



Public Involvement Plan Safer Seward Highway

TransportationX

Prepared for:
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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
ADN	<i>Anchorage Daily News</i>
ad	advertisement
ARRC	Alaska Railroad Corporation
CE	categorical exclusion
CRO	Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities Civil Rights Office
DOT&PF	State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
EA	environmental assessment
EPM	<i>Alaska DOT&PF Environmental Procedures Manual</i>
FAQ	Frequently Asked Question
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
HPCM	<i>Alaska Highway Preconstruction Manual</i>
MOA	Municipality of Anchorage
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	milepost
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NOA	Notice of Availability
NOI	Notice of Intent
OWJ	official with jurisdiction
PDF	Portable Document Format
PI	public involvement
PIP	Public Involvement Plan
Project	Seward Highway MPs 98.5 to 118 Bird Flats to Rabbit Creek Project
QR	Quick Response
REM	Regional Environmental Manager
ROW	right-of-way
SME	subject matter expert
USDOT	U.S. Department of Transportation

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1 General Information

1.1 Project Overview

The State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is proposing to construct safety improvements along the Seward Highway between Bird Flats and Rabbit Creek, from mileposts (MPs) 98.5 to 118 (hereafter referred to as the Project; see **Figure 1**).

Proposed improvements may include the following:

- A divided highway with expansion up to four travel lanes and/or sections of up to four travel lanes
- Realignment of the highway to flatten curves
- Relocation and realignment of the Alaska Railroad Corporation's (ARRC) railroad tracks (as needed)
- Construction and/or improvement of turnouts/parking areas
- Construction of acceleration and deceleration lanes
- Construction of rock catchments (as needed)
- Construction of non-motorized pathways and facilities

The Seward Highway is a state-owned and operated highway within the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA). The Project area falls within a DOT&PF Designated Safety Corridor, a segment of state highway with a higher than average incidence of fatal and major injury crashes. The Seward Highway is also recognized for its scenic, natural, historical, and recreational values and holds three designations: U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service Scenic Byway, Alaska Scenic Byway, and All-American Road. These designations recognize and protect the most scenic, historic, and recreational highways in the United States.

Figure 1. Project Base Map



1.2 Project History

The current effort to improve safety along the Seward Highway between Anchorage and Girdwood began in the early 2000s. In 2004, DOT&PF proposed design improvements for a problematic section of the Seward Highway between MPs 105 and 115 to improve vehicular and pedestrian safety along this highway. DOT&PF and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) signed and approved a categorical exclusion (CE) in 2004; however, design and permitting efforts for this project were suspended due to lack of available construction funding.

In 2006, the Seward Highway from MPs 90 to 117.5 was designated as the state's first safety corridor due to the elevated rate of fatal and major injury (high-severity) crashes. Since 2007, DOT&PF has made efforts to provide physical safety improvements along stretches of the corridor with historically higher rates of high-severity crashes (DOT&PF 2017). Many factors affect crash severity, including roadway geometry; road and weather conditions; speed; seatbelt use; vehicle type; driver impairment, fatigue, and/or attitude; and emergency response resources. Since 2006, safety improvement projects have targeted the stretch between MPs 99 and 111 due to the higher frequency and severity of crashes.

A CE prepared for Project Z566310000 (Seward Highway Safety Improvements, Indian to Potter Marsh, MPs 105–115) was approved in 2004 and re-evaluated as a part of the smaller Seward Highway MP 105–107 Windy Corner Project, which kicked off in 2012. As a result of public feedback and consultation with FHWA, DOT&PF revised the Class of Action from a CE to an environmental assessment (EA) in 2017. DOT&PF conducted the Seward Highway MP 105–107 Windy Corner Project in compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, producing a Draft EA that was made available to the public in March 2020 ([DOT&PF 2020](#)). After reviewing public comments received on that document, DOT&PF evaluated extending this project north, between Windy Corner and Rainbow Point at MPs 105 to 109.5.

In 2022, DOT&PF further extended the scope of the study to encompass the highway from MPs 98.5 to 118. This Project has been identified as Project No. 0A31034/ Z566310000 Seward Highway MPs 98.5 to 118 Bird Flats to Rabbit Creek. This will allow DOT&PF to develop solutions for a longer corridor, considering impacts and mitigation in a comprehensive manner. The Project team will incorporate comments, issues, and analyses from prior projects in identifying the needs and potential transportation solutions during this Project. The NEPA process will begin anew to address the changed project termini.

1.3 Project Purpose

The purpose of the proposed Project is to implement safety upgrades to decrease high-severity crashes and improve traffic operations to alleviate traffic congestion. Because it is a designated safety corridor, DOT&PF is actively managing the tightly constrained, two-lane highway to keep through and local traffic moving and safe. The Project will also seek to provide capacity for long-term growth and peak traffic periods. More specifics on the purpose of and need for the Project will be developed and summarized in a purpose and need statement, which will be available for public review and comment during scoping.

1.4 Purpose of the Public Involvement Plan

This Public Involvement Plan (PIP) details the proposed methods for involving agencies, organizations, and the public during the EA. Public involvement (PI) is the systematic process designed to provide clear and consistent information to those people who might be affected by the plan (stakeholders), and to engage people and groups at appropriate, meaningful levels of the decision-making process. Good PI also provides clear expectations for the Project sponsor as well as the various stakeholder groups.

The primary goals of this PIP are to:

- Effectively engage stakeholders through education and involvement;
- Clarify DOT&PF and stakeholders' roles, responsibilities, and ability to influence decisions; and
- Detail the relevant federal, DOT&PF, and MOA requirements for PI that will govern the PI process.

This PIP is based on the following principles:

- The Project team will keep an open mind and consider all points of view.
- The Project team will keep the public informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback regarding how public input has influenced Project decisions.
- The Project team will openly share information to help the public become familiar with the issues and public process.
- The Project team will clearly define, acknowledge, and communicate milestones in the process to allow for public comment at the times when input has the potential to affect decision-making.
- The Project team will offer input opportunities in multiple formats so each stakeholder can communicate in a manner that best meets their needs.
- This PIP is a working document, and the Project team may revise it as needed.

1.5 Regulatory Requirements

Public and agency involvement on transportation projects completed by DOT&PF within the MOA are guided by a range of documents including:

- *Alaska DOT&PF Environmental Procedures Manual (EPM)*
- *Alaska Highway Preconstruction Manual (HPCM)*
- NEPA Assignment Program Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between FHWA and DOT&PF
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Title 21 of the Anchorage Municipal Code (Chapter 21.03.190)
- MOA's Context Sensitive Solutions Policy

2 Project Decision-Makers and Stakeholders

This section describes the decision-makers and stakeholders involved in the Project. Different stakeholders will have varying levels of interest in the process. Brief summaries of agency and stakeholder roles, and how each group will be involved in the PIP, are provided below.

2.1 Agency Decision-Makers

This section lists key decision-makers at the local, state, and federal levels who will be engaged regularly to review issues, make key decisions, and determine key messaging that will be shared with Project stakeholders. Section 4, Stakeholder Involvement Methods and Tools, identifies methods, tools, and processes used to engage key agency decision-makers to ensure continuity and coordination on key Project and stakeholder issues.

2.1.1 Key Local Decision-Makers

Key local decision-makers, who are local-level stakeholders with key interests in the success of this Project, include:

- Anchorage School District
- MOA:
 - Anchorage Fire Department
 - Anchorage Police Department
 - Mayor's Office
 - Anchorage Assembly
 - Department of Economic and Community Development
 - Parks and Recreation Department
 - Planning and Zoning Commission
 - Planning Department
 - Urban Design Commission

2.1.2 Key State Decision-Makers

Key state decision-makers, who are state-level stakeholders with key interests in the success of this Project, include:

- Alaska Governor's Office
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Habitat Section
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources:
 - Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation
 - State Historic Preservation Office(r)
- DOT&PF:
 - Office of the Commissioner
 - Central Region Director
 - Regional Environmental Manager (REM)
 - Statewide NEPA Program Manager
 - Right-of-Way (ROW) and Utilities
- ARRC

2.1.3 Key Federal Decision-Makers

Key federal decision-makers, who are federal-level stakeholders with key interests in the success of this Project, include:

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT)/FHWA
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

2.2 Other Informed Organizations or Individuals

Other organizations or individuals who are stakeholders with key interests in the success of this Project include:

- U.S. Representative and Senators:
 - Alaska Representative, District At Large
 - Alaska Senator, Senior
 - Alaska Senator, Junior
- Alaska Legislature: Senators and Representatives:
 - Senate District C
 - Senate District D
 - Senate District E
 - House District 6
 - House District 7
 - House District 8
 - House District 9
 - House District 10
 - House District 11
- Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions:
 - Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
 - Citizen's Advisory Committee
 - Freight Committee
 - Policy Committee
 - Technical Advisory Committee
- Federation of Community Councils:
 - Girdwood Board of Supervisors
 - Turnagain Arm Community Council
 - Rabbit Creek Community Council
 - Old Seward/Ocean View Community Council
- Homeowners' Associations:
 - Rainbow Valley Homeowners' Association
 - Chugach Park View Homeowners' Association
 - Potter Creek Homeowners' Association
 - Goldenview Park Homeowners' Association

- Southpark Terrace Homeowners' Association

2.3 Potential Stakeholders

The Seward Highway has numerous potential stakeholders, including area residents and businesses, recreational users, federal and state agencies, local government, emergency services, utilities, tribal entities, and non-governmental organizations. **Table 1** provides a list of potential stakeholders, including:

- Those who actively participated in prior related environmental studies and
- Those who may be impacted by construction.

Table 1. Potential Stakeholder Groups

Potential Stakeholder Groups	
General Public	
Residents and property owners Surrounding local businesses Consumers statewide	Traveling public Commuters Park/trail users
Users	
Cargo businesses Ground transportation services ARRC	Alaska tour companies Developers
Public Utilities	
Alaska Communications Systems Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility	Chugach Electric Association General Communications Incorporated
Local Governments	
Director, MOA Office of Economic and Community Development Director, MOA Parks and Recreation Director, MOA Planning and Zoning Commission Kenai Peninsula Borough	City of Seward City of Whittier City of Kenai City of Soldotna City of Homer
State/Federal Agencies	
Alaska State Troopers National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Marine Fisheries Service National Park Service State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game	State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources DOT&PF U.S. Environmental Protection Agency U.S. Army Corps of Engineers U.S. Coast Guard U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service U.S. Department of the Interior FHWA U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Tribal Organizations / Governments	
Cook Inlet Region, Inc. Kenaitze Indian Tribe	Ninilchik Traditional Council Chenega Corporation

Potential Stakeholder Groups	
Elected Officials	
Governor of Alaska Mayor of Anchorage Anchorage Municipal Assembly Alaska State Senate	Alaska House of Representatives U.S. House of Representatives U.S. Senate
Nongovernmental Organizations	
The Alaska Center Anchorage Trails and Greenways Coalition Friends of the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge Nordic Ski Association of Anchorage Bike Commuters of Anchorage Bike Anchorage Cruise Lines International Association	Anchorage Citizens Coalition Alaska Municipal League Anchorage Park Foundation Anchorage Waterways Council Anchorage Running Club Kenai River Sportfishing Association Alaska Outdoor Council
Community and Economic Development Organizations	
Alaska Travel Industry Association Alaska Trucking Association Alaska Chamber of Commerce Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau Anchorage Chamber of Commerce Anchorage Economic Development Corporation Kenai Mountains Turnagain Arm Corridor Communities Association	Arctic Bicycle Club Chugach State Park Citizens' Advisory Board Climber's Alliance Federation of Community Councils Girdwood Community Council Hope Alaska Chamber of Commerce Bike Anchorage

2.4 Environmental Justice

Project communications (i.e., PI) will meet the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), Executive Order 12898 *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*, and FHWA Order 6640.23A *FHWA Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*. Based on the Windy Corner Project, linguistic, cultural, or institutional disparities are not anticipated; however, the project team has conducted a high-level review. The analysis has confirmed that there is a low likelihood of environmental justice impacts based on the following demographic data:

- The lowest average household income of the seven block groups that intersect the project area is \$97,500; the highest is \$184,722. This is higher than the most recent poverty guidelines for Alaska, published in 2017 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- The project area is less diverse than the MOA as a whole. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the MOA is 56.5 percent “White.” The project area is more “White,” ranging from 70.3 percent in Tract 27.13 to 86.9 percent in Tract 29.

3 Public Involvement Methods and Tools

This section outlines the outreach steps, methods, tactics, and activities that will be used to engage the public and Project stakeholders and enable them to meaningfully contribute to the Project. The activities will build upon each other to solicit public comments that will be incorporated into the PI report.

The activities described below are not listed in chronological order. Many of these activities will occur concurrently throughout the Project. Actual dates will coincide with Project activities, milestones, and deliverables.

3.1 Scoping

NEPA requires scoping to determine the scope of environmental issues that need to be addressed, identify alternatives and measures that may mitigate adverse environmental impacts, and identify other environmental requirements that should be performed concurrently with Draft EA development.

3.1.1 Agency Scoping

Scoping letters will be sent to inform agencies with expertise or jurisdiction within an area affected by the Project. An agency scoping meeting will be held in early 2023, and a Stakeholder Working Group will be convened. It is anticipated that this working group will meet on a monthly basis. Please see Section 4, Stakeholder Involvement Methods and Tools, for more information on the plan to involve agencies, which will begin prior to scoping and continue after scoping.

3.1.2 Public Scoping

Public scoping will begin with a Notice of Intent (NOI) to Begin Engineering Studies to be published to inform the public and agencies of DOT&PF's intent to begin environmental review for this Project. This NOI will be published in a local newspaper and online on the State of Alaska Online Public Notices website. A 30-day public comment period will be provided. Additionally, public scoping will be announced on the Project website and via the communications tools described below, including a deadline for comments. Newspapers in which advertising will be considered include: *Anchorage Daily News* (ADN), *Peninsula Clarion*, *Homer News*, and *Seward Journal*. A public meeting will be held during scoping, anticipated during the first quarter of 2023, to solicit input. All comments received will be reviewed by the Project team and appended to a scoping summary report.

3.2 Public Notices

Public notices, including NOIs, Notices of Availability (NOA), and Notices of Public Meetings/Hearings, will be managed per guidance provided by the EPM and HPCM. In addition to the specific requirements for different notice types, all notices will include the standard practices described in the following subsections.

3.2.1 National Environmental Policy Act Notice Language

The NEPA Assignment Program MOU between FHWA and DOT&PF requires DOT&PF to include the following disclosure as part of agency outreach and PI procedures, including any NOIs, scoping materials, scoping meeting notes, public meeting notices, NOAs, or public hearings:

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.

3.2.2 Civil Rights/Title VI/Americans with Disabilities Act Notices

DOT&PF is required by federal agreement to include a disclosure regarding Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) compliance as part of agency outreach and PI. The Project team will work with the DOT&PF Civil Rights Office (CRO) to confirm the most current language prior to publication. At the time of writing this PIP, the current language is:

It is the policy of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) that no one shall be subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability, regardless of the funding source, including Federal Transit Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and State of Alaska funds. Full Title VI Nondiscrimination Policy: dot.alaska.gov/tvi_statement.shtml. To file a complaint, go to: dot.alaska.gov/cvlrts/titlevi.shtml. For individuals requiring TTY communications, please contact Alaska Relay 711 or 1-800-676-3777.

CRO notices will be published with all public announcements, and Title VI documents will be displayed at public meetings and documented in the meeting record.

3.2.3 Notices of Public Meetings/Hearings

Public meetings held during scoping or other periods in which the Project team desires to inform the public and/or solicit feedback will be noticed following the standard requirements. If the public meeting is being held in conjunction with a public hearing, the meeting notice will also include the additional requirements for a public hearing.

The Project team anticipates that a public hearing will be held following release of the Draft EA for public comment. The Notice of Public Hearing may be published jointly with the Draft EA NOA.

In addition to meeting standard requirements, a Notice of Public Hearing will be:

- Issued at least 15 days in advance of the hearing to appropriate agencies, officials, property owners, community groups, FHWA, and the DOT&PF Commissioner and Regional Director;

- Published in local and regional newspapers: the first time 30 to 40 days prior to the hearing and the second time 5 to 12 days prior to the hearing; newspapers in which advertising will be considered include ADN, *Peninsula Clarion*, *Homer News*, and *Seward Journal*; and
- Published on the State of Alaska website as an Online Public Notice.

The notice will include the following information:

- The deadline for submitting comments (a minimum of 30 days from the availability of the Draft EA until a minimum of 10 days after the public hearing)
- The statement: "...public hearing is for the purpose of considering the economic, social, and environmental effects of the Project and its consistency with the goals and objectives of such urban planning as has been carried out by the community"
- Project background information including:
 - Description of the proposed Project
 - Map or graphic of the proposed Project
 - Contact person's name and phone number
 - Locations of the following information:
 - Drawings maps, plans, reports, or other project information
 - Environmental documents
 - Written views from agencies, private groups, and individuals
- The procedure for submitting written comments
- The disclaimer "All public comments received will become part of the public record and may be subject to Freedom of Information Act request."
- The Project purpose and need, alternatives, and tentative schedule for ROW acquisition and construction
- Indication that relocation assistance programs will be discussed with applicable individuals and/or businesses
- Mandatory ADA text and other notices required by laws, Executive Orders, and regulations (e.g., Title VI, floodplains, wetlands, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act)
- Availability of the Draft EA NOA and where it can be found for review

3.2.4 Notices of Availability

Per EPM Section 7.5.5, DOT&PF will issue a public NOA after the Draft EA has been approved for distribution. In addition to meeting standard requirements, this NOA will:

- Describe the Project and its impacts, and explain where the Draft EA can be found for review;
- Be combined with the Notice of Public Hearing, if possible;
- Be published by other methods, as appropriate; and
- Be published a minimum of 15 days prior to a public hearing held for the purpose of releasing the Draft EA.

Once approved for distribution, the approved Draft EA will be made available in the following ways:

- Distributed electronically by DOT&PF to appropriate agencies for their review and comment
- By request for public review, including online via the Project website
- Via hard copies delivered to the Anchorage Loussac Library and Girdwood Community Library for public review
- Via hard copies kept on site at the Anchorage DOT&PF Central Region office and Statewide Environmental Office for public review

The Draft EA must be available for review and comment for a minimum of 30 days from the date the NOA was published.

In the event of a Finding of No Significant Impact, notice of such will be emailed to involved federal and state agencies. This notice will follow standard requirements and will be distributed by the same methods as the Draft EA NOA.

3.2.5 *De minimis* Impact Finding (if needed)

Per EPM Section 8.6.1, the public must have opportunity to review and comment on any DOT&PF intention to approve a *de minimis* impact finding related to parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges under Section 4(f) of the USDOT Act of 1966. This does not apply to historic sites. This comment opportunity is provided by way of a public notice, which:

- Should be combined with other required NEPA process public notices;
- Is required to provide at least a 2-week review and comment period;
- Should provide a longer review period if the HPCM's Public Involvement and Agency Coordination Chapter requires a longer period;
- Must include a comment period that occurs before the official with jurisdiction (OWJ) concurs with the *de minimis* finding; and
- Must be approved by the Statewide NEPA Manager prior to publication.

Public notices for a proposed *de minimis* impact finding must:

- State in the heading "Notice of Proposed *de minimis* Section 4(f) Finding" along with the project name and number;
- State that DOT&PF intends to make a finding that the proposed Project will not adversely affect the activities, features, and attributes of the Section 4(f) property(ies) after consideration of impact avoidance, minimization, and mitigation or enhancement measures and consultation with the OWJ;
- State that DOT&PF is requesting public comments on an intended *de minimis* Section 4(f) Impact Finding for the proposed Project and identify the property(ies) that is protected under Section 4(f) of the USDOT Act of 1966;
- Describe the potential impacts to the Section 4(f) property(ies); and
- Include the NEPA Assignment Program MOU language noted in Section 3.2.1.

3.3 Public Meetings/Open Houses

Public meetings/open houses will focus on the communities directly affected by the Project, centering on the people and businesses in communities that will likely feel the biggest impacts of the Project's development (Rabbit Creek, Turnagain Arm, Girdwood, Rainbow, and Indian). The Project team proposes to hold three sets of meetings: one during scoping, one for alternatives development, and for the Draft EA release. Each set of meetings will be held in three locations: once in South Anchorage, once in Indian, and once in Girdwood. To show that the Project team is listening and that its approach is reasonable, sensible, and responsible, the Project team will update the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) following each meeting. Each event will include a poster called "We Heard You" that highlights overall feedback and shows how the Project team responded to this feedback. The Project team will staff meetings to answer questions. Each meeting will begin with a short presentation from the Project team, followed by an open house and/or public hearing format as appropriate to answer specific questions the public may have and collect feedback.

The three anticipated meetings include the following:

- **Public Meeting #1 Scoping Meeting:** Scheduled for Quarter 1 of 2023 to solicit input regarding initial impacts to be considered during development of the Draft EA.
- **Public Meeting #2 Alternatives:** Scheduled for Quarter 3 of 2023 to share the proposed action and the alternative(s) that will be evaluated in the EA, provide an update on any engineering adjustments and analysis underway, and share the resources that will be the focus of the EA analysis.
- **Public Meeting #3 Draft EA and Draft Section 4(f) Analysis (may include Public Hearing):** Scheduled for Quarter 3 of 2024 to present the Draft EA and Section 4(f) analysis.

Two newspaper advertisements (ads) are planned for each public meeting, with additional communication methods (detailed in Section 3.5) planned to remind stakeholders of the comment period dates and opportunities to comment. The first newspaper ad will be published at the start of the comment period. The second newspaper ad will be published on the Sunday or Monday prior to the public meeting. Each newspaper ad will be one-quarter page in the ADN and other local papers. The ads will be in black and white. To comply with NEPA standards, the required legal language will be included in the newspaper ads. Public meeting ads will also include meeting details, comment period dates, and ways to comment. The newspaper ads will be submitted to the DOT&PF Project Manager for approval prior to submittal for publication.

3.4 Key Messaging

Messaging will consist of two components: (1) a simple and easily repeated broad Project message, and (2) topic-specific messaging. Each will be responsive to what the Project team hears from the public, how the Project progresses, and what topics Project staff deem most important for the public to know and understand. Safety (current safety issues and design improvements) will be at the center of all messaging.

Throughout the life of the Project, as formal comments are received, social media comments are reviewed, and Project staff converse with the public and stakeholders, issues will be re-evaluated and new messaging will be incorporated as appropriate.

Messaging will be developed with the audience at the forefront. Plain language will be used for maximum understanding. Technical language that is not commonly used or understood by a general audience will be avoided. Acronyms will be used sparingly and avoided if possible.

3.4.1 General Project Messaging

HDR, in coordination with DOT&PF, has developed general project messaging through the new project name and project logo: Safer Seward Highway. This message is easily repeatable by Project staff across all platforms, in each interview, and at every meeting. It will introduce the most important concept and will feed into more specific messaging.

3.4.2 Topic-Specific Messaging

Messaging about specific topics will be developed based on the issues of highest concern to the public. Examples include safety, rockfall mitigation, pedestrians and cyclists, recreational trail access, construction impacts, tourism, and speed limits. The key messages described below will be updated on a regular basis.

3.5 Media and Engagement

3.5.1 Branding

The Project team will develop a brand package to ensure a consistent look, feel, and message associated with the Project. The brand will help ensure that every tool and tactic reinforces the Project's key messages, education, and awareness goals. The brand will work to simplify this complex Project and communicate the value of the Project through every channel and at each touchpoint. The brand package will include:

- Tagline
- Key messages
- Graphic design concept and associated imagery: An info-graphics-heavy concept focused on simplicity, making the Project memorable and reinforcing project benefits, is anticipated.

The contractor will provide two or three options for DOT&PF's review and selection. Once an option is agreed upon, all communications tools will be developed in alignment with the brand concept.

3.5.2 General Outreach Campaign

In addition to the required advertising associated with public meetings, the Project team intends to use a variety of advertising, public, and media relations tactics to raise awareness and build support for the Project. Examples include:

- Social media advertising/boosted posts: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn (detailed in Section 3.7 Social Media)

- Develop a video series focused not only on Project information, but also on messaging from high-profile Project advocates (details in Section 3.6, Electronic/Digital Communication), which will align with the Project brand
- Radio ads, to include local stations as well as Spotify and possibly Pandora
- Radio talk show interviews with a variety of Project subject matter experts (SMEs) and third-party Project advocates
- Podcasts with a dynamic individual interviewing SMEs and Project advocates
- Movie theater ads in Anchorage and Kenai Peninsula communities
- Airport advertising
- Bus signage (interior and exterior)
- Flyers
- Coffee cup sleeves at coffee shops, particularly smaller communities south of the Project area
- Proactive media relations to help direct the narrative; pitch stories to key publications (*ADN*, *Peninsula Clarion*, *Alaska Journal of Commerce*, *Alaska Public Media*, *Homer News*, and *Seward Journal*), and provide interviewees (recognizing that the journalists will seek opposition interviews for a balanced story)
- Outreach to targeted key stakeholder groups from **Table 1**, including exploring opportunities to have the Project added to standing meeting agendas, providing regular updates via email, and/or other opportunities
- Project ambassadors who are identified and assigned to have direct communication with key members of active opposition groups; establish direct personal relationships to build trust, help to answer questions, educate, and identify and address concerns
- Other opportunities with a particular focus on reaching stakeholders in more rural communities

3.5.3 Print Materials

Print materials will help reinforce Project messaging at public events and are particularly useful in reaching individuals and communities with insufficient or unreliable internet access. Project print materials will include:

- Fact sheets
- Flyers (with Quick Response [QR] code directed to Project website)
- Brochures
- Pop-up banners (for in-person meetings, events, etc.)
- Other print materials such as postcards/mailers (to be considered and used if needed)

While the brochures and pop-up banners will be high level and static, flyers and the fact sheet will be updated when new information becomes available, posted on the Project website, and made available in advance of and at public events.

3.5.4 Public Meetings

Each public meeting will also be publicized using social media, emails/e-blasts, and the Project website. The Project team will explore radio advertising, public service announcements, and other mechanisms to ensure robust awareness.

3.5.5 Media Queries and Contacts

Shannon McCarthy, DOT&PF, is authorized to speak with the press/media about the Project. All media queries should be directed to Shannon, with a copy sent to HDR Public Outreach Lead Katherine Wood. DOT&PF will coordinate with the authorized spokespeople. If additional information is needed from the Project team, the HDR Public Outreach Lead will coordinate information gathering and response to DOT&PF.

3.6 Electronic/Digital Communication

3.6.1 Website

The Project Team will develop and maintain a Project website branded in alignment with and in support of the broader public information campaign. The website will be hosted by HDR at the following address: <https://safersewardhighway.com/>. The site will be ADA compliant and will provide Project information, meeting notices/PI opportunities, key contacts, a mechanism to submit comments, and other materials to support public education about the Project. The website will be maintained to ensure timeliness and accuracy of messaging, and the comments will be monitored and analyzed for message development and Project input.

3.6.2 E-blasts/Emails

A contact list that includes email addresses will be developed and maintained by HDR, initially using resources from previous DOT&PF projects near the Project corridor (e.g., the Windy Corner Project EA phase). The list will be kept current using contact information gathered through many of the tools outlined in this PIP.

The Project team will send e-blasts (and/or emails) as approved by DOT&PF. E-blasts use a paid service that includes the ability to track engagement and provide analytics including open rate, read rate, and reach.

3.6.3 Text Alerts

The Project team will investigate and recommend a system to push out text alerts for public meetings and other significant Project announcements. The GovDelivery system has a text feature and is an option.

3.6.4 Other

The Project team will investigate and recommend other forms of electronic and/or digital media that will help reach more remote audiences and/or key stakeholders. Some examples include 30-second to 1-minute Project videos (for social and/or paid advertising), QR code for use on print materials, and online message boards frequented by target audiences.

3.7 Social Media

Social media content will be developed by the consultant and sent to DOT&PF communications staff for posting on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Content will be provided in multiple formats to conform to the requirements and aesthetics of each platform. The consultant will provide scheduling and ad-boosting recommendations when delivering content to DOT&PF.

All content will be provided for posting on DOT&PF's main social media accounts. The consultant will provide sharing recommendations for Facebook groups where applicable.

Social media will serve as both a tool to drive engagement in the public process as well as to educate and inform regarding Project benefits. Posts will use a variety of high-impact imagery, including infographics; photographs; or short, engaging videos intended to inspire support for upgrades to the infrastructure. Language in the posts will be casual and easy-to-understand for broad comprehension and appeal. Each post will link back to the Project website, where the user can find more information and Project contact information.

Content will focus on specific topics or calls to action related to the Project and will be posted consistently throughout the NEPA process. Social media messaging will integrate with other communication tactics by mirroring other messaging and outreach activities. For example, if the Project team sets up a booth at a cycling event, social media posts in the days surrounding the event could focus on multimodal transportation alternatives. Each focused post will work in concert with the overall, general Project messaging. Potential topics include pedestrian and cyclist access, scenic pull-outs, rockfall mitigation, addressing safety concerns, corridor history, and recreational trail access.

Tactics to strengthen engagement will include calls to action (e.g., attend a meeting, comment on alternatives, click a link, tag a friend in the comments) and platform-specific tactics. Potential examples include a photography contest on Instagram or a poll/quiz on Twitter.

In addition to communicating information to the public and stakeholders, social media will be used to understand what the public is saying about the Project. Social media comments will not be considered formal Project comments but will be reviewed to increase awareness of the public conversation about the Project, help guide messaging, and evaluate the effectiveness of messaging.

3.8 In-Person Events

3.8.1 Traveling Open Houses/Listening Posts

The Project team will develop and implement Traveling Open Houses/Listening Posts, each of which will consist of a set of informational displays and handouts set up in a public place over a period of at least 4 hours. HDR will provide staff to answer questions and listen to input from participants. The Traveling Open House/Listening Post event(s) will be advertised through postcards; contact with the media, including newspaper ads; social media; and on the Project website.

Up to eight Listening Posts are planned over the course of the Project. Proposed locations include:

- Community events in Anchorage, Girdwood, Kenai, and surrounding communities (e.g., Girdwood Forest Fair, Anchorage Transportation Fair)
- Local sporting goods shops, including REI, Skinny Raven, and others

- Recreational events such as the Alaska mountain runners trail series, Alyeska Slush Cup, and Kenai Silver Salmon Derby

3.8.2 Road Show to Peninsula

To facilitate maximum engagement at in-person events, a road show package will be compiled, consisting of a variety of outreach materials that could include:

- Printed materials
- Tablets to show digital renderings of the design
- Virtual reality goggles for viewing digital renderings
- DOT&PF and/or Project swag
- Computers to allow submission of geo-located comments
- Games or contests
- Logo promotional items

The Project team will reach out to the Alaska Chamber of Commerce, local Chambers, and the Alaska Municipal League to identify local events with the biggest draws.

3.8.3 Community Council Updates

The Project team will offer to make presentations to all community councils within immediate proximity of the Project area, including, but not limited to the Turnagain Arm Community Council, Portage Valley Community Council, Rabbit Creek Community Council, Bear Valley Community Council, Old Seward/Oceanview Community Council, Anchorage Hillside Home and Landowners Organization, and Girdwood Community Council (Girdwood Board of Supervisors). These presentations will provide information regarding the Project's status, scope, and schedule.

Upon request, the Project team will give updates to additional community councils and other interest groups. Community councils and other interest groups will be included in email updates, and public notices will be sent to representatives of these groups with a request that they distribute the notice to their members.

3.9 Accessibility

Visual or hearing-impaired individuals' inability to participate in meetings and access materials may preclude or inhibit them from attending or participating in Project activities. In response to this potential accessibility barrier, the Project team will use ADA-compliant techniques for all materials and have reasonable accommodations for meetings.

3.10 Research, Data, and Reporting

3.10.1 Comment Database

Comments received via website submittal, email, mail, phone, or written form will be distributed to the Project team and archived in a comment database managed by HDR.

Comments received outside of a comment period will be acknowledged and considered by the team but will not receive individual responses. If a question is asked that is answered by

existing materials, the Project team will provide the materials that share the information. If a question is asked that is not answerable based on existing analyses or data, the question will be acknowledged and shared with the Project team. The DOT&PF Project Manager will determine if additional research will be performed to answer the question, or if the question will be forwarded to the next stage of the study.

All comments gathered during the Scoping and Draft EA comment periods will be collated and summarized. Comments received on the Draft EA will be responded to in the Final EA.

The following protocol (see **Table 2**) has been developed to streamline tracking, integration, and response to comments received from the public and agencies. This protocol will be managed by the PI Team Lead and implemented by all Project team representatives. Compliance will be monitored, and this protocol can be adjusted as necessary throughout the Project.

Table 2. Public Involvement Tracking Protocol

Type	Procedure
Email Inquiries	Emails received from the public or agencies will be forwarded to the PI Task Lead. Emails will be converted to electronic, text-selectable Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) files and stored in Project files.
Inquiries Mailed to DOT&PF	Mail delivered to DOT&PF will be date stamped, scanned (including the envelope to show date postmarked and who the mail was addressed to), and emailed to the PI Task Lead by DOT&PF staff to enter, and will be stored electronically in the Project files.
Telephone Calls	The call receiver will summarize the call in a telephone log, which will be forwarded to the PI Task Lead.
Face-to-Face Conversations	Comments received in face-to-face conversations will be summarized on a comment sheet, on a contact log, or in an email and sent to the PI Task Lead.
FAQ Responses	Standard responses to anticipated questions/comments or FAQs will be drafted to help facilitate the understanding and consistency of responses to standard inquiries.
Media Inquiries	All media inquiries will be directed to the DOT&PF Commissioner’s Office Public Information Officer.
Social Media Posts and Comments	Comments and questions submitted via social media will not be responded to or included in the comment database. Social media will be monitored for questions that need to be addressed by the PI or Project team through FAQs or public information materials.

3.10.2 Public Opinion Survey

The Project team will engage a third-party research firm to develop and execute a public opinion survey to establish baseline sentiment regarding the Project and test messaging. A follow-up survey will be conducted after 9 months to assess progress, adjust messages as needed, and inform the plan for continued Project outreach.

The Project team may recommend online focus groups, an online survey, or other less formal research depending on the public response during early engagement.

3.10.3 Media Monitoring and Data Analytics

The Project team will monitor news articles, letters to the editor, and other published sources to gather information and relevant public input. Media monitoring and data analytics software

services can be used to provide alerts of any mention of the Project and its associated keywords when used on the internet. It will also track online hits and traffic for data-driven PI reporting. Data and relevant information will be reported to DOT&PF.

4 Stakeholder Involvement Methods and Tools

4.1 Agency Introduction and Scoping Letters

Engagement with agencies will be initiated by DOT&PF’s Central Region or Statewide Environmental Office personnel. Initial outreach will occur through a letter of introduction that includes information regarding Project leadership, Project purpose and need, Project goals, areas of impact, and expected actions needed under NEPA for the EA. Introductory letters will invite the recipients to an Agency Kick-off Meeting, during which Project staff will provide an overview of the Project and identify the key agency decision-makers who will participate in regular coordination meetings. Key agency decision-makers should have the authority to speak for their respective organizations. The Project team will support these engagements by crafting the Project introduction letter and key messaging, preparing a presentation and agenda for the kick-off meeting, and producing informational leave-behind documents. Refer to Section 3.1 for details on scoping, including an agency scoping letter and an agency meeting.

4.2 Stakeholder Working Group

The Stakeholder Working Group will consist of representatives from key state, federal, and local agencies as well as community organizations with the power to speak on behalf of their organizations. Following Project initiation and scoping, this group will meet regularly (anticipated monthly) to discuss Project progress, issues, and resolutions, particularly as they relate to the EA. **Table 3** provides a list of the agencies and community organizations that are anticipated to be invited to participate in the Stakeholder Working Group.

The Project team will continue to populate the following tables as contact information is collected.

Table 3. Stakeholder Working Group

Organization
Alaska Department of Natural Resources / Chugach State Park
Alaska Department of Fish and Game – Habitat Section
State Historic Preservation Office
Alaska Railroad Corporation
Municipality of Anchorage Planning and Zoning
Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions
National Marine Fisheries Service
Bike Anchorage
Friends of Chugach
Alaska Trucking Association
Alaska Travel Industry Association
Potter Marsh Homeowners Association
Chugach Park Homeowners Association
Turnagain Arm Community Council

Organization
Rabbit Creek Community Council
Girdwood Board of Supervisors

4.3 Other Informed Organizations / Agencies

Table 4 provides a list of other organizations, individuals, and agencies who may be interested in the Project and will be added to the email list.

Table 4. Other Informed Organizations/Agencies

Agency
Alaska Congressional Delegation
Alaska Senate, Districts C, D, and E
Alaska House of Representatives, Districts 7, 8, and 9
Alaska State Troopers
Anchorage School District
Portage Valley Community Council
Anchorage Assembly
Municipality of Anchorage
Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development
Anchorage Fire Department
Anchorage Police Department
Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department
City of Seward
City of Soldotna
City of Homer
City of Whittier
City of Kenai
Audubon Alaska
Cook Inlet Region, Inc.
Chenega Corporation
Kenaitze Indian Tribe
Ninilchik Traditional Council
Qutekcak Native Tribe
Rainbow Valley Homeowners' Association
Golden View Homeowners' Association

4.4 Stakeholder Working Group Communications

The purpose of the communications process is to keep all key decision-makers and other key stakeholders up to date on all identified issues, ensure a common understanding, and provide assurance that their issues are being heard and addressed as completely as possible.

As outlined above, communications will kick off with an introductory letter followed by an Agency Kick-Off Meeting with each key decision-making agency. Representatives from each agency and organization will be invited to participate in an Stakeholder Working Group, which will hold regular virtual meetings (anticipated monthly). During each virtual meeting, Project staff will provide a Project update and discuss key issues, identified risks, potential solutions/mitigation, and course of action. This discussion will be recorded in a Key Issues document (described below).

This document will be disseminated to all participating key agency decision-makers, and all outstanding issues will be reviewed at each Stakeholder Working Group meeting. As each issue is addressed and finalized, that issue will be “closed.” If a formal response is required, the accountable agency will attach the response and the date sent. The Project team will support agency responses, keep and update the Key Issues list, and facilitate Stakeholder Working Group meetings.

Two known determinations needed for the EA are determinations for Section 4(f) of the USDOT Act and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. These determinations will be made by DOT&PF Environmental personnel.

Table 5 provides a draft Key Issues template that the Stakeholder Working Group will use to track ongoing Project issues. This document will be used by the key decision-makers to communicate internally and externally with one voice on Project issues. A stakeholder matrix will be maintained to track stakeholder engagement, meetings, and issues.

Table 5. Draft Key Issues Template

Seward Highway MP 98.5–118 Key Issues									
No.	Agency	Issue/ Policy	Risk	Proposed Mitigation/ Solution	Course of Action	Message	Open/ Closed	Agency Attachment	Date Sent
1									
2									
3									
4									

5 Implementation of Public Involvement Plan

Table 6 provides a draft implementation plan for the Project. Note that all dates and tools are subject to change.

Table 6. Implementation Plan

Step in Process	Timing	Key Input Points	Tools
Initiation	January – February 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PIP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Notice (NOI to begin engineering and environmental studies) Website Branding Project handouts Public opinion survey
Scoping	February – May 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scope of the study Purpose and need Alternatives to be considered (proposed action and no action, request for any others?) Meet with MOA Planning and Zoning (P&Z) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scoping letter sent out Public notice (Public Meeting #1) Public Meeting #1/open house/scoping meeting Introductory stakeholder one-on-one meetings Stakeholder Working Group meetings 30-day comment period Mobile Campaign
Affected Environment Studies	January – November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 106 process MOA P&Z Application with Concept Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media photograph contest Listening posts First Stakeholder Working Group meeting P&Z Commission meeting
Alternative(s) Refinement	January – November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design refinement including road, rail, pathway, trail, and access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Notice (Public Meeting #2) Public Meeting #2/open house/alternatives meeting Listening posts
Draft EA and Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation	June 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DOT&PF may identify a preferred alternative Alternatives impact analysis outcomes Proposed mitigation measures Section 4(f) <i>de minimis</i> impact finding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public notice (Public Meeting #3 Hearing/NOA for Draft EA/<i>de minimis</i> Impact Finding) Public Meeting #3/open house/potential public hearing 30-day comment period Road trip to Kenai Peninsula
Final EA and Final Section 4(f) Evaluation; Finding of No Significant Impact	November 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A preferred alternative must be identified Informs of DOT&PF's final decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public notice (Final EA NOA) Statute of Limitations and publication in <i>Federal Register</i>

Step in Process	Timing	Key Input Points	Tools
Ongoing	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informational updates• General Project awareness building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholder Working Group meetings• Community council meetings• Social media• Earned media• Website• Email• Listening posts• Media coordination and monitoring

6 Project Contacts

The following contacts will be used for public materials:

- General:
 - Project Email: info@safersewardhighway.com
 - Phone: (907) 802-3656
- Project Website:
 - <https://safersewardhighway.com/>