



Project Purpose and Proposed Action

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 higher rate of fatal and major-injury crashes than similar corridors in the state. 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 2022¹](#)), but serious crashes are still happening, 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 would decrease crashes, improve safety, and provide space for mixed-user groups along the corridor.

2. What is the Proposed Action?

The Proposed Action is a four-lane, divided highway with a 55-mile-per-hour (mph) design and posted speed with a separated multi-use pathway. The highway would be updated to: add a barrier, median, or vertical separation for north- and southbound travel lanes; provide space along the road for falling rock or ice; add turn pockets and travel lanes; adjust the Alaska Railroad (ARRC) alignment and tracks to accommodate the widened highway; and improve intersections, culverts and drainage, parking and recreational access, and signage. To make these changes, the highway would be widened into the mountainside in some locations, requiring rock cuts, and extend toward the water for approximately 7 miles, requiring fill placement into Turnagain Arm and realignment of railroad track.

3. Did you look at smaller options? Why didn't those work?

Yes, we looked at a wide variety of locations and ideas with our Stakeholder Working Group. We looked at a three-lane option, which would mean alternating passing lanes, and an undivided option, both three- and four-lane. Of these, the four-lane divided highway performed the best at improving safety, ease of maintenance, and ability to stay open during emergency events. The three-lane ideas provided much lower safety benefits, with a high cost; construction would also require more lane and road closures. This analysis is documented in the Traffic and Safety Analysis, which is included as Appendix G of the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA). The undivided highway and three-lane options do not meet the project's purpose and need, as documented in Appendix E (Highway Configuration Development and Selection Memorandum) of the Draft EA.

¹ https://dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/hwysafety/safety_corridors.shtml

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

Yes, a separate, non-motorized, shared-use pathway is part of the design. However, the pathway alone does not provide sufficient safety improvements to advance as a stand-alone improvement; therefore, it is part of the larger highway project.

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

No. There isn't enough room within the existing ROW to make the needed improvements. We have avoided and minimized impacts on residential and commercial property. ROW would need to be acquired from Chugach State Park, and if mitigation for this is documented in the project's Section 4(f) evaluation ([SSH Project EA Appendix Individual Section 4\(f\) Evaluation Appendix S²](#)). ROW would need to be acquired from the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge on the water side; we carefully routed the improvements to avoid impacts to deep-water habitat in Potter Marsh.

6. **Where would road-building material come from? Would it be mined from Chugach State Park?**

Necessary cuts to the mountainside to construct the improvements would supply sufficient materials for the rest of the corridor. No material site(s) are proposed within the park. The engineers have looked closely at ways to balance the amount of cut and fill in the design.

Design engineers would continue to strive toward greater balance between cut and fill needs within the project, providing both cost and time-savings.

Cost

7. **How much will it cost?**

The current cost estimate is \$1.4 billion (2024 dollars) for the entire project over 10 to 20 years. Construction would occur in stages, roughly \$150 million at a time, much as we have built out improvements to the Seward Highway through Anchorage, from 36th Avenue to O'Malley Road. Future phases would be funded using National Highway System funds and federal grants as well as state-match funds. Stages and timing would depend on funding availability.

8. **Why did the estimated project cost increase from \$600 to \$700 million to \$1.4 billion?**

The \$600 to \$700 million cost came from DOT&PF's 2017 Reconnaissance Study, and the new cost estimate is \$1.4 billion. There are two reasons that the current cost estimate is higher: refinement of engineering and inflation. As the engineers have begun detailing the project to the 15% level of design, we have a better sense of how much excavation and material would be needed, how the project might be constructed, and where it would be

² <https://safersewardhighway.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Appendix-S.-Section-4f-Evaluation.pdf>

routed. This kind of engineering detail means that the current cost estimate is more accurate than prior reconnaissance engineering cost estimates. The other reason the project cost estimate is higher than estimated in 2017 is that during the COVID-19 pandemic, material costs for construction projects rose rapidly, for some materials by as much as 40%. Since that time, construction cost escalation has softened slightly, but inflation continues. As more engineering occurs over time, the cost would continue to change to reflect more detailed engineering and the current market.

9. How will the project be paid for?

This project expects to use federal funds from the National Highway Performance Program to design and construct this project. DOT&PF also plans to pursue federal grants.

10. Will advancing this project mean that other high-fatality corridors in Anchorage won't be addressed?

No. The Safer Seward Highway Project would have to compete with highway projects across the entire state for National Highway System funds. The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program process is how DOT&PF prioritizes among projects to be funded in the future, and public comment is encouraged.

At the same time, DOT&PF is committed to advancing work to address pedestrian deaths in Anchorage via the [Vision Zero Taskforce](#)³, an inter-agency group that is taking a comprehensive approach to pedestrian safety.

11. How would new improvements be maintained? Can we afford it?

Maintenance costs would increase for additional pavement surface, such as for plowing. DOT&PF is responsible for the increased maintenance needs and would include them in their annual maintenance and operations budget.

Environmental Process and Draft EA

12. Why is the environmental document an EA?

DOT&PF determined that an EA is the appropriate class of action for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document because significant environmental impacts can be avoided through design and mitigation.

13. What is a Section 4(f) evaluation?

Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Act provides special protection for publicly owned parks, recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites during federally funded transportation projects. Because the Seward Highway runs between Chugach State Park and the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge—both Section 4(f) properties—the project must avoid adversely affecting their activities, features, or attributes unless there is no feasible and prudent avoidance alternative. When use of these properties cannot be

³ <https://dot.alaska.gov/comm/pressbox/arch2024/PR24-0027.shtml>

avoided, an individual Section 4(f) evaluation is required to ensure compliance with the USDOT Act. This formal process, completed during the draft and final phases of the EA, identifies and evaluates avoidance alternatives and measures to minimize harm. If multiple reasonable alternatives use Section 4(f) property, it determines which causes the least overall harm. For the Safer Seward Highway Project, our team has conducted extensive analysis of Section 4(f) properties and impacts, published as a standalone document as Appendix S of the Draft EA for public review and comment. Learn more about Section 4(f) requirements in the FHWA Environmental Review Toolkit: [FHWA Environmental Review Toolkit](#)⁴.

Several park improvements and additions are proposed to mitigate impacts to Chugach State Park, including a pedestrian overcrossing at Beluga Point, improved parking facilities at Windy Corner and Beluga Point, and improvements to the Bird Creek Campground, along with many other improvements.

14. Is the project team considering a no-build alternative?

Yes, analysis of a no action alternative is a required part of the NEPA process and is included as part of the EA analysis. Once the Draft EA review period is complete, DOT&PF will review all comments and decide whether to select the No Action (no-build) or Proposed Action (build) alternative.

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

Yes. We've heard that the public values the scenic nature of the road and surrounding area. During the EA process, we evaluated how proposed changes to the highway might affect aesthetics. Avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures have been proposed to reduce visual impacts and will be continually refined during design. The Proposed Action would not make the Seward Highway lose its scenic designations. You can read the Visual Impact Assessment (Appendix N of the Draft EA) for more information.

16. How can you build into the Cook Inlet with the beluga whales?

Turnagain Arm is designated critical habitat for endangered Cook Inlet beluga whales. As such, we have consulted with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to avoid and reduce impacts on beluga whales, other marine mammals, and their habitat. Agreed-to mitigation measures include performing work at low tide when the area is dry, stopping work when beluga whales or other marine mammals are nearby, and using designated observers to implement the mitigation measures as specified by the NMFS permit. With the mitigation in place, NMFS has issued their opinion that marine mammals will not be harmed by this project.

17. How did feedback from the public and agencies influence the Draft EA?

It influenced the Draft EA a lot! Over the past 3 years, we have had extensive feedback from the public, agencies, and our Stakeholder Working Group that has shaped this project. Hearing about how people use the corridor and the safety challenges they've experienced has given us first-hand information to consider as we designed solutions within the constraints, avoided impacts, and found mitigation—win-win solutions. Based on your feedback, we have:

⁴ https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/Env_topics/4f_tutorial/overview.aspx?e=e#e

- Changed the project’s purpose and need to address mobility and reliability, and focus on all users (vehicles, bikes, rail, pedestrians);
- Added pedestrian undercrossings throughout the project corridor;
- Considered other possible solutions such as a three-lane (alternating passing lanes) and undivided highway configurations;
- Designed the separated multi-use pathway throughout the corridor;
- Designed for more rock cut and less fill in the water to minimize impacts on wildlife and Turnagain Arm;
- Avoided private property impacts;
- Avoided and mitigated Cook Inlet beluga whale impacts;
- Avoided cultural and historical resources impacts;
- Improved parking and park facilities; and
- Protected scenic views.

18. What happens after the Draft EA?

The Draft EA is available for a 60-day public review and comment period. After that, DOT&PF will review all the feedback from the public and agencies. If it is determined that impacts, mitigation, and public/agency input have been properly addressed, DOT&PF can decide whether to move forward with the Proposed Action, finalize the EA, and issue a Finding of No Significant Impact. From there, the project can move forward with engineering design. If DOT&PF decides to not advance the project, they can select the No Action alternative in the EA and close out the environmental review process.

19. How long will design take? When will construction start?

With a phased approach, we will be looking to design, fund, and construct in several segments. We are looking at a few locations that make sense as a Stage 1 project. When selected, design would commence if DOT&PF decides to move forward with the Proposed Action after the EA is finalized.

Questions we heard at the January 2026 Public Hearings

20. What’s the scoop with the “missing” appendix?

DOT&PF is not a decision-making entity in the Land and Water Conservation Act (LWCF) Section 6(f) process. Section 6(f) of the LWCF (Title 36, Part 59 in the Code of Federal Regulations [CFR]) requires that impacted protected park land be replaced with land of equal fair market value and reasonably equivalent usefulness and location. The Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the National Park Service (NPS) jointly implement the LWCF program in Alaska. To complete a Section 6(f) conversion of use, several steps must be completed. We have completed step 1 below. Step 2 is in progress.

DOT&PF offered replacement land for Section 6(f)-encumbered Chugach State Park (CSP) lands impacted by the Proposed Action, as described in Section 3.3.13.3 (page 66) of the Draft EA, as a portion of “a 103.1-acre parcel above the Stuckagain Heights neighborhood

adjacent to CSP (MOA Parcel 04101111000).”

DNR can choose to accept that replacement land, verifying that it meets the existing comprehensive statewide outdoor recreation plan and provisions of Section 6(f). We are meeting with DNR currently to support their decision-making. This will be documented in a DNR Commissioner’s Finding, which will be announced by DNR in a public notice.

NPS will receive the details of the conversion of use from DNR and will complete a NEPA process (likely an EA) and analysis to confirm that the Section 6(f) conversion requirements in 36 CFR 59.3 are met. When completed, NPS will amend the existing Section 6(f) boundary maps for CSP to show the conversion.

The Appendix T placeholder in the Safer Seward Highway Draft EA is intended to reserve space in the Final EA for an agreement or memorandum describing the DOT&PF and DNR conversion agreement and an LWCF EA completed by NPS (if NPS finalizes it in time). The land conversion agreement is currently being negotiated between DOT&PF and DNR. There will be a public comment opportunity associated with the public notice for the DNR Commissioner’s Finding. Also, the NPS LWCF manual states that the “public comment period shall be no less than 30 days” for LWCF EA Documents (see [LWCF Manual v72.1 - Land and Water Conservation Fund \[NPS⁵\]](#), Chapter 4, B.6.b(2)).

21. Will this project take away trailheads and recreation opportunities along the Seward Highway?

The project doesn’t include any proposed trailhead closures. It does, however, propose improvements to trailheads, increased parking capacity, and safety upgrades for trail access from the highway.

The project does propose to remove or alter approximately 44% of known rock-climbing routes within DOT&PF ROW or close to the highway. Widening the road is a central feature of the safety improvements. In this narrow corridor, the team tried to minimize both the impacts on beluga whale habitat in Cook Inlet and the amount of rock cutting on the opposite side of the highway. You can check out a breakdown of which climbing routes may be impacted at [Climbers Info - Safer Seward Highway⁶](#).

The project includes a proposed paved, separated pathway for bikes and pedestrians along the entire 20 miles that connects the Rabbit Creek Road pathway to the Bird to Gird Trail.

A proposed grade-separated access route over the railroad tracks at Beluga Point is also included.

The proposed improved parking area at Windy Corner includes a wildlife viewing area to make it easier to see Dall sheep where they most often gather. This is intended to provide a safe place to enjoy Alaska’s spectacular scenery and wildlife.

⁵ <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/v72-1.htm>

⁶ <https://safersewardhighway.com/climbers-info/>

22. Why can't we use this money for schools or police enforcement instead of this big project?

This project would be constructed using [National Highway Performance Program](#)⁷ (NHPP) funds. The Federal Highway Administration provides NHPP funding to states by formula. These are federal-aid funds designated solely for highway construction. They cannot be used for anything other than National Highway System projects.

23. Where is the data on safety problems?

The project team completed a [Traffic & Safety Analysis](#)⁸ in December 2024, which is included in the Draft EA as Appendix G. Crash data from 2017 to 2021 was used, as it is the most current available data for this (nearly) 20-mile segment. There is also a [Safety Corridor Audit](#)⁹ from 2022 that examined the performance of designated safety corridors across the state, including this segment.

24. If you just lower the speed limit, won't that fix all the safety problems?

While speed certainly impacts safety, the data shows that it is not the whole story. [Appendix G: Traffic and Safety Analysis](#) shows that weather and head-on collisions are significant factors. We cannot do much about the weather, but the analysis indicates that speed is not the only issue; problems also include limited space with tight corners, narrow lanes, and little room for error. A four-lane divided highway with access improvements will provide the space and separation that has been proven to save lives.

25. What data did you use to select the four-lane option?

DOT&PF performed a technical study to determine the configuration of the Proposed Action, [Appendix E: Highway Configuration Development and Selection Memorandum](#)¹⁰, and a safety analysis in Appendix G: Traffic and Safety Analysis; both are available on the project website for review.

Ultimately, we chose the four-lane divided option to support safety, reliability, and traffic.

- Future safety modeling predicted that the four-lane divided design would reduce total and serious/fatal crashes by about 68–69%—far more than the three-lane design, which would reduce total and serious crashes only by about 38%.
- Reliability data showed that four-lane highways stay open more often during serious incidents. The four-lane option is expected to stay open more reliably during emergencies and makes both construction and long-term maintenance more efficient, with fewer disruptions to travelers.

⁷ <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/specialfunding/nhpp/>

⁸ <https://safersewardhighway.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Appendix-G.-Traffic-Safety-Analysis.pdf>

⁹ https://safersewardhighway.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/23-04-24_2022_FINAL_Safety-Corridors-Audit_DOT-PF_DPS.pdf

¹⁰ <https://safersewardhighway.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Appendix-E.-Highway-Configuration-Development-Selection-Memo.pdf>

- Traffic counts and 2052 projections (including peak volumes up to 1,469 vehicles per hour) showed that only a four-lane road could meet the national standard for level of service for this type of facility. National guidance advises that a three lane road could meet the required performance level but advises against a three-lane layout once traffic exceeds about 1,200 vehicles per hour in one direction.

Taken together, the safety, reliability, and traffic data supported selecting the four-lane divided solution design.

Details: Traffic engineers predicted the future number and severity of crashes for each concept; see the [Traffic & Safety Analysis](#) (pages 24 and following), We also analyzed Safe System Approach scores (page 30) and looked at future levels of service to determine how well the roadway would function (page 33 and following).

26. What makes this option safer? The crash reduction percentages shared at the meeting were vague.

The four-lane divided option reduces all crashes by 68–69%, whereas the three-lane option reduces all crashes by only about 38%. The four-lane divided option is superior to the three-lane because it separates directions of travel, greatly reducing the chance of crashes. The four-lane solution also gives drivers consistent passing opportunities and helps prevent long backups that form behind slow vehicles and can result in dangerous driver behavior. The four-lane option is additionally expected to stay open more reliably during emergencies and make both construction and long-term maintenance more efficient, with fewer disruptions to travelers. The three-lane options don't meet the performance standards needed for this corridor, are expected to result in frequent bottlenecks, and are not expected to have the same positive impact on driver behavior as the four-lane option. A recent local example of this type of improvement project is on the Parks Highway north of Wasilla into Big Lake, where the existing two-lane highway was expanded into a median-separated four-lane highway.

Details: This analysis is documented in [SSH Project EA Appendix Highway Configuration Memo](#) and the [Traffic & Safety Analysis](#).

27. How does DOT&PF plan to use the public feedback they receive at the three open houses? Many don't agree that four lanes is the right idea.

The public comment period allows feedback through multiple channels including email, voicemail, an online comment form, mail, and testimony at the public hearings. All comments collected during the public comment period will be compiled, carefully reviewed, and addressed in the Final EA. DOT&PF will consider all comments and plans to use them to revise the EA document. This could include adding descriptions or discussions, revising or expanding analysis, adding or changing plans for mitigation, and/or determining whether sufficient evidence exists to make a finding of no significant impact.

It's also important to point out that the project team worked closely with a stakeholder advisory group for over 18 months to help shape the EA and the proposed solution. Many details were collaborated on through this process, including selection of a 55-mph design speed as opposed to the more traditional 65- to 70-mph design speed used for adjacent designs in prior

years. The working group included the following organizations: DNR / CSP, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska State Historic Preservation Office, ARRC, Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions, NMFS, Bike Anchorage, Alaska Trucking Association, Alaska Travel Industry Association, Turnagain Arm Community Council, Rabbit Creek Community Council, Girdwood Board of Supervisors, and US Army Corps of Engineers.

28. Is securing and maintaining funding over the course of the 10- to 20-year project period a concern?

No, this approach of funding a project over time is standard for DOT&PF; we've already done it on many highways like the Seward Highway through Anchorage from 36th Avenue to Dimond Boulevard. We would use National Highway System funds and federal grants as well as state-match funds.