



MEETING RECORD

DATE: 2/16/2005 TIME: 9AM JOB NO.: 200936
RECORDED BY: Sarah Schoen CLIENT: KABATA
MET WITH: Ken Hudson, Susan Lee, Sev Jones OF Matanuska-Susitna Borough
MEETING LOCATION: MSB Conference Room
ROUTE TO: INFORMATION ACTIONS
SUBJECT OF MEETING: Knik Arm Crossing One-on-One Agency Scoping Meeting

MEETING ATTENDEES

Ken Hudson, MSB

Susan Lee, MSB

Sev Jones, MSB

Darryl Jordan, KABATA

Jim Glaspell, URS

Robin Reich, HDR

Sarah Schoen, HDR

ITEMS DISCUSSED:

Robin Reich (HDR) started the meeting by introducing the project, and describing the current task of writing the EIS. HDR is the lead consulting company, with URS and PND doing a large amount of work. The Notice of Intent (NOI) was filed in January, and scoping is continuing from now until August. Robin said that this is the start of the official one-on-one agency scoping meetings, but agencies have been involved for a while and have helped design studies along the way. The intent is that when scoping is finished, there will be no surprises, from agencies or from KABATA. Robin described some of the alternatives. The main objective of the project is to connect Anchorage to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB). KABATA is a government agency that was brought about through legislation and funded by congress. KABATA is basically an arm of DOT. KABATA is trying to "streamline" the process by meeting with agencies early so there will not be any surprises. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is the agency in charge of the project and environmental document. The purpose and need (P&N) statement is still in draft form and is expected to change as scoping continues. Robin explained that the P&N has five main intents. One need is to meet the legislative intent of connecting Anchorage to the MSB by a bridge. Connecting the Port of Anchorage (POA) and Port MacKenzie would help alleviate some of the POA's congestion by allowing expansion to happen in designated industrial areas of Port MacKenzie. With the new Homeland Security concerns, a link between Elmendorf Air Force Base (EAFB) and Port MacKenzie is beneficial. This link would be an alternative escape route in addition to the Glenn and Seward Highways for the Anchorage bowl in case of an emergency. Another important need is the need for a connection to the quickly growing Mat-Su valley. Ken Hudson (MSB) asked if KABATA will develop a bridge with a railroad on it. Robin said that they may develop a bridge that could accommodate a rail in the future, but not initially.

Ken also noted that there are more than two escape routes from Anchorage; the Old Glenn Highway is an alternative escape route.

Ken said that HDR should contact the Port Manager for Port MacKenzie, Marc Van Dongen. Robin replied that we have been in contact with him.

Ken asked when the ribbon cutting date is. Robin said 2010.

Robin then gave a quick description of the project constraints. The POA is an industrial area that is busy and crowded, and has restrictions on traffic flow based on security concerns. Port traffic is not permitted to mix with public (through) traffic. Government Hill poses constraints based on homeowner issues. There are quality of life issues for the neighborhood. There are constraints involved with security and airspace at the Base. There are also environmental constraints such as: the deep trench through the approximate center of Knik Arm, essential fish habitat, and beluga whale habitat. Siltation of the POA is a large issue. The amount of constraints for such a small project area makes it hard to have many alternatives. Robin showed a figure of past alignments and commented on differences in current alignments. She said that the option of having the bridge more to the south (below the ports) was discounted because it would be in the way of boats headed to the ports and fishermen. Robin acknowledged that the project will have to accommodate with the Port MacKenzie plan, which is in development now.

Ken said that the bridge will have to be high enough to allow passage of ships. Port MacKenzie has reserved use of Port MacKenzie for cruise ships and hotels. That will likely be popular, as the bus ride into Anchorage would be significantly shorter with the bridge connection than from other ports around Alaska. He said that the Port plan is designated for the future, so they want to accommodate for larger boats maneuvering in the area, and don't want to have to downsize later because of the bridge.

Robin described the goal for developing a list of alternatives and criteria from which to analyze the alternatives (cost, impacts to fisheries, etc) with the agencies. Robin described the 1984 EIS project, which went from Anchorage all the way to Houston. The project now is shorter, ending at Port MacKenzie.

Ken mentioned that the first presentation of the project back in 1975 suggested moving the International Airport.

Darryl Jordan (KABATA) added that the silting in of the Little Susitna or either port is also a constraint. Tidal dams would cause siltation.

Robin mentioned that there have been multiple possible crossing types suggested (tunnel, ferry, etc), and that KABATA's ideas include embankments on either side of the Arm, or island structures with a bridge structure spanning the deepest water.

Sev Jones (MSB) asked how many lanes would be on the bridge.

Darryl said there would probably be three. Sev asked if there would be a pedestrian lane. Darryl said yes.

Robin added that there would be utilities crossing the bridge also.

Ken asked for a cost estimate, which corridor they would use, and where traffic would go. He mentioned that if traffic didn't travel through the Palmer/Wasilla area they would lose business.

Robin said that the Ferry EA determined that people from the Palmer/Wasilla area will not use the ferry (or bridge) because it would not save them time, but that people in the western MSB would have shorter trip to Anchorage using the bridge.

Ken said that the bridge will influence more people to develop in the area about Port MacKenzie, and then they will go to Houston more often than Palmer/Wasilla.

Robin replied that those impacts will be assessed in the secondary and cumulative impacts section of the EIS. Other roads and improvements will also be considered.

Darryl noted that a traffic change diagram would be used.

Susan Lee (MSB) mentioned that the traffic on the Knik-Goose Bay Road has increased recently. There are about 300 new homes in the area, and it leads to traffic jams.

Ken said that Port MacKenzie is part of an industrial road network. All the traffic currently travels down Knik Road. Especially with the addition of the bridge, the MSB will have to eventually improve the road system in the area.

Sev asked about the possibility of a rail addition.

Darryl said that if there is a bridge connecting the Mat-Su to Anchorage, the railroad won't have to extend as far. The railroad won't have to physically cross Knik Arm; freight could cross over the Arm in trucks. There is a lot of room at Port MacKenzie for the railroad to have operations.

Jim added that seismic problems are the main constraint as far as bridge construction goes.

Ken brought up mass transit, light rail, and van pool options.

Darryl talked about the population growth in the Mat-Su.

Robin talked about the studies that were going on for the project. The beluga study is being led by LGL. Land-based observation points and summer and fall boat surveys were set up to study belugas in the Arm around Knik Arm. The study found that there is a resident group of between 100 and 150 belugas who appear to stay within Knik Arm from when observations started in July until around December. There were a few groups spotted in February, but most of the whales do not appear to have been in Arm since the middle of December. On a typical day the belugas ride the tide up the Arm and go out with the tide to around Eagle Bay. It is unknown why the belugas left after December.

Robin continued that there was a fisheries study in 1983 for the previous draft EIS for this project. The study was led by Jon Houghton, who is leading the fisheries study for the current EIS. Jon is using similar sample sites and techniques as were used in 1983. There were juvenile and adult salmon and longfin smelt caught between July and November (before the studies were aborted due to ice). More marine species were caught later in the year. A goal is to examine the connection between belugas and fish. A years worth of data will be collected. Orson Smith, a professor at UAA, conducted a study on the hydrology/oceanography of Knik Arm. The fisheries and beluga studies will be available for review in the next week; the agencies will receive the reports via disk.

Ken mentioned the need to acknowledge the fisheries resources of the native communities, as well as traditional knowledge from Knik.

Robin said that Steve Braund is working on the cultural section of the EIS and will be looking into that.

Susan mentioned that belugas were feeding on salmon around the construction of the Port MacKenzie.

Ken wondered if any belugas had been tagged or radio collared. Robin said that NOAA Fisheries has been involved with tagging, but the study associated with the bridge is using human observers. Robin said that the studies are trying to draw a connection between belugas and the fish species.

Ken asked about the effects of siltation and joked that maybe there wouldn't be a need for the bridge.

Robin said that the deep trench in the center of the Arm would likely always be there.

Jim added that the Army Corps of Engineers is not even sure where the sediment is coming from. There has been an increase in the amount of sediment around the Port of Anchorage.

Ken suggested that global warming could be influencing that; with less of the rivers freezing in the winter, there is more movement of sediments.

Robin said that the draft is scheduled to be done at the end of November in this streamlined process. The draft in November is going to be an "impeccable", so it will move quickly to the final EIS. This project is coupling the NEPA process with permitting, so that both will be done at close to the same time.

Jim reminded the MSB to give their input throughout the process, especially in regards to permitting.

Susan asked if KABATA would hold public meetings in the Valley. Robin said that they would.

Ken advised to focus on alerting the public on problems that the bridge would solve, and opportunities that it would provide.

Jim said that KABATA will not talk about development (housing) across the Arm in the P&N, but it would appear in the secondary impacts section.

Darryl advised the MSB to look at all of the information early, and give inputs, questions, and comments before the whole process gets formal.

Ken said that the MSB would like a wall map of the project area.

Darryl wanted to know who the MSB thought KABATA should talk to about the project, as they would like to involve all sorts of stakeholders.

Jim mentioned that all of the information for the project is electronic, and the public website can provide a lot of details.

Ken said that they want information, aerial photos, etc. for general information purposes. He wondered if a fuel pipeline would be a part of the bridge.

Darryl said that they have expressed interest in a fuel pipeline. Sewer planning and storm-water drainage are also issues to consider.

Susan said that she is working on the Coastal Zone Management Program, but that it may take a while to complete.

Ken said that his position is Chief of Code Compliance and he is in charge of floodplains. For permitting, KABATA should look at anything that needs specific permits in the Port MacKenzie Special Land Use District. Ken wants to transfer the permitting to the Port MacKenzie Director.

Susan processes all land use permits. There are required permits in the Port District.

Robin asked if that would be amended in the new Port Plan with the new coastal zone planning efforts.

Susan said that she didn't know, but that the Area Meriting Special Attention would remain intact.

Robin asked if Susan works closely with the Municipality of Anchorage on coastal management since they share a boundary

Susan said that she talks with Thede, but there are no coordinated reviews.

Darryl asked if Susan will participate in joint meetings. She said that she would. Susan said that the Coastal Zone Management Plan will be completed by July 1st.

Robin asked which office of OPMP is leading the effort to update plans. Susan said Randy Bates in Juneau is leading the effort. The deadlines were extended. HDR will receive a copy of the plan as soon as they can.

Darryl asked if the MSB was a cooperating agency. Robin said that she wasn't sure. Susan said to ask John Duffy.

Sev is working on a rewrite of the 1970 Comprehensive Plan Area Wide, Chapter 1, which includes new goals and policies.

Robin said that she would like to have a copy of that report. She asked how that was different than the Comprehensive Plan.

Sev said that the plans are separate, but that his plan is built into the Comprehensive Plan.

Some groups to include in the mailing list are the Friends of Mat-Su and local community councils (Pt. MacKenzie, Knik-Fairview, Big Lake, Houston, Wasilla, etc.)

Sev said that he had a map of the community council boundaries if Robin would like to see it.

Susan said there is a notebook of Borough organizations that she would copy and send to HDR.

Sev mentioned Lynn Foler was looking at the Big Lake watershed impact and analysis and water quality.