

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

Over the past year, our design team has been meeting with you and updating the research and analysis needed to redesign this important section of highway. At the June 2025 open houses, we look forward to presenting the preferred design alternative and gathering your feedback as the project transitions from the design phase into the initial construction phase.



The Sterling Highway is a vital part of the National Highway System, connecting communities on the Kenai Peninsula to the rest of the state. It serves as a 'gateway' to the Peninsula for visitors and freight. Although classified as an Interstate Highway, the Sterling Highway functions as an important local route for residents commuting daily to and from work or school, and for businesses situated along its frontage.



The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is proposing to improve safety and reduce congestion for people and motorized vehicles traveling along the Sterling Highway between Sterling and Soldotna. This project will address known safety concerns by providing travelers with a safer and more reliable roadway that supports the efficient year-round movement of goods, services, and people, while accommodating the seasonal increase of tourist and recreational traffic.

This federally funded project, with a percentage of local state matching funds, is currently in the design phase.



This project is being delivered using the Progressive Design Build procurement method, which is a collaborative approach to project delivery that involves the contractor early in the design process to enable Department of Transportation to have greater flexibility in the design approach and to have greater cost certainty as the project progresses. This approach provides a fresh opportunity to engage with stakeholders and fosters innovation in solving design challenges.

QAP is the contractor. and they have partnered with DOWL and other subconsultants for the Design Build team that is supporting Department of Transportation in developing these much-needed improvements. Stephanie Queen is leading public involvement efforts to prioritize local input and perspectives as the project advances.



Due to elevated crash rates, this section of the Sterling Highway was designated as a 'Traffic Safety Corridor' in 2009. This designation 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. While some safety metrics have improved since the designation, fatal and serious injury crash rates remain well above national averages, with nearly half resulting from head-on collisions.

The primary objective of this project is to design and construct permanent improvements to the highway that will significantly reduce the number of fatal and serious injury crashes, allowing the 'traffic safety corridor' designation to be removed. Specific safety objectives include reducing the frequency and severity of head-on collisions; minimizing wildlife-vehicle collisions; improving overall driver safety; providing reliable access for emergency response; enhancing safety in adverse weather conditions; and proposing a design that can be adequately maintained.



Traffic volumes have increased by over 400% since the 1970s. During much of the summer season, traffic volumes already exceed the current two-lane roadway's capacity, and they are expected to increase by another 30% over the next 30 years. Summer average daily traffic volumes are more than double those of winter. The road becomes congested during the summer, making passing and turning movements difficult, which leads to elevated crash rates due to driver frustration. Excessive wait times to turn left onto the highway are common, with drivers often turning right to find a safe place to turn left and re-enter the highway in the opposite direction.



During the winter months, traffic flows more freely, but lack of street lighting, wildlife on the road, and slippery conditions result in higher rates of fatal

and serious injury crashes and animal-vehicle collisions, compared to the summer months.

Snow and ice can hide roadway striping and markings, making it harder for drivers to identify lanes and increasing the potential for collisions.



Our team is committed to engaging with the public throughout the design process, providing information, opportunities to comment, and addressing public concerns whenever possible.

Public involvement activities have included:

- Multiple rounds of public open houses, with meetings scheduled in both Soldotna and Sterling;
- Booths at the Home and Sport Rec & Trade shows, where thousands of attendees could learn about the project;
- Smaller, targeted group meetings with local, state, and federal agencies including the Kenai Peninsula Borough, City of Soldotna, State of Alaska Division of Parks, Forestry, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Student Transportation, Alaska State Troopers, Soldotna Police Department, Central Emergency Services, and others.

We have also sent regular e-newsletters with updates about project activities and opportunities to provide feedback to the project team.

Starting next week, the team will be at Wednesdays in the Park, where we will continue to meet with people to discuss the recommended design and get their feedback.



Here are some of the comments we have heard from past public involvement activities.

- There is general support for a separated bike path.
- Some people support lighting, while others have concerns about light pollution.
- There is a desire to maintain access for ATV's.
- Concerns have been raised about winter maintenance and whether the proposed U-turns will be safer than existing conditions. There is also frustration with how long this project has been in development and a desire to 'get it done!'



The project team evaluated two highway concepts during the design phase:

- 1. A divided four-lane highway with a depressed median and
- 2. A five-lane section (two lanes each direction with a continuous center left-turn lane).

Research indicates that a four-lane divided highway with a median is the safer option and more effective at 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 due to ice or other difficulties, rather than placing them directly in conflict with oncoming traffic. However, we recognize that the four-lane alternative does not offer the same level of direct access to adjacent properties as the five-lane alternative.

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



Throughout the design phase, the project team worked to identify solutions to this challenge. In response to community feedback and concerns, our team is recommending several changes to the previous '2022 preferred alternative,' including:

- Incorporating different typical sections in different portions of the corridor, rather than using a single typical section for the entire length of the project;
- Working with the Kenai Peninsula Borough to identify and expand side-street networks, allowing more connections and easier navigation off the highway;
- Reevaluating the frequency and locations of median breaks to better align with large neighborhoods and reduce out-of-direction travel requiring U-turns; and
- Widening the center median where the divided highway is proposed, providing a more comfortable and safe experience, similar to a protected Left-turn rather than a traditional U-turn.



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

The design also incorporates more median breaks than previously shown, as well as new frontage roads and off-highway local road connections.



The preferred design alternative includes a five-lane section in the dense business area just outside Soldotna City limits, from Boundary Street to Isbell Street. This area has the highest concentration of existing businesses and driveways in the corridor, with limited opportunities for frontage roads. Traditionally, this area has not been the location of the most serious crashes, allowing the project design to accommodate the access priorities of adjacent landowners with a center turn lane.



In areas where a divided four-lane highway is recommended; the design incorporates two different types of intersections. The first type is a traditional fourway intersection, allowing for full left-turn access onto and off the highway. There are 10 of these proposed in the project, including intersections at West Robinson Loop Road, Jim Dahler Road/Forest Lane, and Fairway Drive.



The second type of intersection in the four-lane divided sections is the Restricted Crossing U-turn or 'R-CUT.' The R-CUT provides a protected left-hand turn off the highway and is 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 four-way intersection, as it removes conflict points where vehicles entering and exiting the highway are both trying to turn left through the same space. For vehicles needing to make a 'U-turn' on the highway, the R-CUT provides 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 five of these proposed in the project, including intersections at Murray Lane and Whisper Lake Street.



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



The section of highway immediately west of Mackey Lake Road has the highest concentration of serious crashes during the study period, with six head-on collisions resulting in two deaths and four serious injuries. At this location, and several others in the corridor, the redesigned highway will improve sight lines by altering the vertical and horizontal geometry of the highway. For example, the design proposes to lower the grade of the hill just west of Mackey Lake Road and raise the existing Mackey Lake Road intersection to reduce the steepness of both the highway and intersecting roadway in that location.



The culvert at Soldotna Creek is undersized for flood flows and does not meet design guidelines for fish passage, so it will 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 and provide an off-grade crossing for moose and other wildlife.



The proposed improvements include adding a separated, paved multi-use pathway along the entire length of the corridor, routed along the north side of the highway. The design team is still evaluating opportunities to improve pedestrian crossings of the highway to provide safe access to the new pathway.

The design also includes continuous roadway illumination on both sides of the roadway for the entire length of the corridor.



The updated traffic and safety analysis for the project evaluated all major intersections and determined that none of them meet federal standards for installing new traffic signals. Some intersections may meet warrants for traffic signals in the future, such as the Mackey Lake Road intersection. Therefore, the team is designing the roadway to accommodate future traffic signal installation without significant reconstruction.

The team will be updating the traffic signal and intersection at Devin Drive to increase left-hand turning opportunities coming out of Fred Meyer and to modernize signal equipment.

PREFERRED DESIGN ALTERNATIVE PROJECT OUTCOMES	NP 825 TO 94 YOUR SAFETY IS GUR GOAL
Significant reduction in fatal and serious injury crashes	
Improved traffic flow	
Improved safety and new recreational opportunities for pedestrians	
Better night-time and winter visibility	
Improved local (off-highway) road network	
Places of refuge for emergency vehicles and vehicles in distress	

We believe this proposed design achieves the necessary safety objectives of the project and will significantly reduce future crashes and prevent future loss of life. The expanded roadway will also improve traffic flow, with additional travel lanes creating safe passing conditions, more comfortable gaps, and safer turning opportunities. While some instances of out-of-direction travel will be required to access a median break, this design is anticipated to save drivers time and reduce waiting times to access the highway, especially during peak times and the summer season. Overall, this project, which has been under consideration for several decades, represents a significant investment in our region and community.



The project is currently at the 30% design level. The next steps include finalizing the design; fall and winter clearing within the corridor; working with landowners to clear ROW encroachments; contacting landowners where new ROW or temporary construction easements may be needed; developing and gathering public feedback on a traffic control plan for the initial phase of construction; constructing the first phase of highway improvements starting at the Sterling end and heading west.



To view the design, get more information, and provide your feedback, please visit our project website. There, you can access an online web mapper showing the proposed preferred design alternative and meeting materials from the past year.



Thank you for your interest. Public input is valuable to our team to make the project better. If you have any questions or comments, please reach out.

