

Haines Open House Summary



PROJECT:	Chilkat Connector Feasibility Study	DATE:	October 2, 2025
PROJECT NUMBER:	SSHXY00688	TIME:	4:30 to 6:30 p.m.
LOCATION:	Haines Borough Public Library	ADDRESS:	111 3rd Avenue, Haines, AK

Project Team Attendees:

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities – Greg Lockwood (Project Manager), Tyler Riberio (Environmental)

DOWL – Steve Noble (Project Manager), Dana Johnson (Assistant Project Manager), Renee Whitesell (Public Involvement Lead), Ariel Hippe (Transportation Engineer), Morgan McCammon (Public Involvement Support)

Notice:

- State of Alaska Online Public Notice – Created September 9, 2025
- Chilkat Valley News – September 20 and 27, 2025
- KHNS radio – September 24 through October 2, 2025

Meeting Overview:

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), with support from DOWL, hosted a public open house Chilkat Connector Feasibility Study project on Thursday, October 2, 2025, at the Haines Borough Public Library. The meeting format was open house style, with information boards around the room and alternatives maps on tables in the middle. Attendees signed in and received a fact sheet. The open house featured project boards displaying key information including the feasibility study objectives, risks, road challenges, hydrologic and hydraulic information, typical road sections, Alaska Marine Highway System details, route comparison, and ways to make comments. This event provided a platform for public engagement and feedback on the study's development.

The open house event drew approximately 76 attendees, including seven project team members, interested members of the public, and interested elected officials.

Questions and Comments Summary:

The following comments summary is based on discussions with project team members and comments submitted in writing via comment forms.

Questions

Schedule and Costs

Q: How is this study funded and how much does it cost? A: This study is State funded and costs \$2.4 million.

Q: How much would these alternatives cost to construct? A: This feasibility study is determining costs of the various components of constructing an alternative to give decision-makers at DOT&PF as much information as possible. The draft study will be available in December 2025. A 30-day public comment period will follow. The final study will be available in January 2026.

Q: What is the overall study schedule? A: Study team members collected geotechnical, hydrologic, hydraulic, avalanche, and risk data and conducted an environmental overview over the summer and fall 2025. Public meetings were held in Juneau and Haines on October 1 and 2, 2025, to collect community feedback.

A draft report of the study is expected in December 2025, with the final study expected in January 2026. Public and interested party comments are welcome for the duration of the study, and comments received earlier are easier to incorporate.

Q: Could the funding for this study and a potential future project be used to fund the existing AMHS routes? A: Alternatives are being explored to find ways to make AMHS more sustainable long term, which includes shorter ferry routes to minimize operations and maintenance expenses.

The Study and Alternatives

Q: How is this study different from the Juneau Access project? A: The Juneau Access Project has been studied extensively, with past Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) evaluating multiple alternatives. The project concluded with a no-action alternative being selected. The Juneau Access Project is an entirely separate effort that has provided a foundational information as a starting point for the Chilkat Connector Feasibility Study.

Specifically, the West Side corridor has been identified as a potential route requiring further due diligence due to its potential for improving economic vitality in the region by constructing a more cost-effective road connection and more efficiently linking Southeast Alaska with the contiguous National Highway System. Currently, Juneau remains the only state capital in the United States that is inaccessible by road, relying exclusively on air and marine transportation. This isolation increases the cost of goods and services, limits economic opportunities, and restricts travel options for residents and businesses.

Q: The ferry crossing shown on Alternative 1 between Cascade Point and William Henry Bay crosses directly east and west, leading to problems with cross winds. How would a ferry cross like that? A: The potential crossings are by no means navigation routes. These are rough estimates of approximate crossings and ferry terminal locations. In the event routes are changed, AMHS would develop the routes for crew and passenger safety and efficiency.

Similar statements are true about the road alignment.

Q: How will walk-on passengers get back and forth from Juneau and Haines to the proposed ferry terminal locations? A: For ferry travelers in Juneau, Goldbelt, Inc. has committed to providing a shuttle service between the Mendenhall Valley and the Cascade Point Ferry Terminal. Until such time as decision-makers at DOT&PF decide whether to move forward with a project on the west side of Lynn Canal, the AMHS ferry will continue to operate out of the existing ferry terminal in Haines.

If a ferry terminal is developed on the west side of Lynn Canal, access for Haines users traveling without a vehicle would require a shuttle, taxi, or other means of transport, which could vary based on the required travel distance (e.g. with or without a new bridge to the west side).

Q: Mining operations only last around five years. Why couldn't industrial users operate from the existing Haines ferry terminal and mitigate impacts to the community? A: Evaluating the purpose and need for revising the ferry terminal locations and improving ferry terminal operations is being considered as part of this feasibility study. Potential needs include resource extraction, community impacts from freight activities, and

AMHS efficiency and capacity. In addition to resource extraction purposes, options are being explored to find ways to make AMHS more sustainable long term, which includes shorter ferry routes to minimize operations and maintenance expenses. If this study results in selection of a feasible concept and a future environmental documentation effort is initiated, a “No Action” alternative that preserves use of the existing ferry terminal will be required to be evaluated as part of that effort.

Q: Will this study take climate change into account, both for the construction of the road and the long-term impacts of climate change on the resiliency of a road? A: This feasibility study is documenting environmental and geologic conditions that could be influenced by climate change, such as precipitation trends, shoreline conditions, and avalanche exposure. These findings will inform whether a road is technically and economically feasible. If the project proceeds to environmental or design phases, DOT&PF would conduct more detailed climate and resiliency evaluations consistent with state and federal requirements.” This could also be expanded if an analysis of ferry emissions versus vehicle emissions was run for the various routes as Cascade Point study did at a basic level.

Q: Will this study take into account impacts to the tourism industry with travelers no longer exiting the ferry in Haines and potentially not backtracking to Haines? A: Concerns about the impacts to the tourism industry and to residents and businesses in Haines will be documented in the feasibility as potential negative impacts that would require mitigation and further study.

Process

Q: Why is the project team collecting demographic information on the Title VI sign in form? A: It is the policy of DOT&PF that no person in the State of Alaska shall, on the grounds of race, color, sex, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity regardless of the source of funding.

The information requested on the sign in sheet is voluntary. Its purpose is to ensure fair and equal representation by the public in all projects and programs administered by DOT&PF.

Q: What are the opinions of Skagway residents on changes to AMHS routes? A: Comments will be accepted throughout the study. Open houses were held in Juneau and Haines because this study is evaluating changes to the location of ferry terminals in these communities.

Comments

- Support for a road on the west side of Lynn Canal.
 - Access to property.
 - Resource development.
 - Greater freedom of movement.
- Opposition to a road on the west side of Lynn Canal.
 - Alternatives would only benefit industrial users.
 - Maintenance and maintenance costs, especially in winter.
 - Construction costs.
 - Safety of residents.
 - Landslides and avalanches, and the potential for residents to be stuck in a remote location.
 - Tourism industry impacts, with tourists leaving the ferry and not backtracking to Haines.
 - Fishing industry impacts.
 - Impacts on fish, bird, and wildlife habitats.
 - Driving lengths and travel time for Haines residents and visitors.
 - Emergency response and medical care access.
 - Impacts on water and the environment.

- Impacts on subsistence resources.
- Visual and viewshed impacts.
- Vehicle noise.
- Vehicle pollution.
- Hunting impacts.
- Increase travel costs for residents.
- Crossings from the west side road to Haines:
 - Support for a crossing over Lynn Canal near the airport.
 - Concern crossings at Mud Bay and Pyramid Island would adversely affect residential properties, trails, and viewsheds.
- Concern smaller ferries will not be able to operate in Lynn Canal in inclement weather.
- Concern that a ferry terminal at Pyramid Harbor may be impacted by silt/require regular dredging.

Other Alternatives

- Support for maintaining and funding the existing Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) routes.
- Suggestion to purchase a new fleet of AMHS vessels for existing routes.
- Suggestion to build a road on the east side of Lynn Canal, near the Lace River, from Berners Bay and a tunnel to upper Katzehin and Skagway.
- Fund and maintain existing road infrastructure.
- Suggestion for a shuttle between Haines and the proposed ferry terminal location.

Cascade Point Ferry Terminal Project

- Concerns with process for the project.
- Concerns with the location, which is further for people to travel to the ferry terminal.
- Concerns with the costs.
- Suggestion this project will only benefit industrial users, not residents and visitors.
- Suggestion to include a shuttle from Cascade Point to Juneau for walk-on travelers. Concerns Goldbelt would not fund this shuttle in perpetuity.

Meeting Process

- Appreciation for the meeting, the project team traveling to Haines, and the opportunity to comment on the study.
- Concerns with the costs of the meeting, meeting materials, and the project team traveling to Haines.
- Suggestion for a presentation.