

Juneau Access Improvements Project
Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the purpose and need of the Juneau Access Improvements (JAI) Project?

The purpose and need for the JAI Project is to provide improved transportation to and from Juneau within the Lynn Canal corridor by reducing travel times between communities, reducing State and user costs, providing capacity to meet demand, and providing flexibility and improved opportunity for travel. Currently, the only public surface transportation connecting Juneau with other Lynn Canal communities is the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS). The AMHS is the State-owned ferry system that provides transportation for many of Southeast Alaska's coastal communities.

Why are you doing another study?

In 2006, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) completed its environmental review of the Juneau Access Improvements (JAI) Project in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by issuing a Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD), selecting the East Lynn Canal Highway to Katzechin with shuttle ferries to Haines and Skagway for design and construction. A 2009 District Court decision ruled that the 2006 Final EIS was not valid because it did not consider an alternative that would improve surface transportation in Lynn Canal using existing Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) assets. In 2011, a Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel upheld the lower court ruling, 2-1. In direct response to the court ruling, the FHWA, the lead federal agency for the project, determined that a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) should be prepared for the JAI Project and, on January 12, 2012, FHWA issued a Notice of Intent to prepare an SEIS.

How is this Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) different from the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) approved in 2006?

This Draft SEIS assesses a new alternative that improves marine ferry service in Lynn Canal using existing Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) assets, identified as Alternative 1B: Enhanced Service with Existing AMHS Assets. The Draft SEIS also updates the 2006 Final EIS by reassessing the reasonable alternatives presented in that Final EIS, including any changes to regulations, updated project conditions, updated analyses, and alternative revisions that were necessary to address new environmental and engineering information made available since the 2006 Record of Decision (ROD).

Alternatives

What are the proposed alternatives?

Reasonable alternatives considered in the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) include:

- ✓ **Alternative 1:** No Action Alternative— this includes current programmed improvements under the authority of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) without the proposed Juneau Access Improvements
- ✓ **Alternative 1B:** Enhanced Service with Existing Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) Assets
- ✓ **Alternative 2B:** East Lynn Canal Highway to Katzehin with Shuttles to Haines and Skagway
- ✓ **Alternative 3:** West Lynn Canal Highway
- ✓ **Alternative 4A:** Fast Vehicle Ferry Service from Auke Bay
- ✓ **Alternative 4B:** Fast Vehicle Ferry Service from Berners Bay
- ✓ **Alternative 4C:** Conventional Monohull Service from Auke Bay
- ✓ **Alternative 4D:** Conventional Monohull Service from Berners Bay

Each alternative is explained in Chapter 2 of the Draft SEIS. The analysis of each alternative is presented in Chapter 4.

Why isn't there an alternative that includes a road all the way to Skagway?

There is a provision in Federal regulations that limits expenditure of Federal highway funds on projects that impact parks, recreational areas, wildlife refuges and historical resources unless no prudent and feasible alternative exists (Section 4(f) Regs 23 CFR 774).

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) determined that an East Lynn Canal Highway connecting into Skagway would impact lands within the Skagway and White Pass District National Historic Landmark (NHL), a protected resource. Given the project purpose and need and the existence of other prudent and feasible alternatives without these impacts, alternatives connecting a road to Skagway were dropped from further evaluation in the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS).

Why is building a road up the Taku River not an option?

Such an alternative would not meet the purpose and need of improved transportation to and from Juneau in Lynn Canal, and therefore is not a reasonable alternative. In addition, such an alternative would involve construction in, and access to, a province of Canada, which is not supported by the government of that province. In 1993 and 2003 the British Columbia (B.C.) Minister of Transportation was contacted regarding provincial interest in the Taku River Valley Highway. Each time, B.C. indicated no interest. For these reasons, there is no reasonable alternative along the Taku River.

Why doesn't Alternative 3: West Lynn Canal Highway tie into the Haines Highway north of the Haines Airport instead of Mud Bay?

Extending the West Lynn Canal Highway farther north of the Haines Airport would add cost and environmental impacts to that alternative and is not necessary to meet the purpose and need for the JAI Project. The proposed Chilkat Inlet bridge with Alternative 3 is positioned to avoid high-value wetlands and habitat, avoid crossing areas where eulachon spawn, and allow vehicles to travel between Haines and Juneau faster.

Traffic

How many vehicles per day does the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) currently carry in Lynn Canal?

Traffic volumes are measured between Juneau and Haines and consist of both northbound and southbound travel. A 25-year average (1983-2012) of the number of vehicles carried per day is 77 vehicles. The 2012 daily average number of vehicles was 71. It is estimated that the AMHS in 2020, with currently programmed improvements, would carry a daily average of 90 vehicles.

How many vehicles per day would the Juneau Access Improvements (JAI) Project alternatives carry?

The table below provides Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' (DOT&PF) estimate of the average number of vehicles per day for each alternative in 2020. The estimate is based on a 2014 modeling study.

Table 1. Average Vehicles per Day in 2020 (by Alternative)

	Alt 1	Alt 1B	Alt 2B	Alt 3	Alt 4A	Alt 4B	Alt 4C	Alt 4D
Vehicles per day	90	115	835	655	165	265	100	245

Why would Alternatives 2B and 3 (East and West Lynn Canal Highways) have more traffic compared with the other alternatives?

Traffic models predict that more people are likely to use the highway alternatives because of the lower cost, improved travel opportunity and flexibility, and shorter travel times.

Preferred Alternative

What is the preferred alternative?

In its 2006 Record of Decision (ROD) for the Juneau Access Improvements (JAI) Project, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) selected Alternative 2B, East Lynn Canal Highway to Katzehin, with Shuttles to Haines and Skagway, for advancement to design and construction.

After careful review and consideration of the updated information and analyses conducted in support of the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS), the FHWA and the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) continue to prefer Alternative 2B.

Alternative 2B would widen 2.9 miles of the Glacier Highway from Echo Cove to Cascade Point and construct a new highway 47.9 miles from Cascade Point to a point just north of the Katzehin River delta. Shuttle ferry service to Skagway and Haines would be provided from a new terminal at Katzehin using two Day Boat Alaska Class Ferries (ACFs), which are currently programmed as part of the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS). Haines to Skagway service would continue in the summer using a new conventional monohull ferry.

Have any changes been made to Alternative 2B since the 2006 Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

The Alternative 2B alignment has been shifted to avoid geologic hazards, reduce impacts to wetlands and bald eagle nesting trees, and reduce potential impacts from avalanches. Alternative 2B also has been modified to use the two programmed Day Boat Alaska Class Ferries (ACFs).

Why did FHWA and DOT&PF identify Alternative 2B as the preferred alternative?

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) identified Alternative 2B as the preferred alternative because it best meets the project purpose and need. This alternative would generate and accommodate the greatest projected traffic demand, provide substantially greater flexibility and opportunity to travel, provide the shortest travel times, result in the lowest user costs, and also have the lowest cost to the State on a per-vehicle basis compared with the other alternatives.

Compared to Alternative 1 - No Action, Alternative 2B is estimated to:

- ✓ Transport 10 times the number of vehicles
- ✓ Provide 5 to 7 times the number of ferry trips per week
- ✓ Cut travel time in half
- ✓ Cut traveler's costs up to 75 percent
- ✓ Reduce DOT&PF operating cost on a per-vehicle basis by 75 percent

Is the selection of Alternative 2B final?

No, a final decision has not been made. The FHWA and the DOT&PF will select an alternative in the Final SEIS after considering all comments on the Draft SEIS. The FHWA intends to issue a final decision in a Record of Decision at the same time the Final SEIS is released. The Record of Decision will identify the alternative that will be implemented.

Costs

What is the estimated cost to construct the preferred alternative (Alternative 2B: East Lynn Canal Highway to Katzehin with Shuttles to Haines and Skagway)?

The estimated construction cost is approximately \$574 million. The cost can be broken down into four main components:

Highway Construction	\$523 million
Katzehin Ferry Terminal Construction	\$20 million
Skagway Ferry Terminal Modification	\$9 million
Construction of the Haines/Skagway Shuttle Ferry	\$22 million

How much funding does Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) currently have for this project?

Total funding available for the project to date (2014) is \$202 million. Of this, \$154 million is federal funding previously approved by the Alaska Legislature and \$48 million is State General Funds (GF) already appropriated.

In order to fully fund the project, what is the fiscal impact from this proposed project on other planned Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) projects?

The project will be funded through two sources of funds—State General Funds (GF) and federal-aid funds that are either allocated directly for the project or from DOT&PF’s Federal Aid Program. The earmarked funds are slated solely for this project; therefore, their expenditure does not affect other projects. The project has long been depicted in the Federal Aid Program, therefore its construction does not affect any other projects in the program.

The State Transportation Improvements Program (STIP) spending plan is a constantly changing projection that is dependent upon funding available and the advancement of projects in a given year. Projects programmed in the STIP do not always proceed on schedule, so in order to maximize the state’s ability to use, rather than lose its federal spending authority in a given federal fiscal year, projects not ready to advance may yield their place in the STIP to other projects that are ready to advance. Because the financial programming of projects in the STIP is

dependent, in part upon project schedules, attempting to connect how the funding of one project affects the funding of another cannot be done with any certainty.

What is the current net annual cost to the State’s General Fund for ferry service in Lynn Canal?

Ferry service in Lynn Canal cost the State \$15.1 million in fiscal year 2012. This cost reflects the expenditures for operation and maintenance minus AMHS revenue for Lynn Canal.

Do any of the evaluated reasonable alternatives reduce the State of Alaska’s net annual General Fund costs for transportation in Lynn Canal?

Yes. See Table 2 below.

Table 2. Estimated Net Annual State General Fund Expense in 2020 by Alternative (in \$)

Alt 1	Alt 1B	Alt 2B	Alt 3	Alt 4A	Alt 4B	Alt 4C	Alt 4D	2012 Net GF Expenses
7.7 M	15.4 M	10.0 M	9.3 M	18.9 M	14.9 M	10.8 M	5.4 M	15.1 M

These costs include highway routine maintenance and snow removal operations, avalanche control and the operation and maintenance of the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) in Lynn Canal minus AMHS revenue in Lynn Canal.

Do any of the evaluated reasonable alternatives reduce the State of Alaska’s net annual cost to the Alaska Marine Highway General Fund in Lynn Canal?

Yes, see Table 3 below.

Table 3. Estimated Net Annual AMHS General Fund Expense in 2020 by Alternative (in \$)

Alt 1	Alt 1B	Alt 2B	Alt 3	Alt 4A	Alt 4B	Alt 4C	Alt 4D	2012 Net GF Expenses
7.7 M	15.4 M	7.2 M	7.0 M	18.9 M	14.9 M	10.7 M	5.4 M	15.1 M

These costs include the operation and maintenance of the AMHS in Lynn Canal minus AMHS revenue.

Why is the net cost for the No Action Alternative (Alt 1) projection for year 2020 less than the fiscal year 2012 net cost for ferry service in Lynn Canal?

The savings results from replacing the *MV Malaspina* with the two Day Boat Alaska Class Ferries (ACFs).

What will it cost a motorist to travel in Lynn Canal under the alternatives evaluated?

For a family of four and a 19 ft. vehicle, the estimated cost (in dollars) for fuel and Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) fare for a one-way trip (2020) is presented in the table below.

Table 4. Estimated Total Cost of Fuel and AMHS Fare for One-Way Trip* in 2020 (\$)

Route	Alternative							
	1	1B	2B	3	4A	4B	4C	4D
Auke Bay – Skagway (\$)	286	223	67	108	286	190	286	190
Auke Bay – Haines (\$)	216	173	47	59	216	132	216	132

*For a family of four traveling in a 19 ft. vehicle.

Community Impacts

Would a highway alternative open up more private land to development?

There is little private land available for development along the alignments of the two alternatives with major highway components (Alternatives 2B and 3). None of this private land is adjacent to existing communities. Alternative 3 crosses more private land than Alternative 2B.

The only private property along the Alternative 2B alignment is Goldbelt Corporation property in the Echo Cove area, a small Sealaska parcel north of Sawmill Cove, a private parcel north of the Sealaska parcel, and Coeur Alaska property and associated holdings north of Berners Bay. All remaining property is under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Both Coeur Alaska and Goldbelt currently have developments planned and permitted. A road connection already exists to Goldbelt’s holdings. A road connection to the other holdings would facilitate some of their development plans. The Sealaska parcel is a cultural site and no development is currently planned.

Would any of the alternatives affect subsistence hunting?

Alternatives 2B and 3 would provide improved access to subsistence harvest areas that previously were accessible only by boat or aircraft. Improved access to these areas could increase competition for subsistence resources from recreational hunting.

How close would the Alternative 2B highway be to the Berners Bay cabin?

The nearest point of disturbance would be more than 800 feet from use areas such as trails, outbuildings, and cleared areas at the cabin. The highway centerline would be approximately 1,000 feet east of the cabin. Visitors could continue to access the cabin by small boat, float plane, or by trail from the highway.

Does the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) have any plans to accommodate ferry walk-on passengers?

Walk-on passengers would be accommodated on the shuttle ferries. DOT&PF does not provide land transportation to or from any ferry terminal. Private sector transportation service providers may offer transportation to and from terminals if there is a demand for this service. DOT&PF will work with potential public transportation providers in terms of grant application assistance, schedule coordination and dedicated space on the shuttles.

What amenities will be provided at the Katzehin Ferry Terminal?

There would be an enclosed heated structure with restroom facilities. The terminal is intended to be open full time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Will the Katzehin Ferry Terminal be staffed?

No, the Katzehin Ferry Terminal would not require staff. Similar to the terminal in Metlakatla, the terminal at Katzehin would be automated, allowing the crews to operate the ramps from the ferry vessel and eliminating the need for shore-side staff other than periodic cleaning and routine maintenance. The ferry vessels would be staffed from the home ports—Haines and Skagway—and the vessels would be secured at those ports at night.

Avalanches

What has the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) done to mitigate danger to motorists presented by avalanches for Alternative 2B?

The alignment of Alternative 2B has been adjusted to avoid or minimize avalanche impacts. In addition, the alternative would incorporate Hazard Reduction Methods that include:

- ✓ Snowsheds for three of the high hazard locations
- ✓ Bridges spanning 10 avalanche paths
- ✓ Raised roadway embankments to serve as a barrier

Avalanche control efforts would occur during planned road closures. These efforts would include:

- ✓ Use of remote-controlled explosives from blaster boxes installed in the starting zones of eight high-hazard avalanche paths
- ✓ Helicopter delivery of explosives for avalanche paths that requires less frequent explosive work

What is the duration of anticipated road closures due to avalanche risk for Alternative 2B?

Avalanches and Avalanche Mitigation Measures are estimated to result in an average of 10 road closures per year with an average of 12 days closed per year.

Does Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) have the means to mitigate in the event of an extended road closure?

Yes. One or more of the Alaska Class Ferries (ACFs) could run between Northern Lynn Canal and Auke Bay.

Wildlife

Are there anticipated impacts to wildlife?

The direct loss of terrestrial habitat from the build alternatives that include a highway (Alternatives 2B, 3, 4B, and 4D) would have a minor effect on wildlife because that loss would be a small (less than 1 percent) part of the habitat available in the project study area. Alternatives 2B and 3 would have greater impacts to wildlife than the other alternatives.

Alternative 2B would remove approximately 400 acres of the approximately 103,500 acres of old-growth forest mapped along the east side of Lynn Canal. Currently, most of the habitat in the project area is roadless and undeveloped. Alternative 2B could create a potential barrier to wildlife passage between upland habitats and important marine habitat along the east side of Lynn Canal. To reduce this impact, wildlife underpasses would be constructed at anadromous (migrating fish) streams and other known high-use wildlife corridors.

Will the alternatives impact bald eagles and nest trees?

Alternatives 1 (No Action), 1B, 4A, and 4C would have no road construction or blasting and no impacts on bald eagles. The alignments of Alternatives 2B, 3, 4B, and 4D have been shifted, to the extent practicable, to maximize the distance between nest trees and project construction work limits. No eagle nest trees are anticipated to be removed. The highway for Alternative 2B would be located within 0.5 mile of 136 bald eagle nests and within 660 feet of 99 of these nests. Alternative 3 would be within 0.5 mile of 63 bald eagle nests, and within 660 feet of 48 of these nests. Twenty-three bald eagle nests are documented within 0.5 mile of the proposed ferry terminal in Sawmill Cove for Alternatives 4B and 4D, and seven nests are located within 660 feet of the work limits for the highway portion of these alternatives.

What permits would be required for impacts to bald eagles and nest trees?

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) would apply for permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to disturb bald eagles in nests within 660 feet of the work limits of the alignment and for nests within 0.5 mile of blasting activities. For alternatives

that require widening of 2.9 miles of the existing Glacier Highway, DOT&PF would obtain permits to disturb bald eagles in nests within 660 feet or as close as existing activity is tolerated.

Marine Mammals

Did the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) look at potential impacts to marine mammals, including endangered species such as the Steller sea lion?

Yes. There are two species in the project study area that are protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA): the western population of Steller sea lion (classified as endangered) and the humpback whale (classified as endangered). The eastern population of Steller sea lions was removed from the threatened and endangered species list in December 2013. Although the species is no longer protected under the ESA, it remains protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

There are two principal haulouts that are used on an annual basis by Steller sea lions in the project study area: Gran Point and Met Point. These haulout sites are on the east side of Lynn Canal. Gran Point is designated a Critical Habitat Area under the ESA.

Underwater noise levels generated during pile driving for construction of ferry terminals (Alternatives 2B, 3, 4B, and 4D) and bridges (Alternatives 2B and 3) could disturb Steller sea lions and/or humpback whales. Blasting would be necessary near the Gran Point and Met Point haulouts for Alternative 2B. The sound generated from blasting could disturb Steller sea lions, causing them to leave the haulouts if the sound is too loud or startling. Other than Alternative 2B, none of the build alternatives are in proximity to the Gran Point and Met Point haulouts.

What permits or approvals are required for Steller sea lions and humpback whales?

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has initiated formal Section 7 Consultation under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for Alternative 2B, the preferred alternative. The results of this consultation will be documented in the Final SEIS/Record of Decision (ROD). If another build alternative were selected, the FHWA would consult with the NMFS, as appropriate, on potential impacts to Steller sea lions and humpback whales.

In addition, under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) will be applying to the NMFS for a Letter of Authorization (LOA) Request. The LOA authorizes disturbance to marine mammals that may occur during construction.

Wetlands and Waters of the U.S.

Did the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) issue a permit in 2008?

The Juneau Access Improvements (JAI) Project received a USACE permit, POA-2006-597-2 Berners Bay/Lynn Canal, in 2008. The permit expired in 2013. The 2008 USACE permit analyzed all the JAI Project alternatives and determined that Alternative 2B was the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative. The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) submitted a permit application to the USACE in October 2014 for the updated Alternative 2B identified in the JAI Draft SEIS.

How do wetland impacts by Alternative 2B identified in this Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) compare to the 2008 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) permit?

The table below shows the changes in impacts due to design changes since the 2008 permit.

2008 JAI Project Permitted under POA-2006-597-2	2014 Alternative 2B
62 acres of forested wetland fill	60.7 acres of forested wetland fill
0.2 acre of estuarine emergent wetland fill	No estuarine emergent wetland fill
32 acres of intertidal and subtidal fill	32.1 acres of intertidal and subtidal fill
14.8 acres of deepwater rock disposal	No deepwater rock disposal
1.3 acres of stream channel dredging	2.9 acres of stream channel dredging*
4.4 acres of intertidal and subtidal dredging	4.4 acres of intertidal and subtidal dredging
114.7 acres total impact to wetlands and waters	100.1 acres total impact to wetlands and waters

*This increase is the result of additional fill required to prevent culvert failures, and the inclusion of additional culverts resulting from shifting the alignment uphill to avoid geotechnical concerns and bald eagle nests.

What has been done to reduce wetland impacts for Alternative 2B since the 2008 USACE permit?

Under the current Alternative 2B alignment for the Juneau Access Improvements (JAI) Project, all palustrine emergent wetlands and estuarine emergent wetlands have been avoided, and the need for deepwater disposal has been eliminated by modifying the road alignment. Potential impacts to forested wetlands and intertidal areas have been minimized by alignment changes, extensions of bridges, and construction using the minimum-width fill footprint necessary. This

has resulted in a footprint reduction of 14.5 acres over what was originally authorized by USACE.

How are the fish streams for Alternative 2b being addressed?

All anadromous fish streams would be crossed by bridges to avoid fill in streams and adjacent riparian habitat, where practicable. Anadromous fish streams that can be crossed with 130-foot or shorter bridges would not have any structure or fill in the stream channel. To reduce impacts to riparian wetlands and to provide wildlife passage, the Lace and Antler rivers would have a minimum of 50-foot bridge extensions on each side, and a 100-foot bridge section has been added to the north side of the Katzehin River Bridge.

What type of mitigation will be required for impacts to wetlands and waters of the US?

As part of the permitting process, the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) will coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to develop a compensatory mitigation plan to offset impacts to waters of the U.S. in compliance with the 2008 Mitigation Rule. The DOT&PF will be proposing compensatory mitigation that includes In-Lieu Fee payments to a land trust to protect in perpetuity the appropriate amount of wetland acreage.

Public Involvement

How can I be involved?

The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is currently requesting public comments on the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS). Public Comments on the Draft SEIS must be received or post marked by November 10, 2014. Comments will be responded to in the Final SEIS. Means to comment include:

Public Open Houses and Hearing. Open houses will be held in Juneau (October 14) Haines (October 15) and Skagway (October 23) and attendees are invited to provide written and oral comments at those events. Each open house will include an opportunity to provide public testimony at the project hearing.

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What type of comments will assist the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) in their deliberations?

The FHWA and DOT&PF will respond to comments received on the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) in the Final SEIS. However, comments with a factual basis that address the accuracy of the information in the Draft SEIS, that offer new information that has a bearing on the decision to be made, that submit additional data for consideration, or that request clarification are most helpful. Examples include:

- ✓ Identification of inaccurate or incomplete information (data gaps)
- ✓ New information pertaining to the methods used to assess impacts
- ✓ New or different assumptions that should be considered in the analysis

All communications received on the Draft SEIS are kept by FHWA as part of the project record and may be released under Freedom of Information Act requests.