

Seward to Glenn Connection Planning and Environmental Linkages Study

Agencies and Tribes Committee Meeting Notes

Meeting Details

Date: Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Time: 11:00am – 12:00pm

Location: HDR Office

Attendees

Emily Vullo, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Bob Charles, Knik Tribal Council

Bruce Wright, Knik Tribal Council

Richard Martin, Knik Tribal Council

Jackie McConnell, Knik Tribal Council

Brian Lindamood, Alaska Railroad Corporation

Galen Jones, DOT&PF

Amy Burnett, HDR

John McPherson, HDR

Edith McKee, HDR

Alice Horazdovsky, HDR

Summary

Galen welcomed the meeting attendees, and each attendee introduced themselves, noting which agency or tribe they represent.

Amy noted that with respect that we are gathered today on the homeland of the Dena'ina people.

Right now, we are in the 60-day comment period. The length of the comment period emphasizes the importance the state has placed on receiving and utilizing public feedback. Galen added that we are still very early in the alternatives development process. He encouraged attendees to visit the project website if they'd like to view the SG PEL Study's history and timeline.

PEL Study Overview, Design Approach, and Alternatives Discussion

John gave an overview of the PEL Study's benefits, noting that a PEL Study is meant to merge the environmental and planning processes. The goal is to not revisit things like the Purpose and Need and alternative designs during the National Environmental Policy Act process. John then described the PEL Study area.

John noted that the proposed purpose is to improve mobility, accessibility, safety, and livability for people and goods traveling on or across the roadway system connecting the Seward Highway, Glenn Highway, and Port of Alaska by all modes (including people on foot, bicycles, and buses) while improving community cohesion. The intent is to maintain the functionality of the National Highway System while meeting the local travel needs of residents who live, play, and work in the area and must safely travel across or along those roadways; and to improve neighborhood connections and quality of life and accommodate adopted plans as practicable.

He added that a balanced design approach was taken for each alternative. We looked to incorporate the following in each design:

- Improve local travel, livability, and economic development
- Improve nonmotorized travel and livability
- Improve freight movement, reduce conflicts, and improve safety
- Reduce travel conflicts and improve safety
- Improve regional travel
- Be consistent with adopted plans like the MTP2050, Anchorage Land Use Plan Map, and Fairview Adopted Plans

John then gave an overview of the local and regional roadway types that are included in the alternatives:

Local Roadway Examples

A Main Street will improve pedestrian access. A Woonerf is in the MTP2050 and is oriented to nonmotorized travel where cars travel at slower speeds and the road has various uses (e.g., bike lanes, restaurant seating). A complete street is designed to support all modes of travel (walking, biking, and motorized travel).

Regional Roadway Examples

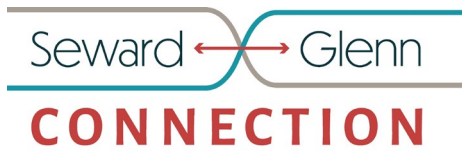
An at-grade road is completely on the surface. A depressed road is below the surface, and a viaduct is a long bridge.

Alternative A

In each alternative, you'll see on the map that we have a highway connection, various ways to connect the port to the highway network at an interchange, and nonmotorized improvements. The motorized aspects of this alternative have been in past MTPs and were focused on during the previous Highway-to-Highway Project. Its focus is to connect the highways. The non-motorized aspects contain some projects that are in currently adopted plans. A lane is also removed between 5th and 6th Avenues and on Gambell and Ingrá Streets. You'll also see a regional trail connection between the Ship Creek and Chester Creek Trails.

Alternative B

The motorized aspects of this alternative maximize DOT&PF's existing right-of-way (ROW). The non-motorized aspects contain a frontage road along Merrill Field that will have nonmotorized facilities along it.



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Alternatives AB1 & AB2

These alternatives combine various motorized and non-motorized elements from Alternative A and Alternative B. In Alternative AB2, you'll see that a depressed freeway does go through Fairview.

Alternative C1

The motorized aspects of this alternative contain a port connection on 1st Avenue that goes under Reeve Boulevard and Commercial Drive to an interchange. The non-motorized aspects include a lane is also removed between 5th and 6th Avenues and on Gambell and Ingra Streets. The trail connection will be on 15th Avenue even with the highway.

Alternative C2

The motorized aspects of this alternative differ from Alternative C1 due to the highway alignment being south of 15th Avenue; 15th Avenue will be the main local travel street, and the highway would be south of 15th Avenue. The non-motorized aspects are very similar to those of Alternative C1.

Alternative D

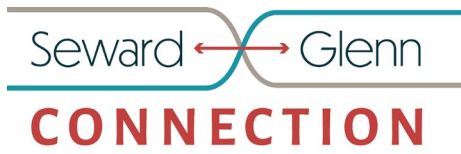
The motorized aspects use more of the Merrill Field property but don't cross the Chester Creek Greenbelt. The trails would pass underneath the roadways. It's important to note that the trails would have impacts from the bridge piers. The port access would be on Whitney Road and Viking Drive, with a bridge over Ship Creek. This design promotes buses to travel under Commercial Drive. The non-motorized aspects contain a Woonerf and a regional trail connection on Hyder Street and connect the Ship Creek and Chester Creek trails.

Discussion and Feedback

Galen noted that we've met with and received great feedback from the Alaska Railroad Corporation and Alaska Trucking Association. Edith added that we've also met with many Community Councils and there is a strong consensus to not recreate the current issues in Fairview in another location.

Bob Charles noted that the SG PEL Study team should make use of public lands, and he intends to submit a formal comment on this topic.

Bruce commented that Alternative D seems reasonable and then asked what the future of Merrill Field is. John responded that the question will be answered in a Comprehensive Plan or the Merrill Field Master Plan, although the SG PEL Study team did try to reduce impacts to Merrill Field. Bruce added that the SG PEL Study team did a good job with Alternatives B, C, C1, and C2. He did note that the sharp turn on the south of the designs could present a safety problem. John responded that the alternative would be designed for a 60-mph speed, but the posted speed would be 55 mph. Bruce added that he thinks Alternative D is the best option but could be a better route if Merrill Field was removed.



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John concluded the meeting by letting attendees know that the next steps for the team will include putting cost estimates, travel forecasts, environmental impacts, and ROW details to all alternatives during the screening process.