



**WESTERN ALASKA
ACCESS PLANNING STUDY**

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

May 2011



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

INTRODUCTION

In January 2010, the State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) published the Western Alaska Access Planning Study Corridor Planning Report. The Corridor Planning Report evaluated corridor options connecting Fairbanks to Nome and recommended the Yukon River Corridor shown in Figure E1, a 500-mile road corridor starting near Manley Hot Springs, following the north side of the Yukon River and extending to the Nome area road system near Council.

From October 2010 to March 2011, DOT&PF conducted various public involvement activities to determine how the general public and stakeholders felt about the corridor options and the Yukon River Corridor recommendation in particular. This Public Involvement Report Executive Summary documents the public sentiments expressed. A more detailed recap of the public response can be found in the Western Alaska Access Planning Study Public Involvement Report.

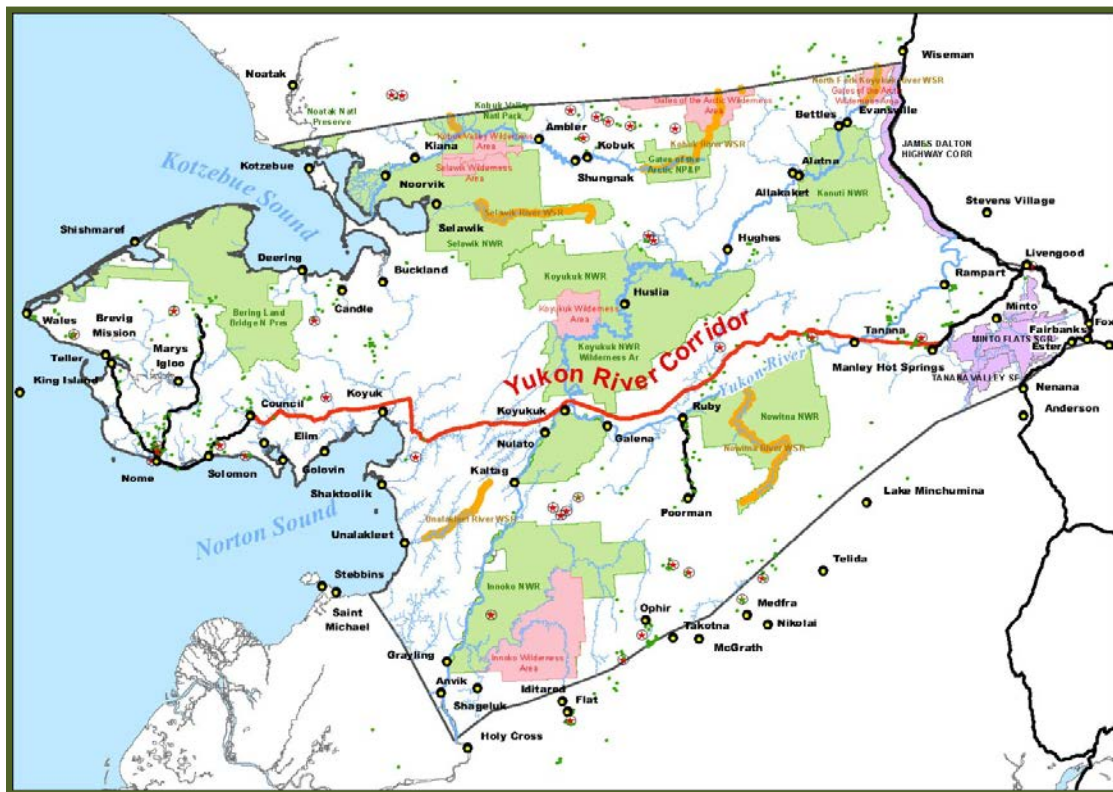


Figure E1: Recommended Corridor

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT RESPONSE RATE

Public input was primarily through public meetings, Questionnaire and Comment Forms, by e-mail, and by resolutions and letters. It should be noted that some people who attended the public meetings chose not to fill out a project Questionnaire and Comment Form, or otherwise comment in writing.

- 31 public meetings attended by 620 people
- 278 questionnaire and comment forms submitted
- 50 e-mail comments submitted
- 13 letters, e-mails, and resolutions submitted by organizations, communities, and Native entities
- 12 media stories from October 2010 to March 2011

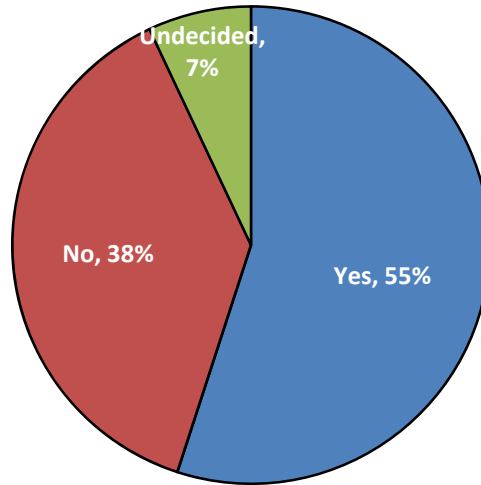
Copies of the public meetings notes, Questionnaire and Comment Forms results, e-mails, letters, and resolutions can be found in the Public Involvement Report, Appendices G through K.



Noorvik Area Public Meeting

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.

"I am in favor of connecting the Seward Peninsula (Nome Area) to the Fairbanks Area." - All Communities

Percent in Favor or Against Western Alaska Access



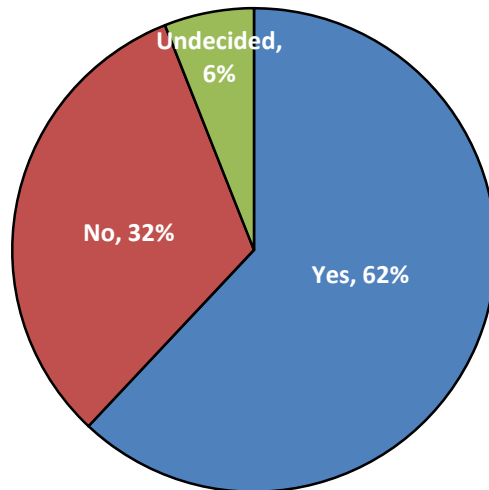
Elim from the Air



Flying to Nome Area Meeting

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***

Graphics for each community can be found in Appendix J of the Public Involvement Report.

STAKEHOLDER GROUPS - LETTERS, E-MAILS AND RESOLUTIONS

The following communities and native entities submitted letters, e-mails, and/or resolutions about the Western Alaska Access Planning Study. Excerpts summarizing the sentiments of these groups are shown below. Copies of the entire letter, e-mail, and/or resolution can be found in Appendix K of the Public Involvement Report.



Manley Hot Springs Public Meeting

- ***Manley Village Council - February 4, 2009***

“...Manley Village Council fully supports the...plan to build a ‘Road to Nome’ using the proposed Tanana Highway and the existing Tofty Road as Phase 1 of this high priority, Road to Resources, economic stimulus project.”
- ***Manley Hot Springs Community Association - January 27, 2011***

“...the Manley Hot Springs Community Association, at a general meeting of its members, voted 6-1 in favor of supporting the Yukon River Corridor connecting the Fairbanks area with the Seward Peninsula.”
- ***Bean Ridge Corporation, Manley Hot Springs - November 6, 2010***

“Bean Ridge Corporation supports the Yukon River Corridor being built near Manley Hot Springs with a spur road off the Elliot Highway approximately 5 miles from ‘downtown’ to ensure that the quiet enjoyment of residents of the community will be minimally disturbed.”
- ***State of Alaska Minerals Commission - February 17, 2009***

“The Minerals Commission is pleased that the State is considering and evaluating this infrastructure corridor proposal. The development of the vast mineral resources of the Northern Region have been hindered by remoteness and inaccessibility.”
- ***Wales Native Corporation - June 25, 2009***

“It is in the Wales Native Corporations (WNC) best interest to support the Western Alaska Access Planning Study...The location of that corridor would give WNC goods and services/resource costs reduced by a significant margin if this study led to reality.”
- ***Tanana Chiefs Conference - March 18, 2010***

“Now therefore be it resolved that the Tanana Chiefs Full Board of Directors support the State’s proposed Road to Nome; and...direct TCC staff to take actions needed to support this project that will strengthen the infrastructure of rural Alaska and bring jobs into our communities.”
- ***Toghotthele Corporation, Nenana - October 7, November 5, 2010***

“I can’t tell you how excited I am to finally see a project like this moving forward. ...This is the sort of project that will bring jobs to Alaska, open up new resources, and provide cheaper supplies to remote areas.”



Nenana Public Meeting Open House

(October 7) “The City of Nenana is working on building the Tolchaket Highway from Nenana to Kantishna, it is shovel ready and all the permits are done (500-foot right-of-way) for the 28-mile road. If this gets completed, that may be a good starting point for your western access route.” (November 5)

- ***Council Native Corporation - March 9, 2011***

“...the Council Native Corporation Board of Directors has voted unanimously to oppose the construction of the Fairbanks to Nome road construction project. After long consideration we feel the negative outcome far outweighs the positive outcomes.”

- ***City of Tanana - February 2011***

“The City Council favors the proposed Yukon River Corridor, Route 2b. We also wish to highlight that we understand this highway project will be developed in a number of phases and the need to complete Phase 1, which would be a road from Manley Hot Springs to the south side of the Yukon River near Tanana. The importance of getting the highway built to the south shore in the next five years will give plenty of time and great opportunity to develop a deep water port. That will allow the barging season to extend almost thirty additional days a year (May 15 to October 15).”



Tanana Public Meeting

- ***Tanana Tribal Council - March 1, 2011***

“...the Tanana Tribal Council recommend and support the Yukon River Corridor Route 2b running as close as possible to the ridge South of the Yukon River, with a crossing between 6 and 9 miles above Tanana on the Yukon River above Tanana, Alaska and intersecting the White Alice Road from behind Mission Hill.”

- ***Tozitna, Limited Village Corporation - February 5, 2011***

“...the Tozitna, Limited Board of Directors recommend and support the Yukon River Corridor Route 2b running as close as possible to the ridge South of the Yukon River, with a crossing between 6 and 9 miles above Tanana on the Yukon River above Tanana, Alaska and intersecting the White Alice Road from behind Mission Hill.”

- ***City of Bettles - March 5, 2011***

“I am in favor of a road to Nome following the proposed Route 2b - with reservations...This route makes the most sense to go to Nome...My feeling is that this road will not be built without the sociological and environmental issues being thoroughly addressed and mitigated before construction.”

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

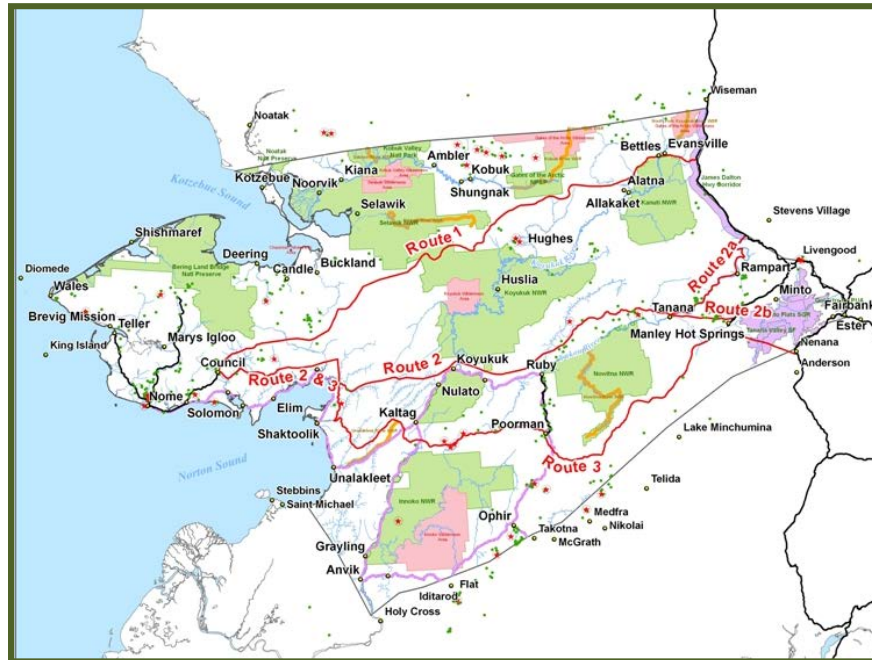


Figure E2: Preliminary Corridor Alternatives

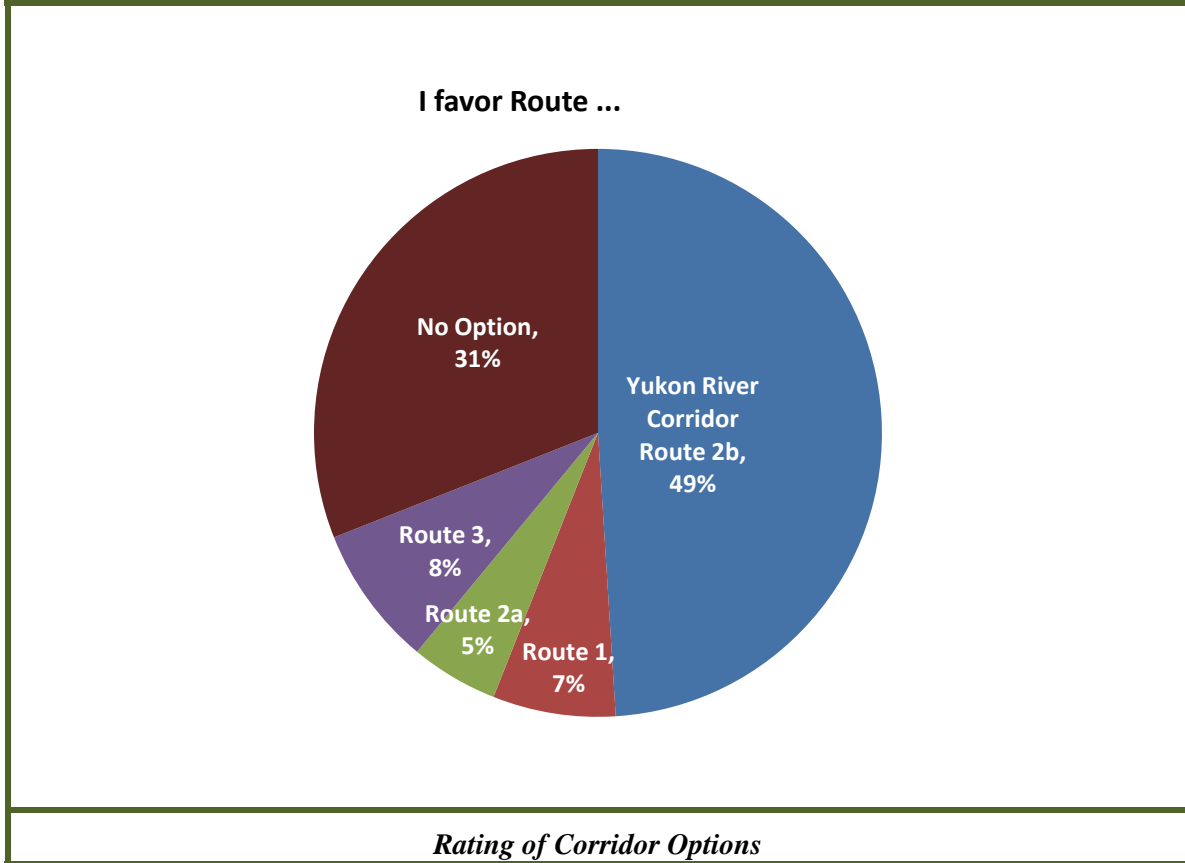


Galena Public Meeting



Fish Wheel in Nenana

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.



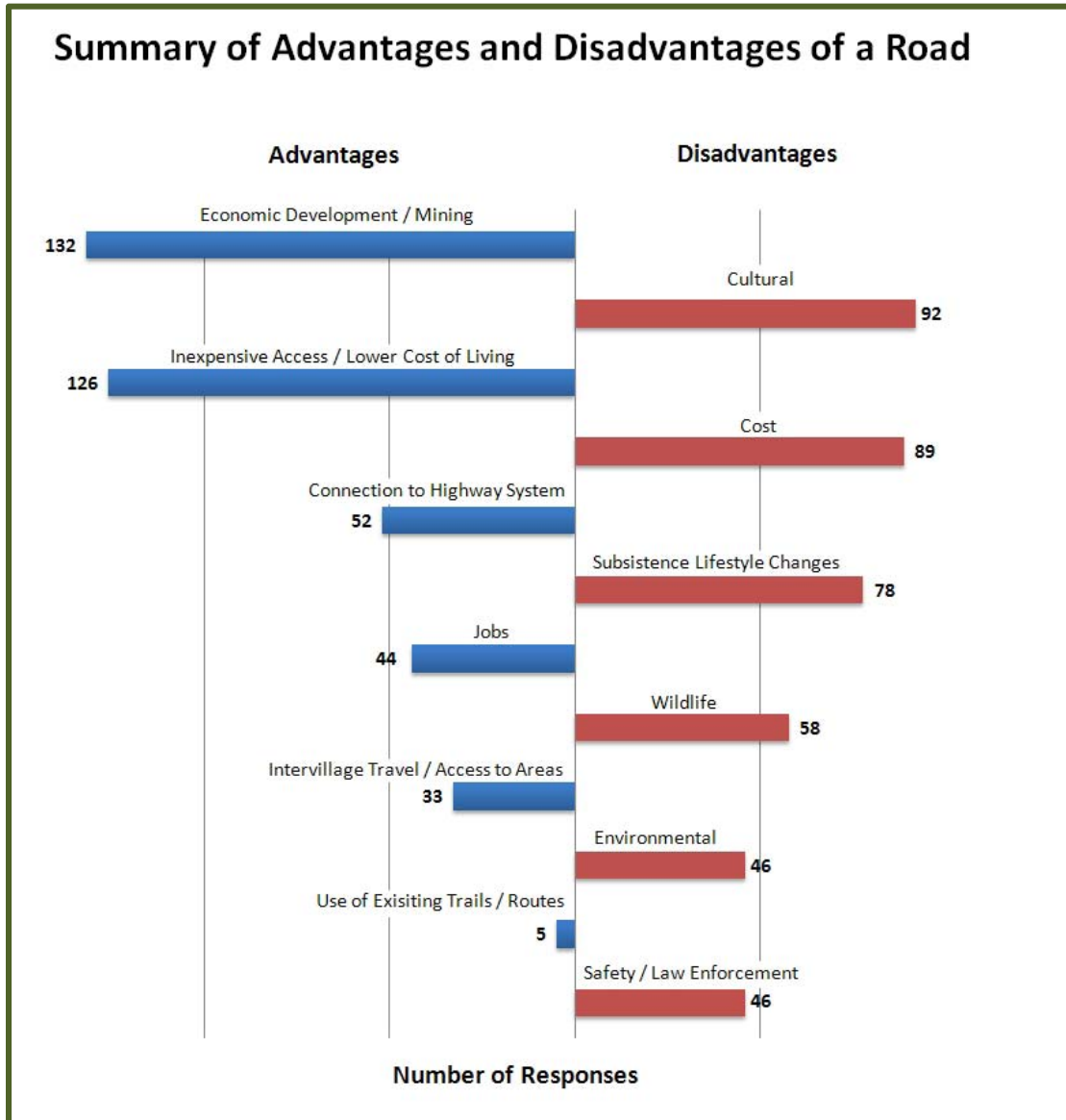
Elim Public Meeting



Koyuk River from Koyuk

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF A ROAD

Survey respondents were asked to identify the advantages and disadvantages of a road.



The most frequently heard **advantages** included:

- Economic Development and Mining
- “Potentially valuable mineral deposits would become economic, bringing wealth to remote areas of the state.”
- “Open area to mining and resource development to create an in-state economy and employment.”

- Inexpensive Access/Cost of Living
 - “Lower cost of living, which might entice some families to move back to rural Alaska.”
 - “Lower gas and fuel prices, including food and postal costs to the interior villages.”
- Connection to Highway System
 - “Survival in villages depends on access.”
 - “Long overdue to have road access to major cities and communities of Alaska.”

- Jobs

- “Possibly create better job options for rural Alaskans.”
- “Many job opportunities along the roadway - close to home for village residents.”



Nulato Public Meeting

- Intervillage Travel/Access to Areas

- “Allowing all access publically to Alaskans that live and reside in areas, which will bring better service agriculturally to towns along the corridor.”
- Improved access to Western Alaska and its communities.”



Discussing WAAPS Route in Noorvik

- Use of Existing Trails and Routes

- “Simplicity of semi-existing route.”
- “Improving existing transportation routes would be less expensive and money well spent.”

The most frequently heard **disadvantages** included:

- Cultural Disadvantages
 - “We will lose our traditional lifestyle.”
 - “Huge impact on the remote way of how we live with the land and the river.”
- Wildlife Disadvantages
 - “Outside hunters would abuse the road and come in and hunt our wildlife.”
 - “The wild remote character of Alaska would be diminished along the corridor.”
- Environmental Disadvantages
 - “Concerned about environmental issues related to mine waste.”
 - “Will facilitate mining activity, which will create water runoff and pollution problems.”
- Cost
 - “This road will cost an enormous amount of money to build and maintain.”
 - “Benefits overstated, costs understated. Time frame will not benefit Western Alaskans.”
- Safety/Law Enforcement
 - “Crime will come to this area.”
 - “Think of all the drugs, alcohol, and wild things the road will bring to the villages.”



Project Displays at Kaltag



Allakaket Public Meeting

- Subsistence Lifestyle Changes
 - “I like it that Alaska Natives were the first ones here and do not need other people killing our game and catching our fish.”
 - “We are used to subsistence lifestyle which was handed down years after years. We want this to go on for generations.”



Viewing Maps at Buckland

A summary of advantages and disadvantages expressed by members of each village or community can be found in Appendix H of the Public Involvement Report.

CONCLUSIONS

- 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.



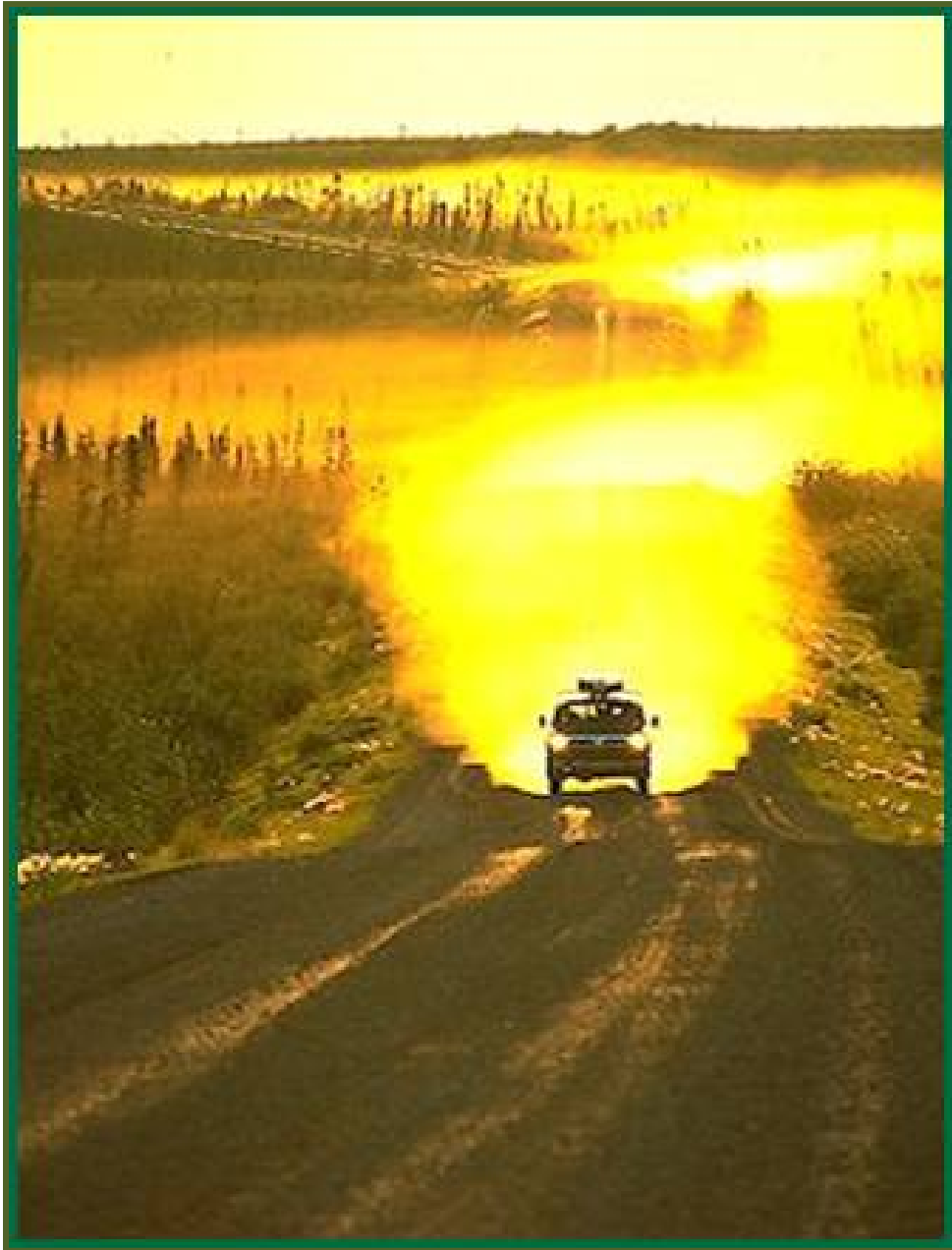
Reviewing Maps in Noorvik

- **55%** of Questionnaire and Comment Form responses were in favor of a road, while **38%** were opposed, and **7%** were undecided.
- **49%** of responses favored the Yukon River Corridor over a no-road or other-road options.
- **69%** of responses from along the Yukon River Corridor favored a road corridor.

- 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 nonresidents, 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 should be considerable local involvement in overall route planning, but in particular on the final route selection, community connections, and addressing access to subsistence resources.



Anchorage Public Meeting



***Thank you
to all who participated in the WAAPS meetings
and commented on corridor options.***



Prepared by:

DOWL HKM
4041 B Street
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
(907) 562-2000

In Association with:

Northern Economics, Inc.
Petrotechnical Resources Alaska
Hawley Resource Group
McKinnon and Associates
Allied GIS, Inc.