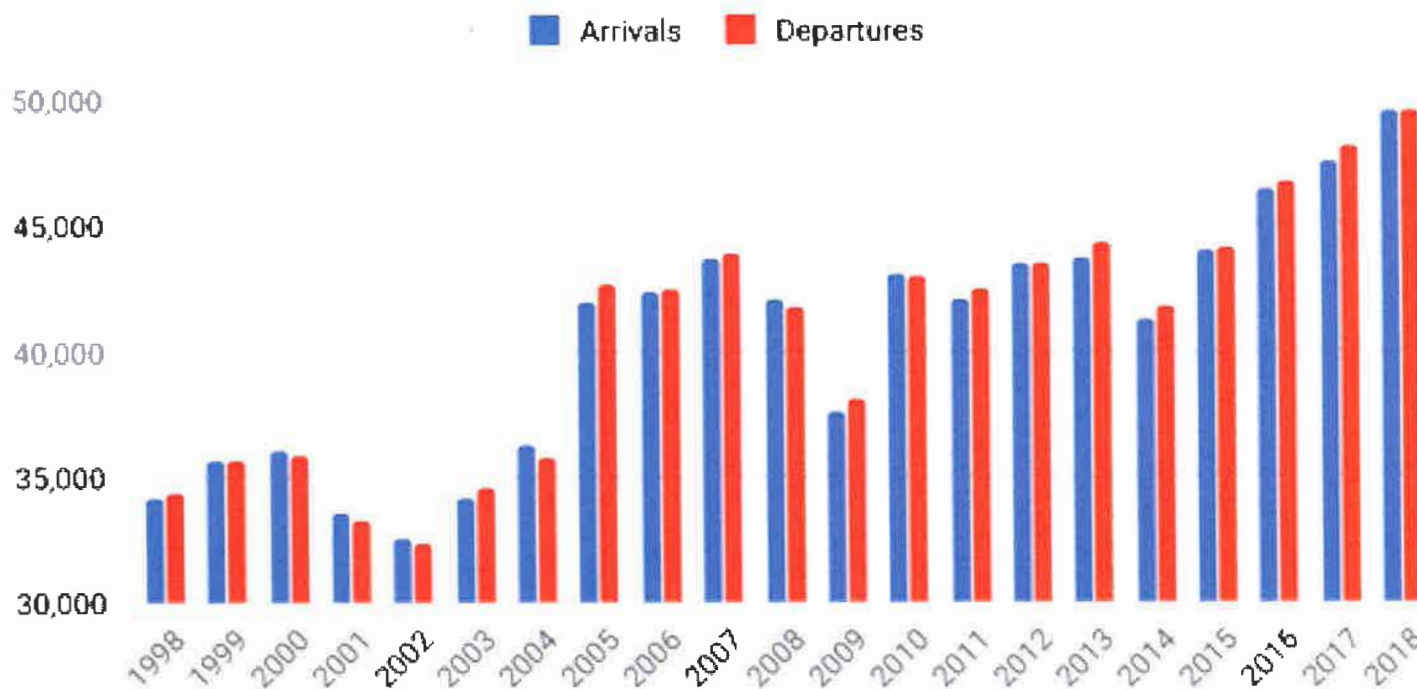


Passenger Traffic at Petersburg Terminal



ABOUT THIS REPORT:

After 3-months of interviews the staff of the Petersburg Pilot present this special report on the demands for space at Petersburg's James A. Johnson Airport. As the 1991 expanded Alaska Airlines terminal facility has become more congested, the long-term and short term parking more chaotic, we talked to numerous sources about the issues and prospects for improvements at the airport. Here is our report.

SPECIAL REPORT

Parking, passengers & TSA put squeeze on airport space



BRIAN VARELA / Petersburg Pilot

Customers compete for space as outbound passengers clear security screening, while inbound passengers retrieve luggage.

Airline plans terminal upgrades

By BRIAN VARELA
Pilot writer

The Petersburg Alaska Airlines terminal is one of five terminals throughout the state that are next in line to receive some form of upgrades as part of a \$100 million initiative to either expand or remodel all 11 of the airline company's owned terminals in Alaska, according to regional vice president Marilyn Romano.

The Alaska Airlines 2020 Great Land Investment Plan first began in February 2017 as a brand overhaul that featured a new logo and updates to their terminals, but soon included a reconfiguration of their fleet, according to Romano.

So far, updates have been completed at the Kodiak, Cordova, and Yakutat

terminals, with work underway at the Kotzebue terminal. In November 2018, construction of a \$50 million hangar was completed in Anchorage. According to Romano, the next terminals set to

receive an upgrade are the Nome, Petersburg, Wrangell, Barrow and Deadhorse terminals.

The remaining terminal in Bethel is the newest of Alaska Airlines' owned terminals and may only get a fresh coat of paint and a rebranding, said Romano.

"The state of Alaska is the only place where Alaska Airlines owns and

maintains terminals," said Romano. "Also, it kind of sets us apart. It's something unique to our company. It's unique to any carrier of our size. We happily do it to invest in those commu-

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RON LOESCH / Petersburg Pilot

Airport parking overflows on heavy travel days such as the holidays and during the Little Norway Festival in May.

Parking largely uncontrolled

By BRIAN VARELA
Pilot writer

Although Alaska Airlines is expecting to bring upgrades and improvements to its terminal in Petersburg through its 2020 Great Land Investment Plan, the airline company will not be increasing the number of available parking spots at the airport.

According to a map provided by Lynette Campbell, chief of aviation leasing with the Alaska Department of Transportation, Alaska Airlines leases DOT land that is directly under the terminal, which extends to include several parking spots in front of the building, and land under a nearby storage building. Marilyn Romano, regional vice president with Alaska Airlines, said that the terminal was designed to handle one plane at a time. The only time that traffic backs up is when passengers are arriving or leaving the airport. It is during this time that the vehicles are double

parked or blocking the flow of traffic. "When the planes come in, everyone mobs up there," said Police Chief Jim Kerr. "When they leave, it's all done with."

Kerr said that despite the limited parking near the airport, there have not been any complaints about vehicles parked illegally. If a police officer does see a vehicle parked unsafely, Kerr said

that most of the time the police officer will call and ask the individual to move their vehicle, instead of issuing a parking citation. Kerr said the police department tries to impound cars as little as possible and relies on educating individuals to encourage better parking.

"I don't know how we're going to fix [the parking situation]," said

Kerr. "It's such a small area. Unless we made a bigger area and made designated drop off and pick up areas instead of right there."

There is an area of pavement between the Alaska Airlines terminal and

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In June 1991 Alaska Airlines began construction of a new passenger terminal at the Petersburg airport. The existing 2,275 sq. ft. terminal, built in 1973, was remodeled to house cargo, maintenance and service operations for the airline. Initially, the airline operated from a trailer parked near the gravel runway.

Pilot file photo

Terminal upgrades

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nities.”

Since the initiative began in 2017, about \$100 million has been spent upgrading the first five terminals. Romano said that once Alaska Airlines comes up with a final decision on how best to upgrade the Barrow and Deadhorse terminals, then the initiative will exceed \$1 million.

Alaska Airlines doesn't know when it will upgrade the Petersburg terminal; work was expected to begin last year, but setbacks at other terminals pushed back the starting date. Romano said that the Petersburg and Wrangell terminals may only get a rebranding and won't see any major upgrades, such as an expansion.

According to David Booker, the previous Alaska Airlines customer service manager in Petersburg, the airline company sent engineers to study the heat and cooling system and electrical situation in the Petersburg terminal. Booker said he had been trying to get the old boilers in the building replaced with their electrical counterpart. He also said that he would like Alaska Airlines to address a choke point in the terminal where people are picking up their luggage and outbound passengers are waiting to be screened by the Transportation Security Administration.

Romano said that Alaska Airlines sends out a group of engineers to each of the terminals before work begins to determine the best way to upgrade the terminal. One aspect of the engineers' analysis is the possibility of rearranging a terminal's blueprint to make space more useable. TSA staff and equipment also takes up space that the terminals weren't designed to hold. According to Tim Thompson, manager of external affairs with Alaska Airlines, TSA doesn't lease the space within each of the terminals. Instead, Alaska Airlines is federally mandated to provide space to TSA.

“The terminals were built before the creation of TSA, so the terminals are filled with large equipment that they weren't originally designed to hold,” said Romano.

In the last 20 years, the Petersburg terminal has seen an increase in traffic flow that could be a factor that Alaska Airlines engineers consider when determining if the terminal's blueprint needs to be rearranged. According to Thompson, Alaska Airlines doesn't have an exact terminal count of how many people have gone through the terminal. Alaska Airlines only has the number of people, including connecting passengers, who arrived and departed at the terminal. In 1998, six years after the construction of



Pilot file photo

Red steel framing for the terminal was erected in August 1991. The new terminal quadrupled the available passenger space in its former facility.

the current Petersburg terminal was completed in 1992, Alaska Airlines' records show that 34,137 people arrived in Petersburg and 34,376 people departed. In 2018, records show that 49,457 people arrived in Petersburg and 49,521 people departed. Although, the numbers provided by Alaska Airlines can't give the exact number of people traveling through the terminal, the numbers do reflect an increase in travel to Petersburg and throughout Southeast Alaska over the

After the combi jets were taken offline, Alaska Airlines created a dedicated freighter fleet of 737-700s that more efficiently move cargo throughout Alaska.

“When we knew the combis and all the 400s were going to be retiring,” said Romano. “We actually went out and modified three 737-700 next generation airplanes and transformed them into full freighters.”

20 year period.

“Basically, if you are flying Juneau to Wrangell on flight 64, that passenger counts as an arrival into Petersburg and is also counted as departing Petersburg, even though they never left the aircraft,” said Thompson.

Another major aspect of the Alaska Airlines 2020 Great Land Investment Plan is the reshaping of its Alaska cargo fleet. As part of the initiative, Alaska Airlines retired all five of its Alaskan combi jets. The combi jets, or 737-400 jets, were half freighter and half passenger jets. In addition to the five combi jets, Alaska Airlines only had one freighter jet.



Pilot file photo

The expanded passenger terminal opened in December 1991.



Pilot file photo

Alaska Airlines opened its expanded 3,300 sq. ft. passenger terminal in Dec. 1991, giving the company a total of 5,600 sq. ft. of space, including the cargo facility. It was built to accommodate 65 passengers.



BRIAN VARELA / Petersburg Pilot

Customer service areas in the waiting area have become increasingly congested due to growing passenger traffic and the required accommodation of the Transportation Security Administration equipment and employees since the events of 9/11. On heavy traffic days, Petersburg inbound passengers are routed through security gates onto the parking lot, instead of the terminal.

Patty Nelson remembers her 28 years with Alaska Airlines

By **BRIAN VARELA**
Pilot writer

In her 28 years working for Alaska Airlines, Patty Nelson has seen and done it all. Her duties consisted of taking reservations, checking luggage, running security and everything in between.

In 1965, when she first began working at the airport, Alaska Airlines did not have a presence on Mitkof Island yet. Alaska Coastal Ellis Airlines was flying three propeller planes into Petersburg when Nelson was hired. The Grumman Goose and Twin Otter were smaller aircraft, while a larger aircraft came in the mornings carrying 40 to 50 passengers. Soon after she started working for the company, the propeller planes were replaced by modern jets as a way to lower maintenance costs.

"The day the jets first landed in Petersburg was very historic," said Nelson.

In the late 1960s, Alaska Coastal Ellis Airlines and Cordova Airlines merged with Alaska Airlines. By that time, the small cabin that the terminal was operating out of had been replaced by a trailer. Alaska Airlines

eventually moved into a terminal building in 1974. One of the biggest perks of the new building was that it had running water and restrooms.

"The day the jets first landed in Petersburg was very historic,"

— PATTY NELSON

Whenever someone had to relieve themselves before 1974, they would have to go behind the building and use the outhouse. Nelson said the outhouse was not ideal, but it was the best they could do at the time, especially since the outhouse was good enough for western movie star John Wayne.

One day, the terminal got a message on the teletype that said a dignitary was on board the incoming flight. Wayne was traveling through with his son, and was not going to get off in Petersburg. Nelson made a bet with her coworkers that not only was Wayne



Patty Nelson Pilot file photo

going to get off the plane, but he was going to ask to use the restroom, which was still an outhouse.

"And so here comes John Wayne, with his big cowboy hat and cowboy boots and with his son," said Nelson. "He said, 'where are the restrooms?'"

And I said, 'the restrooms are just right around the corner behind the terminal,' and he said, 'thank you, ma'am.'"

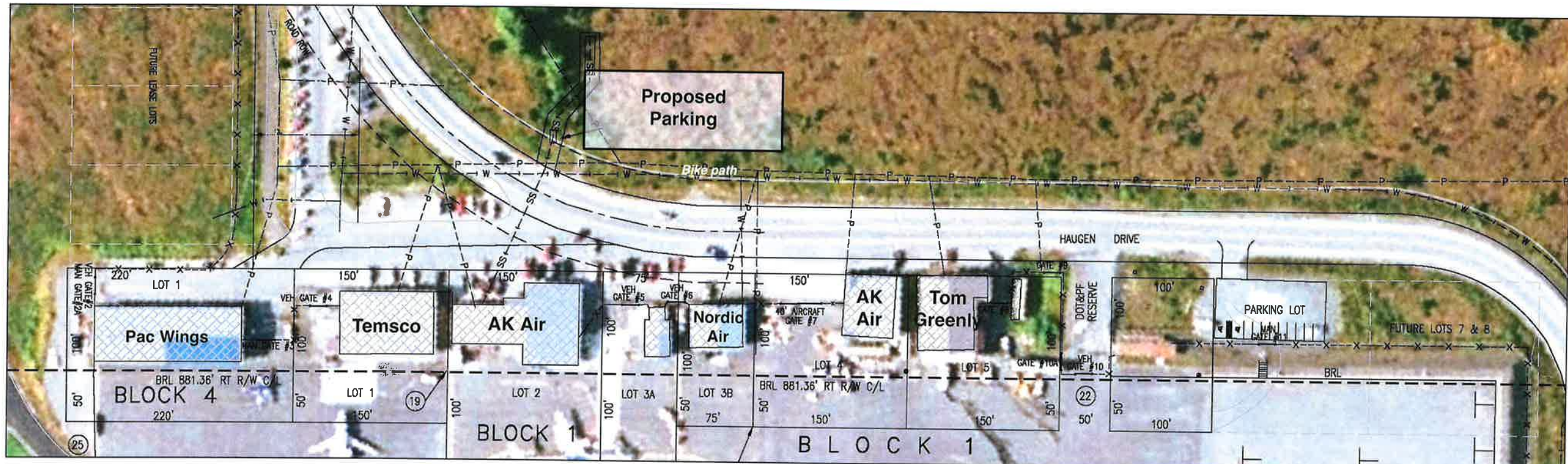
For a while after that incident, a sign hung in the terminal that read, "John Wayne used our restroom."

While meeting John Wayne was a memorable experience for Nelson, not all interactions with customers were as positive. One of Nelson's many duties included security detail. She would help customers walk through metal detectors and search luggage. Nelson remembers that one day an individual kept setting off the metal detectors. While Nelson remained calm and professional, the individual grew increasingly frustrated.

"He got so irritated he slugged me," said Nelson. "He hit me in the shoulder. I didn't dare tell the guys, because they would have killed him."

Another incident that Nelson remembers is when a gun went off in the terminal. A man had a loaded pistol in his bag, and when the bag got thrown into baggage claim, it went off. Nelson said that fortunately the bullet missed everyone in the terminal. The man who owned the gun did not get into

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The State of Alaska owns all airport property, including the runway and tarmac areas. Land is leased to Pac Wings, Temsko, Alaska Airlines, Nordic Air and Tom Greenly.

Photo courtesy of ADOT- PF



Movie star John Wayne was among visiting dignitaries that made use of the airport outhouse, before indoor facilities were added in the 1970s.

Patty Nelson

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 the kind of trouble that he may have gotten into had the gun gone off in an airplane terminal today.
 "Heavens, when I first started working at the airlines, the guys all carried their shotguns on board and their rifles and everything else," said Nelson. "Nobody even thought about anything like this."

Around the same time that Nelson retired in 1993 at the age of 53, construction on the current terminal had already been completed the previous year. The remodel and expansion of the existing terminal cost approximately \$750,000 in 1991 when Alaska Airlines made the decision to upgrade it. The expansion added a 3,300 square foot passenger waiting area and an indoor baggage claim. The existing 2,275 square foot building was converted into a storage area for cargo and a maintenance room.

Having worked for Alaska Airlines for nearly 30 years, Nelson said that she has always had a pleasant experience when traveling out of the current Alaska Airlines terminal. She said she has flown with several other airlines, but Alaska Airlines will always be her favorite.

"You fly on Alaska Airlines and you feel like you're home," said Nelson.

Editorial

Plan for growth; address the issues

by Ron Loesch, Publisher

Petersburg's Alaska Airline terminal is a busy place. Since 1998 departures from the facility have increased by 31 percent, from 34,376 to 49,521 in 2018.

Even infrequent travelers take note of the crowded terminal on heavy travel days. Parking spaces expand along both sides of Haugen Drive and passengers and those transporting their guests move outside to escape the packed terminal. The trek between available parking spaces to the terminal grows longer.

While Alaska Airlines has expanded terminals in Kodiak, Cordova, Yakutat and Kotzebue, facilities in Nome, Petersburg, Wrangell, Barrow and Deadhorse await overdue upgrades.

The airline hopes it will be possible to rearrange the Petersburg facility to make existing space more efficient.

More concerning is the parking situation. Since the congestion occurs for short periods of time when two 737 jets land twice a day, officials find it easy to dismiss or ignore the growing problems.

Cars park three-deep in front of the terminal entryway and along the Haugen Drive rights-of-way. On heavy travel days, parking expands from in front of the Temsko building beyond the Nordic Air hangar.

A serious, no-man's land exists along the roadway running between Pac Wings to the west and the Alaska Airline terminal. The Alaska Dept. of Transportation maintains it is a road, yet vehicles often park on the roadway, making it difficult for traffic to drive east onto Haugen Drive. A yield sign along that route, points toward the terminal building, not towards traffic.

The state says it lacks resources to enforce traffic, except in winter when DOT needs to maintain access to the triangle shaped property where they push

snow. In 2017, the Planning and Zoning Commission proposed that the Borough enter into a lease of state land across Haugen Drive to place a 35-car parking lot that would double the long-term parking spaces now provided along the snow-dump area adjacent to Haugen Drive.

Commissioner Richard Burke told the Borough Assembly the lot could be floated on muskeg, on state land leased for free for use as airport parking. He estimated the cost at \$65,000.

Borough Manager Steve Giesbrecht said the lot would require excavation of muskeg and rock backfill, firm access across the bike path, lighting, warning signage and annual maintenance at a cost of up to \$200,000.

The assembly has dropped discussion of the proposal.

It's time for the Assembly, the borough administration and the Department of Transportation to plan for the future. The time to shrug-off the issue must end. Because the congestion takes place only twice a day, doesn't make it less of a concern.

Unmarked roadways, free-for-all parking schemes, poorly established pedestrian walkways and insufficient long-term parking areas must be addressed. Nothing will happen without a plan showing a pathway to meet long-term goals.

The State of Alaska, Petersburg Borough and the lessees of airport property must work together for a solution.

The State land lease for expanded parking is free. Improvements can be made with federal grants given to airports across the state. There should be no confusion between what pavement constitutes a road right of way and a parking space.

Let's not wait for a pedestrian or vehicle accident before officials take action.

Parking

Continued from page 7

the snow dump where cars park when planes are arriving or departing if provided parking spots are full. There are no lines on the ground or signs designating the area as a parking lot or a street. According to Aurah Landau, a public information officer with DOT based out of Juneau, that area of pavement is a road and not a parking lot. Since that land is owned by DOT, the responsibility of parking enforcement falls on the state. Landau said that DOT does not have the staff to regulate parking at the airport; however, DOT does enforce parking during the winter when snowplows are trying to access the snow dump.

DOT also does not have any plans to paint lines in the road to clarify that the pavement in front of Temsko Helicopters, Inc. and the Alaska Airlines terminal is a road. When cars proceed to pull out of the airport and onto Haugen Dr., the drivers can see a yield sign facing the Alaska Airlines terminal. Landau said the yield sign is facing the terminal and not the cars that are approaching Haugen Dr., because it would be blocking traffic.

"The fact is, whether it's a parking lot or a road, cars still need to move in and out effectively," said Landau.

In May 2017, Richard Burke, of the Planning Commission, went before the borough assembly to present his plan for the creation of an additional parking lot across the street from the Alaska Airlines terminal on DOT land. Under Alaska Administrative code 17 AAC 45.130, municipalities are able to lease land from the state for free, as long as the land benefits an airport. Burke, who is a road engineer with the United States Forest Service, said his proposed plan would have created a parking lot that was approximately 150 feet by 300 feet that added 35 additional parking spaces. The parking lot could be made out of a basic shot rock pad to keep costs down, said Burke.

"There's a misconception that you have to dig out the muskeg underneath it," said Burke. "Sure it's going to settle, but you just throw some more rocks on it in a couple years."

Burke estimated the project would have been in the \$55,000 to \$65,000 range. Borough manager Stephen Giesbrecht was advised to look into the project, but after consulting with DOT and borough staff, he found that Burke's estimations did not include additional costs that would result from building a parking lot across the street from the airport. A cross walk would have to be created, and since Haugen Dr. is a state street, the borough would have to get permission from

DOT. Lighting would also be needed for the winter. Between Haugen Dr. and Burke's proposed parking lot is the Haugen St. Bike Path, which was installed by DOT. After Giesbrecht presented his findings at a later assembly meeting, the borough assembly did not make a motion to put the topic on a future agenda for further discussion or action.

"The state was not thrilled about the concept of letting cars drive on a walking trail that they put in, designed basically for bicycles and walking traffic," said Giesbrecht. "They wanted us to tear that out and put in a road quality crossing there."

Additionally, the borough would have to install warning lights on the trail near the parking lot to let pedestrian traffic know that cars cross over the trail.

Since the parking lot would have been built over the muskeg, Giesbrecht said that the borough would have had to dig it out and fill it with rock, similar to what the borough did when it built the new fire station in that same area. Giesbrecht said that if the borough were to just fill the muskeg with rock, it would have to keep adding rock over the years as the parking lot began to sink, and the borough isn't in a position to be taking on long term maintenance projects.

"It's not the assembly's position to go deal with parking that's on state land," said Giesbrecht.

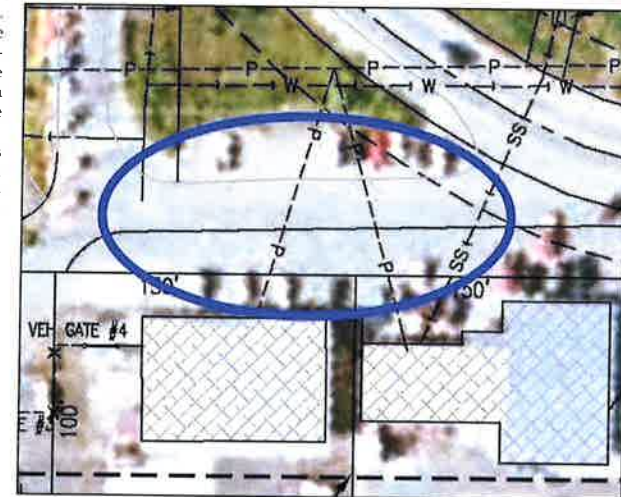
After all the additional specifications would be made to the parking lot, Giesbrecht roughly estimated the final cost of the project to be between \$150,000 to \$200,000, according to an email from Giesbrecht in August, 2017

to then interim mayor Cindi Lagoudakis. Since May 2017, Burke said he has given up on the idea of creating a parking lot directly across the street from the Alaska Airlines terminal. With the borough assembly looking to make cuts in its budget as a response to Gov. Mike Dunleavy's 2020 fiscal year proposed budget, now may not be the time for a \$60,000 project, he said.

"This has been a frustrating point for me and then with the threat of the ferries disappearing, the airplanes are going to be more important," said Burke.

In addition to the seven day, diagonal parking area and the few parking spaces in front of the terminal, there is another designated airport parking lot past City Cargo in the direction towards Sandy Beach. Although some people do park there, it isn't nearly as congested as the parking near the terminal.

"There is a parking lot available, but for some reason people don't like to use it a lot," said Campbell. "Too far to walk in inclement weather maybe."



The roadway in front of Alaska Airlines and Temsko Helicopters has no painted lines indicating it is a state-owned road. Parked cars often block portions of the road while dropping-off or picking-up passengers.

Photo courtesy of ADOT- PF