

August 2, 2013

Glenn Highway: Hiland Road to Artillery Road Reconstruction Northbound Lane Design/Build Project
Project No.: AKSAS 54694

Re: Request for scoping comments

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is soliciting comments and information on a proposed State-funded project that will provide an additional northbound (NB) lane on the Glenn Highway between the Hiland Road and Artillery Road interchanges. As part of the proposed project, the bridge over Eagle River may require widening or replacement. This project is being pursued under a design/build process. The proposed project is located within Sections 11&14, T. 14 N., R. 2 W., on USGS Quad Map Anchorage (B-7) SW, Seward Meridian; Latitude 61.3208°N, Longitude 149.57°W, in Eagle River, Alaska (Figure 1).

Purpose and Need

The main purpose of the proposed project is to relieve congestion on the Glenn Highway near Eagle River. Population growth in the Mat-Su Valley and the Chugiak-Eagle River area has contributed to steadily worsening congestion on the Glenn Highway. This is especially evidenced during peak hours as commuters travel to/from Anchorage to access employment sites.

Easing the Glenn Highway commute is one of the key transportation issues identified in the Municipality of Anchorage's Long Range Transportation Plan. During the commute hours, projected travel demand will exceed the existing corridor capacity unless remedies are implemented. Traffic modeling used for the 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan predicts an increase in traffic volumes on the Glenn Highway of approximately 100% by 2035. The highway will not have the capacity to absorb the predicted traffic volume increase. An additional lane will add capacity to accommodate the traffic and aid in congestion relief.

Another identified need is to reduce the steep grade on the NB approach to Eagle River. By flattening the grade, it would help to increase capacity by reducing the need for drivers to suddenly slow down as they approach the steep downhill.

Proposed Action

The project is currently at a reconnaissance-level phase and DOT&PF will be considering several different design options. At a minimum, the proposed project would:

- Add an additional NB lane to the Glenn Highway between the Hiland and Artillery Road interchanges.
- Realign the highway alignment to reduce the NB highway grade of the steep downhill approaching the Eagle River bridge (sometimes referred to as "brake-light hill")
- Construct a new NB bridge over Eagle River to accommodate the additional lane.

Depending upon the final design and funding availability, other proposed project components may include making improvements to the Hiland Road and Artillery Road interchanges to

accommodate the additional NB lane and improve traffic flow. Modifications to the Glenn Highway may also be done to accommodate a future high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane.

At this point, DOT&PF is developing a preliminary design concept for the project. A request for proposals (RFP) will be issued later this fall seeking a design/build contractor who will further refine or amend the preliminary design. As part of the design/build process, DOT&PF will hire a design/build contractor and it is possible project components may change as the design progresses. Substantive design changes by the design/build contractor would likely result in a supplemental environmental review process. Construction is anticipated to begin in 2014 and would continue through 2015.

Existing Site Conditions or Facilities

In the southern portion of the project area, the Glenn Highway passes through military land. The area adjacent to and east of the project area in this portion supports a high school, a low-security prison, and a park. In the northern portion of the project area as the highway nears the community of Eagle River, the adjacent land uses change to a more urban developed area.

Generally, the Glenn Highway corridor traverses the landscape with an essentially flat profile grade until the northbound and southbound (SB) lanes split at Eagle River where the grades are between 5% and 6% on the south side of the river, and about 4.5% on the north side. The NB approach to Eagle River has a well-known grade and is sometimes called "brake-light hill." The existing two-lane Glenn Highway bridge over Eagle River is 243 feet long and 47.5 feet wide and consists of three spans.

Access from this controlled-access highway is provided to the abutting lands via interchanges; the first at Hiland Drive where Eagle River Loop connects to the Glenn Highway before Eagle River, and the second at Artillery Road where ingress and egress is allowed to the business community of Eagle River and its surrounding residential lands. The distance between the two interchanges is approximately 1¾ miles.

Preliminary Environmental Research

The proposed project is not expected to create significant environmental impacts. A State Projects Environmental Form will be prepared in accord with DOT&PF's Environmental Procedures Manual. We have conducted preliminary environmental research, using the most current available, data to identify environmental resources within the proposed project vicinity (attached). To ensure that all factors are considered in developing the proposed project, please provide your written comments, recommendations, and the additional requested information to our office no later than August 23, 2013.

If you have any questions on the environmental effects, please contact me, Regional Environmental Manager, at (907) 269-0539, or via email at brian.elliott@alaska.gov. Questions concerning the engineering aspects of the proposed project can be directed to Brian Schumacher, Project Manager, at (907) 269-0450.

Sincerely,

Brian Elliott
Regional Environmental Manager

Attachments:

Figure 1 Project Area Map
Preliminary Environmental Research

cc: Brian Schumacher, Project Manager, DOT&PF
Paul Witt, Project Manager, HDR Alaska, Inc.

Agency Distribution:

Cindy	Heil	Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC), Division of Air Quality
William	Ashton	ADEC, Division of Water
Michael	Daigneault	Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Division of Habitat
Judith	Bittner	Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR), State Historic Preservation Office
Tom	Harrison	Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Chugach State Park
Larry	Beck	Bureau of Land Management
Linda	Serret	Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER)
Thede	Tobish	Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), Planning Division
John	Rodda	MOA, Eagle River/Chugiak Parks & Recreation
Lance	Wilber	MOA, Public Transportation
Matthew	Stichick	MOA, Anchorage Department of Health & Human Services
Jeff	Urbanus	MOA, Department of Public Works
Jeanne	Hanson	National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Habitat Conservation Division
Nicloe	Hayes	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Regulatory Division, Anchorage Field Office
Jim	Helfinstine	U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), 17th Coast Guard District (dpw)
Carma	Reed	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Office of Community Planning and Development
Jennifer	Curtis	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)
Maureen	de Zeeuw	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Steve	Klosiewski	USFWS

APPENDIX A: PRELIMINARY ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH

Air Quality: In 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) determined that Eagle River had attained National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS). Following that determination, the EPA began reviewing the proposed maintenance plan, that once approved, designated Eagle River as a maintenance area. In March 2013, Eagle River became a PM-10 Maintenance area.

Anadromous Fish Streams: A search of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Atlas to the Catalog of Waters Important to the Spawning, Rearing or Migration of Anadromous Fishes on 04/29/2013 indicated that Eagle River and Meadow Creek, a tributary of Eagle River, are anadromous. Eagle River (AWC Code: 247-50-10110) is listed as having Chum salmon, Coho salmon, and Pink salmon present; Chinook salmon rearing; and Sockeye salmon that are both rearing and present. Meadow Creek (AWC Code: 247-10110-2053) is listed as having spawning Chinook salmon and Pink salmon that are present and spawning.

Contaminated Sites, Spills and Underground Storage Tanks: A search of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) databases¹ on 05/02/2013 indicated there are two contaminated sites within the project area boundaries, both of which are noted as “Cleanup Complete.” A “Cleanup Complete” site is one where remediation has been effectively applied to the extent that ADEC no longer considers the site a potential threat to public health or the environment. The nearest active contaminated site (ADEC file number 2107.38.002; Hazard ID 626) is located approximately 800 feet from the project area boundary, at or near 11933 Town Park Circle. No leaking underground storage tanks (LUST) were identified within the project area boundaries. Federal records² were also searched and did not identify sites within or immediately adjacent to the project area boundary.

Flood Plain and Regulatory Floodway: A review of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Maps on 04/29/2013 indicated that a portion of the project area is within an area subject to 100-year flooding. The project site is located on the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map Panels 0200050379D and 0200050387D. The project team will consult with the MOA’s Flood Hazard Administrator for the flood hazard permit.

Historic Resources: Initial research indicates one documented historic resource is located within the project area. ANC-270, the Eagle River-Knik Trail, is a primary trail associated with the Iditarod National Historic Trail. ANC-270 has not been evaluated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), tribal entities and other interested parties will be conducted in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and AS 41.35.070.

1 Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) Division of Spill Prevention and Response, Contaminated Sites Program Database: <http://dec.alaska.gov/applications/spar/CSPSearch/default.asp> and <http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/faq>

2 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Priorities List: <http://www.epa.gov/superfund/sites/npl/where.htm>; EPA Superfund Site Information search: www.epa.gov/superfund/sites/cursites; EPA Region 10 Report: List of Regulated Handlers, Sorted By Location Zip Code and Handler Name; <http://yosemite.epa.gov/R10/OWCM.NSF/ed6c817875102d2d8825650f00714a59/d26539284e2898aa88256e710072c3ff?OpenDocument>

Wildlife, Migratory Birds, and Bald Eagles: Wildlife habitat within the project area is limited to the areas adjacent to the developed highway. Wildlife habitat adjacent to the project area includes spruce and birch forests. Some common terrestrial mammal species that may inhabit the project area include brown bears, black bears, moose, red fox, weasels, snowshoe hares, red squirrels, and voles. Moose are common year-round in the project area.

Resident birds that may occur in the forested areas adjacent to the project area include bald eagles, owls, gulls, common ravens, gray and Steller's jays, black-billed magpies, chickadees, and spruce grouse.

In Alaska, all native birds except grouse and ptarmigan (which are protected by the State of Alaska) are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). To avoid disturbance of breeding migratory birds in southcentral Alaska, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recommends restricting vegetation clearing and grubbing to outside of the time frame of May 1 – July 15.

Bald eagles are present year round in the project area and nest along the Eagle River. In the winter, hundreds of bald eagles can be found scavenging at the Anchorage Regional Landfill. Bald eagles are protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) (16 USC 668–668c) and the MBTA. USFWS generally recommends no clearing of vegetation within 330 feet of any nest. No activity should occur within 660 feet of any nests between March 1 and June 1. Between June 1 and August 31, no activity should occur within 660 feet of active eagle nests until after juvenile birds have fledged, unless specifically authorized by USFWS.³

Recent aerial surveys have not been conducted in the project area to determine if there are any bald eagle nests in the Project area. The USFWS no longer maintains the Bald Eagle Nest Atlas database and recommends conducting a pre-construction survey to determine if there are any bald eagle nests in the project area.

Navigable Waters: Initial consultation with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) indicates that Eagle River is considered navigable in law. However, navigation of Eagle River is restricted by the presence of the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Eagle River Flats Training Range at its mouth. As such the USCG has been requested to provide a determination of the Coast Guard's jurisdiction of the bridge crossing over this segment of the river. At this time the project team continues to conduct ongoing coordination with the USCG.

Water Quality: The project area is located within Eagle River watershed, with Eagle River running through the center of the project area and Meadow Creek, a tributary of Eagle River, approaching the site from the northeast and intercepting Eagle River inside the project area boundaries. Eagle River is currently listed as a Category 4a water body, which means an established, and EPA-approved, Total Maximum Daily Limit (TMDL) exists for the impaired water. Although Eagle River was never listed as water quality impaired on the State of Alaska's 303(d) List, it did undergo a TMDL program⁴ in 1995 for ammonia and metals. This was done in order to support a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for the

3 U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2007. National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines.

4 The TMDL Program Results Analysis Project is a multi-year EPA effort directed at measuring and analyzing programmatic and environmental results from the TMDL Program.

wastewater treatment facility that currently discharges into the river. The program was completed by the EPA on April 12th, 1995 and the facility continues to operate under an Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (APDES) permit. Meadow Creek is listed as a Category 3 water body on the State of Alaska 303(d) List due to the fact that there is insufficient or no data or information to determine whether the Water Quality Standards (WQS) for any designated use are attained.

State and Municipal Parks: A search of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR) Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) web page on 04/29/2013 indicated there are no State parks in the proposed project area. The Chugach State Park is located approximately 0.28 miles from the project area. There are no municipal parks located within the project area; however, the MOA's Targhee Park is located approximately 134 feet from the project area.

State Refuges, National Wildlife Refuges, Critical Habitat Areas and Sanctuaries: A review of the ADF&G listing of State of Alaska Refuges, Critical Habitat Areas, and Sanctuaries on 04/29/2013 indicated no State Refuges, Critical Habitat Areas, or Sanctuaries in the project area. A review of the USFWS web site on 05/3/2013 indicated that no national wildlife refuges exist within the proposed project area. No federal recreation areas (e.g., parks, preserves, monuments, or Wild and Scenic Rivers) under the Bureau of Land Management or the National Park Service exist in the proposed project area.

Threatened and Endangered Species: The USFWS, ADF&G, and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) websites were reviewed on 05/13/2013 to determine if any threatened or endangered species or critical habitat is located within the proposed project corridor. Based on that review, there are not anticipated to be any state or federally-listed threatened or endangered species under the jurisdiction of the above listed resources agencies in the project area.

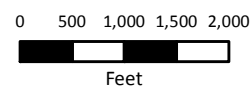
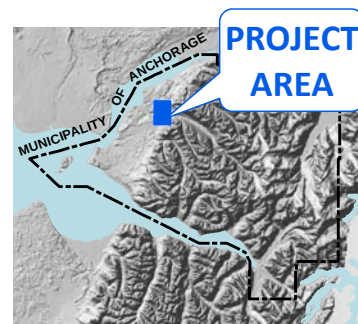
Noise: A traffic noise analysis will be completed, using the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Highway Traffic Noise Model (TNM, Version 2.5 or newer), to assess and evaluate any highway and construction noise impacts according to DOT&PF noise policy.

Wetlands and Other Waters of the U.S.: The Anchorage Wetland Management Plan wetland mapping and the NWI wetland mapping did not identify wetlands or waters of the U.S. within the project area except for Eagle River and Meadow Creek. A field visit was conducted in June 2013 to confirm the existing mapping. Wetland scientists observed a few wetlands that were associated with roadside ditches adjacent to the highway.

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**Figure 1:
PROJECT
AREA**

- Project Area
- MOA Parks
- Joint Base
Elmendorf-Richardson
- Property Boundary
- River/Stream



DATE: August 02, 2013
SOURCES: MOA, HDR Alaska
PROJECTION: AK State Plane ZN4, NAD83 FT
MAP NOTES: