



OPEN HOUSE

Soldotna

October 24, 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.



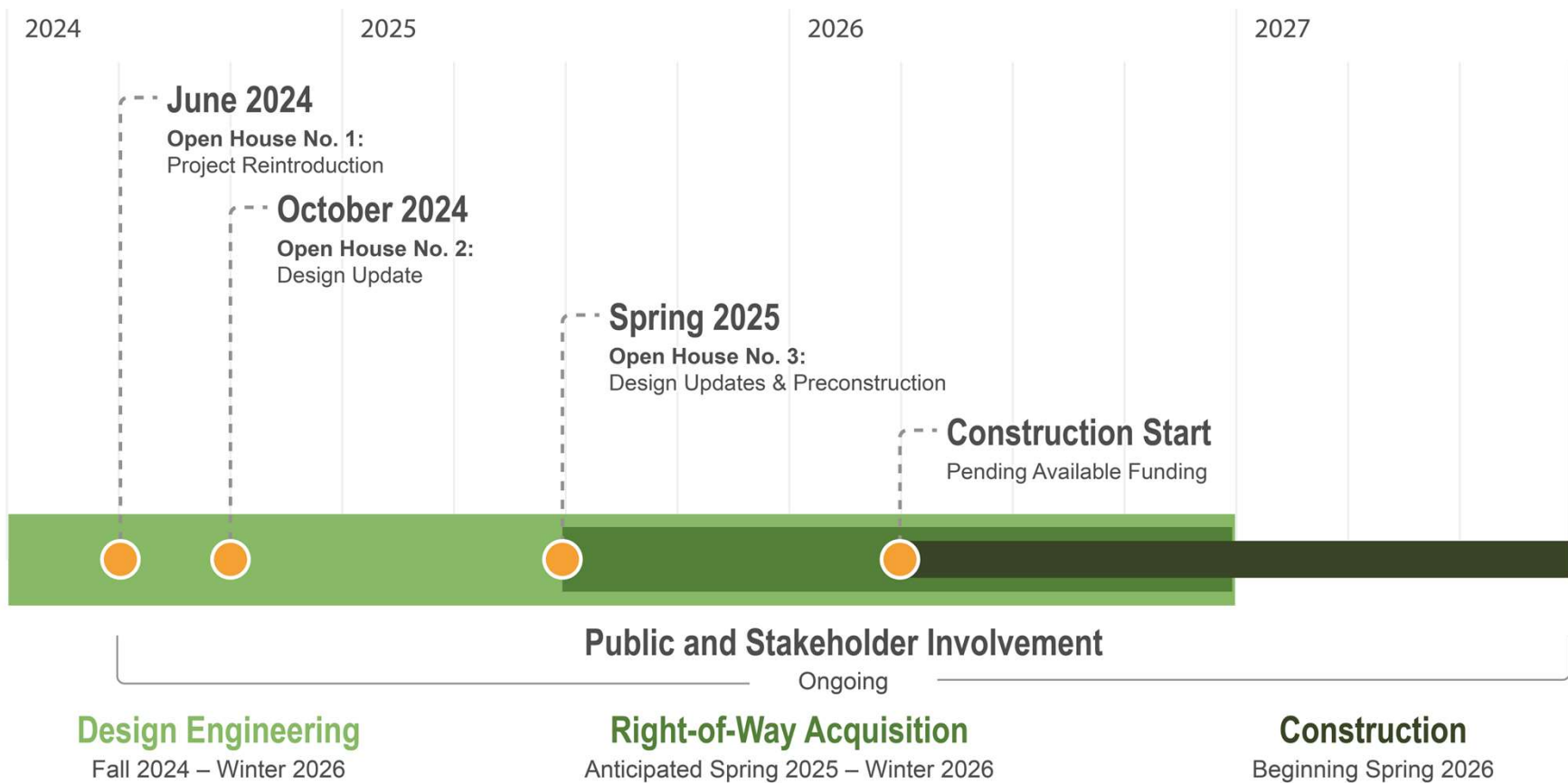
PROJECT AREA

VICINITY & OVERVIEW MAP



PROJECT SCHEDULE

PROGRESSIVE DESIGN BUILD INITIATION



PROJECT OVERVIEW

DESCRIPTION, PURPOSE, & GOALS



Purpose: Improve Safety and Reduce Congestion



Goals:

- Provide a safe and reliable roadway
 - Fatal and major 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 injuries
- Allow for decommissioning of the Traffic Safety Corridor designation
- Accommodate the seasonal traffic increases
- Balance needs to maintain access to businesses and neighborhoods

ANIMAL-VEHICLE COLLISIONS

STATISTICS AND IMPROVEMENTS



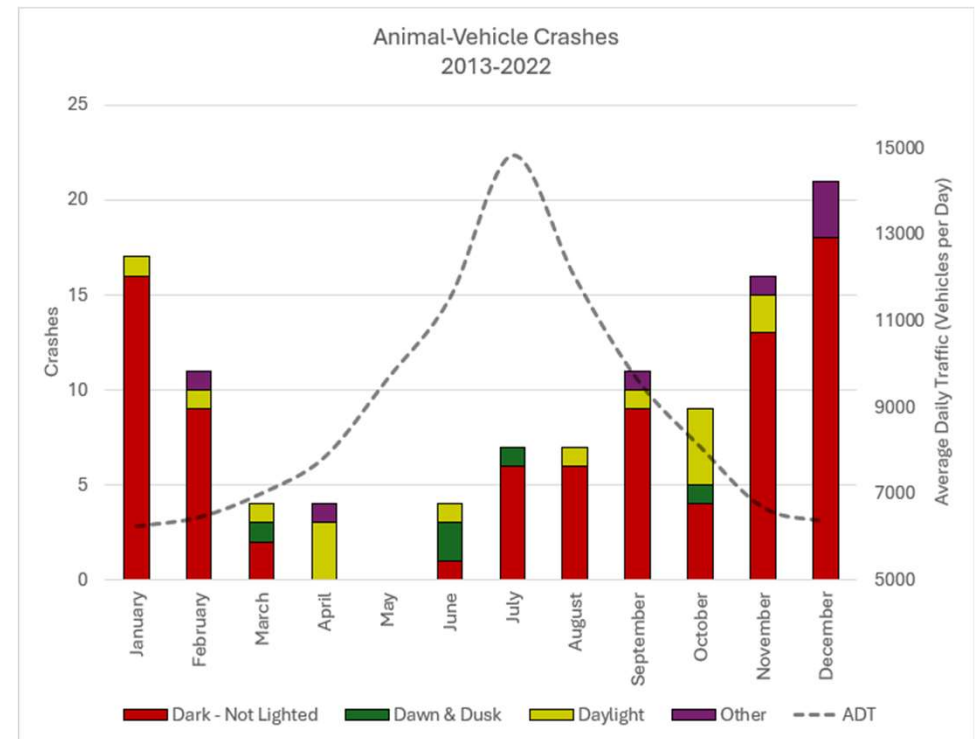
Animal-vehicle crashes account for more than 25% of accidents on the project corridor

- 70% of animal-vehicle collisions in winter months
- 80% of animal-vehicle collisions occur in “dark” or “dusk” conditions



Solution options:

- Continuous lighting
- Clear right-of-way
- Up-size culverts where possible to allow animals to cross under highway



RIGHT-OF-WAY ACQUISITIONS

TYPES OF ROW ACQUISITIONS



ROW Type	Description
Full or Partial Fee Acquisition	Fee acquisition is the purchase of all the right, title, and interest in land. The fee acquisition can be of the full property or a portion of the property. It is DOT&PF's policy to acquire all right-of-way in fee when feasible.
Permanent Easement	A legal right to use and/or enter upon another's land for a specific purpose. When someone is granted an easement, they are granted the legal right to use the land, but the legal title to the land itself remains with the owner of the land.
Temporary Construction Easement (TCE)	A non-permanent right to use and/or enter upon land owned by a property owner. It is valid for a set amount of time, and it is compensable. A TCE is required when additional room to construct the project is needed.
Temporary Construction Permit (TCP)	A non-permanent right to use and/or enter upon land owned by a property owner. It is valid for a set amount of time, and it is non-compensable. A TCP is obtained to construct an improvement for a landowner resulting in a betterment to the property, for example a driveway approach to match the new roadway surface.

RIGHT-OF-WAY ACQUISITIONS

ROW ACQUISITION PROCESS SIMPLIFIED



Opportunities for Property Owners to Participate in the ROW Process

1. Valuation

- For acquisitions over \$25,000:
 - A third-party appraiser will reach out to a property owner to invite them or a designee to attend the appraisal inspection.
 - The appraiser will estimate their opinion of fair market value in an Appraisal Report.
 - The DOT&PF's review appraiser will provide a formal review of the Appraisal Report and establish a Recommendation of Just Compensation.
- For acquisitions under \$25,000:
 - Qualified DOT&PF staff or ROW consultants will prepare a Waiver Valuation Report that estimates fair market value.
- The DOT&PF's Regional ROW Chief will review and sign either the Recommendation of Just Compensation or the Waiver Valuation to establish the **just compensation**.

2. Negotiations

- DOT&PF will deliver a written offer of Just Compensation and give the property owner a reasonable amount of time to consider the offer, ask questions, or request clarification.
- Property owners may provide additional information or make reasonable counter offers and proposals to DOT&PF.
- DOT&PF will consider any reasonable requests that are made during negotiations.

3. Closing

- Once an agreement is reached, the acquisition documents are reviewed and signed by the property owner and DOT&PF.
- All liens, mortgages, and encumbrances on the property must be released (title clearing) before a transaction can be completed. Property owners can assist in the closing process by providing information and documents that are needed to clear title.
- After an agreement is reached, it is expected that the transaction will close, and payment will be received in 60 to 90 days. However, if title clearing is extremely complex, it may take longer. Owners whose properties are free and clear of encumbrances can expect to close the transaction and receive payment sooner.

What Does Just Compensation Mean?

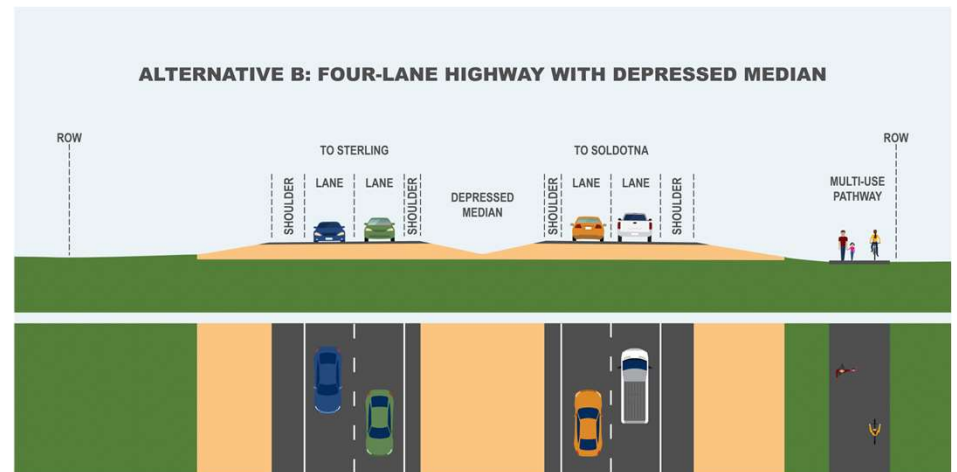
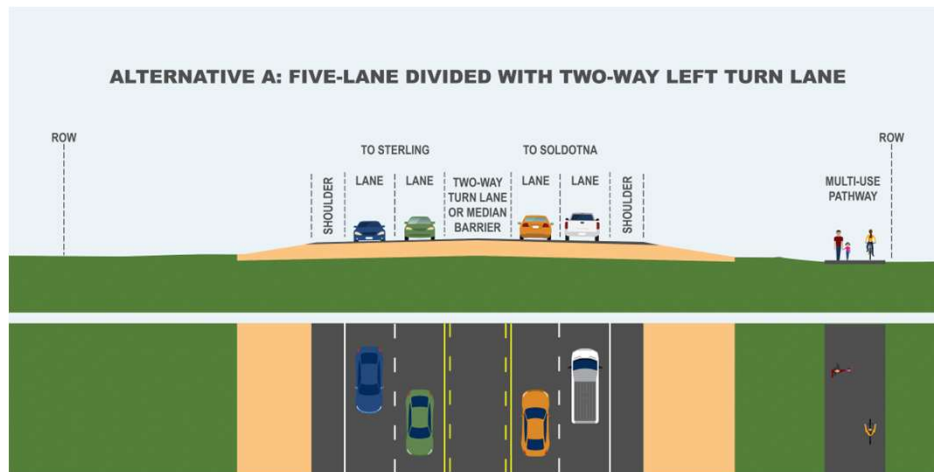
- It is fair and equitable to both the property owner and the public.
- It includes the cost of items in acquisition areas such as fencing, sheds, wells, and septic systems.
- It may not be less than the amount established in the approved appraisal report or waiver valuation as the fair market value for the property.

REFINING A HIGHWAY DESIGN

DESIGN ALTERNATIVES A & B



Two primary design alternatives, as shown at the summer public meetings:



ALTERNATIVE A: PROS AND CONS

FIVE-LANE WITH CENTER TWO-WAY LEFT TURN LANE (TWLTL)



Positives:

- Allows unrestricted access to driveways and other side streets
- Studies have shown up to 20% reduction in overall crashes most due to reduction in rear-end crashes
- Lower construction costs relative to other road designs
- Familiar to motorists since it is similar to other Kenai Area highways



Negatives:

- Has not been shown to significantly reduce head-on collisions
- Overlapping left turn movements can lead to crashes
- Illegal use of center lane as a passing lane
- Illegal use by vehicles turning left from minor roads as an acceleration or merge lane
- Increased snow removal and maintenance burden
- Wider crossing width for pedestrians, cyclists, and other users

Crash study source: <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/08046/index.cfm>

ALTERNATIVE B: PROS

FOUR-LANE DIVIDED HIGHWAY WITH UNPAVED MEDIAN



Safety Improvements

- Reduces head-on collisions up to 70% (24 fewer, saving 8 lives)
- Reduces overall crashes by up to 50% (201 fewer)
- Provides space for emergency vehicles and vehicles in distress
- Provides refuge for crossing pedestrians and cyclists



Improve Snow Removal Operations

- Reduces lane miles that must be plowed compared to Alternative A
- Increases snow storage space available



Improve Traffic Flow

- Decrease overall travel times and delays
- Decrease idling and wait times to make turns
- Increased travel efficiency through corridor

Head on collision statistics source: https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/roadway_dept/strat_approach/brochure/docs/FHWA-SA-21-025_Head_On_Crashes.pdf
Crash rates for non-traversable median vs TWLTL: NCHRP report 420, https://accessmanagement.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/NCHRP_rpt_420.pdf

ALTERNATIVE B: CONS

WHAT IS THE TRADEOFF?



Restricts left-turn access at some driveway and side streets

- Potential impact to businesses if access is made more difficult



Potentially higher construction cost

- More earthwork associated with divided embankment and median
- Needs for construction of frontage roads and side streets to maintain access



Potentially larger overall footprint if median width exceeds comparable center turn lane

- Increases environmental impacts
- Increased impacts to utilities
- Increases right-of-way needs

IMPROVING ALTERNATIVE B:

TAILORING DESIGN TO THE NEEDS OF THE STERLING HIGHWAY



We've heard the public concerns loud and clear

- Limited left-turn access from highway is both inconvenient and potentially damaging to businesses
- U-turns are difficult for large vehicles, especially considering the speed of traffic on the highway



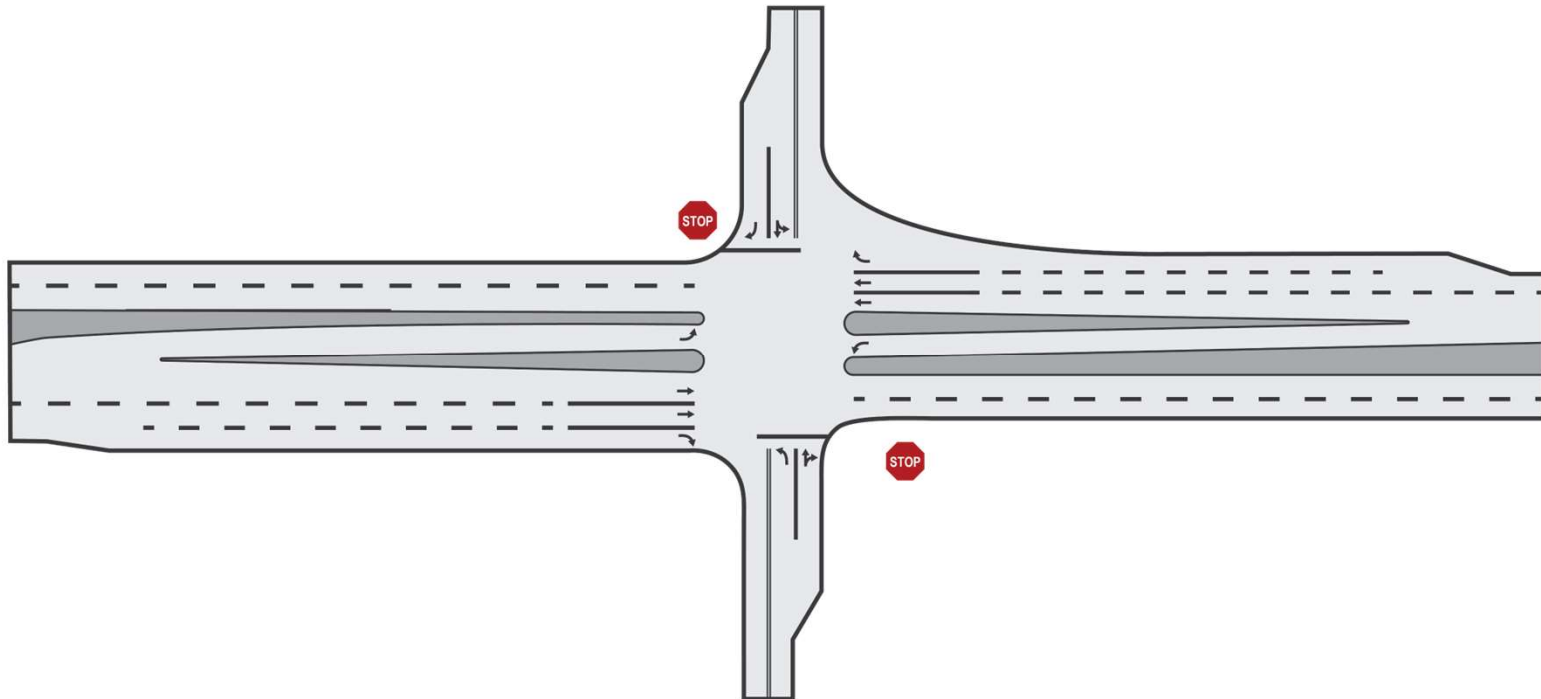
How can we improve Alternative B to address these concerns?

- Add more median openings
- Add local and frontage roads
- Implement divided highway intersection options that are more flexible, accessible, and safer than conventional stop-controlled median left turns
- Add short sections of five lanes

DESIGN ALTERNATIVES LOOKING FORWARD

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL DESIGN SOLUTIONS BEING CONSIDERED: LEFT & U-TURNS

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL DESIGN SOLUTIONS
BEING CONSIDERED: LEFT & U-TURN



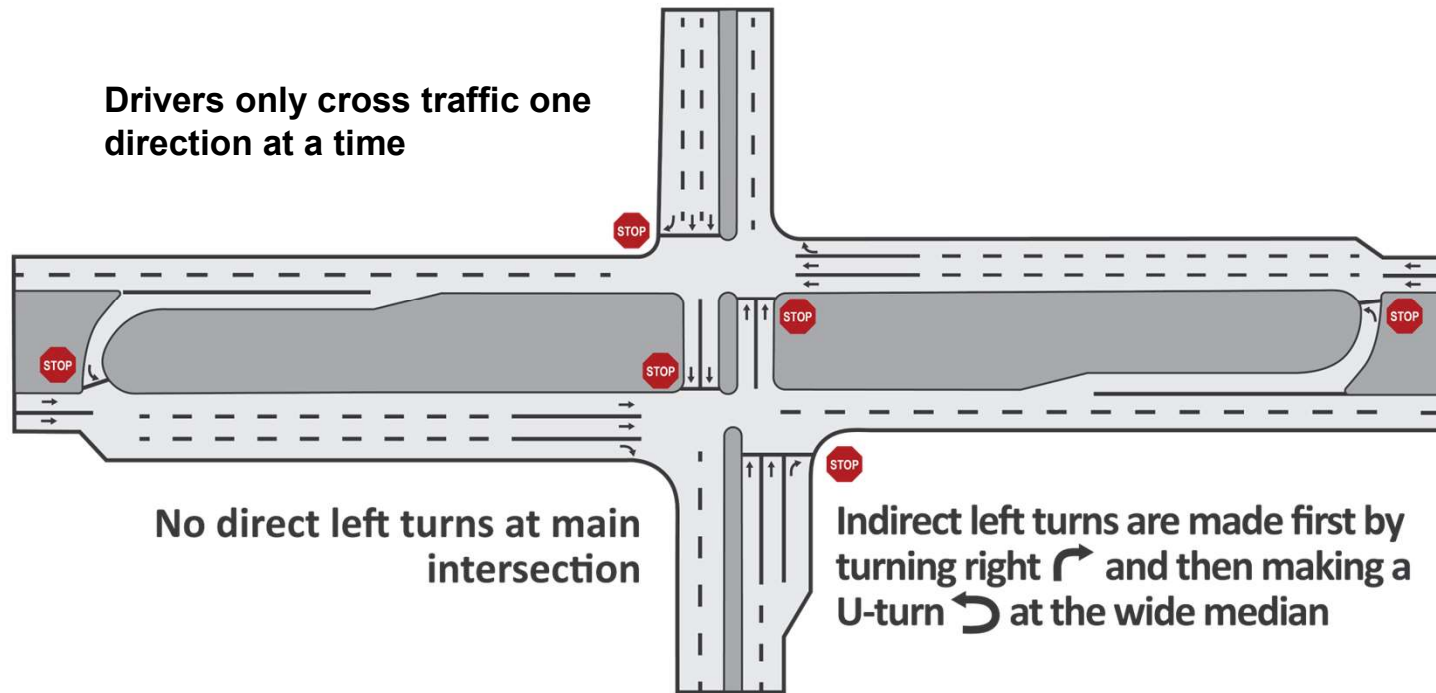
DESIGN ALTERNATIVES LOOKING FORWARD

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL DESIGN SOLUTIONS BEING CONSIDERED: LEFT & U-TURNS



EXAMPLES OF AN UNSIGNALIZED MEDIAN U-TURN INTERSECTION

SOURCE: FHWA



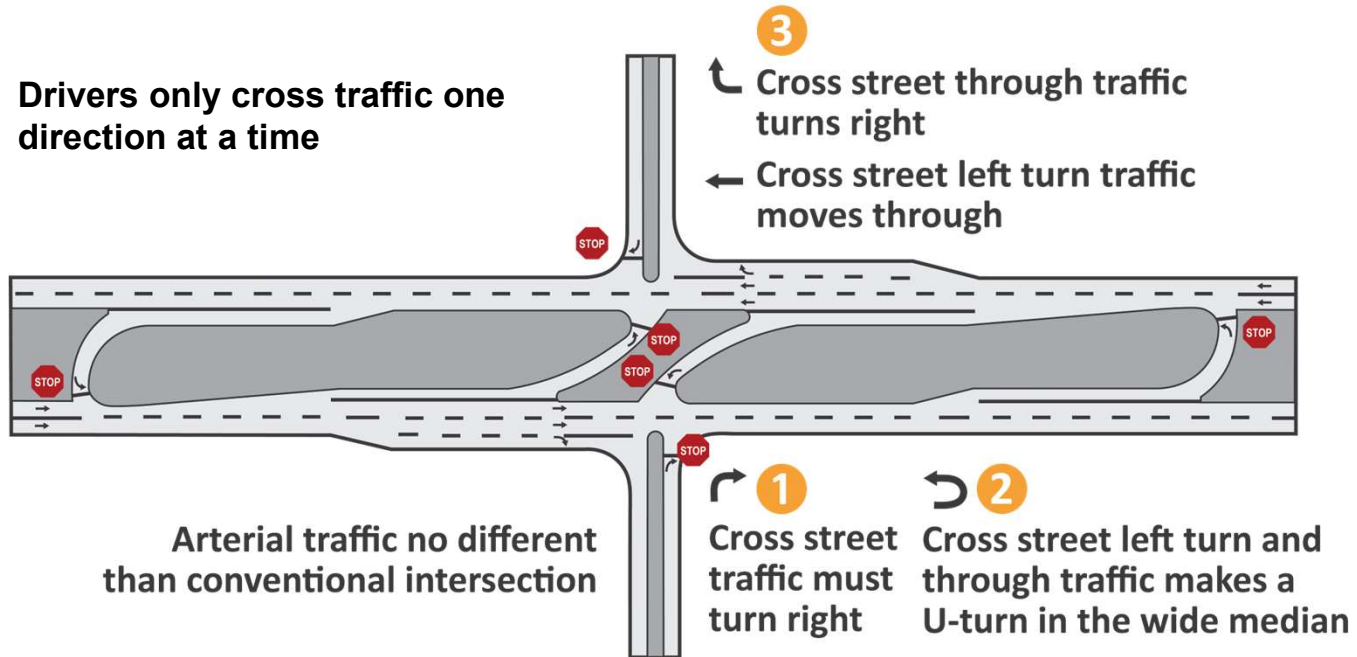
DESIGN ALTERNATIVES LOOKING FORWARD

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL DESIGN SOLUTIONS BEING CONSIDERED: LEFT & U-TURNS



EXAMPLES OF AN UNSIGNALIZED RESTRICTED CROSSING U-TURN INTERSECTION

SOURCE: FHWA

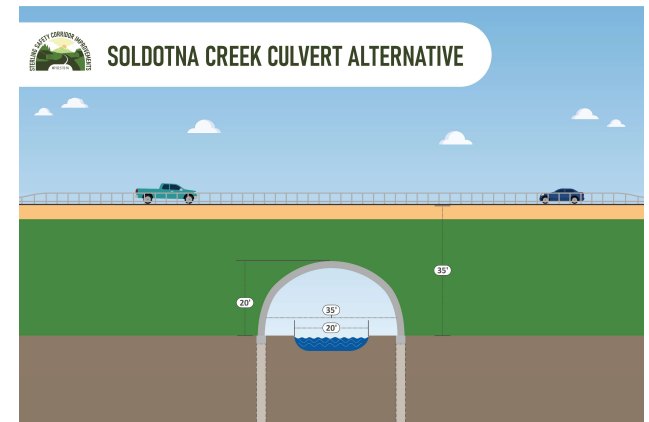
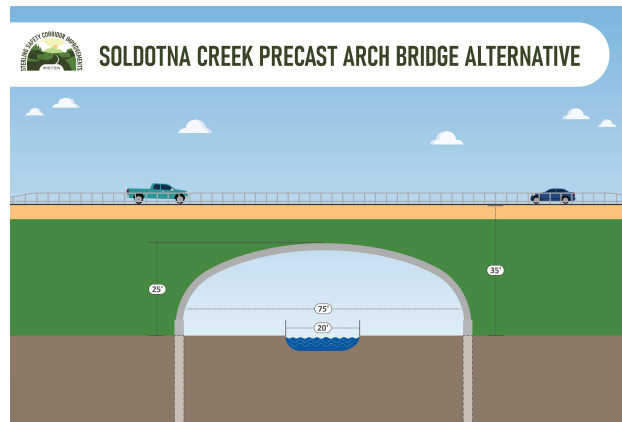
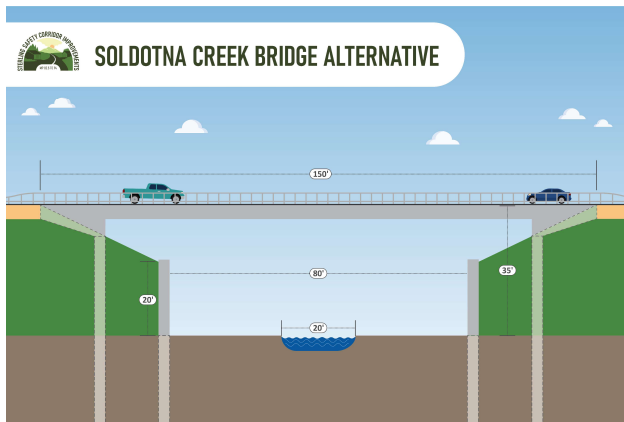


DESIGN ALTERNATIVES LOOKING FORWARD

EVALUATION OF SOLDOTNA CREEK CROSSING



The existing culvert will be replaced to improve fish passage.





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



Stephanie Queen, Public Involvement Lead

THANK YOU!



Email: SterlingSafetyImprovements@dowl.com



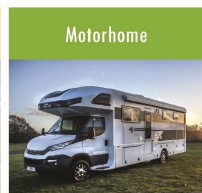
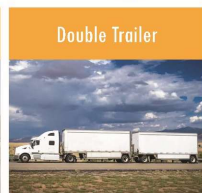
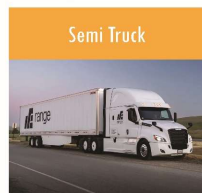
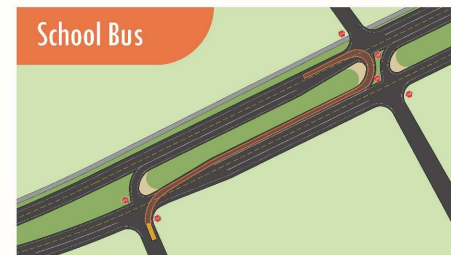
Website: www.SterlingSafetyImprovements.com



Phone: (907) 562-2000

Not Your Typical U-Turn

- Safer than stop-controlled intersection
- Turn right to then turn left – only cross one direction of traffic at a time
- Only necessary to wait for break in traffic from one direction at a time
- Wide medians allow for easy maneuvering by all vehicle and trailers



Fatality & Serious Injury Crashes

(2013-2022)



- Areas with Multiple Fatalities and Serious Injuries
- Head-On Fatal Crash
- Head-On Serious Injury Crash
- Other Fatal Crash
- Other Serious Injury Crash



WE HEARD YOU!

Public Comments on the Corridor



Traffic Lights at Major Intersections

Many comments advocate for traffic lights at key intersections, including: Mackey Lake, Fairway Drive, Forest Lane, Robinson Loop, Scout Lake, and others. Residents emphasize the difficulty making left turns (especially during peak traffic periods), as well as safety concerns.

I would like to see lights at Forest & Mackey Lake, helping to slow down traffic, hoping to allow people to safely get on the highway.
- Lauri

Why not just put in some stop lights and reduce the speed limit?
- Jacqueline

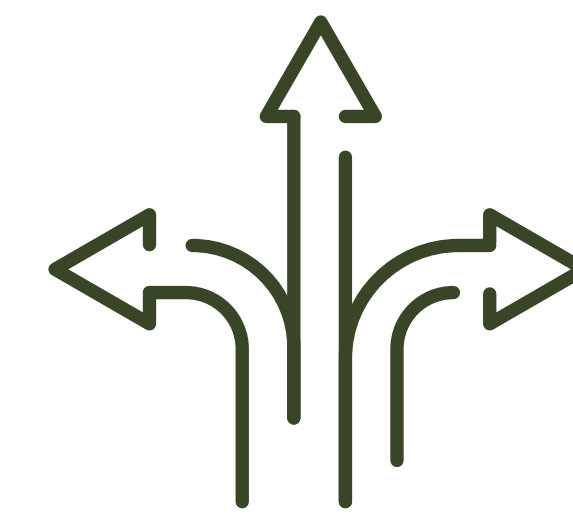


Speed Limit

Several people suggest reducing the speed limit to 45 mph along key sections of the highway, as a way to improve safety. Others are opposed to reducing the speed limit, believing it is more practical to maintain the current 55 mph.

The section of Hwy between Sterling and Soldotna should be 45 MPH.
- Brian

If you can't keep the speed limit to 55 MPH then don't mess with it!!!!!!!
- Fred



Turning Lanes

There is strong support for adding turning lanes at busy intersections, with residents expressing concerns about the current risk of rear-end collisions and the difficulty of making safe turns without designated lanes.

Please be sure safety is a top priority by assuring turning lanes are included in the project.
- Denali

I believe that turning lanes are absolutely needed on several roads especially Evergreen Dr.
- Hugh

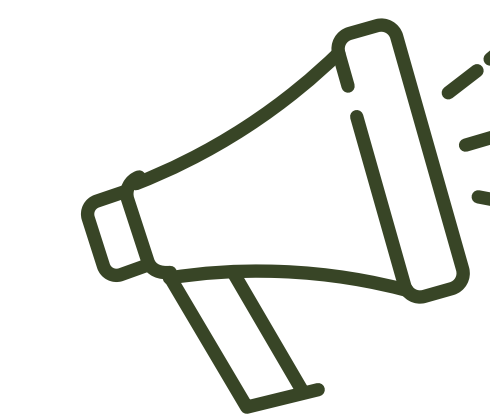
I'm praying for a turn lane at the entrance to Lake Terrace Drive.
- Cecelia

As many have stated in the past, we need turn lanes.
- Lauri



Better Enforcement

I would like to see more police presence during high traffic volume, to encourage people to slow down, at least thru the summer high traffic months.
- Lauri



Noise

Increased traffic noise due to reduced tree cover and the addition of more hard surfaces is a common concern. Some request the addition of sound barriers to mitigate the noise.

Concern with highway noise and lights. Don't want it to be like Anchorage.
- Anonymous

Less trees and more hard surfaces is a sure-fire way to add more ambient noise and the highway noise can already be too loud at times. Not including noise mitigation would be a disservice to the community.
- Jason



Safety and Traffic Flow

While safety is a recurring theme, there is skepticism about whether the proposed project truly improves road safety. Commenters want examples of other similar projects and evidence, such as statistics, showing improvements in safety and travel times.

WE HEARD YOU!

Public Comments on the Corridor



Winter Maintenance and Snow Removal

Comments stress the need for better snow removal and road maintenance, particularly on a divided highway. There are concerns that without adequate winter maintenance, the improvements won't reduce accidents, especially during heavy snow seasons.

“ Please consider road maintenance and snow removal. If necessary, obtain input from DOT maintenance personnel. Believe me, reducing road maintenance is a significant benefit.

- Doug

“ I think the state is being negligent in planning if there are no preparations or funds set aside for improved/speedy snow removal and more frequent sanding. A four lane divided highway covered in snow does not equal less accidents.

- Alice



Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure

Residents are generally supportive of a separated bike/pedestrian path for the length of the project, given the danger of walking or cycling on the highway's shoulder, however one commenter questioned how the bike path would coexist with ATV traffic.

“ We need a sidewalk walking path! Many, many, many other AK communities have them (Nikiski, Tok, Homer, Wasilla, Palmer). We need along this crazy highway.

- Tammy

“ We love the bike path plan and are very much looking forward to being able to get to town safely on bikes!

- Donna



Project Schedule, Urgency

Many residents expressed some form of 'planning fatigue,' and want to see the project constructed (and not just studied).

“ Speed up this project!!!! I was t-boned on this road last year!!!

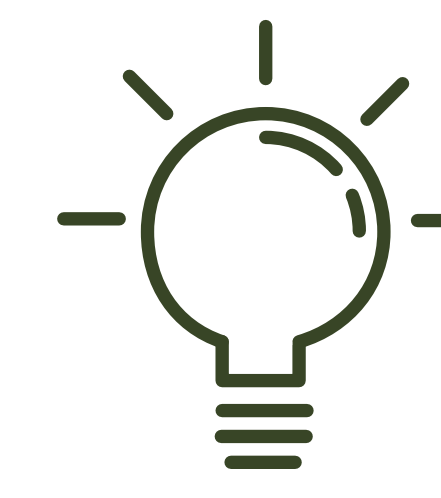
- Aaron

“ about time, can't happen soon enough.

- Roy

“ The process to upgrade the Sterling highway has been in planning for way too many decades. The State needs to move forward with construction and improvements.

- Ric



Lighting and Visibility

Residents are split on the issue of continuous lighting throughout the corridor. While most comments were supportive, some residents were concerned about light pollution and the cost of maintenance.

“ Love the lighting option. Will be huge help with car and animal accidents.

- Linda

“ This project should definitely include lighting for the entire length. Many problems would be minimized or eliminated.

- Anonymous

“ I am adamantly opposed to full lights the entire corridor. Light pollution cost of power and replacing bulbs is too high a price to pay.

- Alice



ROW Acquisition

Multiple residents express concerns about the right-of-way acquisition process, particularly how it will affect their property lines, buffer zones, and businesses. Some property owners are worried about losing parking or being forced to relocate, while others demand clarity on how much of their land will be affected. Specific locations such as Back Trackers Creek Trailer Park are highlighted as vulnerable to losing space between homes and the highway, which could render certain properties inaccessible or unusable.

Property owners request clarity on the right-of-way (ROW) acquisition process, fair compensation, and the impact on their land and businesses.