



NOTICE OF INTENT TO BEGIN ENGINEERING AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES AND FLOODPLAIN ENCROACHMENT

Project Title: Seward Highway MP 98.5 to 118, Bird Flats to Rabbit Creek Project No.: Z566310000/0A31034

The Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) has assumed the responsibilities of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) under 23 U.S.C 327 and is soliciting comments and information on a project that would reconstruct the Seward Highway between mileposts (MP) 98.5 and 118, Bird Flats to Rabbit Creek, in the Municipality of Anchorage. This project is an expansion of the previously advanced 4.5-mile project titled, Seward Highway MP 105-109.5, Windy Corner to Rainbow Point and has the same state and federal project numbers. The purpose of the proposed project is to implement safety upgrades to decrease high-severity crashes and improve traffic operations to alleviate traffic congestion.

The beginning of project is located at Latitude 60.949786, Longitude -149.395832 (approximately 2.3 miles south of Bird Creek Campground and Trailhead); and the end of project is roughly located at Latitude 61.087179, Longitude -149.834311 (approximately 0.80 miles north of the Rabbit Creek crossing of the Seward Highway).

The efforts to improve safety along the Seward Highway between Girdwood and Anchorage began in the early 2000s.

- 2004 – A Categorical Exclusion (CE) was approved by FHWA for Seward Highway Safety Improvements, Indian to Potter Marsh, MP 105 to MP 115.
- 2013 – The start of the smaller Seward Highway: Windy Corner project, MP 105 to 107 prompted a reevaluation of the CE.
- 2017 – Public feedback and consultation with the FHWA resulted in the Class of Action being revised to an Environmental Assessment (EA).
- 2020 – DOT&PF extended the project 2.5 miles between Windy Corner and Rainbow Point (MP 105 to 109.5) to address concerns raised by public and agency comments on the Draft EA for the Seward Highway: Windy Corner project, MP 105 to MP 107.
- 2021 – Public and agency scoping commenced as a part of a new EA for the renamed project, Seward Highway, Windy Corner to Rainbow Point (MP 105 to 109.5).

In September 2022, after reviewing public and agency comments, DOT&PF again extended the termini of the project to encompass 19.5 miles along the Seward Highway between Bird Flats and Rabbit Creek to evaluate solutions for a longer corridor. Therefore, a new NEPA process is required for this project. Public and agency scoping as a part of a new EA is starting now for the renamed project: Seward Highway MP 98.5 to 118, Bird Flats to Rabbit Creek.

Proposed improvements may include:

- Construct a divided highway with expansion up to four travel lanes and/or sections of up to four travel lanes

- Realign the highway to flatten curves
- Relocate and realign the Alaska Railroad Corporation's railroad tracks (as needed)
- Construct and/or improve turnouts/parking areas
- Construct acceleration and deceleration lanes
- Construct rock catchments (as needed)
- Construct non-motorized pathways and facilities

Project actions and improvements will be further defined once alternatives are developed and additional public and resource agency involvement is conducted.

Project activities, such as roadway and railroad realignments and incidental drainage work, may result in longitudinal encroachments into base floodplains adjoining Turnagain Arm and roadside ditches as well as crossing encroachments into the base floodplains adjoining numerous creeks. The project is located on Federal Emergency Management Agency Flood Insurance Rate Map panels 02000051154D, 02000051170D, 02000051190D, 0200051500D, 020051200D, 0200051475D, 0200051500D, 0200051482D, 02000511501D and 0200051505D. Base floodplain encroachments are anticipated to be minor, with no net changes to the base flood elevations, therefore they would not result in significant encroachments as defined in 23CFR 650.105(q) and USDOT Order 5650.2(4)(p).

The proposed project would comply with all applicable authorities including Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act; Executive Order-11990 (Wetland Protection); Executive Order-11988 (Floodplain Management); Executive Order-12898 (Environmental Justice); Executive Order 11593 (Historic Preservation); Executive Order 13084 (Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments); Clean Air Act; Clean Water Act; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act; U.S. DOT Act Section 4(f); Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act; Endangered Species Act; Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act; and Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Act.

Engineering and Environmental Studies will be conducted during summer 2023.

DOT&PF is soliciting comments on the proposed project. There will be additional opportunities for public comment and participation as this project is developed. Your comments would help us evaluate potential environmental, social, and economic impacts of this project, as well as impacts to historic and cultural resources. Please submit your written comments to the following address.

Brian Elliott, Regional Environmental Manager
DOT&PF Central Region Preliminary Design & Environmental
P.O. Box 196900
Anchorage, AK 99519-6900
Email: brian.elliott@alaska.gov

To ensure that all possible factors are considered, please provide written comments to the above address by February 24, 2023. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Tom Schmid, P.E., Project Manager, at (907) 269-0543 or Brian Elliott, Regional Environmental Manager, at (907) 269-0539.

The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by DOT&PF pursuant to

23 U.S.C. 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated November 3, 2017, and executed by FHWA and DOT&PF.

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