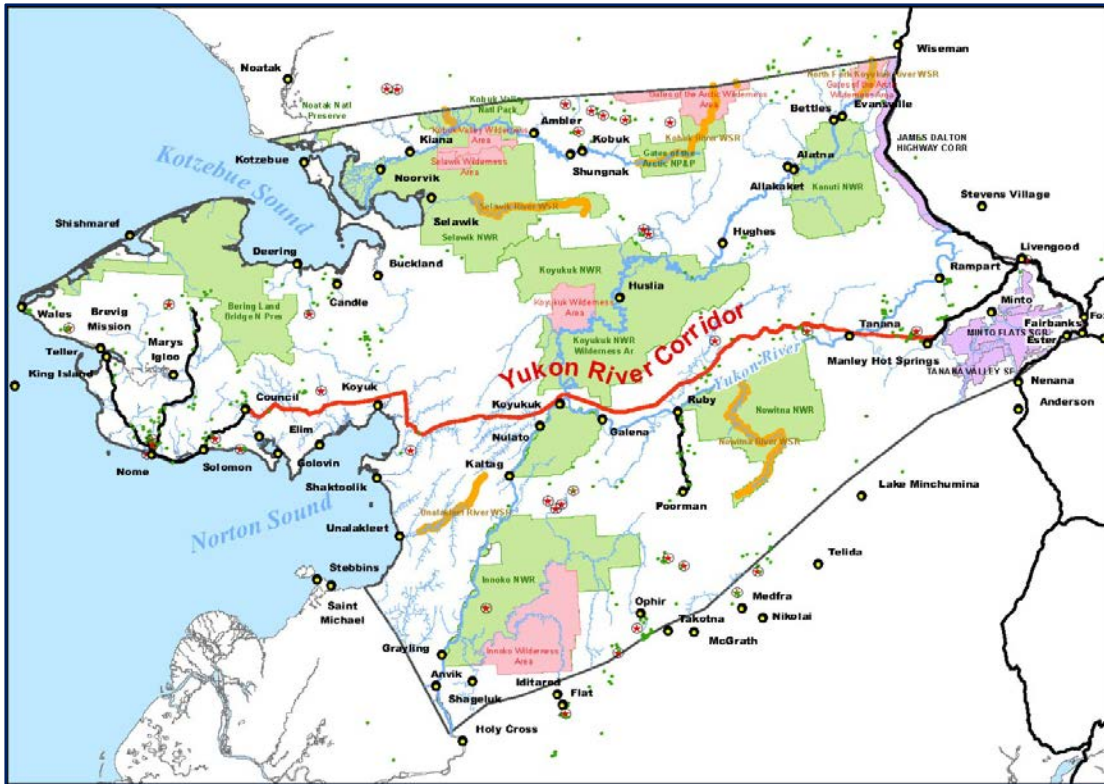


Figure 2: Western Alaska Access Planning Study
Preliminary Alternatives

DOT&PF and the project team identified historical routes and community and mineral resource development destinations in Western Alaska while attempting to avoid environmentally sensitive areas and land management/ownership conflicts. Four different east-west alternatives were identified and evaluated. The Yukon River Corridor was recommended based on its ability to access communities and resources, minimize costs, and avoid environmental and land use conflicts.



**Figure 3: Western Alaska Access Planning Study
Recommended Alternative - Yukon River Corridor**

3.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT METHODS

Public involvement on the WAAPS alternatives and the recommended Yukon River Corridor was initiated in October 2010 and continued through March 2011. The following describes and documents the methods used to involve the public in the decision-making process.

3.1 General Mailing and E-Mail Distribution List

These lists include a general public list and an agency/official list. The general public list was assembled by identifying the leaders of cities, villages, and regional and native corporations using the State of Alaska Division of Community and Regional Affairs website. These individuals assisted in supplying information to each community within the WAAPS study area. Persons who expressed an interest were also added to the project mailing list. Agency and State officials who had a specific connection to the study area, communities, or the project were also added to these lists. A complete mailing and e-mail distribution list can be found in Appendix B.

3.2 Informational Flyers

The initial informational flyer was sent to all communities, agencies and officials on the general mailing and email distribution list. This flyer consisted of the purpose for the public involvement efforts, project website and to announce the kickoff of the public meetings. A copy of the informational flyer is included in Appendix C, along with the list of communities the flyer was sent to. A second flyer will be mailed and e-mailed to announce the completion of the public involvement process and release of the Public Involvement Report.

3.3 Meeting Advertisements

Advertisements were placed for public meetings held in major hub communities – Nome, Fairbanks, and Anchorage. Advertisements for meetings included:

- Thursday, October 7 through October 14, 2010; Nome Nugget
- Monday, January 31, 2011; Fairbanks Daily News-Miner
- Monday, February 6, 2011; Anchorage Daily News
- Thursday, February 10, 2011; Anchorage Daily News

Copies of these advertisements can be found in Appendix D.

3.4 Meeting Flyers, Press Releases, Public Service Announcements and Media Coverage

Flyers were distributed to each community prior to each public meeting. Flyers were distributed via mail and e-mail to a specific city, tribal and village contact to post in visible places in each community to increase awareness of the public meeting before it occurred. All community-specific public meeting flyers were posted to the project website at least one week in advance to provide visitors the information on upcoming meetings. Press releases were disseminated statewide to the media by the Northern Region DOT&PF, Public Information Officer. Public Service Announcements (PSAs) were also released for each set of meetings to public radio stations in the region, along with the State of Alaska online public notification system. The project team was interviewed by the media on multiple occasions regarding the project. Twelve (12) stories in radio, television, and newspaper media assisted in educating the public about the project and upcoming meetings.

Community-specific meeting flyers, copies of press releases, PSAs, and the printed news stories can be found in Appendix D.

3.5 Project Website

The project website, www.westernalaskaaccess.com, provides information about the Corridor Planning Report, the WAAPS documents, contact information, and media. It also allowed the public to submit project related comments by comment form or e-mail, and to complete a digital version of the Project Questionnaire and Comment Form. Copies of the web pages and the digital Questionnaire and Comment Form are included in Appendix E.

3.6 Project Questionnaire and Comment Form

A Project Questionnaire and Comment Form solicited written public feedback on the proposed Yukon River Corridor and other routes considered. The Questionnaire and Comment Form asked if they favored a road connecting Fairbanks to Nome; if they favored the proposed Yukon River Corridor or other options; the reason it was or was not favored; and what advantages and disadvantages a road corridor offered. The Questionnaire and Comment Form identified the residential location of the respondent. Two hundred seventy-eight (278) Questionnaires and Comment Forms were submitted. A copy of the Questionnaire and Comment Form can be found in Appendix C.

3.7 Frequently Asked Questions

A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet was created as an informational item for use at public and stakeholder meetings, and was placed on the project website. The FAQ explained the benefits of the project, the expense of the project, the options considered, evaluation criteria used, and the next phases. A copy of the FAQ is included in Appendix C.

3.8 Project E-mail Address

For persons wanting to communicate about the project via e-mail, a project specific e-mail address, WAAPS@dowlhkm.com, was created. This address was included in the general information flyer, the community specific public meeting flyers, newspaper advertisements, the Project Questionnaire and Comment Form, FAQ's, and was announced at public and stakeholder meetings.

4.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT MEETINGS

Thirty-one (31) public meetings were held from October 2010 to March 2011. Public meetings began with a 30 minute open house, with project information displayed around the room for informal viewing and discussion with WAAPS project staff. Following the open house, a WAAPS presentation was given, usually in a PowerPoint format. The PowerPoint presentation can be found in Appendix F. A question and comment period followed. If time remained it was used for informal discussion. The public meeting notes and sign-in sheets can be found in Appendix G.

4.1 Hub and Surrounding Village Public Meetings

Public meetings were held in the hub communities of Fairbanks, Nome, Kotzebue, Galena and Anchorage. Community public meetings were held in 26 villages, usually with 2 meetings per day.

Both the City and Tribal entities were offered separate meetings, but in nearly every case they preferred a single combined public meeting. See Table 1 and Appendix C for the meeting schedule.

Meeting attendance ranged from 4 attendees to 50 attendees, and averaged 20 attendees per meeting. Based on the sign-in sheets, a total of 620 people attended the public meetings; however, some attendees did not sign in.

**Table 1: Western Alaska Access Planning Study
 Public Meeting Schedule and Recorded Attendance**

Hub	Community	Meeting Date	Attendance
Anchorage	Anchorage	2/10/2011	45
Nome	<i>Visit 1</i>		
	White Mountain	10/11/2010	14
	Koyuk	10/11/2010	26
	Elim	10/12/2010	18
	Shaktoolik	10/12/2010	14
	Unalakleet	10/13/2010	9
	Nome	10/13/2010	27
	<i>Visit 2</i>		
	Golovin	1/19/2011	17
Council	2/26/2011	7	
Kotzebue	<i>Visit 1</i>		
	Ambler	1/10/2011	35
	Kobuk	1/11/2011	11
	Shungnak	1/10/2011	15
	<i>Visit 2</i>		
	Kotzebue	2/18/2011	21
	Kiana	1/26/2011	25
	Buckland	1/24/2011	15
	Noorvik	1/25/2011	18
Selawik	1/25/2011	13	
Deering	1/24/2011	4	
Galena	<i>Visit 1</i>		
	Nulato	11/9/2010	14
	Kaltag	11/9/2010	17
	Koyukuk	11/10/2010	5
	Galena	11/10/2010	35
	<i>Visit 2</i>		
Ruby	2/2/2011	20	
Huslia	2/2/2011	30	
Fairbanks	<i>Visit 1</i>		
	Tanana	10/27/2010	45
	Nenana	10/28/2010	14
	<i>Visit 2</i>		
	Manley Hot Springs	11/11/2010	28
	Hughes	11/11/2010	5
	<i>Visit 3</i>		
	Bettles	2/1/2011	9
Allakaket	2/1/2011	14	
Fairbanks	1/31/2011	50	
TOTAL PUBLIC MEETING ATTENDANCE			620

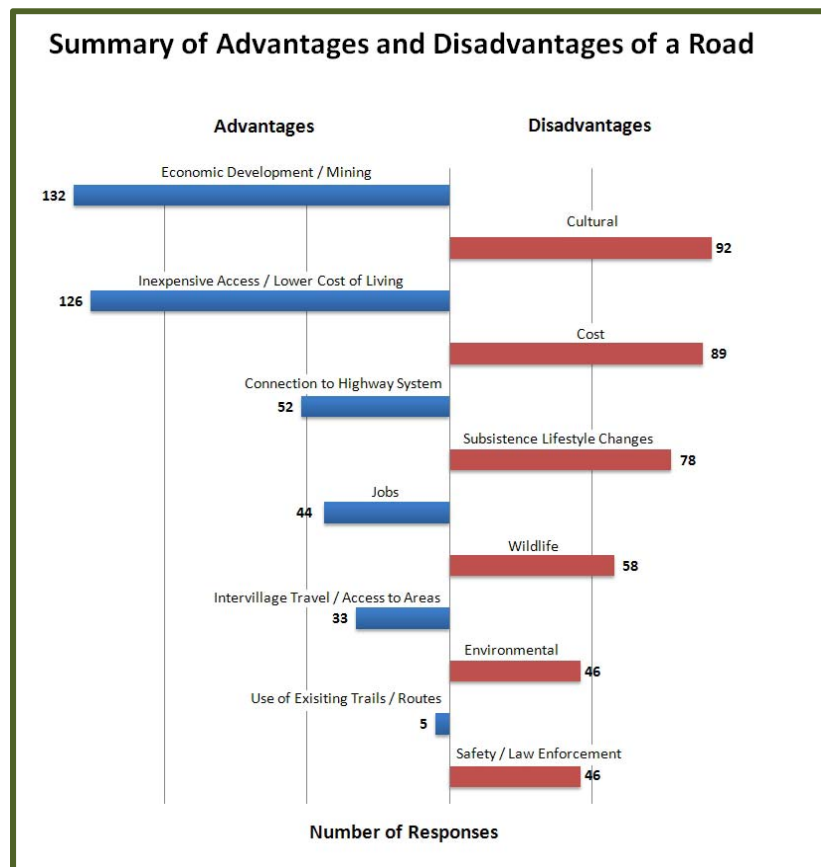
4.2 Public Meeting Presentation

Public meeting presentations described the WAAPS project purpose, how routes were identified and evaluated, the rationale and benefits of the proposed Yukon River Corridor, and examples of public comments received. A copy of the PowerPoint presentation can be found in Appendix F.

4.3 Public Comments

Besides comments received during public meetings, public comments were obtained by a Project Questionnaire and Comment Form, by written letters, resolutions, and individually submitted e-mails via the project e-mail address. During each public meeting, project team members encouraged members of the community to fill out a Project Questionnaire and Comment Form.

All comments received by the Project Questionnaire and Comment Form and web survey were placed into the WAAPS Questionnaire and Comment Form Summary of Advantages and Disadvantages. This summary organizes each comment into categories of advantages and disadvantages for each community.



Comments submitted by project e-mail have been recorded. These comments along with the WAAPS Questionnaire and Comment Form Summary can be found in Appendices H and I.

5.0 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Stakeholder involvement was conducted throughout the entire phase of WAAPS by informing stakeholders such as businesses, Native Village and Regional Corporations, mining companies, economic development groups, and others, of upcoming meetings in their areas. Project information flyers were distributed to both potential and recognized stakeholders at the same time flyers were distributed to the public. Stakeholders were invited to attend public meetings in each community with project team members to listen to the concerns and questions of the communities their entity represented.

5.1 Stakeholder Meetings

Table 2 shows other meetings and conferences where project presentations were made and/or WAAPS information and the Questionnaire and Comment Forms were handed out.

Table 2: Stakeholder Meetings and Events

Meeting/Event	Date and Location	Information
DOT&PF Transportation Forum	Friday, October 22, 2010 Fairbanks Princess Lodge	Presentation by DOWL HKM.
BIA Providers Conference	Sunday, November 28 to Friday, December 3, 2010 Anchorage Egan Center	DOT&PF presented information at booth.
Kawerak/Bering Strait Regional Conference	Tuesday, February 22 to Friday, February 25, 2011 Nome Recreation Center	DOT&PF presented information at booth.
Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee	Thursday, February 3, 2011 Fairbanks Denny's Restaurant	Presentation by DOWL HKM.
Alaska Miners Association	Convention: Monday, November 1 to Sunday, November 7, 2010 Anchorage Sheraton Hotel	Provided FAQ and Questionnaire and Comment Forms.
Northwest Arctic Planning Commission Meeting	February 18, 2011 in Kotzebue	Presentation by DOWL HKM.
North Pole Rotary Club	Wednesday, March 2, 2011 North Pole Pagoda	Presentation by DOWL HKM.

5.2 Stakeholder Comments

Stakeholder comments were obtained through the Project Questionnaire and Comment Form, via the comments page on the project website, by written letters, resolutions, as well as by collecting them from individually submitted e-mails via the project e-mail address.

Thirteen (13) letters and resolutions submitted by stakeholder organizations, communities and Native entities can be found in Appendix K.

6.0 QUESTIONNAIRE AND COMMENT FORM RESULTS

Project Questionnaire and Comment Form responses have been summarized in graphs and a WAAPS Questionnaire and Comment Form Summary of Advantages and Disadvantages for each community. The graphs address public opinions in favor or against a Western Alaska Access Corridor and sentiments regarding which alternative is favored. The Comment Summary Analysis shows the advantages and disadvantages of a Western Alaska Access corridor.

6.1 Questionnaire and Comment Form Summary

The WAAPS Questionnaire and Comment Form aims to summarize responses received from the 31 communities visited and other areas within and outside the WAAPS study area. The summary groups comments into the six advantages and disadvantages categories, as well as a miscellaneous field for each community or village.

The most frequently mentioned advantages about the proposed Yukon River Corridor were the lowered cost of living, potential for job creation, and community sustainability; while the most frequently mentioned disadvantages about the proposed corridor were the anticipated competition for subsistence resources from non-community members, affects on wildlife, and the changes to rural lifestyle.

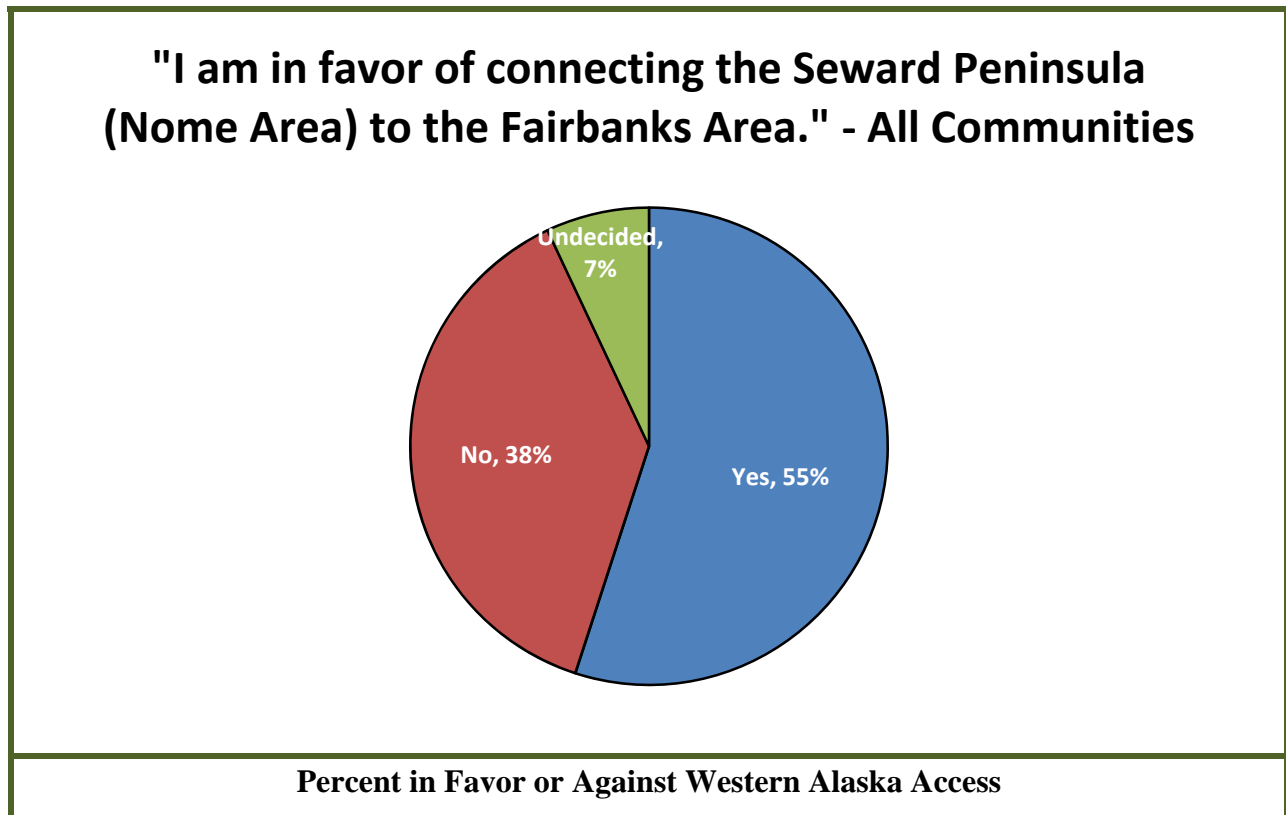
The summary of advantages and disadvantages from the Questionnaire and Comment Form can be found in Appendix H.

6.2 Questionnaire and Comment Form Graphs

The Questionnaire and Comment Form asked several questions that have been summarized statistically in graphs for each community in Appendix J.

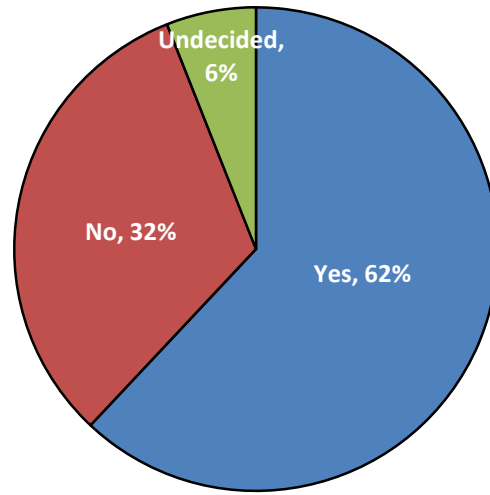
6.2.1 Percent in Favor or Against Western Alaska Access

In response to the Questionnaire and Comment Form, 55% of the respondents were in favor of connecting the Fairbanks area road system to the Nome area road system, 38% were opposed, and 7% were undecided.



Communities along the proposed Yukon River Corridor tended to favor a road corridor more than those who were not along the corridor.

**“I am in favor of connecting the Seward Peninsula
(Nome Area) to the Fairbanks Area.” -
Communities along the Yukon River Corridor***



* The Yukon River Corridor communities within 25 miles of the corridor include Manley Hot Springs, Tanana, Ruby, Galena, Koyukuk, Koyuk, Nulato, Elim, Golovin, White Mountain, Council, and Nome.

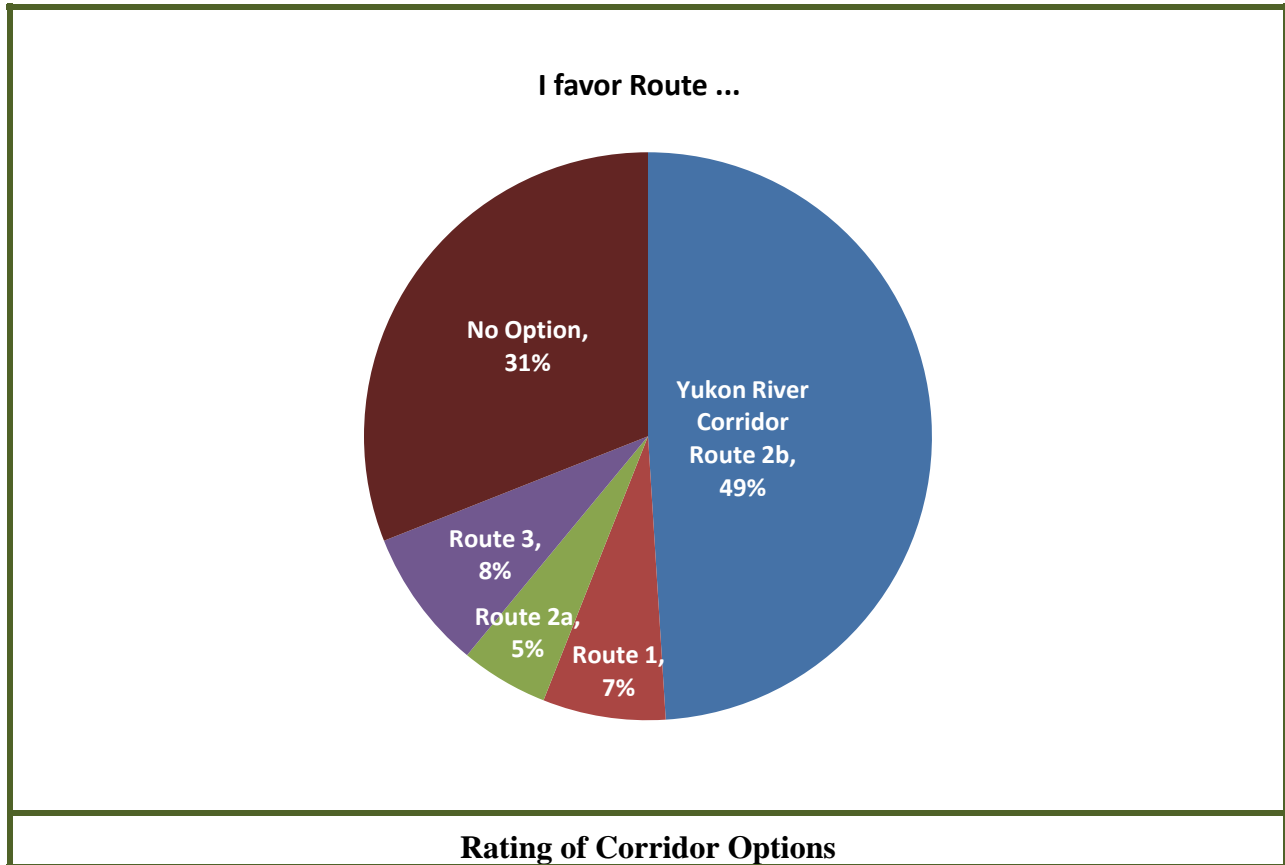
**Percent in Favor or Against Western Alaska Access
- Villages Along the Yukon River Corridor**

6.2.2 Rating of Corridor Options

Survey respondents were asked to identify which route they preferred. Options included:

- **Route 1** - From the Dalton Highway near Bettles to Nome
- **Route 2a** - From the Dalton Highway north of the Yukon River Bridge to Nome
- **Route 2b** (Yukon River Corridor) - From Manley Hot Springs to Nome
- **Route 3** - From Nenana to Nome
- None of the Above

Respondents favored Route 2b, the Yukon River Corridor, beyond the other options. Forty-nine percent (49%) of respondents favored the Yukon River Corridor, 31% favored no corridor, and 20% favored other corridor options. Graphs for each community can be found in Appendix J of the Public Involvement Report.



7.0 CONCLUSION

The following summarizes the results of the public involvement received and further public involvement ahead. The DOT&PF and DOWL HKM planning team extends our appreciation to each of the communities visited for the interest shown, hospitality, and assistance provided.

- Generally, there were opinions for and against a road corridor in each community.
- While opinions were often strongly felt, it appeared most people could see both the advantages and disadvantages of a road corridor.
- Similar comments were expressed in public meeting format as well as written in the submitted Questionnaire and Comment Forms.

- Fifty-five percent (55%) of Questionnaire and Comment Form responses were in favor of a road, while thirty-eight percent (38%) were opposed, and seven percent (7%) were undecided.
- Sixty-nine percent (69%) of responses from along the Yukon River Corridor favored a road corridor.
- Forty-nine percent (49%) of responses favored the Yukon River Corridor over a no-road or other road option.
- The most frequently mentioned advantages about the proposed Yukon River Corridor were lowered cost of living, potential for job creation, and community sustainability.
- The most frequently mentioned concerns about the proposed corridor were competition for subsistence resources from non residents, the effects on wildlife, and changes to rural lifestyles.
- There was more support for a road corridor from residents and community representatives to the east, particularly in Fairbanks, Manley Hot Springs, Tanana and Galena, than from communities to the west.
- Yukon River Corridor route definition may be useful for communities, the State of Alaska, and others for long-term land use and transportation planning and for decisions relating to mineral development. For example, the Yukon River Corridor work was a factor in the decision by the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources to conduct a mineral-resource assessment and geological field study west of Tanana near the proposed Yukon River Corridor.
- There was limited formal feedback from the mining industry and Regional Native Corporations. If further work on the corridor is approved, these groups and others should become more involved.
- If formal work on the corridor is approved, there will be considerable local involvement in overall route planning, but in particular on the final route selection, community connections, and addressing access to subsistence resources.