

Meeting Details

Purpose: Seward Glenn PEL Project Update for Legislature
Date: Monday, June 13, 2022
Time: 10:30am – 11:30am AKT
Location: 4111 Aviation Ave., Anchorage, AK 99502

Attendees

Kelly Summers – DOT&PF	John McPherson – HDR
Doug Campbell – DOT&PF	Taylor Horne – HDR
Justin Shelby – DOT&PF	Josie Wilson – HDR
Kevin Jackson – DOT&PF	Jenny Merrill – HDR
Jill Reese – DOT&PF	
Senator Tom Begich (virtual attendance)	
Mercedes Colbert – Sen. Begich's office	
Assemblyman Chris Constant	

Summary

All attendees introduced themselves.

Josie Wilson provided a safety moment for in-person attendees about exiting the room in case of an emergency.

Josie mentioned that this meeting is being recorded for notetaking purposes and the minutes will be posted on the project website. These actions are taken to ensure that the PEL Study processes remain transparent.

Kelly Summers provided a welcome and noted the purpose of the meeting is for the project team to provide an update to legislative members.

Taylor Horne shared a presentation on project updates. See presentation on website.

Slide 3. Taylor provided a summary of the project progress to date.

- Phase one started in summer 2021. The project team gathered baseline information by inspecting the project area and identifying what information needed to be gathered. The project team summarized that information in the environmental setting report, also available online. During the first phase, a subconsultant, RSG conducted traffic modeling and the project team collected traffic data from the MOA Traffic office.
- Phase two occurred from summer 2021 through this winter. The project team collected data and developed the baseline and forecasted traffic volumes for how traffic moves

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through the study area. The second phase culminated in a series of advisory committee meetings as well as a public meeting and comment period that occurred in January and February 2022. The project team asked for input on the traffic forecasts, the environmental setting report, as well as what are the transportation needs and issues in the project area.

- Phase three is where the project is currently. The project team used the background research and input from the first public comment period to develop the draft purpose and need statement and the draft system performance memo. The project team hosted a Community Advisory Committee meeting on June 1, 2022, and Public Meeting #2 on May 25, 2022. The project team is currently collecting comments on the draft purpose and need statement, alternatives screening criteria memo, and draft system performance memo.

Slide 4. Taylor provided a summary of comments received during the first comment period that lasted from January 24 to February 28, 2022. The public submitted a total of 419 comments, the top three themes included:

- Non-Motorized- walking and biking in the area. This category had the most comments, 150 total.
- Alternatives- solutions to fix the problems. This category had 98 total comments.
- Other- assorted comments. This category had 93 total comments.

Slide 5. Taylor mentioned the non-motorized comments from the first period were added to a heat map. The darker the green color indicates the higher concentration of comments received with concerns about that area. The Gambell and Ingra couplet near 15th Avenue had the highest density of non-motorized comments.

Slide 8. Taylor shared a map about the predicted traffic growth between the baseline traffic year of 2019 and predicted growth to 2050. The darker colors of the main streets indicate higher amount of traffic growth. The Glenn Highway coming in north of Merrill Field has the highest predicted growth of over 9,000 cars a day. The Gambell-Ingra couplet has predicted growth of 2,500-5,000 cars a day. Taylor mentioned this information is also available online.

Slide 9. Taylor shared three bar charts of past population forecasts that have been used for traffic studies in the area. In 2006, some of the predicted population growth was fairly steep, but now, that prediction is much flatter. Predicted population growth, particularly in the Anchorage area is not as high as previously predicted.

Slide 10. Taylor shared a map of the 2050 predicted level of service (congestion) during the three-hour evening peak period. The project team created a project-specific traffic model based on the AMATS traffic model to analyze level of service and how congestion is predicted to change over time. In the map, green lines mean free flowing traffic/low congestion. Yellow, orange, and red lines mean reduced or poor level of service due to congestion.

Slide 11. Taylor shared a map of the 2050 predicted level of service during the evening rush hour. The project team used the model to predict congestion over the busiest hour within the three-hour evening peak period, which predicts a reduced level of service of F, all along the

Glenn Highway north of Merrill Field. Other areas in the project area are also predicted to experience reduced level of service such as near Alaska Regional Hospital on 15th Ave. In general, the Gambell-Ingra couplet seems to still perform well in 2050. The project team hypothesizes that because there is reduced predicted population growth, much of the system is predicted to function well from a traffic movement standpoint.

Slide 12. Taylor shared a graphic that summarized the alternative screening process. Taylor mentioned that the project team is in between step two and step three of the alternative screening process. The red dots in the graphic represent a public meeting and opportunity for the public to provide input. The project team took the feedback from the first public meeting and comment period to produce the draft purpose and need statement and draft alternative selection criteria memo. The project team is now at the second public meeting (second red dot from the top) and the second public comment period. Over the summer 2022, the project team will develop design criteria and use the comments received from the public to develop a set of draft alternatives and conduct level one of the screening using the screening criteria. Then the project team will host another public meeting (third red dot from the top) later in 2022 to share draft results. Following the first level of screening, a reduced set of alternatives that perform well will be refined from a design perspective and then go through a second level of screening. After the second level of screening, there will be another public comment period for feedback on the refined alternatives before the recommended alternatives are presented.

Slide 13. Taylor went over the documents and background information that the project team is requesting feedback on during the current public comment period. The draft system performance report outlines nine different items that the Federal Highway Administration asks the DOT to consider in the purpose and need statement. This system performance memo provides the information and analysis for each of the nine factors listed on the Slide 13 graphic. The document summarizes the background data that the project team has completed and ties it into the purpose and need statement. Taylor encouraged all meeting attendees to review the system performance report.

Slide 14. Taylor shared the draft purpose and need statement which serves as the foundation for the whole process, meaning it is the problem statement for the transportation project and the alternatives to be developed to improve or fix those problems. Screening criteria are used to gauge how well alternatives will fix problems in the purpose and need statement. Taylor read the draft purpose statement, "the purpose of the PEL study is to improve mobility, accessibility, and safety for people and goods traveling by all modes on or across the roadway system connecting the Seward Highway, the Glenn Highway, and the Port of Alaska. The intent is to:

1. Maintain the functionality of the National Highway System,
2. Meet the local travel needs of residents who must safely travel across or along those roadways, and
3. Improve neighborhood connections."

Slide 15. Taylor explained the draft need statement categorizes the problems that need to be solved in the corridor. These needs were identified as a result of the project team's background research and the results from the first public comment period. Taylor mentioned these needs are not listed in any order or hierarchy. The needs in the corridor fall into three categories:

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1. Safety - Crashes for vehicles and people walking and bicycling are elevated at several study area intersections.
2. Conflicting travel functions - Serving competing regional and local travel functions on the highway network in the study area leads to conflicts that reduce mobility, safety, and accessibility for all users.
3. Social Demands and Economic Development - Current street design on the Seward/Glenn corridor in the study area is inconsistent with the vision expressed in recently adopted development plans and is adversely affecting neighborhood redevelopment efforts, community cohesion, and quality of life.

Taylor mentioned that the system performance report provides background information about the data to support each of the needs in the purpose and need statement.

Slide 16. Taylor discussed the Level 1 Evaluation Criteria which identify ways to measure how well an alternative meets the needs that were identified. Taylor reminded everyone that these are still draft and that the project team is collecting feedback from the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and others. Taylor mentioned the project team already heard input from public that the team missed the mark on tying in non-motorized users.

Safety

- Measure the number of crashes with the Build Condition compared to the No Action condition. Build means if you build the alternative, No-Action means if nothing is done between now and 2050.
- Measure the number of conflict points between vehicles and non-motorized users.
- Measure the number of vehicle conflict points with the Build Condition compared to the No Action condition.

Conflicting Function

- Peak period (3:00-6:00PM) freight travel time
- Peak period travel time other users, meaning how long does it take to get between two points measured through the study area
- Miles of roadway in the study area that have a peak period volume-to-capacity ratio about 0.8, meaning how congested is the road or how many cars can the road handle. 1.0 means the road cannot handle any more cars. 0.8 means the road is 80% full and this is when congestion slows everything down.
- Peak period delay, meaning the delay it takes to get from one place to another.
- Miles of road with average peak period travel speed within 20% of design speed, meaning are you traveling at a speed close to the designed road speed.

Social Demands & Economic Development

- Consistency with Anchorage 2020, 2040 Land Use Plan, Fairview Neighborhood Plan, and other land use plans.
- Regional VMT (Vehicle Miles Traveled)
- Regional VMT per capita (per person)

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- Impacts to Section 4(f) resources, meaning parks and other protected or historic resources.

Slide 17. Taylor provided an update on the schedule and next steps. Currently, the project team is in Phase 3, moving into Phase 4 during summer/fall 2022. The project team is asking for input regarding the Purpose and Need and Level One Screening Criteria. The project team will take feedback, make modifications to documents then use the criteria as the basis for evaluating ideas for how to fix those problems. All of the ideas will be bundled together to create about five different alternatives and the project team will use those alternatives to do a draft level one screening of the alternatives. Then the project team will return to the public with draft results, including potential solutions and how the solutions rank against the criteria. The project team will ask for public feedback on the solutions again.

Josie reminded attendees that the project team is looking at spring 2024 to complete the study, but a lot of people are expecting construction immediately. The project team still has a lot of process and a long way to go. Referring to what Assemblyman Constant asked about “when do things get finalized,” Josie mentioned, all these documents continue to be drafts as the project team moves forward until step six, final documentation, and the project team still includes a public review of that final documentation. This is a long process, unfortunately some people want something tomorrow, but there are still quite a few steps. The project team is on step three and still has several steps to go.

Josie mentioned the project team wants feedback on drafts of the purpose and need statement, the system performance memo, and the alternative selection criteria memo. The project team is still accepting recommendations for ways to solve the problems in the corridor because the alternatives will be developed next.

Josie shared the new updates to the website including:

- The project library contains all project related documents, including notes from this meeting.
- The outreach activities page contains public meeting recordings and documentation of public outreach activities completed so far.
- The committees’ page contains information on the project’s four committees and corresponding committee meeting materials. Josie noted the CAC is made up of three Fairview groups and two downtown groups, so the project team is hearing from a diverse set of people. Minutes from the June 1, 2022 CAC meeting will be posted on the website soon. The Technical Advisory Committee will meet on Wednesday, June 15, 2022.

Josie walked through the comment form and identified multiple ways for individuals to provide a comment, including translation options for individuals who speak a language other than English. There are also options to comment by phone for individuals who do not have a computer or smartphone.

Josie reminded the group that all comments from today’s meeting will be added to the public comment record.

Josie mentioned the project team recently mailed a newsletter to all addresses in the project area. The newsletter will also be posted on the project website.

Josie mentioned the project team will hold an info kiosk at the Carrs on Gambell St., so members of the public can ask questions and make comments.

Kelly Summers closed the meeting and thanked everyone for participating.

Q&A/Comments

Assemblyman Constant asked when and how does the draft purpose and need statement become finalized.

Taylor responded to Assemblyman Constant, that this document is draft, and the project team will review input from the current public comment period. The project team will develop a revised draft based on the public comments. Then the DOT will present the revised draft to the policy committee.

Assemblyman Constant commented - what is missing in the top paragraph of the draft purpose and need statement is any reference to the environmental conditions caused by the project. What gets framed as neighborhood connections, which is an important part of it, is missing an element which is the environmental conditions of humans, so many people living so close. That includes the crashes, conflicts of cars and people, the divestment that is happening surrounding the highway facilities which causes increases in poverty, those are the kind of environmental concerns. The connectivity is very important because that will help mitigate those concerns. At the top paragraph, there should be a reference to environmental concerns.

Josie responded to Assemblyman Constant, so after, "mobility, accessibility, *add environmental concerns*, and safety. And then the project team would need to define what those environmental concerns mean.

Assemblyman Constant responded, the more traditional definition of environmental, which is all of those things.

Josie responded to Assemblyman Constant, yes all of it, the environmental and social part of it.

Taylor responded to Assemblyman Constant, I think you are using the environmental definition, like you are saying: there is support by the document the project team has already produced.

Assemblyman Constant responded to Taylor that in the first paragraph sentence, it would be helpful for the public to see it referenced there instead.

Assemblyman Constant commented, let me guess if my comments are aligned with what occurred. Under the social demands and economic development section, it talks about plans, it talks about volume of miles traveled, but it does not talk about the impact of the facilities on the

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residences and the neighbors, the density of the residential uses right next to a federal highway, right? One of the key messages that could be somehow communicated in the evaluation process is impacts on those residential and neighborhood uses as consistent with plans. There is a lot of room in there for interpreting things away from the impacts of the residential uses. I would drive a little more tightly towards residential uses relative to transportation.

Taylor responded to Assemblyman Constant, could you help us flesh that out, what impacts, what is an impact and how to measure it.

Assemblyman Constant responded to Taylor, the traffic accidents are important to track. If you measure on-ramps and off-ramps to federal highways, or the federal system in Anchorage, how many on-ramps and off-ramps do you have from the 36th Ave stoplight to that federal highway. And count how many off-ramps you have between 36th Ave and Airport Heights Rd. and you see that on-ramps and off-ramps are the streets in the neighborhoods, but they do not get treated that way, they get treated as turns. Yet, some of these ramps are so dangerous. So, I don't know how to measure that, but all of these people are living right on this federal highway.

Taylor responded to Assemblyman Constant, yeah totally understand, and that is also what we were trying to address with conflicting functions too.

Assemblyman Constant responded, but all the functions are related to traffic flow, travel time, peak period, miles of roadway, peak period delay, miles of road average travel. None of that gets anywhere near the question of impacts on people who live within that zone, the 300 feet of the edges of that facility, which DOT maintains a right-of-way and the authority to take. It has for 50 years. Which then causes the deterioration of properties, loss of property value, and increased various uses, because people who would otherwise be there defending their homes are not there anymore.

Sen. Begich commented, maybe in the social demands category, after the word plans, the project team needs to say "...and other neighborhood uses as identified by public comment." Because that gets to the bulk of the public comment for non-motorized right in the area of Gambell-Ingra area. So, maybe ensuring the public comment is also heard, not just the plans themselves.

Josie responded to Sen. Begich and Assemblyman Constant, I just want to make sure, one, we are recording for note taking purposes and so all of these comments are part of our public outreach process. So, anything that is said as far as, I would like to see... that is all considered a formal comment. So, I just want to make sure it was clear. And two, I will say your name for note taking purposes just so that we know, so that was Assemblyman Constant, and then Sen. Begich is the one that made that suggestion. And three, any metrics that you can come up with, that you think would be helpful to measure the things we are talking about, please send those our way. We are hearing comments like, "we would like to see..." and the project team agrees, yes, we would like to see those too, but how do we measure it? How can we make it a criteria? The project team could use some verbiage around those suggestions. Sen. Begich, that comment was really helpful. Any other comments about how we measure criteria, so when we

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get to alternatives, we can determine this alternative is better than this other alternative because of that criteria.

Assemblyman Constant suggested that the project team contact the Fairview working group, the Fairview Community Council Executive Team, to get verbiage.

Josie responded to Assemblyman Constant, the project team will take the action to contact the Fairview working group and report back to Assemblyman Constant.

Jill Reese asked Assemblyman Constant, does the community feel unstable because of all these different plans that have never seemed to end. So, the community does not know what is going to happen in the near future.

Assemblyman Constant responded to Jill, I think the community is happy with the plans that have been adopted with the municipality land use plans. What the community is concerned with is the lack of progress. The highway-to-highway became the next plan, then this plan, and no apparent progress and yet deterioration ongoing, and the impacts are historically cataloged to be the only outcome of the highway policy which runs through neighborhoods of poverty, I do not know exactly how to say that without offending anyone, last time I said, are you calling us racists. That is not my point here, my point is there has been a historic pattern and there is a federal drive to fix these problems that have been created, but now looking at 2050 and the fact that the section between 5th and 6th Avenue and 15th Avenue, it looks green, not brown. Then that puts into my mind that great, this section is going to be put off again. We will all be retired or beyond at the time this question comes to fruition. So, the deterioration is truly measurable. You can see it, you can feel it, walk through it. There are now empty lots that should be bought if this is a project that is going to happen. There is a failure happening in the neighborhood and it is due to the highway.

Josie responded to Assemblyman Constant, you mentioned there were several comments you wanted to make. Did you make them?

Assemblyman Constant commented, I have another, but it is unrelated, it is with the purchase of the property up on Government Hill. Are we sure we are not going to see an amendment to this project for adding the bridge back in? Because there is a taking of property for a bridge right now. That is the hottest conversation that I have had from my constituency in the last 15-21 days, saying wait a minute, if the bridge is back on, should not it be a part of this study. I am not advocating for that; I am just saying what is going on here.

Josie responded to Assemblyman Constant, this is the first that the project team members have heard about it.

Assemblyman Constant responded, there is a purchase of a property happening right now, closing a business, the building is slated to be demolished in service of the right-of-way to the bridge.

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Sen. Begich responded that Assemblyman Constant is referring to the Tesoro, up on Government Hill. It is a complicated issue; the owners of the Tesoro have been under the taking order for some time and have chosen to press the department to purchase the property. And there is some question as to whether federal money would be lost if it was not purchased, and we are trying to get some understanding from the department on that issue now. What Assemblyman Constant is getting at is, if indeed the bridge project is still on, part of the right-of-way that has been set aside is the Gambell-Ingra corridor, potentially for that bridge, which just means that everything we are doing is fiction if indeed that bridge comes back into fruition. So just a heads up, not to delay the project or delay moving forward, but it could significantly change the outcome.

Assemblyman Constant commented, I certainly do not want to add it to this project, I just want to be fundamentally in service to reality as opposed to fiction.

Sen. Begich commented, so we are letting you at the table know it is out there. You probably do at some point have to address it, at least in cautionary tones in the document that you produce. The Knik Arm Bridge has never been fully eradicated. There have been some Governor's orders under the Walker administration and a lack of activity under the current administration both of which imply the bridge will never move forward.

John McPherson responded, the project team had some questions about this in the first public meeting and the project team has this documented in the FAQ document. What the project team has told the public is this PEL is a step-down examination, a sub area plan of the overall metropolitan transportation plan and we must be consistent with that plan. Right now, there is no Knik Arm Crossing in the metropolitan transportation plan. None of our modeling includes that and we do not intend to have any kind of examination of a Knik Arm Crossing. If a project like that resurrected itself, it would have to first get adopted into the plan. I do not know if that provides you with any assurance, but we must be consistent with the adopted plan.

Assemblyman Constant responded to John McPherson, I think those are fabulous words, yet the purchase and demolition of a building to me weighs heavier than words.

Jill responded, this was the last acquisition from the prior effort for the bridge, and it has been with Right of Way (section), in their files working with Tesoro for many years, and it has allowed them to stay for many years. But in order to close that phase of the bridge project, we must finish that acquisition. It is not something that is new, it has been on the books and has been working through for many years. There were other acquisitions in that area, for instance, the Subway across from there that we are not pursuing because there is no more right-of-way activity going forward. We had to clean up the details of what they had started prior, and that is what this is.

Assemblyman Constant asked Jill, so when you say, closing the right-of-way, it does not mean it is completing it for any actual planning and construction of the bridge. You are saying we are just closing the right-of-way files for any loose ends, put this project to sleep for now.

Jill responded to Assemblyman Constant, yes, exactly.

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Mercedes commented, we are on the scheduled DOT meeting tomorrow 6/14/22 at 11am. Jill added, Chris, if you would like to join us. Senator Begich added, the reason for the meeting on 6/14/22 is to make sure that people are fully aware of what it means, what the implications are, et cetera. I will reinforce, Mercedes can too, there was not Knik Arm money in the budget this year at all. Mercedes has been handling budget negotiations for us. That was a critical point from our caucus perspective, we would not have supported a budget that had a Knik Arm component in it, because we are focused on these projects, the PEL we are working on here and projects that are actually consistent with AMATS and with the various planning documents that are out there, and that bridge is not. I share your concern, and I hope that in tomorrow's meeting we can get more official clarity to help us move forward.

Assemblyman Constant responded, there is a natural connection to this if there is a subversive project happening, we should bust it out from under the shade and put it on the table so it can be fully explored. Sen. Begich responded, of course.

Kevin Jackson commented, it is important to recognize that this PEL is a planning study, once we get to the end, all this will do is resolve into a recommendation.

Assemblyman Constant said, yes people are well aware and have been watching this since 2000. In 2017 we put money in and secured the PEL, then we got short circuited and jumped over for the Midtown project. They fully proceeded with the Midtown project before they began the Fairview section. People are concerned about getting to work because we have been talking about this since kids were not even born out there now have juris doctorate degrees. That is what is going on here, that is the pressure.

Sen. Begich commented he appreciates the level of inclusion in the CAC, it is important because part of the issue is addressing things early in the process. Josie responded yes and the end goal of PEL study with alternatives and recommendations that the community supports.

Mercedes commented that due to not being up for re-election, there are no limits on when Sen. Begich's office can send out announcements.

Sen. Begich commented this is a great opportunity for the office to take advantage of its reach over the project area to get the message out and to encourage more comments. Mercedes and Sen. Begich will work on that.

Assemblyman Constant asked how is this project interfacing with the Midtown congestion project and how will the process reflect the connections between the two projects.

John McPherson responded, the Midtown congestion PEL is completed, so we will need to make our solutions match up with what they have come up with. The project team will not re-explore issues in Midtown but will pick up from where it ends and figure out what needs to happen within this study area.

Assemblyman Constant responded, there are changes happening to the Midtown study that are based on current conditions. It might be wise to have some reflection of those changes and how they connect in this study, maybe measure them somehow like how are those connections beneficial, do they cause harm to the Midtown project, or does the Midtown project cause harm to this project. Do we have some way to analyze between the linkage studies.

John McPherson responded, yes, when the project team reaches the evaluating and modeling the alternatives step, the project team will ensure it has the latest design in Midtown to ensure consistency.

Action Items/Next Steps

Based on the meeting discussion, the following action items will be undertaken by the project team:

- The project team will get verbiage on tactical criteria from the Fairview Working Group.