



# OPEN HOUSE NO. 1

## Sterling and Soldotna

June 25 and 26, 2024



*The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by DOT&PF pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated April 13, 2023, and executed by FHWA and DOT&PF.*

Welcome to the first open house for the Sterling Safety Corridor Improvements Milepost 82.5 to 94 project.

# PROJECT TEAM



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Project Manager

**Julia Hanson, P.E.**  
Design Manager

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Project Engineer



**Stephanie Queen**  
Public Involvement Lead

The project is lead by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, or DOT&PF. The consultant team is lead by QAP, with design provided by DOWL and public involvement conducted by Stephanie Queen Consulting.

# PROJECT AREA

## VICINITY & OVERVIEW MAP



This project proposes to reconstruct the Sterling Highway between Sterling at milepost 82.5 and Soldotna at milepost 94 to improve safety and reduce congestion.

# PROJECT SCHEDULE

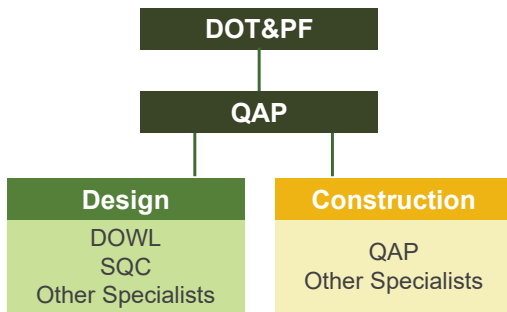
## PROGRESSIVE DESIGN BUILD INITIATION



This project is restarting following completion of the environmental document in 2021. Design engineering is starting in summer 2024 and is expected to be complete by summer 2026. If additional right-of-way is needed, the acquisition process will begin in early 2025. Pending available funding, early construction activities could begin as soon as spring 2025.

# WHY IS THE CONTRACTOR INVOLVED ALREADY?

PROGRESSIVE DESIGN-BUILD (PDB) DELIVERY



## Why did DOT&PF choose the PDB process?

- More collaborative
- Fosters engineer/contractor innovation
- Lower risk of budget overrun
- More flexible construction schedule
- Greater ability to phase construction
- Continuity of project knowledge through construction

Some might ask, why is the construction contractor involved so early in the process? The DOT&PF chose to use a Progressive Design-Build delivery for this project because:

- It's more collaborative and fosters innovation between engineers and contractors
- It reduces the risk of cost overruns
- It adds flexibility and allows phased construction more easily, and
- It provides continuity of project knowledge and design decisions though the construction process

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## DESCRIPTION, PURPOSE & GOALS



Photo by AA Roads, 05/10/23

- Federally-funded project to reconstruct Sterling Highway between Sterling and Soldotna
- Purpose: **improve safety** and **reduce congestion**
- **Goals:**
  - Provide a safe and reliable roadway
  - Allow for decommissioning of the Traffic Safety Corridor designation
  - Accommodate the seasonal traffic increases
  - Uphold the trust of stakeholders and the public
  - Balance needs to maintain access
  - Begin construction in 2026
  - Phase construction to maximize benefits from available funding

This project is federally funded, and the goals include:

- Providing a safe and reliable roadway so the Traffic Safety Corridor can be decommissioned
- Balancing access needs
- Accommodating seasonal traffic increases
- Maximizing the benefit from available funding by phasing construction, and
- Ultimately upholding the trust of stakeholders and the public

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

## CORRIDOR HISTORY



1950	Sterling Highway constructed
1983	Environmental Assessment to widen highway from MP 79-94
1991	MP 79-83 (within Sterling) widened to 4-lanes with center left-turn lane
1991	MP 83-94 improved 2-lane section with widened shoulders
2009	Traffic Safety Corridor designation
2015-2021	Preliminary Engineering Report and Environmental Assessment completed <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>4-lane divided highway was preferred alternative</li></ul>
2022	Design-Build project started but cancelled after significant public input
2024	Project restarted using Progressive Design-Build delivery

The Sterling Highway was originally constructed in 1950 as a two-lane road. In the 1980s and 1990s, DOT&PF and communities realized this roadway was not sufficient to handle the amounts of traffic and took the necessary steps to widen the highway from milepost 79 to 94. Having experienced high levels of crashes, including fatal and serious injury crashes, in 2009 this section of roadway was designated a Traffic Safety Corridor. This designation means that long-term, major improvements are needed to address roadway safety for all users, including drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians. In 2015, work began on the long-term road project, completing a Preliminary Engineering Report and Environmental Assessment, or EA, in 2021. In 2022, a design-build project was started but cancelled after significant public input revealed division within the communities over the course of action. In 2024, the project was restarted using the Progressive Design-Build delivery process.

## PROJECT FOCUS: SAFETY & CONGESTION

### WHY THIS PROJECT IS NEEDED



Photo by Erin Thompson/Peninsula Clarion, 2021

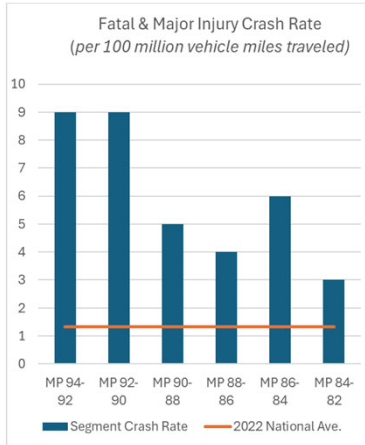
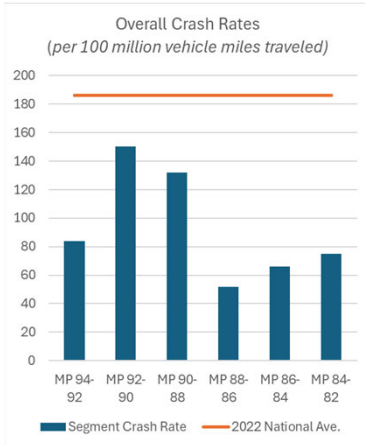
- Fatal and major injury crash rates remain above national averages
- Most fatal and major injury crashes occur during winter months
- Head-on collisions account for nearly half of fatal and major injury crashes
- Traffic volumes have increased >400% since the 1970s
- Traffic exceeds current 2-lane roadway's capacity
- July traffic is more than double winter traffic

This project remains focused on increasing safety for all roadway users, including vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians, and reducing congestion. Fatal and major injury crash rates remain above national averages, with most of these occurring during winter months. Adding pressure on the existing highway system is growing traffic volumes, which have increased 400 percent since the 1970s. As many will recognize, seasonal summer traffic is more than double winter traffic.



# CRASH RATES

## OVERALL RATES VS. FATAL & SERIOUS INJURY RATES



- Overall crash rates are below national averages for all corridor segments
- Fatal & major injury crash rates are significantly higher than national averages
- Highest fatal & major injury crash rates in MP 90-94 segment, near Soldotna

While overall crash rates are below national averages, fatal and major injury crashes are significantly higher than national averages. The highest fatal and major injury crash rates are between milepost 90 to 94 and are nearly nine times the national average. For additional information on the traffic and safety data, please visit the project website at [www.SterlingSafetyImprovements.com](http://www.SterlingSafetyImprovements.com), Public Meetings and Materials Section.

# EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

## PREVIOUS PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE



Recommended in 2021 Environmental Assessment	Advantages	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ 4-lane divided highway through most of corridor</li><li>▪ 5-lane highway with center left-turn lanes on each end of the corridor</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Substantially reduces head-on crashes and improves safety</li><li>▪ Reduces read-end crashes by providing left-turn lanes</li><li>▪ Provides safe passing opportunities</li><li>▪ Increases capacity</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Restricted access and required U-turns to many properties</li><li>▪ Wider corridor for pedestrians to cross</li><li>▪ Increased lanes – higher travel speeds and more exposure to animal-vehicle crashes</li><li>▪ Utility relocation / impacts</li></ul>

**Broad range of public support and opposition**

The 2021 EA recommended a divided four-lane design though most of the corridor, transitioning to a 5-lane highway with a center left-turn lanes on each end of the corridor. The advantages of this design include:

- Substantial reduction in head-on crashes and improved safety
- Reduction in rear-end crashes by providing periodic left-turn lanes, and
- Provide safe passing opportunities and increased capacity by including two travel lanes in each direction

This design was not without challenges, including:

- Restricted access and required U-turns to many properties, homes, and businesses
- Wider corridor for pedestrians to cross, and
- Increased lanes could lead to higher travel speeds and additional exposure to animal-vehicle crashes

It's important to note this alternative received a broad range of public support *and* opposition.

## OBSERVATIONS AND INPUT

### PREVIOUSLY VOICED CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES



- Large number of fatal crashes, injury crashes, and near misses
- Passing on the right, speeding, tailgating, and lack of headlight use
- Perceived lack of law enforcement
- Tourists driving slowly with no passing options
- School busses stopping in the lane of traffic
- Poor pedestrian amenities and inability to cross safely
- Competing uses: local vs through traffic, recreational vs commercial, tourist vs resident
- Congestion and high seasonal traffic
- Impacts to emergency responders
- Noise from rumble strips
- Corridor lighting impacting quality of life
- Off-road, ATV, and snowmachine use
- Planning fatigue – decades of study without action

The themes previously heard from stakeholders and the public regarding the 2021 preferred alternative include:

- Comments on the large number of fatal crashes, injury crashes, and near misses
- Unsafe driver behaviors such as passing on the right, speeding, tailgating, and not using headlights
- A perceived lack of law enforcement
- Lack of passing opportunities
- School bus safety
- Lack of pedestrian amenities
- Competing roadway uses
- Congestion and high levels of seasonal traffic
- Impacts to emergency response
- Noise and lighting concerns
- Off-road vehicle use adjacent to the roadway, and
- Planning fatigue due to decades of study without action

# NEW TEAM – FRESH PERSPECTIVE

## UPCOMING OUTREACH AND DATA COLLECTION



- 1 Continue to gather input from the public and stakeholders
- 2 Schedule stakeholder meetings on specific topics:
  - Public safety and emergency response
  - KPB school district
  - Business owners, tourism, and economic interests
  - Trucking, freight, and transportation
  - Wildlife and environment
- 3 Collect and analyze engineering data
  - Survey
  - Traffic
  - Geotechnical
  - Utilities
- 4 Develop and evaluate design alternatives
- 5 Begin permitting and preparation construction



Based on community feedback, the new project team plans to continue gathering input from the public and stakeholders. In addition to public meetings, the project team plans to meet with stakeholders on specific topics, including:

- Public safety and emergency response
- Kenai Peninsula Borough school district
- Business owners, tourism, and economic interests
- Trucking, freight, and transportation, and
- Wildlife and the environment

The project team will reevaluate, collect, and analyze updated engineering data, such as:

- Survey
- Traffic data
- Geotechnical information, and
- Utilities

The project team will use this information to develop and evaluate design alternatives, which will be shared with the public for comment in fall 2024. During winter 2024/2025, the project team will select the alternative that best meets the project needs to improve safety and reduce congestion. This selected alternative will include different design features to address, first and foremost, the safety of all traveling the Sterling Highway in the corridor. Additional considerations include various property access needs and traffic volumes along the corridor.

## ADDRESSING ACCESS CONCERNS

### TOOLS TO MITIGATE IMPACTS ON ADJACENT PROPERTY ACCESS



- Typical section variations – short sections of 5-lane roadway with center turn-lane
- Frontage roads in ROW – 2-lane and 1-lane (right in, right out)
- Improve connections of parallel side streets – provide alternate routes for local traffic
- Phased construction approach
- Construct side streets in platted ROWs to provide alternative access
- Relocate driveways to side streets (existing or new)
- Establish easements along undeveloped lots to facilitate future frontage road access
- Restrict driveway permits on highway when alternate access available
- Traffic signals
- Pedestrian underpasses



Different segments of the Sterling Highway between milepost 82.5 and 94 have different safety concerns and access needs for properties adjacent to the highway. The project team will evaluate various design tools to maximize safety and minimize disruptions to property owners in the corridor.

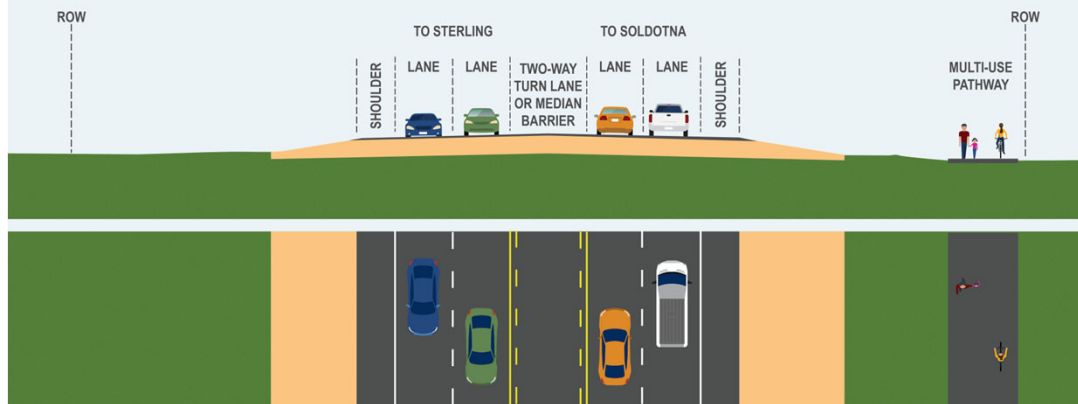
- Some variations to the typical sections could be included to increase access to businesses and homes.
- Where right-of-way permits, a frontage road could be added for access. Easements along undeveloped lots could facilitate future frontage road access.
- Alternate routes could be created by connecting parallel side streets or constructing new side streets in platted rights-of-ways.
- Construction could be phased.
- Driveways could be relocated when alternative access is available.
- Traffic signals and pedestrian underpasses in high traffic areas could be added.

# DESIGN ALTERNATIVES LOOKING FORWARD

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL DESIGN SOLUTIONS BEING CONSIDERED



## ALTERNATIVE A: FIVE-LANE DIVIDED WITH TWO-WAY LEFT TURN LANE



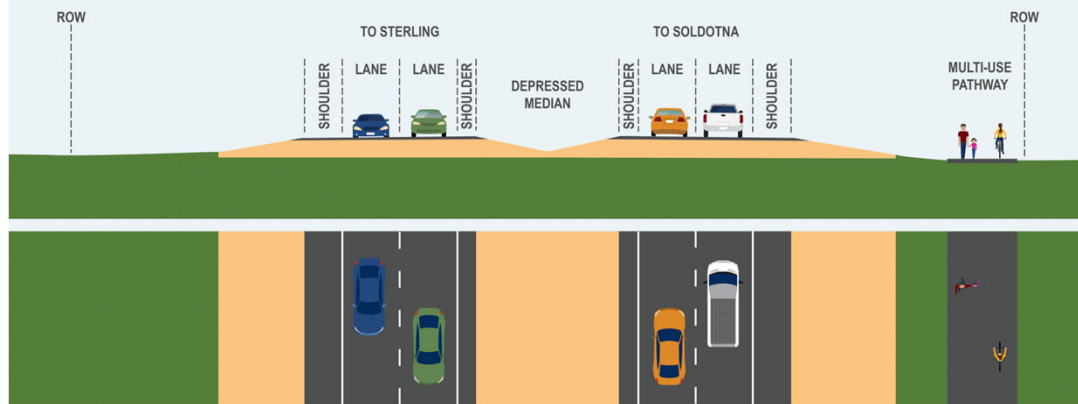
The team will continue to evaluate a five-lane section that includes two travel lanes in each direction with a center two-way left-turn lane and a multi-use pathway on the north side of the highway.

# DESIGN ALTERNATIVES LOOKING FORWARD

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL DESIGN SOLUTIONS BEING CONSIDERED



## ALTERNATIVE B: FOUR-LANE HIGHWAY WITH DEPRESSED MEDIAN



The team will also continue to consider a divided four-lane alternative that includes two travel lanes in each direction separated by a depressed median with a multi-use pathway on the north side of the highway. The five and four-lane alternatives could be considered together for different sections of the highway depending on safety and access needs for businesses and homes along the corridor.

## DESIGN ALTERNATIVES LOOKING FORWARD

### EVALUATION OF SOLDOTNA CREEK CROSSING



*Photo by Department of Fish & Game, 2001*

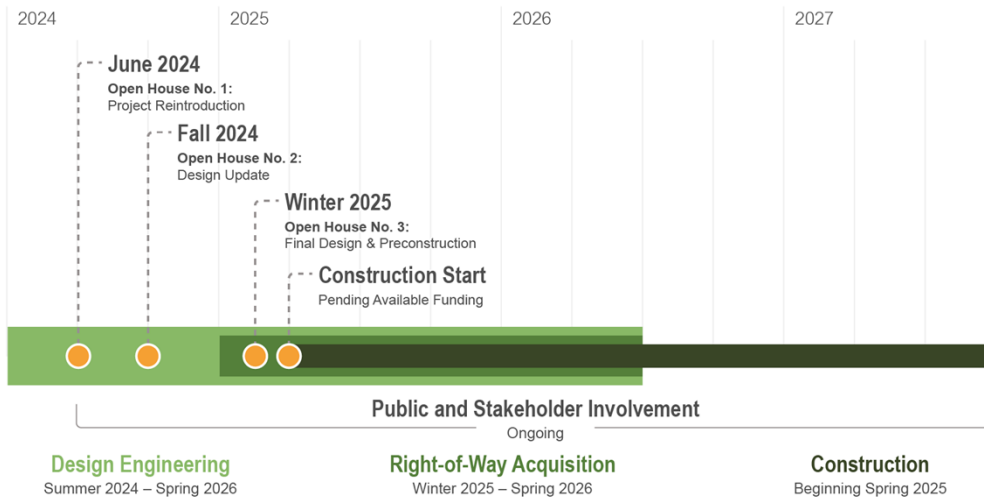
- Existing culvert is long enough to accommodate 5- or 4-lane section – replacement is being considered but not required
- Anadromous stream requires fish passage considerations
- Replacement structure options may include:
  - Larger corrugated structure
  - Prefabricated buried bridge
  - Single-span bridge
- Potentially design replacement to accommodate moose and pedestrians

The highway crosses Soldotna Creek near Mackey Lake Road and the existing culvert is being considered for replacement. New structures that will be considered range from a larger corrugated structure to a single-span bridge. Replacement of the existing culvert will be evaluated based on available funding, fish passage requirements, and potentially accommodating moose and pedestrians.



# PROJECT SCHEDULE

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUED PUBLIC INPUT



This is the first of three rounds of public meetings planned for this project during the project design phase, which will occur from summer 2024 to summer 2026. The same project team plans to return to Sterling and Soldotna for the next open houses in fall 2024 to share an update on the design with the communities and hear comments. The third open houses are planned to occur in early 2025 to share the proposed final design and update communities on preconstruction activities, which may begin in spring 2025 pending available funding. Throughout the project, the project team wants to hear your comments and concerns.



Your input is valuable.

Tell us what you think about safety in the corridor and your experiences.

What is important to you and the community? What has the project team not yet thought about? Your feedback will be considered as the project team moves forward with design. Comments and questions will be accepted throughout the project.

## PROJECT CONTACTS

- Jake Gondek, DOT&PF Project Manager
- Julia Hanson, DOT&PF Design Manager
- Jeff Schock, QAP Construction Project Manager
- Steve Noble, DOWL Design Project Manager
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## THANK YOU!



This concludes the presentation. Please share your comments and questions with the project team through the website at [www.SterlingSafetyImprovements.com](http://www.SterlingSafetyImprovements.com), by email at [SterlingSafetyImprovements@dowl.com](mailto: SterlingSafetyImprovements@dowl.com), or by calling 907-562-2000. Thank you.