



SAFER SEWARD HIGHWAY

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Last Updated: July, 2023

1. Why is the Safer Seward Highway (Seward Highway Milepost [MP] 98.5–118, Bird Flats to Rabbit Creek Improvements) Project needed?

The purpose of the proposed Safer Seward Highway Project is to improve public safety. This section of the highway has a much higher rate of fatal and major-injury crashes than similar corridors in the state. As such, in 2006 it was designated a Highway Safety Corridor. Since then, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) has worked with public safety partners to increase enforcement, improve emergency response times, and educate users. This has helped to reduce serious crashes by 40% overall ([Safety Corridor Audit 2017](#)), but serious crashes are still happening at a high rate and there has not been an improvement to the rate of fatalities. Our plan is to develop improvements to the road cross-section and alignment that will decrease high-severity crashes and provide space for mixed user groups along the corridor.

2. What happened to the Windy Corner projects?

The “Windy Corner” (MPs 105 to 107) and “Windy Corner to Rainbow Point” (MPs 105 to 109.5) projects (collectively referred to as the “Windy Corner projects”) focused on smaller segments of the Seward Highway. In response to public and agency comments on the 2020 Draft Seward Highway: MP 105 to 107, Windy Corner Environmental Assessment (EA), DOT&PF expanded the project to a 20-mile corridor from MP 98.5 to 118. Looking at a larger highway section allows us to develop a more comprehensive safety solution and enable better coordination among agencies on similar issues that occur along the entire corridor.

3. How much of the previous design efforts (e.g., public and agency input, EA and other environmental documents, engineering) will be reused for this expanded project?

Everything! The comments and prior work are the starting point for this EA. Previously completed analyses and design will be considered and used where appropriate.

4. Can the proposed project be constructed within the existing right-of-way (ROW)?

DOT&PF’s top priority is enhancing safety for Seward Highway users. There likely isn’t enough room within the existing ROW to make the needed improvements (e.g., straightening curves, providing space along the road for falling rock or ice, adding lanes, adding a shared-use pathway). Additionally, the highway is currently at or near the minimum separation distance from the Alaska Railroad tracks. It’s likely that we will need to make rock cuts or place fill in Turnagain Arm, the extent of which will be determined during the EA process.

5. Can a separated, non-motorized pathway be constructed as part of the proposed project?

Yes, a separated, non-motorized, shared-use pathway is currently part of the design. During the Windy Corner projects, many public commenters asked for a shared-use pathway.

6. Would the aesthetics be suitable for a Scenic Byway?

We've heard that the public values the scenic nature of the road and surrounding area. During the EA process, we'll evaluate how proposed changes to the highway might affect aesthetics and avoidance, minimization, and mitigation will be evaluated to reduce visual impacts.

7. Will there still be access to the waterside at Windy Corner?

It's too soon to know. The team is utilizing the 2017 Reconnaissance Study and other work done to date at Windy Corner, taking comments from the public and agencies, and then we will determine where we need to develop additional design concepts. Maintaining reasonable access to trails, pullouts, recreation, and scenic opportunities is part of the project.

8. Why improve the highway if the Highway Safety Corridor designation has already improved corridor safety?

The Highway Safety Corridor designation has reduced high-severity crashes, but it hasn't reduced fatal crashes. Safety Corridor designations are intended to be temporary measures, used until long-term safety improvements are constructed. Safety upgrades and traffic operation improvements proposed for this project are the long-term solutions needed to permanently reduce fatal and major-injury crashes. As DOT&PF implements permanent engineered safety improvements, segments of the Seward Highway between MPs 87 and 117 may be removed (i.e., decommissioned) from the Highway Safety Corridor program based on recommendations in future DOT&PF Safety Corridor Audits.

Additional Safety Corridor program information is available at: https://dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/hwysafety/safety_corridors.shtml.

9. How much will it cost?

At this stage of project development, we haven't prepared cost estimates. The proposed project's cost will depend on the design developed for the EA. The 2017 Reconnaissance Study estimated the project cost at \$830 million; in 2023 dollars, that would be a little over \$1 billion. We will be looking for cost savings and added value as the proposed project advances.

10. How long will the EA take? When will construction start?

DOT&PF is aiming to complete the EA by the end of 2024. Design would follow, with the earliest construction could begin in 2025.

11. Will the environmental document be an EA (similar to the Windy Corner projects)?

Yes. DOT&PF's preliminary analysis indicated an EA is the appropriate class of action based on several factors. The protected resources are well-defined in this corridor, based on the DOT&PF staff's long history of successfully avoiding, minimizing and mitigating impacts to these protected resources and communities over the decades of maintaining, operating and constructing improvements to the Seward Highway along Turnagain Arm. Additionally, the planned highway improvements aren't included in the Federal Highway Administration's list of example projects that normally require an environmental impact statement (listed in 23 Code of Federal Regulations 771.115(a)(1) through (6)).

12. Where will road-building material come from? Will it be mined from Chugach State Park?

We're working with resource agencies, including Chugach State Park, to identify important natural resources within the corridor. We're currently designing a proposed alignment that we'll present to the public, agencies, and other stakeholders. At that time, we'll know more about where road building materials will come from and any potential impacts to Chugach State Park.

Questions?



Email the project team at info@safersewardhighway.com
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