Frequently Asked Questions

Seward Highway MP 75-90
Road & Bridge Rehabilitation Project

1. What is the purpose of this project?

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), seeks to rehabilitate approximately 15 miles of the Seward Highway and multiple bridges and culverts between milepost (MP) 75 near Ingram Creek and MP 90 near Girdwood. The purpose of the proposed project is to address safety problems, roadway deficiencies, and congestion. DOT&PF has prepared a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) to present and analyze the environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and the No Action alternative in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

- **Need 1: Safety -** Increase safety and decrease the likelihood of fatal and major injury crashes within the project corridor.
- **Need 2: Roadway Deficiencies -** Extend the service life of the bridges and culverts throughout the project corridor; address existing roadway deficiencies and aging structures to provide for improved operation of and reduced maintenance costs for the roadway facilities.
- **Need 3: Congestion -** Reduce unacceptable congestion and improve mobility in the design year for users traveling on the Seward Highway between MPs 75 and MP 90.

2. What engineering alternatives were considered?

DOT&PF considered a number of alternatives and design options early in the project development process. The key factors to consider were improving safety, correcting roadway deficiencies, and reducing congestion. Improvement alternatives were advanced or dismissed for a variety of reasons including cost, topographical constraints, and environmental concerns. Rejected alternatives included:

- **Two-lane Highway with Auxiliary Passing Lanes ("MP 88 Variant"):** retain the same two-lane-highway centerline as the Proposed Action except for a variation at the MP 88 curve. At the curve, this option would straighten the roadway curve and shift the highway alignment further inland near MP 88. This would require moving the ARRC tracks further inland (by approximately 245 feet) and making cuts up to 200 feet high to remove material.
- **Four-lane Highway:** convert the existing 2-lane highway corridor into a 4-lane highway between MP 75 and MP 90. This would require expanding the project footprint into the hillside of the Chugach National Forest (CNF) or Turnagain Arm.
- **Upper Turnagain Arm Crossing:** realign the highway to go across Turnagain Arm along a 2-mile causeway and bridge. This would transect beluga whale critical habitat.
- **Separation of Opposing Travel Lanes:** separate the opposing travel lanes (e.g., Jersey Barriers) to diminish the possibility of head-on collisions. Separation would require a significant increase in the proposed project footprint.

3. What actions are DOT&PF considering in the EA?

FHWA and DOT&PF are considering two potential actions: a no-build alternative and a Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would upgrade the existing two-lane facility. Elements include:

- Resurfacing the roadway in the entire 15-mile corridor
- Straightening curves to improve sight distances
- Improving the Portage Glacier Road intersection
- Replacing existing bridges (8 total)
- Adding 5 miles of new passing lanes
- Adding new parking areas/improving access for the hooligan fishery
- Enhancing recreational access at Placer River and Portage Creek
- Improving drainage
- Replacing guardrails and culverts as needed.

4. Where will the new passing lanes be located?

Auxiliary passing lanes are proposed in the following locations;

- Between Ingram Creek and Placer River Overflow (MP 75.5 – 77.6)—north and southbound.
- Just north of the Portage Glacier Road (MP 78.8 – 80.3)—northbound only.
- North of Twentymile River (MP 81.2 – 82.2)—northbound only.
- Between Kern Creek and Virgin Creek (MP 86.5 – 89)—southbound only.

5. Will there be improvements at the Alyeska Highway intersection?

The Seward Highway-Alyeska Highway intersection is outside the project area for Seward Highway MP 75-90. No improvements at the intersection are planned under this project; however, a bypass of the junction of these two highways is considered to be a reasonably foreseeable future action in the Environmental Assessment.

6. Will the highway be safer for recreationists, especially during hooligan fishing season?

The Proposed Action would address the safety issues related to recreational activities such as the hooligan dipnet fishery by adding the following elements:

- Two new paved parking lots on the Turnagain Arm side of the existing highway near MP 81.5 and 83.
- Foot access between the two parking lots.

7. What topics does the EA cover?

The EA studied potential direct and indirect effects of the Proposed Action alternative on environmental, social, and historic resources, as well as long-term cumulative impacts. To the extent practicable, the Proposed Action would be constructed within the existing DOT&PF right-of-way. More than 19 subject areas are included in the EA, including land use and right of way, socioeconomics, noise and air quality, wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, visual impacts, and waterbodies.

8. Will there be noise impacts?

A Noise Study was completed in 2016 and determined that no significant noise impacts would be generated by the Proposed Action.

9. Who makes the final decision about what will be built?

DOT&PF and FHWA will review all comments received on the draft EA. The revised EA will be completed in early 2017, with a Finding of No Significant Impact anticipated no later than summer 2017.

10. How is the project funded? What will it cost?

The Seward Highway MP 75-90 Rehabilitation Project is estimated to cost approximately $200-250 million (including environmental analyses, design, right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation and construction), and will be funded by a combination of Federal funds (approximately 90%) and State funds.

11. When will something be built, and how long will construction take?

Pending completion of the engineering design and construction funding availability, construction could begin as early as 2018. The first phase of project construction will rehabilitate MP 75 to 77.7 (Placer River Overflow), and MP 81 to 90. Phase 2 will construct MP 77.7 to 81 and is anticipated to begin in 2020. Each phase is anticipated to take approximately two years to construct. Dates are projected and subject to change, based on availability of funding and other factors.

12. Will boat access be maintained through construction?

Reasonable access to the boat ramp will be maintained during construction.

13. How can I provide comments on the EA?

DOT&PF will be hosting a public open house/open forum hearing in Girdwood on January 12, 2017 at the Girdwood Community Room at the Scott and Wesley Gerrish Brant Library, Girdwood from 5:00 to 8:00PM. An online open house will run throughout the comment period, from December 6, 2016 to January 22, 2017. Comments are welcome at any time, but to be considered in the final EA, comments must be received by 5:00PM on January 22, 2017.

14. Who do I contact for more information?

Visit the project website at www.sewardhighway75to90.com, or contact the project team at info@sewardhighway75to90.com.We'd like to hear from you!