

Interior Alaska Transportation Plan

Sean Parnell, Governor

**Marc Luiken, Commissioner,
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities**

The Interior Alaska Transportation Plan is one plan in a series of regional, multi-modal transportation plans that are components of the Alaska Statewide Transportation Plan. As per state statutes, this plan will be updated every five years to address the changing transportation needs in Interior Alaska by updating general guidance on transportation development and recommendations for specific transportation improvements throughout the region. For additional information or questions, please contact:

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Adopted IATP becomes component of Statewide Transportation Plan

This IATP draws its authority from Alaska Statute 44.42.050 and is a component of the Alaska Statewide Transportation Plan as defined in CFR 450.214. In accordance with 17 AAC 05.150, I am proud to hereby approve and adopt the November 2010 Interior Alaska Transportation Plan, as a component of the Alaska Statewide Transportation Plan.

Adopted: 
Marc Luiken, Commissioner

Date: 20 Dec 2010
December 20, 2010

Preface

This document is a component of the Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan. The most recent State Plan was adopted February 29, 2008 and is titled Let's Get Moving 2030 (LGM 2030). The Interior Alaska Transportation Plan will also be adopted by the Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities as a component of LGM 2030.

Long Range Transportation Plans are required by the Federal Highway Administration. LGM 2030 is a policy level document and relies on area plans for a more detailed look at regional transportation networks and recommendations. Different geographic regions of the State require discussion of different types of solutions. For example, the Southwest and Southeast plans had a heavy investment in the Marine Highway infrastructure. The Western Alaska Plan was more directed at barge and airport investments.

The Interior Alaska Transportation Plan is primarily focused on highways since most of the interior planning study area is served by a surface transportation system. However, the plan encompasses barges, trails, transit and aviation as well as travel on the Alaska Railroad.

The plan conforms to planning requirements of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETY-LU). In particular, it complies with the requirements for tribal government to government coordination, broad outreach to the public and environmental impacts documentation.

A separate, stand alone, document (the Interior Alaska Transportation Plan Documentation of Compliance with Federal and State Requirements) contains the record of outreach and environmental documentation.

The Interior Alaska Transportation Plan can be downloaded from <http://projects.ascg.com/iatp/Documents.asp> or you may call the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities at (907) 451-5151 to request a copy.

Executive Summary

The purpose of the Interior Alaska Transportation Plan (IATP) is to develop a 20-year regional transportation plan that guides future investments toward vital transportation projects consistent with the DOT&PF overall mission, addresses regional needs, and enhances the movement of people and goods within the Interior of the state and points beyond. As a necessary component of the Statewide Transportation Plan, the IATP analyzes railroads, highways, rural interconnecting roads and trails, aviation and river transportation. It takes into account not only the objectives that support the purpose of the Interior plan, but the overarching goals for transportation across the state.

Background and Setting

In a region as expansive as Alaska's Interior, it is important to have a solid understanding of the various geographic, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to the area's transportation needs.

With a study area encompassing approximately 132,200 square miles, the terrain varies greatly; wide valleys and flat tundra, vast wetlands, rolling foothills, deep moraines, wild rivers, active volcanoes and dissected uplands, lowland basins and mountain passes. Such a varied display of geography often poses constraints when determining the configuration and direction of transportation routes in the Interior.

Though Fairbanks is the economic hub of activity in the Interior, there are about 50 other communities within the study area—most of which can be accessed by the highway system—that also contribute to the region's diverse economy. Economic drivers include fishing, logging, agriculture, mining, construction, military, transportation and tourism.

The Interior is also varied culturally. A number of communities within the study area are primarily Native with federally recognized tribal governments. Other communities arose with post-World War II construction, agricultural efforts, homesteading, mining, pipeline and highway development and the Military.

As this diverse region continues to grow, the dependence on its transportation systems will also continue to grow. For this reason, the following transportation inventory, resource and economic development impact assessment, forecast, and analysis were conducted, followed by a review of financing and ending with recommendations and implementation strategies.

Transportation Inventory

The transportation inventory catalogues the existing highway system, including both the National Highway System and the Alaska Highway System, providing information on subjects such as roadway classifications, existing traffic volumes and roadway operations, waysides and pullouts, and pavement conditions. Highway corridor assessments are also included to provide comprehensive data for individual, high volume highways. In addition, data on community and airport access roads, barge landing roads, community transit systems, and existing aviation systems is contained in the inventory.

Such data makes accurate analysis possible in terms of impact assessments, forecasting, and overall analysis of the Interior transportation system.

Resource and Economic Development Impacts

The transportation inventory data were used to analyze current conditions and resource trends for this diverse economic region and, based on such trends, to determine possible ways in which resource development in the area may affect the Interior's transportation systems. Based on projected development needs, the most pertinent transportation issue currently facing the Interior region is the possibility of increased access needs for activities such as mining, tourism and gas pipeline construction.

Forecast

Once the transportation inventory and impact assessments have been completed, it is possible to do transportation forecasting. The forecasting in the IATP focuses on population projections of the Interior's communities, historical traffic volume growth trends and the expansion of resource development. The process ultimately results in the forecasting of traffic volumes in the year 2030, providing a separate methodology for the forecasting of aviation traffic volumes as well. Consideration was also given to railroad, river and trail use patterns.

Analysis

One of the most important aspects of any plan is the comprehensive analysis that ties the plan's previous sections together and provides more multidimensional interpretations of the data. The analysis includes roadway capacity determinations based on data from the IATP forecasts, crash data and safety plan strategies, overall system needs, preservation and management, maintenance operations and, as in the transportation inventory, individual highway corridor assessments that address the unique challenges faced with each major highway.

An aviation analysis was also conducted that focused on airport coverage, the role of airports in the region, and National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems inclusion, as well as other issues such as emergency access and security.

Financing

Alaska relies heavily on Federal funds for both surface transportation and aviation needs. Costs for projects in Alaska are disproportionately higher because many construction locations are remote. Alaska must look for additional Federal and non-Federal funding sources in order to keep up with needs and desires both in the IATP study area and in the state as a whole.

This section provides information on historic funding levels and expected funding levels. It also discusses alternative financing such as State General Obligation Bonds and Private Public Partnerships. This section highlights road, aviation and railroad funding opportunities.

Recommendations and Implementation

Rounding out the IATP is the chapter that provides recommendations for highway capital improvements, as well as other multi-modal improvements. Details provided include the project type, estimated cost, and priority. The two major highways with the most recommended improvements are the Dalton Highway and the Richardson Highway, with the majority of both highways' projects being classified as short-term projects and totaling \$310,400,000 and \$132,000,000 respectively. The Steese Highway has only one recommended project, rehabilitation and resurfacing from mileposts 62 to 81 at a cost of \$7,000,000. Additional short term projects are recommended for the other area highways.

This section also provides information on proportions of funding allotments provided by the State and other agencies, such as the Federal Highway Administration, for each short-term transportation capital improvement recommendation.

As a contributor to the Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan, this plan is designed to provide a blueprint for transportation activities in the Interior over the coming years. Based on interviews, studies, and extensive local knowledge, the recommendations presented will serve as a guide to providing the Interior with the safest, most reliable transportation access possible. The Interior Alaska Transportation Plan will be updated as necessary to meet the changing multi-modal transportation needs of the region.