Frequently Asked Questions

State / Federal Project No.: CFHWY00130 / 0A33026
FAQ Last Updated June 2025

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1. GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q: What is the purpose of this project? A: The Sterling Safety Corridor Improvements Milepost (MP) 82.5 to 94 project is a federally funded project to reconstruct the Sterling Highway between Sterling and Soldotna to improve safety and reduce congestion. The goals of this project are to:

- Provide a safe and reliable roadway that supports the efficient movement of goods, services, and people
- Reduce the number of fatal and serious injury crashes (e.g., head-on crashes)
- Allow for decommissioning of the Traffic Safety Corridor by constructing a safer roadway that is less reliant on institutional and enforcement measures to abate crashes
- Better accommodate the seasonal increase of tourist and recreational traffic
- Minimize inconvenience to motorists and impacts to private property access

Q: Why is this project needed? A: Due to elevated crash rates, this section of the Sterling Highway was designated as a 'Traffic Safety Corridor' in 2009, which enacted educational and enforcement controls and mobilized resources aimed at improving safety (including a double-fine zone) until more permanent engineering measures could be implemented. Since being designated a safety corridor, some safety metrics have improved, but fatal and major injury crash rates remain well above national averages with nearly half of these resulting from head-on collisions.

In addition, traffic volumes have increased over 400% since the 1970s. Traffic volumes already exceed the current two-lane roadway's capacity during much of the summer season, and traffic volumes are expected to increase another 30% over the next 30 years. Summer average daily traffic volumes are more than double winter average daily traffic volumes. During the summer season the road is congested and passing and turning movements are difficult, which leads to elevated crashes from driver frustration. During the winter months, traffic flows more freely, but lack of street lighting, wildlife on the road, and slippery conditions lead to much higher rates of fatal and major injury crashes and animal-vehicle collisions compared to the summer months.

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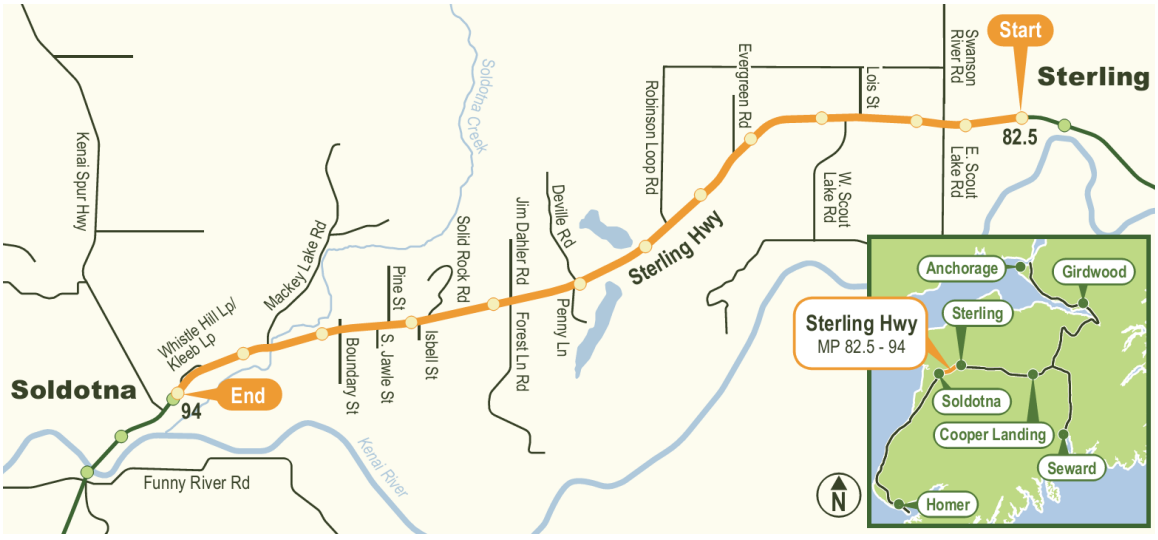
This project is necessary to address both the safety and capacity deficiencies of the current highway configuration.

Q: What is a 'Progressive Design-Build' project? What are the benefits? A: Unlike the traditional step-by-step 'design-bid-build' project delivery model where the design is completed, the project is advertised for contractor bids, and then the low bidder is awarded the construction, in a 'Progressive Design-Build' (PDB) model the contractor and design consultant work together to advance design and construction tasks as a joint team. PDB is also known as "collaborative delivery" and "value-based contractor selection". By integrating the contractor into the preconstruction efforts, the PDB approach is expected to:

- Encourage collaboration to improve project efficiency
- Foster engineer/contractor innovation
- Lower risk of budget overrun
- Increase flexibility of the construction schedule and construction phasing
- Maintain continuity of project knowledge through construction

Q: What happened to the previous project/design? Will this project consider comments and concerns shared during that project? A: The previous design effort was paused so that a plan and project delivery method could be developed to better address public and stakeholder input received. Comments and input provided by the public and stakeholders in response to the original study in 2015 are documented and will be considered during the current project.

Q: What is the project area? A: The project area begins in Sterling at Sterling Highway Milepost (MP) 82.5 just east of the Weigh Station and continues to Soldotna at MP 94 near the Devin Drive intersection at Fred Meyer's.



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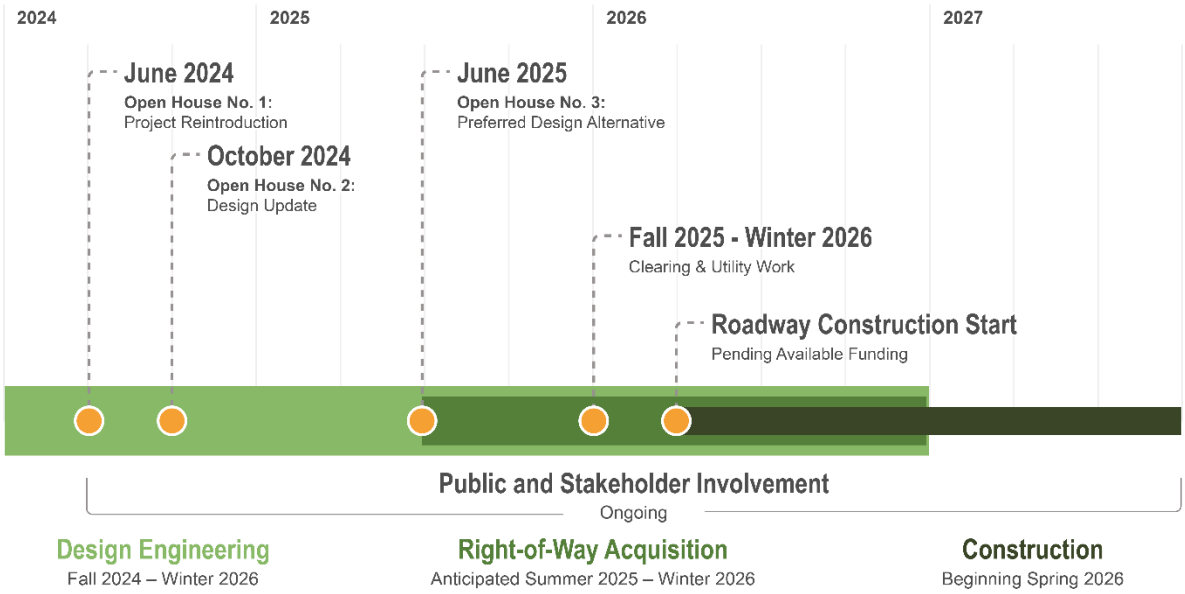
2. PROJECT SCHEDULE AND FUNDING

Q: What is the overall project schedule? A: The project is currently in the design phase, which is expected to continue through the winter of 2026. During this phase, the project team will gather input from the public, and collect and analyze updated engineering data including survey, traffic and safety, geotechnical, hydrology and hydraulics, and utilities.

The project team developed and evaluated design alternatives, which were presented to the public and stakeholders at public open house meetings for input and feedback. The preferred design alternative was presented to the community at a pair of public open houses in June 2025. The project team is beginning permitting and preparing for clearing and utility relocations to allow construction activities to begin in 2026, or as soon as funding allows.

Construction funding is identified in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) for fiscal year FY26, which starts October 2025 (https://dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/cip/stip/). While some activities such as clearing and utility relocations may begin in late 2025, substantial construction activities will likely not commence until the spring of 2026. This is a federally funded project, with a 9.03% state match.



3. DESIGN QUESTIONS

Q: How do I see the actual plans? What design alternative is being considered? A: The Final Environmental Assessment for the project was completed in 2021 and considered several design alternatives, including a 'do nothing' option. That report concluded that a divided 4-lane highway with median breaks best met the project goals and was therefore identified as the 'preferred alternative.' That report and other project materials are available on the project website, at: www.SterlingSafetyImprovements.com

However, for the current progressive design-build project, DOT&PF has tasked a new project team with re-assessing the previous work and recommendations (including the previous preferred alternative) to balance the project's overall safety benefits with the need to minimize impacts to private property access. For the past year, the design team has worked through an updated traffic and safety analysis and solicited comments and feedback from the public on several design concepts presented at a series of public meetings and events. The preferred (recommended) design alternative is now available for public review and comment on the project website.

Q: Is this project anticipating leaving any 2-lane segments in the corridor? A: The 2-lane alternative was considered the 'no build' alternative in the previous environmental assessment and was determined to not meet the purpose and need of this project; therefore, it is not being considered.

Q: Many people I've talked to don't want a separated highway with a median. Why not just build a 5-lane section with a center turn lane like the Kenai Spur Highway? A: The project team was tasked with evaluating two highway concepts through the design phase – a divided 4-lane (two lanes in each direction) with a depressed median and a 5-lane section (two lanes in each direction with a continuous center left-turn lane). Research shows that a four-lane divided highway with a median is the safer option and would do a better job of reducing fatal and serious injury crashes - particularly in areas with higher traffic volumes, faster speeds, and multiple driveways and access points. Medians provide a recovery area for vehicles that inadvertently leave the roadway because of ice or other difficulties, rather than placing that vehicle directly in conflict with oncoming traffic. However, we recognize that the 4-lane alternative does not provide the same level of direct access to adjacent properties as provided by the 5-lane alternative.

After updating the traffic safety analysis, the project team concluded that a 5-lane section the entire length of the project would not meet the overall project objectives of significantly reducing fatal and serious injury crashes, and so creative solutions and/or compromises would need to be identified, such as developing local roads to provide alternative access to impacted properties.

The design team's proposed solution includes roughly two-thirds of the corridor as a divided 4-lane with depressed medians, and approximately one-third of the project as a 5-lane design with a two-way center left-turn lane. This proposed design will achieve the safety-objectives of the project, while recognizing and responding to specific instances where a center turn lane is more appropriate, with consideration to which

segments of the highway have historically had higher crash rates. The design also incorporates more median breaks than previously shown, as well as new frontage roads and off-highway local road connections.

As part of its assessment of design alternatives, the project team did evaluate available data from the Kenai Spur Highway. Though there are some similarities, as shown in the table below, there are also noteworthy differences. One significant difference between the two highways is the number of crashes resulting in fatalities. During the 10-year study period, there were nine traffic-related fatalities on the Sterling Highway Safety Corridor, compared to one fatality on the Kenai Spur Highway. Eight of the fatalities on the Sterling Highway Safety Corridor were a result of head-on collisions. There were no head-on collision fatalities on the Kenai Spur Highway.

Sterling Highway (MP 82.5-94)	Kenai Spur Highway (MP 5-8)
Average Daily Traffic: 6,000 to 15,000 vehicles/day	Average Daily Traffic: 9,000 to 11,000 vehicles/day
Peak Seasonal Traffic: 13,000 to 19,000 vehicles/day	Peak Seasonal Traffic: 11,000 to 13,000 vehicles/day
Percent Trucks: 7.7%	Percent Trucks: 4.7%
Number of Driveways per mile: ~16	Number of Driveways per mile: ~20
Speed Limit: 55 MPH	Speed Limit: 55 MPH
Percentage of Crashes that are Animal-Vehicle Crashes: 25%	Percentage of Crashes that are Animal-Vehicle Crashes: 50%
Number of Fatalities (10-year Study Period): 9	Number of Fatalities (10-year Study Period): 1
Fatalities due to Head-On Collisions (10-year Study Period): 8	Fatalities due to Head-On Collisions (10-year Study Period): 0

Q: What are the potential benefits of a separated highway design with medians, and what are the downsides? A: Medians physically separate opposing lanes of traffic on a roadway and can be depressed, flush, or raised. They are constructed from a range of materials, such as grass or other landscaping, concrete and steel barriers, or painted lines.

The primary benefit of medians is improved safety, specifically:

- Preventing head-on collisions between vehicles traveling in opposite directions
- Reducing the risk of severe crashes resulting in serious injury or fatalities
- Providing space for emergency vehicles or vehicles in distress to pull safely off the roadway

Medians can also reduce long-term maintenance costs by improving snow removal operations, reducing the number of lane miles that must be plowed and maintained, and improving water quality of run-off as part of a stormwater management system.

While medians provide significant safety and maintenance benefits, there are some downsides to consider, including:

- Restricted left-turn access at some driveways and side streets, potentially requiring a right turn or U-turn to access the property or business.
- Higher reliance on side streets and frontage roads to maintain access.
- Potentially higher construction cost due to earthwork associated with divided embankment and median and the need for construction of frontage roads and side streets to maintain access.
- Potentially larger overall footprint (i.e. width of the highway) if median width exceeds comparable center turn lane and frontage roads are constructed. This can create additional impacts to the environment, utilities, and right-of-way acquisition needs.

Q: With a 4-lane roadway with a median, what intersections are being considered to have left turn access (i.e. a 'median break')? A: In areas of the project where a divided 4-lane is recommended, the design incorporates two different types of intersections. The first is a traditional 4-way intersection allowing for full left-turn access onto and off the highway. There are 10 of these proposed in the project, for example, at intersections of West Robinson Loop Road, Jim Dahler Road/Forest Lane, and Fairway Drive.

The second type of intersection we see in the 4-lane divided sections is what is referred to as a Restricted Crossing U-turn or 'R-CUT.' The R-CUT provides a protected left-hand turn off the highway, and these are strategically located to align with major neighborhoods and intersections. The benefit of the R-CUT is that it performs better from a safety standpoint than a traditional 4-way intersection, because it removes conflict points where vehicles entering and exiting the highway are both trying to turn left through the same space. And for vehicles needing to make a 'U-turn' on the highway, they provide a safe, protected place to come to a complete stop – out of the traffic flow – and wait to make a comfortable 90-degree left-hand turn going the opposite direction. There are 5 of these proposed in the project, for example at Murray Lane and Whisper Lake Street.

Q: Aren't U-turns (if required in alternative intersection style) less safe than making left-hand turns from a center turn lane? How will large vehicles such as semi-trucks, RV's, or vehicles pulling trailers be able to safely make a U-turn? A: Left-hand turns and U-turns from a center two-way left turn lane both create potential safety issues for vehicles travelling in opposing directions competing for the same space. Left hand turns entering the highway from a side-street or driveway require the turning vehicle to cross both directions of traffic, requiring a gap in traffic from both directions. U-turns from protected turn lanes eliminate the conflict associated with vehicle travelling in opposing directions potentially trying to occupy the same space at the same time. U-turns from protected turn lanes also place motorists in a position where they only have to wait for gaps in traffic from on direction at a time.

Alternative intersection styles that reduce risks associated with left turns were considered. These alternative designs use increased median widths, traffic patterns that only require crossing one direction of travel at a time, and dedicated turn lanes that protect turning vehicles from traffic. The result is easier and safer turning movements. The intersection designs in the preferred design alternative have been shown to substantially increase safety, decrease delays, and can accommodate any size vehicle.

Both intersection types – the traditional and the R-CUT – safely and effectively accommodate turning movements of very large vehicles, including vehicles towing boats and trailers, recreational vehicles, school buses, garbage trucks, and single-unit delivery trucks.

Q: Will there be new stop lights? If so – where? A: The project team investigated whether conditions meet federal standards for installing new traffic signals at major intersections, such as: Mackey Lake Road, Forest Lane, and Swanson River Road. This evaluation is guided by the Federal Highway Administration's *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD), available online here: https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/index.htm.

The updated traffic and safety analysis determined that none of the intersections meet federal standards for installing new traffic signals. Some intersections may meet warrants for traffic signals in the future – for example the Mackey Lake Road intersection – so the team is making sure that the roadway as designed will accommodate future traffic signal installation without significant reconstruction.

4. IMPACTS TO BUSINESSES, NEIGHBORING PROPERTIES, AND RESIDENTS

Q: What are the right-of-way needs for this project? How far into my property will the project encroach? A: The State of Alaska DOT&PF has been considering widening the Sterling Highway to four lanes since the mid-1980's and has already purchased much of the right-of-way (ROW) anticipated to be needed for the project. The existing ROW width throughout the project corridor varies from 180 feet to over 200 feet, enough to accommodate highway expansion in nearly all locations.

Additional ROW easements and/or acquisition may be required at some locations to accommodate intersection and access improvements, such as realignment of intersecting roads, new frontage roads, new side streets, and reconnecting driveways, but these needs (if any) are not identified at this point.

We expect to have a better idea of ROW needs in summer 2025, at which point the DOT&PF ROW team will reach out to property owners potentially impacted. DOT&PF will follow all federal and state regulations and statutes for any ROW identified for acquisition. Additional information can be found on the DOT&PF Real Estate/Right-of-Way page at https://dot.alaska.gov/stwddes/dcsrow/.

Q: I would like to sell my property to DOT&PF for this project. How do I go about that? A: Exact right-of-way (ROW) needs have not yet been identified by the project. We anticipate that ROW needs will be identified in the summer of 2025. Once ROW needs are identified, a project team member will reach out directly to affected property owners. As required by law, DOT&PF and its contractors will follow all applicable federal and state regulations for any property identified for acquisition. Additional information can be found on the DOT&PF Real Estate/Right-of-Way page at https://dot.alaska.gov/stwddes/dcsrow/.

Q: During construction, how will emergency vehicles and residents travel to and from Sterling and Soldotna? A: Prior to construction activities beginning, a traffic control and detour plan will be developed and approved by the DOT&PF, in coordination with Kenai Peninsula Borough, the City of Soldotna, first responders, and other user groups. The State of Alaska requires access be maintained for business and residents during construction.

Q: What work is planned to repair or upgrade the Soldotna Creek culvert under the highway at Mackey Lake Road? A: The culvert at Soldotna Creek is undersized for flood flows and does not meet design guidelines for fish passage and will therefore be replaced as part of this project. The design team considered different design options, including a single-span bridge, a precast concrete arch bridge, and a new larger culvert. After evaluating the costs, environmental impacts, and potential benefits of each, the proposed design includes a 145-foot-long single-span bridge. The new bridge will improve hydraulic capacity and fish passage, provide an off-grade crossing for moose and other wildlife, and accommodate future pedestrian facilities.

Q: Will this project result in any changes to the speed limit? Why not just reduce the speed limit to improve safety? A: There are not currently plans to change the existing speed limits in the corridor. Speed limits are determined through speed studies that consider average speeds, crash numbers, roadway environments, and State regulations. Speed limit changes have been shown by national studies to have little effect on how fast people actually drive without additional enforcement and educational programs. Alaska has experience in corridors where lowering speed limits has resulted in greater differences in speed between vehicles, leading to increased safety risks. Therefore, any speed limit change must be carefully considered to ensure the desired outcome. For additional information, please visit the DOT&PF website at this link: https://dot.alaska.gov/traveltopics/how-are-speed-limits-set.shtml.

Q: How will this project address the underlying causes of crashes, such as wildlife or driver behavior? A: Addressing some of the underlying causes of crashes, such as driver fatigue and dangerous or reckless behavior such as speeding or texting while driving, requires increased enforcement and educational programs. However, the physical improvements to the highway are aimed at and expected to improve

safety. Some design safety features being considered include adding lanes for additional capacity and passing opportunities, separating traffic traveling in opposite directions with medians, intersection configuration alignment and improvements, lighting, wildlife under-crossings, and a separated pedestrian pathway.

Q: There are currently areas on each side of the highway that are accessible for off-road vehicles (ATV's, side-by-sides, snowmachines, etc.). Will this project eliminate access to those, or is there a plan to accommodate them in the new design? A: The project team understands the ability to travel the corridor by off-road vehicle is desirable for many users. We are investigating ways to accommodate ATVs without creating conflicts with other users (vehicles, pedestrians) or elements of the project (e.g. utilities) where ATV use is legal (outside of Soldotna City limits).

Q: We love the idea of the separated pedestrian walkway on the north side of the highway, but how will 'south siders' be able to cross the highway to access it safely? Will there be an underpass, bridge, etc.? A: The project team is considering pedestrian safety continuously throughout the design process for all users, including the ability to cross the highway safely.

Q: Will there be sound barriers considered for this project? A: The project team is currently conducting a Noise Study and Analysis. Sound barriers or other noise reduction methods will be implemented if deemed feasible, appropriate, and reasonable in accordance with the Alaska Noise Policy. To view the policy and other information on noise, visit https://dot.alaska.gov/stwddes/desenviron/resources/noise.shtml.

Q: While I understand the need to increase safety, I'm concerned with continuous lighting along the corridor causing more light pollution. What measures can be taken to improve safety but not lead to increased light pollution? A: The design team is currently analyzing ways to improve safety and reduce vehicle-animal collisions with lighting but also minimize light pollution. Some options being considered to reduce light impacts to adjacent properties include appropriate mounting heights, light spacing, "full cut off" style lights that direct the light downward, DarkSky-approved lighting, and "smart" lighting technologies that allow real-time control of lighting levels.

5. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Q: How can I make suggestions or give feedback about the project? A: The team will accept comments and be available to answer questions throughout the project. However, the earlier feedback is received, the easier it is to incorporate into project design considerations. Comments can be emailed to the project team at SterlingSafetyImprovements@dowl.com.

In addition, the project team will host three public Open House meetings:

- Public Open House No. 1 occurred on June 25, 2024, at the Sterling Community Center and June 26, 2024, at the Soldotna Public Library.
- Public Open House No. 2 was held on October 24, 2024, at the Soldotna Regional Sports Complex.
- Public Open House No. 3 was held on June 10, 2025, at the Soldotna Regional Sports Complex, and June 11, 2025, at the Sterling Community Center.

Public open house meetings are advertised on the State of Alaska Online Public Notice site, the project website, by postcard, email notices, in the Peninsula Clarion, and radio stations KDLL and KRSM.

To supplement public meetings, the project team presented project information at:

- Annual Anchorage Transportation Fairs, hosted by DOT&PF on April 15th, 2025, at the Alaska Airlines Center.
- 2025 Home Show, hosted by the Kenai Peninsula Builders Association on April 12-13, 2025, at the Soldotna Regional Sports Complex.
- 2025 Kenai Peninsula Sports and Recreation Trade Show, hosted by the Kenai Peninsula Association of Realtors on May 2-4, 2025, at the Soldotna Regional Sports Complex.

Additionally, the project team will have a booth at the Soldotna Wednesday Market from Wednesday, June 25 through Wednesday, August 6, 2025, at Soldotna Creek Park.

Visit the project website, www.SterlingSafetyImprovements.com for more information, to join the mailing list, and to make comments.

Q: How will public comments be taken into consideration, and will they impact the actual design? A: Throughout the design phase, the project team worked to identify solutions that address public comments and concerns while balancing the project's goals of improving safety and reducing the number of serious and fatal injury crashes in the corridor. We will continue to gather input from the public and stakeholders throughout the design process.

In response to community feedback and concerns, our team is recommending several changes over the previous '2022 preferred alternative,' including:

- Incorporating different typical sections in different portions of the corridor – rather than requiring just one typical section for the entire length of the project
- Looking for opportunities to add frontage roads into the design, allowing more direct access to the highway at major intersections
- Working with the Kenai Peninsula Borough to identify and expand side-street networks, allowing for more connections and easier navigation off the highway
- Reevaluating the frequency and locations of median breaks, to better align with large neighborhoods and to reduce the out-of-direction travel requiring U-turns
- Widening the center median where the divided highway is proposed, providing a more comfortable and safe experience – more like a protected Left-turn than a traditional U-turn

Q: When will actual design plans be available for the public to see? At that point, will the decision already have been made? A: The project team presented the preferred design alternative during the third round of public meetings on June 10 and 11, 2025. All materials from the public open house are available on the project website, and an online web mapper showing the preferred design through the corridor is available on the website, or you can scan the QR code below with your smartphone's camera.

We encourage you to provide specific comments and feedback on the team's recommendations and proposed design concepts.