

# **Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan 2014 Draft Ketchikan, Alaska / Meeting Summaries**

## **Introduction**

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) issued a draft Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (SATP) for public review in June 2014. On August 20, 2014, ADOT&PF held an evening open house and public meeting in Ketchikan, Alaska at the Ted Ferry Civic Center.

A total of 20 people attended the open house or public meeting (see attached attendance list).

## **DOT&PF Presentation at Public Meeting**

The public meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed:

- The DOT&PF statutory obligation to develop and maintain the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan, as a component of the Alaska Long Range Transportation Plan. The SATP directs investment in the regional transportation system over a 20-year period, identifying current priorities, and guiding development of projects.
- The SATP was first published in 1980 and was updated and revised in 1986, 1999, and 2004 as an approved component of the Statewide Transportation Plan. To prepare the current update, DOT&PF conducted a scoping process in 2011, which led to development of the Draft SATP document in 2014.
- The comment period for this Draft SATP document is open until September 30, 2014. Written comments can be submitted to DOT&PF via email, mail, or fax.
- There are also current National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) processes for several projects that have separate comment periods and official administrative records. These include the proposed East Lynn Canal Highway, Angoon Airport, and the proposed road connection from Kake to Petersburg. Comments intended for consideration by an EIS must be submitted to the project manager of each EIS during its open comment periods.
- Trends for the Existing Transportation System – The Draft SATP analyzed and responds to trends that show a *decrease* in Southeast Alaska population, traffic on the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) and funding for transportation projects, coupled with *increases* in operations, maintenance and construction costs.

- Since 2006, AMHS Southeast Alaska system annual maintenance and operation costs have increased from about \$110M to nearly \$140M, while ferry sailings have dropped from about 6,500/year to 6,000 year in that period.
  - From 1991-2012, passenger ridership has declined from approximately 370,000 to 310,000/year, with vehicle traffic holding fairly steady at approximately 100,000 vehicles/year. Over that time, the ferry fleet has increased from six to ten ferries.
- The SATP considers many factors: three aging mainline ferries, comments received on the Scoping Report, interest in continuing existing ferry routes, cost to maintain the existing transportation system, regional transportation needs, current priorities and projects, and funding forecasts.
- Alternatives – The SATP considered four options, described in more detail and compared in Appendix C of the draft plan: (1) Baseline system (maintain existing), SATP Preferred Alternative, (3) Maximize Use of Existing Roads and (4) Highway Route 7
- Recommendations – The Draft SATP recommends maintaining all existing highway and ferry routes and provides improvements that will further increase the mobility of people and goods, such as new road links. It also includes measures to help reduce some system costs, such as retirement or replacement of aging mainliners and use of day boats. It recommends the following specific changes to the transportation system, that would (1) better match capacity to demand, (2) keep ferry service to Bellingham, (3) keep cross Gulf ferry service, and (4) emphasize labor and fuel efficiency:
  - 2016 & 2017 (now 2018) – Two new Alaska Class Dayboat (ACD) ferries to service Lynn Canal
  - 2018 – Angoon Airport completed
  - 2020 – Lynn Canal Highway to Katzehin and ferry terminal completed
  - 2020 – Haines-Skagway shuttle ferry service initiated
  - 2020 – Kake-Petersburg Road (gravel single land), Wrangell Narrows shuttle ferry, and terminals completed
  - 2025 – New mainline ferry on-line; potential for a second mainline ferry to follow
  - 2028 – Fast ferry replacement
  - 2033 – Sitka-Warm Springs Bay road initiated (planning, environmental, design). Construction is not anticipated during the 20-year planning period.
- Capital costs over the next 20 years to maintain and implement the preferred alternative total \$1.3B for system refurbishments and \$1.2B for major projects (construction, procurement), respectively. The Plan reduces the annual operation and maintenance expense of the overall regional transportation system three percent.(Noted that the preferred alternative is not the least expensive alternative to operate and maintain, as maximizing the use of existing roads or constructing Highway Route 7 would reduce annual system costs by 15% to 16%, respectively.)

- The Draft SATP document also includes information about continuing efforts to maintain and improve the transportation system in Southeast Alaska, provides an overview of the existing system, identifies essential undeveloped transportation and utility corridors in the region for reservation (App. A), describes the scoping process and public comments (App. B), compares the four planning alternatives (App. C) and provides public and government involvement plans (App. D).

The Draft Plan recommendations would have the following impacts on Ketchikan: (1) Mainline ferry service will continue in Ketchikan, (2) Mainline ferries previously devoted to Lynn Canal service will be free to provide service on other routes, which can provide more ferry service to Sitka.

## Questions & Answers, Comments

### key

- Comment or Question
  - ADOT&PF Response

### SATP not meeting Ketchikan Transportation Needs

- The SATP should include a bridge to Gravina Island. A final decision about the Gravina Island Access Project is very important to the borough.
- The SATP does not adequately address the lack of maintenance on existing roads in Ketchikan.

### Ketchikan International Airport

- The funding aspects and operational costs of the airport over the next several years, including expected deficits from new federal regulations and impacts from changes to AMHS, must be considered by DOT&PF. The borough looks to DOT&PF to equitably fund the airport.

### Ferry Service Decline

- If the frequency of service is reduced, then traffic volumes will be reduced. Cuts to service result in downward traffic volume trends. IFA happened because the frequency of AMHS trips went down. People travel at different times, so instead of getting fuller boats, people sought alternative modes of transportation. DOT&PF should consider that reducing the number of trips may not be a solution for higher traffic volumes on AMHS vessels.
- The Ketchikan Gateway Borough Assembly is concerned that reduced mainline ferry service will reduce the number of weekly trips from Ketchikan to Prince Rupert (from four to two trips) and to Wrangell (from five trips to four).

### Ferry Service Crucial to Southeast Alaska

- AMHS is crucial to the communities of Southeast Alaska. The needs involving ferry transportation should receive the same consideration as other modes of transportation.

Ferry improvements should be a priority in Southeast Alaska transportation planning. We would also stress the economic value that AMHS has, not only in Southeast Alaska, but to the rest of the state as well.

#### Saxman Seaport

- The South Tongass Highway Ferry Terminal has been left out of the SATP, but should be reconsidered. Reports show that it would increase the economy in Metlakatla, Saxman, and Ketchikan. It would also reduce fuel costs and reduce run times by half between Metlakatla and Ketchikan. The State of Alaska needs to fulfill their MOU stating that two terminals would be built in this area. Instead of the state buying and owning the right-of-way, ADOT&PF should create a long-term lease as they have done for the Prince Rupert ferry terminal.

#### Fast Ferries

- Fast ferries are to be replaced after only 25 years of service. Is the fast ferry program viewed as successful enough to continue that kind of service?
  - We believe so. When comparing them to other vessels in the AMHS fleet, their costs per passenger mile are less than some and more than others.

#### Road Maintenance

- Ketchikan is suffering from benign neglect of its road maintenance. Elderly and young people and visitors on state sidewalks get splashed significantly from pot holes on South Tongass Highway, especially near the federal building and the Bar Harbor area.
- Ownership and control of state roads should be turned over to local communities so that they can be properly maintained. Currently, the roads in the borough have not been maintained.
  - The plan addresses this and expects that an agreement between ADOT&PF and Ketchikan will be made.

#### Non-Motorized Transportation

- The plan only briefly mentions shared use and bicycle travel in Southeast Alaska. With more national attention on the health benefits of active transportation and our increasing aging population, the Draft SAPT should focus more on expanding the shared path system. For example, the North Tongass Project, which has a confused mixture of sections where there is a separated bike path, could be addressed in the plan.

#### Agency Coordination with British Columbia Ferries

- Regarding the Ketchikan-Prince Rupert route, it seems logical that ADOT&PF would coordinate with the Canadian ferry system, yet no effort was made.

#### SATP Project Prioritization

- How did DOT&PF prioritize the timeline of awards listed on page 18 of the draft SATP?

- Prioritization is based on (1) how long it takes to complete a project, (2) if project is already in process and has identified funding, (3) community feedback from the scoping process, and (4) trends within the region.

### Funding

- How will DOT&PF manage state transportation projects if federal funding is being reduced?

### Angoon Airport

- A story in Alaska Dispatch reported that the Angoon airport would not be built for another 20 to 30 years. Is this correct?
  - The report is incorrect. The SATP lists the draft Angoon Airport EIS completion before the end of this year and predicts the airport will be built by 2018 and operational within the 20-year span of the SATP.
- Does the SATP consider the alternative locations for the Angoon airport?
  - DOT&PF proposed the Favorite Bay site because it was the best aeronautical solution. Ultimately, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) controls the decision about the location of the airport and they are responsible for the EIS. DOT&PF may recommend a different location depending on public comment received after the EIS review process.

### Commitment to Rural Alaska

- Upon approval of the transportation bill, the US Senate Appropriations Committee issued a report with a statement about statewide planning in Alaska (page 50), which reads:

“The Committee is concerned that the State of Alaska has not adequately addressed the needs and concerns of boroughs and local communities as part of the statewide transportation planning process, and seeks to ensure that FHWA meets the intent of the statewide improvement program pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 135. Therefore, FHWA shall work with the State of Alaska to ensure all necessary coordination and consultation occurs with areas outside of a metropolitan area to address infrastructure development needs.”

### Population Trends

- How are the population projections in the SATP different than what is predicted in the *Southeast Alaska By the Numbers* report?
  - The SATP uses data from the Alaska Department of Labor and focuses on long term population trends, while the Southeast by the Numbers report may have used other sources for their report and focuses on short term trends.

**Draft Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan  
Attendance at Ketchikan, Alaska meetings  
August 20, 2014**

**Open House and Public Meeting**

1. Bob Weinstein
2. Brett Serlin
3. Carol Atwood
4. Chere Klein
5. Chris French
6. Dennis Watson
7. Dick Coose
8. Jackie DuRelle
9. Lee Wallace
10. Leila Kheiry
11. Lyn Stewart
12. Matt Armstrong
13. Mrs. Kienel
14. Nicole Lamanna
15. Robert Stewart
16. Sonia Henrick
17. Taylor Balkom
18. Tina McPherson
19. Tom Atwood
20. William Kienel

**DOT&PF Team**

Jim Potdevin, DOT&PF  
Verne Skagerberg, DOT&PF  
Holly Smith, Sheinberg Associates