

Juneau Access Improvements Project
Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose and need statement is, in many ways, the most important part of an environmental impact statement (EIS). It establishes why the agency is proposing the project. The purpose of an action is an expression of the overall objectives to be achieved by the project. The needs are explained through documentation of the problems or deficiencies that exist, and the reasons why the agency is proposing the project.

Equally important, the project purpose and need helps define what can be considered reasonable and workable alternatives. It helps formulate the process by which the alternatives will be considered, what types of analysis will be required, and how and why the preferred alternative will ultimately be chosen.

The purpose of the Juneau Access Improvements Project is to improve surface transportation to and from Juneau within the Lynn Canal corridor. This purpose is expressed in five distinct elements. Each alternative evaluated in the Draft SEIS has been considered relative to these five elements and how well it addresses the underlying needs.

The Purpose and Need for the Juneau Access Improvements Project is to provide improved surface transportation to and from Juneau within the Lynn Canal corridor that will:

1. Provide the capacity to meet transportation demand
2. Provide flexibility and improve opportunity for travel
3. Reduce travel times between the communities
4. Reduce State costs for transportation
5. Reduce user costs for transportation

The five elements of the project Purpose and Need Statement are separate, but interrelated.

1. Provide the capacity to meet transportation demand in the corridor.

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) estimates that the demand to travel through the project corridor is over five times greater than the number of vehicles currently transported by the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS).

2. Provide flexibility and improve opportunity for travel in Lynn Canal.

The opportunity to travel is restricted in Lynn Canal under the current ferry system. Annually, an average of 309 round-trip voyages occurs between Juneau and Skagway with intermediate stops in Haines.

During the summer, travelers have a choice of one or two sailings per day; in the winter, they have a choice of approximately four sailings per week. Ferries typically sail below vehicular capacity during winter, but in summer they sometimes cannot accommodate all reserved space and standby traffic.

3. Reduce travel time between the communities in Lynn Canal.

Travel time between the communities by ferry is significantly longer than travel times would be by highway. The travel time on the AMHS is three times longer than the time to make an equivalent length trip by highway.

4. Reduce State costs for transportation in the corridor.

To operate and maintain the ferry system, AMHS depends on vessel-generated revenues (e.g., fares, restaurant income, staterooms) and State funds appropriated annually by the legislature. The past several years have seen a steady decline in the percentage of expenditures covered by revenue, thus increasing the annual cost to the State. The cost to operate and maintain the AMHS is also high in comparison to the cost to operate and maintain Alaska's roads and highways.

5. Reduce user costs for transportation in the corridor.

The user cost for passage in Lynn Canal on the AMHS is substantially higher than the user cost for other surface transportation modes. The cost for a family of four traveling in a 19-foot vehicle on the AMHS in Lynn Canal is five to six times higher than the cost to make an equivalent-length trip by highway.