U.S DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

NEW SEWARD HIGHWAY
RABBIT CREEK ROAD TO 36th AVENUE
Project Number FRAF-CA-MGS-NH-0A3-1(27)/52503

Selected Alternative:

The Alaska Division Office of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has selected the Build Alternative to construct improvements to the New Seward Highway between Rabbit Creek Road and 36th Avenue in Anchorage, Alaska.

The Build Alternative will construct improvements that will address current and future travel demand and mobility needs. The improvements will provide additional capacity, connectivity, and safety enhancements.

The New Seward Highway from Rabbit Creek Road to 36th Avenue is and will remain a controlled access corridor. Noise barriers and fencing throughout the corridor will be upgraded or installed as warranted, and continuous illumination will be added to augment the existing high-mast interchange lighting. The Build Alternative improvements are described below, by segment.

Rabbit Creek Road to O'Malley Road. In this segment, the existing New Seward Highway mainline, which is four lanes (two each traveling north and south) with a center grassed median, will remain unchanged. Pedestrian and bicycle improvements will consist of separated multi-use pathways near the right-of-way boundary on the west and east sides of New Seward Highway from Tradewind Drive to O'Malley Road. At the DeArmoun Road pedestrian overcrossing, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) upgrades will include ramp access improvements.

O'Malley Road to Dimond Boulevard. In this segment, the New Seward Highway mainline will be widened from the existing four lanes to six lanes. The grass median will be retained. On the west side, the Homer Drive frontage road will be extended south from Dimond Boulevard to O'Malley Road, providing a one-way frontage road system from O'Malley Road to Tudor Road. A new multi-use path is proposed for the west side along the Homer Drive frontage road extension and along Brayton Drive on the east side. The southbound ramp exiting from New Seward Highway to O'Malley Road will be widened to two lanes to accommodate the transition from three to two lanes on the mainline in the southbound direction. The northbound on-ramp also will be widened to two lanes to introduce an additional mainline lane in the northbound direction.

A half-diamond interchange constructed at 92nd Avenue will include slip ramps to and from the south. This grade-separated interchange will raise the New Seward Highway mainline on a bridge above 92nd Avenue. The work also will include extension of 92nd Avenue from Homer Drive to Brayton Drive. This portion of 92nd Avenue will be four lanes, providing a through lane in each direction and side-by-side left-turn bays between intersections with the frontage roads. In addition, 92nd Avenue will be reconstructed and extended as a two-lane road west to Old Seward Highway, where right- and left-turn bays will be incorporated for the turning movements.

Dimond Boulevard to Dowling Road. In this segment, the widened, six-lane New Seward Highway mainline will continue. Multi-use sidewalks or pathways will be included along Brayton Drive and Homer Drive frontage roads. Improvements at the Dimond Boulevard interchange will include ramp upgrades, channelization between ramp intersections, and bridge replacement. As part of the ramp upgrades, the southbound ramp exiting New Seward Highway will be expanded to two lanes and the ramp intersection will be relocated to align with the extension of Homer Drive from Dimond Boulevard to O'Malley Road. The work will require rechannelization of Dimond Boulevard to remove the eastbound left-turn pocket to Brayton Drive, where replacement access will be provided with the Sandlewood Place extension. Sandlewood Place on the east side of New Seward Highway will be reconstructed and extended between Dimond Boulevard and Lore Road (76th Avenue).

A new half-diamond interchange will join 76th Avenue with New Seward Highway. The improvement will incorporate a grade separation and will maintain the existing slip ramps to and from the north. New Seward Highway will be raised on a bridge over 76th Avenue to allow the extension of 76th Avenue to Brayton Drive. As it passes below New Seward Highway, 76th Avenue will consist of four lanes, providing a through lane in each direction and side-by-side left-turn bays between intersections with the frontage roads. A new grade separation at 68th Avenue will raise New Seward Highway over 68th Avenue, but will not include ramps for highway access. The extension of 68th Avenue will consist of four lanes between Homer and Brayton drives, similar to 76th Avenue.

Dowling Road to Tudor Road. In this segment, the widened, six-lane New Seward Highway mainline will continue. Multi-use sidewalks or pathways will be included along both Brayton and Homer drives. At the Dowling Road interchange, the ramps will require reconstruction for the lanes added to the outside of the New Seward Highway mainline.

Extension of International Airport Road will connect Homer and Brayton drives. The International Airport Road roadway extension will consist of four lanes, providing a through lane in each direction and side-by-side, left-bays between intersections with the frontage roads. Between Homer Drive and Old Seward Highway, International Airport Road will be reconstructed to three lanes. As part of elevating the mainline over International Airport Road, the bridges over the nearby Campbell Creek for the mainline and frontage roads also will be reconstructed. Replacement of the Campbell Creek bridges will provide adequate clearance for the trail connection along Campbell Creek under New Seward Highway.

Tudor Road to 36th Avenue. The existing six-lane New Seward Highway mainline in this segment will remain basically unchanged. Because the additional through lanes on the mainline match the existing auxiliary lanes south of the 36th Avenue intersection, the intersection will not require reconstruction. Roadway improvements at 36th Avenue may include minor channelization enhancements. Bicycle and pedestrian improvements consist of a new multi-use separated pathway on the west side of the road, adjacent to the mainline, and ADA upgrades for the existing pathways at 36th Avenue and along Tudor Road. At the Tudor Road interchange, improvements to the existing diamond interchange will include Tudor Road widening over New Seward Highway and channelization improvements to provide dual left-turn lanes serving westbound-to-southbound traffic. The addition of a left-turn lane between the ramp intersections will require reconstruction and widening of the Tudor Road bridge.

Proposed Transportation System Management and Travel Demand Management Components. The transportation system management elements of the proposed Build Alternative will include advanced traffic management focus at 36th Avenue and selected auxiliary lane treatment for the critical sections of the New Seward Highway mainline where bottlenecks have been identified. The transportation system management elements and deployment of advanced traffic management at the signalized intersections where New Seward Highway ramps terminate and along the mainline are intended to improve traffic flow and reduce congestion.

The key transportation system management improvements proposed for the New Seward Highway corridor are as follows:

- Modernization of the traffic signal control system at 24 intersections in the corridor;
- Strategic traffic control focus at the intersection of New Seward Highway and 36th Avenue as a network hot spot;
- Use of video traffic monitoring and incident management capabilities on the mainline and at ramp terminals and cross streets;
- Access management on the frontage roads and use of these roads as reliever routes for excess congestion and incident conditions; and
- Provision of park-and-ride facilities near the New Seward Highway at O'Malley.

The initiatives implemented as part of a travel demand management program will include the following:

- Continuation of work with Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) and the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) to promote transit service, including vanpool operations;
- Promotion of employer-based support and implementation of incentives for shifting travel times;
- Encouragement of voluntary travel reduction; and
- Promotion of expanded use of telecommuting in normal business practices.

The Build Alternative offers the following advantages over other considered alternatives:

- Best satisfies purpose and need for the project;
- Retains the depressed median to enhance safety, drainage, and snow storage;
- Utilizes features of the existing right-of-way, which accommodates widening to the outside; and
- Is the most cost effective.

Alternatives Considered:

Construction of the additional lanes within the depressed median was considered, but the advantages of retaining the depressed median in terms of safety, drainage, and snow storage, coupled with the fact that the existing right-of-way generally accommodates widening to the outside, led to the Build Alternative configuration.

An 8-lane typical section was also considered and dismissed during the early planning phase as future traffic demand did not warrant the additional capacity. The build alternative does not preclude the addition of two additional lanes in the future as demand increases.

Additional alternatives were considered but not advanced because of a combination of right-of-way impacts and failure to satisfy the purpose and need for the project. Among those alternatives considered, but not advanced, were the dedication of additional lanes to high-occupancy vehicles; transportation system management and travel demand management strategies as a stand-alone alternative; and various configurations for mainline, interchange, frontage road, and arterial connection improvements.

A No Build Alternative was evaluated to determine the impacts if no action were taken. The No Build Alternative will not improve safety, traffic congestion and delay, or access.

Required Permits and Clearances:

DOT&PF will obtain all necessary permits and agency approvals, and abide by the terms and conditions of each. The applicable permits and approvals anticipated at this time are as follows: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 Permit, Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR) Office of Habitat Management and Permitting Fish Habitat Permits pursuant to Title 41, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) Clean Water Act Section 401 Certification and ADEC wastewater system plan review, ADNR Office of Project Management and Permitting Alaska Coastal Management Program Consistency Determination, and Municipality of Anchorage Flood Hazard Permits. Construction activities will be in compliance with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction General Permit (note: The NPDES program is scheduled to be transferred to the State of Alaska in 2009. Compliance with the Alaska Pollution Discharge Elimination System (APDES) permits will be required once the program is transferred.)

The Build Alternative is in compliance with the following:

- Air Quality Conformity, 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 93.104(d);
- Environmental Justice, Executive Order 12898;
- Protection of Wetlands Executive Order 11990;
- Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environmental, Executive Order 11593; and
- Floodplain Management, Executive Order 11988.

Environmental Commitments:

Following are key commitments made under the identified categories. Further detail can be found in the text of the Environmental Assessment.

Water Quality:

- All stormwater runoff will be pretreated prior to discharge into creeks and storm drain systems. DOT&PF will design and construct a stormwater drainage system to contain runoff from the 25 year 3 hour duration design storm (Alaska Highway Drainage Manual, 1995) in the vegetated median and in vegetated swales between the mainline and the frontage roads. These swales will treat 2 year 6 hour duration stormwater runoff (MOA Design Criteria Manual, 2005) to depths of up to 6 inches with velocities less than 0.9 feet per second through the use of check dikes. Contaminants and sediment will settle out as the water infiltrates. Stormwater runoff that exceeds the capacity of the retention swales will be filtered prior to discharge into the creeks or storm drain system. All preliminary analysis will be confirmed during project design. If necessary, other treatment methods including storm water treatment vaults will be included in the proposed design in order to meet storm water treatment requirements.
- Coordination with Municipality of Anchorage Wastershed Task Force and ADEC will continue on the design of stormwater runoff treatment features.

Wetlands:

- To avoid wetland impacts the Campbell Creek bridges will be designed to avoid fill of the Class A creek-fringe wetlands adjacent to Campbell Creek including those along International Airport Road. The bridges will span the creek.
- To minimize wetland impacts, embankment slopes will be steepened to the extent practicable adjacent to Class A or B wetlands. Vertical walls are proposed at the North and South Forks of Little Campbell Creeks and at Fish Creek tributaries.
- To protect and restore wetlands, temporary fills in wetlands will be placed on geotextile membranes and will be removed after construction. The affected area will be recontoured and revegetated with plants indigenous to the Cook Inlet area.
- Unavoidable wetland impacts will be compensated by in-lieu-fee mitigation or purchase of credits from an approved mitigation bank. During the permit phase of the project other options for mitigation such as preservation, restoration, creation of wetland functions will be explored, if necessary. The Anchorage Debit/Credit Method will be used for determining the compensation for wetland losses that cannot be avoided or minimized.

Floodplain:

- All bridges and culverts will be designed in accordance with local, state, and federal requirements. Excess embankment beneath the Campbell Creek Bridges will be removed from the floodplain to approximately its original contour.

Fish and Wildlife:

- Reduce the potential for vehicle-moose collisions through the use of continuous fencing interrupted only at the Campbell Creek crossing; the new street crossings at International Airport Road, 68th Avenue, 76th Avenue, and 92nd Avenue; and the improved existing road crossings at Rabbit Creek Road, DeArmoun Road, O'Malley Road, Dimond Boulevard, Dowling Road, and Tudor Road. Openness ratios of 2.0 or greater will be provided at these locations to assure adequacy for large mammal passage.
- Replace the existing continuous culverts at the North and South Forks of Little Campbell Creek with Tier 1 culverts daylighted between the frontage roads and the mainline, and sized to accommodate the design storm and meet fish passage criteria in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement between the DOT&PF and the ADF&G for the "Design, Permitting, and Construction of Culverts for Fish Passage" (2001).
- All recommended conservation measures listed in the EFH assessment will be incorporated into the project.
- No vegetation clearing will occur between May 1st and July 15th.
- Noise barriers will be constructed of a material that will not be a hazard to flying birds.

Noise:

- Noise barriers will be provided to mitigate noise impacts where they are found to be feasible and reasonable per DOT&PF Noise Abatement Policy. During the design phase of the project and prior to construction, noise barrier heights, materials and locations will be optimized.

Social/Environmental Justice

- During design the DOT&PF will work with the Taku-Campbell Community Council to ensure impacts on the Helen Louise McDowell sanctuary are minimized to the extent practical.
- The requirements of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, EO12898, and the Uniform Relocation and Right-of-Way Acquisition of Real Property Act will be complied with to mitigate any adverse effects to low income property populations or individuals.

Visual:

- Mitigation measures will include implementation of a landscaping plan for all areas disturbed by construction. The landscape plan will be guided by the Anchorage Municipal Code, Title 21.45.125 C.1, Visual Enhancement Landscaping; the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) *Guide for Transportation Landscape and Environmental Design* (1991), and AASHTO highway safety guidelines (2001).

- Lighting fixtures will be shielded adjacent to residential neighborhoods.
- All areas disturbed by construction will be revegetated with native grasses to provide visual enhancement.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Considerations:

- Design and construct the connection of the Campbell Creek Greenbelt Trail and other trail connections in coordination with the Municipality of Anchorage Non-Motorized Transportation Coordinator. This measure is intended to increase public safety, improve public access to and encourage public use of the greenbelt, provide protective buffer habitat along sections of Campbell Creek within the highway corridor, and facilitate safe wildlife crossings of the New Seward Highway. For documentation of temporary occupancy of Campbell Creek Greenbelt see Appendix 3.
- Additional illumination of the frontage roads, specifically in the vicinity of bus stops, will be considered during the design phase.

Hazardous Waste:

- Updated agency list data will be obtained during the final design phase of the project to ensure that the most recent data are available and used to determine potential property contamination risk. If previously undiscovered contamination is encountered during construction of the New Seward Highway improvements, work in the surrounding area will stop immediately, and the proper state and federal agencies (ADEC and EPA) will be notified at once. Handling and disposal of contaminated material would be done in accordance with an ADEC approved corrective action plan. If the required right-of-way acquisition for the proposed project changes from that anticipated in this document and potentially contaminated properties are to be acquired, a Phase II site investigation will be undertaken at those locations during the final design phase, before construction.

Secondary and Cumulative:

- The DOT&PF will provide a copy of the EA to the MOA to facilitate future planning along the corridor.

Construction:

- If previously undiscovered archeological remains are encountered during construction, all work that could affect the site will be temporarily halted and the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) will be notified immediately.
- The DOT&PF will develop a traffic control plan to minimize delays, provide appropriate detours, maintain roadway safety, and maintain adequate access. Delays can be minimized and safety maintained by using applicable traffic control devices such as detours, flagging, pilot cars, and public notices. Access to all businesses and residences will be maintained during construction activities. Schools within the New Seward Highway corridor will be notified in advance of any temporary road closures that may affect their routes. Facilities that provide emergency services will also be notified in advance of any temporary road closures or detours.
- The DOT&PF will prepare an erosion and sediment control plan during the design phase of the project. The construction contractor will be required to

prepare and implement a storm water pollution prevention plan and a hazardous material control plan.

- For night time, weekend, and holiday operations a noise permit will be obtained from the MOA. Intensive coordination and notice to the public of night time operations will be implemented.
- The contractor will be required to obtain all necessary permits and clearances for contractor supplied material sources, disposal areas, or other off site support areas.

Public Hearing Summary:

DOT&PF issued the following public notices for the Environmental Assessment public hearing and distributed the document in the following manner:

- A display advertisement announcing the hearing and availability of the Environmental Assessment was published in the *Anchorage Daily News* on August 26, August 28, September 7, and September 11, 2006. Affidavits of publication appear in Appendix 1 of this FONSI.
- Mailed Project Update to all parties on the project mailing list on August 29, 2006, announcing EA availability to the public, request for public comment, and public hearing announcement.
- Posted EA for public availability at the Loussac and Samson Dimond Branches of the Anchorage Municipal Libraries, the DOT&PF project website and the DOT&PF Regional Office in Anchorage as well as the FHWA Statewide Office in Juneau.
- Distributed EA to: Municipality of Anchorage, State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, US National Marine Fisheries Service, EPA – Alaska Operations, SHPO, Office of History and Archaeology, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers Alaska District, Alaska Department of Natural Resources – OHMP, Department of Natural Resources OPMP, US Coast Guard Seventh Coast Guard District, Anchorage Historic Properties, Department of Natural Resources MLW, Department of Natural Resources DPOR, and the Federation of Community Councils.
- Additionally, letters regarding the project Notice of Availability and requesting comment were sent to: Alaska Center for the Environment, Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC), Anchorage Transportation Coalition, Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, Eklutna Incorporated, Cook Inlet Region, Inc., Knik Tribal Council, MOA, Office of the Mayor, Anchorage School District – Transportation, Anchorage Police Department, Anchorage Fire Department, State of Alaska, Office of the Governor, Alaska Legislature, House of Representatives and Senate, Anchorage Assembly Members, Bayshore/Klatt Community Council, Campbell Park Community Council, Huffman O'Malley Community Council, Old Seward Oceanview Community Council, Rogers Park Community Council, and Taku Community Council;
- Made electronic copies of the EA available at the public hearing and provided hard copy upon request.
- Follow up calls reminding agencies and organizations of the Public Comment Period and the Public Hearing were completed.

DOT&PF held the public hearing on September 12, 2006 at Polaris Elementary School, and 51 people attended. Hearing certification is located in Appendix 1 to this FONSI. In addition to FHWA representation, project team members at the meeting included DOT&PF design, environmental, and right of way, as well as CH2M HILL engineering and environmental consultants. DOT&PF representatives facilitated an open house meeting, explained exhibits and handouts, answered questions, and took note of specific comments. A court recorder prepared a transcript of the public hearing proceedings and took individual testimony from 5 members of the public.

Comments Received:

DOT&PF received 7 completed comment sheets, 54 emails, 17 letters, 6 phone calls, and 1 fax (plus one duplicate for a total of 91 comments, including testimony) about the project. A copy of all comments received is included in Appendix 1. All comments received have been addressed and the responses are included in Appendix 2.

Conclusion:

The Alaska Division Office of the FHWA has determined that the Build Alternative selected in this decision will have no significant impact on the human and natural environments. This FONSI is based on the attached Environmental Assessment document, which FHWA independently evaluated and determined adequately and accurately discusses the need, environmental issues, and impacts of this proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. The Environmental Assessment provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The FHWA takes full responsibility for the accuracy, scope, and content of the attached Environmental Assessment.

Edrie Vinson — November 4, 2006

Edrie Vinson, Environmental Project Manager
Federal Highway Administration

Date

Attachments:
Eratta, changes & Additions
Appendix 1 – Newspaper Advertisements/ Affidavits of Publication
Project Update Mailer
EA Distribution Letter
Public Sign in Sheets
Public Hearing Agenda
Public Hearing Power Point Presentation
Public Hearing Transcript
Certification of Public Hearing
Environmental Assessment Public Comments
Appendix 2 – DOT&PF Responses to Comments
Appendix 3 – Documentation of Temporary Occupancy for Campbell Creek Greenbelt
Appendix 4 –Essential Fish Habitat Assessment