

**(DRAFT: May 4, 2005)**

## **1.0 (DRAFT) PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT**

### **1.1 Project Background**

More than 50 years of transportation, land use, and economic plans and studies for the South Central region of Alaska have addressed the need for a Knik Arm Crossing. Historic and current studies have identified the need for improved regional network connectivity and access, including development and connectivity of the Port of Anchorage/Ship Creek industrial area within the Municipality of Anchorage and the Port MacKenzie District in the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough. However, the funds necessary to finance the Knik Arm Crossing have historically been beyond the financial capacity of the state's annual federal highway apportionments. Recent studies (2003) conducted by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) conclude that a combination of federal funds, including a federal earmark grant, and non-federal funds, including user fees such as tolls, would be required to successfully advance the Knik Arm Crossing project.

From a historical perspective, the most comprehensive study conducted for the Knik Arm Crossing project was a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) prepared by DOT&PF in 1984. Due to lack of funding, and a dramatic state-wide downturn in the economy in the mid-to late-1980's, the project was never advanced beyond the DEIS stage. With the rebound of a more diversified economy throughout the 1990's, the project needs have grown substantially. Since 1984, considerable changes have and are projected to occur in the project study area, including the construction of Port MacKenzie in the late 1990's, existing and planned expansion of the connecting transportation network to and from Port MacKenzie, planned development of the 10,000 acre Port MacKenzie District, and extensive expansion plans at the Port of Anchorage. These infrastructure improvements coupled with an expanding regional population base, have created greater needs for access to developable lands, efficient freight and good movements, sustainable economic development, and a substantially improved, reliable, and safe regional transportation system.

On February 14, 2002, the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) Policy Committee amended their Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) to authorize the investigation of the feasibility of a Knik Arm Crossing. The LRTP supports transportation infrastructure based on the Anchorage Bowl 2020 Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2001. As part of the current update process to the LRTP, AMATS prepared the *Draft Long Range Transportation Plan: Goals and Objectives, 2004*. Goal 2 of this Plan is to improve access and mobility throughout Anchorage and the region. The Plan calls for improved access to goods, jobs, services, housing, and other destinations. Mobility for people and goods throughout the region in a safe, affordable, efficient, and convenient manner is also a priority. Goal 7 of the Plan is development of a transportation system that supports a thriving, sustainable, broad-based economy for Anchorage by locating and using transportation infrastructure and facilities to enhance community development. Specifically, the Plan calls for optimization of the transportation system to meet the needs of the Port of Anchorage, Ted Stevens International Airport, the Alaska Railroad, and the military and business communities. Additionally, LRTP goals include transportation strategies that enhance the integration and connectivity of transportation systems, across and between modes, for people and freight. The Knik Arm Crossing project would materially support these regional mobility, access, efficiency, economic, connectivity, and transportation integration objectives.

In 2002 and 2003, the DOT&PF conducted a series of studies to update the status of the Knik Arm Crossing project. The results were published in a series of reports entitled *Knik Arm Crossing Engineering Feasibility and Cost Estimate Update, Volume 1, Volume 2 and Volume 3, January 2003*. These reports concluded that federal funding assistance would undoubtedly play a major role in future project funding, but that a myriad of other non-federal funding sources would be required to make the project a reality. Tolls were identified as a likely significant revenue generator over time. Their utilization would open the door to federal credit assistance programs such as Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) and other tools that could be used to fund construction.

In 2003, in response to DOT&PF's feasibility and cost/financial assessments and in recognition of the economic and transportation needs of the region, the Alaska Legislature established the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority (KABATA) within the DOT&PF to pursue the construction of a Knik Arm Crossing. Specifically, Alaska Statutes chapter 19.75 directs KABATA to:

*"...develop, stimulate, and advance the economic welfare of the state and further the development of public transportation systems in the vicinity of Upper Cook Inlet with construction of a bridge to span Knik Arm and connect the Municipality of Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough."*

The Alaska State Legislature directed KABATA to undertake the permitting, design, financing, and construction and then to own, operate, and maintain the crossing as a toll road. Preliminary capital costs are estimated to range from \$400 to \$600 million. In 2005, the Knik Arm Crossing was added to the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP):

STIP Amendment #8 (FHWA/FTA approved February 16, 2005):  
Page Earmark 6; Need ID 16543 "Knik Arm Crossing - Design and construct a toll bridge to span Knik Arm between the Municipality of Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, utilizing a combination of federal, state, and local funds, for a facility that will be eligible to be part of the federal National Highway System. The Knik Arm Toll Bridge Project expects nomination as a High Priority Infrastructure Project that will seek priority earmark funding through the federal transportation reauthorization legislation (replacement of TEA-21) federal fiscal year 2005 or later."

Understanding the geographic and transportation context of the region is also critical to an adequate understanding of the purpose and need objectives of the Knik Arm Crossing project. The South Central region of Alaska, which encompasses Cook Inlet's Turnagain and Knik Arms, is the State's commercial, industrial, financial, communication and population center. The Municipality of Anchorage comprises 1,955 square miles between northern Prince William Sound and Upper Cook Inlet. Eighty-four percent of this land area is taken up by national forest or state parklands and tidelands. Six percent is occupied by military reservations. Only about ten percent of the entire Municipality is inhabited. Most residents live in the Anchorage Bowl, the most urbanized area of the Municipality. The Anchorage Bowl occupies approximately 100 square miles, and is bounded by Chugach State Park, Knik and Turnagain Arms, and by Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson Army Post. Anchorage residents outside the Anchorage Bowl, either live on military reservations, further north in the suburban community of Eagle River/Chugiak, or in small settlement areas along Turnagain Arm (Anchorage 2020: Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan 2001). The Anchorage Bowl is also the hub for inter-

modal transportation facilities. The Port of Anchorage, a national Strategic Port now undergoing an extensive port expansion, and its adjacent Ship Creek industrial area are only two miles apart across the Knik Arm from the rapidly developing Port MacKenzie and its adjacent industrial Port District. However, these areas are currently separated by 80 miles of existing roadway.

The Glenn and Seward Highways (“Glenn-Seward Highway Corridor”) provide the sole north-south ingress and egress routes for the Mat-Su Borough, the Municipality of Anchorage and the other communities south of Anchorage to the tip of the Kenai Peninsula. The Glenn-Seward Highway Corridor is the principal north-south arterial transportation component of the National Highway System (NHS) in Upper Cook Inlet. Therefore, overland connections with and access to the region’s airports, ports, military bases, hospitals, police, fire and disaster relief services and employment and financial centers are limited.

The South-central Alaska transportation system is heavily dependent on automobiles and trucks traveling on roads. The Municipality of Anchorage continues to be the primary employment and work force center for the region. The Glenn-Seward Highway Corridor is subject to heavy commercial and commuter traffic as well as adverse snow and ice conditions. Increased cargo volumes at both ports are projected to further increase regional truck traffic. Industrial, commercial and residential land available in the Municipality of Anchorage is severely limited and diminishing. The Mat-Su Borough has substantial undeveloped land available, which attracts population growth north and induces increased north-south traffic to and from Anchorage over the Glenn and Seward Highways corridor. Extensive development is currently occurring in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and in recent years has been ranked as one of the highest growth Boroughs (counties) in the Nation.

On the western side of Knik Arm, the Point MacKenzie Road connects Port MacKenzie to the Knik-Goose Bay Road which connects directly to the Parks Highway at Wasilla. The Parks Highway is part of the NHS, connecting with the Glenn-Seward Highway Corridor near Palmer and provides roadway access to interior Alaska. The Point MacKenzie Road also joins Burma Road which connects directly to the Parks Highway at Houston via Big Lake Road. On the eastern side of Knik Arm, the existing Anchorage road network connects the Port of Anchorage/Ship Creek industrial area to the NHS at the access to the A Street/C Street couplet.

## **1.2 Purpose and Need Statement**

The purpose of the Knik Arm crossing project is to provide improved, regionally significant vehicular access and intermodal surface transportation connectivity between the Municipality of Anchorage and its Port of Anchorage/Ship Creek industrial area and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and its Port MacKenzie District with a financially feasible crossing to meet the regional transportation infrastructure needs for:

1. Efficient transportation infrastructure to support existing and projected population growth and economic development for the Upper Cook Inlet region and as directed by the Alaska State Legislature in Alaska Statutes chapter 19.75;
2. Efficient and direct surface transportation connectivity for the movement of people and the movement of freight and goods to, between, and distribution from the Port of Anchorage/Ship Creek industrial area and the Port MacKenzie District;

3. Redundant overland route for access to regional airports, ports, military bases, hospitals, and fire, police and disaster relief services for emergency response and evacuation.

### **1.2.1 Discussion of the Purpose and Need Statement**

#### **(1) Efficient transportation infrastructure to support existing and projected population growth and economic development for the Upper Cook Inlet region and as directed by the Alaska State Legislature in Alaska Statutes chapter 19.75.**

Nearly half the population of the State of Alaska resides in the Municipality of Anchorage and Mat-Su Borough (principally in the Palmer-Wasilla area) and has done so for the past 20 years. The Municipality of Anchorage and the Mat-Su Borough are projected to continue as the growth centers in the State. In addition, if major economic activities such as the construction of a natural gas pipeline, further development of the petroleum and natural gas industry, a projected increase in mining activities, and an expansion of air cargo activities at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport occur, they would generate substantial economic and population multiplier effects in the State. Such changes would particularly affect the Municipality of Anchorage, which supports approximately 42 percent of Alaska's population (270,951 people in 2003) and is the State's center of transportation and commerce.

The Mat-Su Borough is also expected to absorb an increasing share of the population growth in the region. In the 10 years between 1990 and 2000, the Mat-Su Borough population grew approximately 50 percent, 3 times the statewide growth rate. The Borough continues to be the fastest growing location within the State (Northern Economics 2004). Since the 2000 Census, the Mat-Su Borough has grown 15.3 percent to 68,335 persons and now represents 11 percent of the population of Alaska. Most of that population lives in an 88 square mile area, locally designated as the Core Area, which extends from Wasilla to Palmer.

Population growth in the northern parts of the Municipality of Anchorage and particularly in the Mat-Su Borough has put greater demands on the transportation infrastructure in the area. In the 10 years between 1990 and 2000, the Anchorage population grew approximately 15 percent. Since the 2000 Census, the population of the Municipality of Anchorage has grown by about 17,000 people, or 7 percent. Currently, the Glenn Highway is the only major highway access that connects Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Population and employment growth in the Municipality of Anchorage, coupled with a limited supply of land, has contributed to increases in Anchorage property values and will likely continue to intensify pressure on land prices. Anchorage housing expenses were 24 percent above that for the Nation in 2001-2002 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004). According to the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (2005), the average sales price for a single family home in Anchorage in the fourth quarter of 2004 was \$272,221. This is up from the average sales price of \$118,239 in 1990, an increase of approximately \$154,000 (Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, 1995) and the costs of homes and land are expected to continue to increase. As the land for homes becomes more limited and the price of land and homes in Anchorage continue to increase, the Mat-Su Borough becomes an increasingly attractive housing alternative, resulting in more daily commuter trips to the Municipality of Anchorage. According to Labor's Alaska Affordability's Index, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough is consistently ranked

as one of the State's most affordable areas to buy a home. Land costs in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough are lower than in Anchorage, and homes are less expensive. The average single-family home in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough costs about \$203,477, almost \$69,000 less than in Anchorage in the last quarter of 2004 (Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, 2005).

According to the Anchorage 2020 Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan, the Anchorage Bowl totals 64,500 acres, of which only 11,725 acres remain currently undeveloped. Of this currently undeveloped land, 6,675 acres are fully suitable for development and 5,050 acres are marginally suitable for development.<sup>1</sup> Given land supply and existing land uses and zoning, several changes in development patterns will be needed to accommodate future growth and housing demand. These changes include higher density development along transit corridors and redevelopment of obsolete and under-used housing, commercial and industrial properties. The current supply of land for single-family homes, whether urban or rural, is inadequate to meet market demand and will likely become more limited as Anchorage grows. According to the University of Alaska Anchorage's Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), Anchorage's population is predicted to grow 38 percent by the year 2020. The forecasts for growth indicate that the Anchorage Bowl will need to accommodate 81,800 more residents (approximately 39,600 households) in the next 20 years (ISER 1999).

Commuters and other travelers from the Mat-Su Borough drive approximately 100 miles round trip, equaling roughly 2 hours, to Anchorage (median trip length and median travel time; Northern Economics, Inc. 2005). Some commuters have substantially longer travel times. Using the Internal Revenue Service (2004) estimate of \$0.405 per mile for necessary and ordinary expenses for operating a vehicle, results in the median round trip cost of \$40.50 to Anchorage by car from the Mat-Su Borough. Over the past several decades, improvements to the Glenn Highway and Parks Highway to reduce congestion have resulted in Mat-Su residents being able to live at greater distances from Anchorage and still commute to jobs in Anchorage with about one hour of travel time. People have responded by moving further north and west along the Parks Highway and Knik-Goose Bay Road, with increased vehicle traffic on the road network and subsequent increases in total vehicle miles traveled.

The 1996 Anchorage Bowl Commercial and Industrial Land Use Study<sup>2</sup> analyzed trends and estimated land requirements for future commercial and industrial development. According to the Study, the Anchorage Bowl has, overall, an adequate supply of commercially zoned land and a comfortable surplus of industrially zoned land to sustain growth in the marketplace. The study concluded that 24 percent of industrial land was fully developed while 37 percent of commercial land was fully developed. While the overall supply of commercially and industrially zoned land in the Anchorage Bowl appears adequate to support growth, the study identified some site-specific challenges for industrial land supply in proximity to major transportation infrastructure. For instance, the Port of Anchorage is constrained by poor landside access and the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport is constrained by residential development, park, wetlands and Cook Inlet.

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1. Municipality of Anchorage Department of Community Planning and Development. *Anchorage 2020/Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan* (adopted 2001).
  2. *The Anchorage Bowl Commercial and Industrial Land Use Study* (prepared for the Municipality of Anchorage Department of Community Planning and Development) 1996.

There have been marked changes in property values and uses since the study was completed. The economic census recently noted the cost of properties in the Municipality of Anchorage. The rise in property values is resulting in conversion or reallocation of land to higher value uses, such as industrial and residential uses to commercial uses, and to higher densities. The Midtown area, for instance, has recently experienced an increase in redevelopment activities with office building construction and higher density residential development. With the Knik Arm Crossing, the Port MacKenzie area would provide an attractive alternative with lower land costs yet easy access to Anchorage. Currently, industrial activities such as warehousing, metal and module fabrication, natural resource extraction, and other land-intensive industries may find it difficult to expand or remain in Anchorage given increasing land costs.

**(2) Efficient and direct surface transportation connectivity for the movement of people and the movement of freight and goods to, between, and distribution from the Port of Anchorage/Ship Creek industrial area and the Port MacKenzie District.**

The Port of Anchorage (POA) is well established as the primary container-handling port in the State and is currently expanding its capabilities to more efficiently handle container traffic. Eighty percent of the State's consumer goods are imported through the Port of Anchorage. However, the Port of Anchorage has limited space to store bulk commodities such as timber and wood chips, sand and gravel, or coal, or to expand its current fuel storage capacity. Similarly, it has very little space for industrial manufacturing for homes, oil field equipment, or mining support items to be barged to rural Alaska. There is limited truck access in and out of the Port that hinders efficient transport of freight to areas north of Anchorage (Northern Corridor Feasibility Study, 1997). This access problem has been increasing along with population growth in the State.

According to the *Port of Anchorage Northern Corridor Feasibility Study, 1997*, the Port of Anchorage handles over 3,000,000 metric tons annually. Approximately one-half of this tonnage is vans/flats or containers. Of this amount, containerized throughput grew approximately 1,370,300 metric tons in 1996. Based on the *POA Northern Access Corridor Reconnaissance Study, 1999*, container-oriented trips into the POA area should continue to increase through the year 2020, growing from 165,533 total truck trips in 1995 to 326,099 total truck trips in 2020, assuming the base case scenario. Containers to Fairbanks and the Mat-Su Borough were estimated to account for approximately 25 percent of the total inbound container market in 1995. Direct movements of trucks between the POA and areas north of the Municipality of Anchorage were expected to become an increasingly larger component of the overall traffic flows, with projected annual growth at approximately 3 percent under the base case scenario.

According to the *Port of Anchorage Road and Rail Extension Project Environmental Assessment, January 2004*, cargo volumes at the Port of Anchorage will grow up to 30 percent within the next 10 to 12 years. In response, truck traffic to and at the Port of Anchorage will increase by at least 50 percent.

The Port of Anchorage estimated that in 2003, there were 903 one-way weekday truck trips and 1,229 peak day one-way truck trips to or from the port (*Port of Anchorage Marine Terminal Redevelopment Final Environmental Assessment 2005*). The Port of Anchorage also estimated that port-generated daily traffic would increase by 99 percent over the next 20 years. This

growth will exacerbate the existing access problems at the Port of Anchorage and make connections to the state transportation system more inefficient. A northern access provided by the Knik Arm Crossing project would divert substantial truck volumes to the north and away from the existing Downtown Anchorage transportation network.

The Mat-Su Borough currently is developing its Port MacKenzie in ways that are largely complementary to the Port of Anchorage. The Borough is making use of its relative abundance of developable land for bulk commodities without competing with the Port of Anchorage's efficient container handling facilities. The Mat-Su Borough has plans for the adjacent 10,000-acre Port MacKenzie District to provide services for bulk commodity storage (fuel, timber, sand and gravel, peat, grain), industrial development, a floatplane base to serve Anchorage air taxi and private pilots, and a public boat launch ramp. Without the direct road connection to the Anchorage Bowl, the opportunity to offer these services is limited because individuals and companies based in Anchorage do not have ready access to the Port MacKenzie District, and companies that locate operations at Port MacKenzie cannot attract employees from the large employee pool in Anchorage. The lack of a direct road connection between the Port of Anchorage/Ship Creek industrial area and Port MacKenzie/Port MacKenzie District limits the economic development potential of the region.

Currently, the 80-mile road distance between the two ports and industrial areas significantly limits efficient access to users. A Crossing connecting the two ports/industrial areas will provide efficient year-round, 24-hour, 7-day-a-week access for Just-in-Time management for customers who need access to each port/industrial area on a timely and uninterrupted basis. The only current connection between the two ports is by a two hour drive one-way via the local roadway network, yet the ports physically are only two miles apart. Because the road connection between the ports is indirect, any user of either or both ports/industrial areas must undertake a time consuming and expensive process involving a drive through downtown Anchorage, around the head of Knik Arm, and through Wasilla, the Mat-Su Borough's busiest city.

Linking Port MacKenzie and the planned 10,000-acre Port MacKenzie District directly to the Anchorage Bowl road, rail, marine, and air transportation hub will improve the currently limited inter-modal connections to the rest of the State and international destinations. Connection of the two ports/industrial areas with a direct road link allows for complementary growth for the State, as well as the Mat-Su Borough and Municipality of Anchorage. Efficient container off-loading in Anchorage and commodity shipping and storage/industrial manufacturing at the Port MacKenzie District will promote stronger regional port capacity. Container loads from Anchorage destined for transshipment north could immediately deploy by truck to the Port MacKenzie District rather than over the longer, existing route through Downtown Anchorage. Increased commodity and fuel storage potentials at Point MacKenzie will serve airport and Anchorage consumer and commercial needs. A recent report published in association with the Stranded Gas Act (Information Insights, 2004) has indicated that additional port infrastructure will be required to meet shipping demands for pipe and other construction supplies.

As the Matanuska-Susitna Borough population and economic base grows, there will be greater demand for direct access to the Port of Anchorage for efficient container movement. As the Anchorage population and economic base grows, there will be greater demand for the industrial land base and commodities shipping that can be provided at the Port MacKenzie District.

**(3) Redundant overland route for access to regional airports, ports, military bases, hospitals, and fire, police and disaster relief services for emergency response and evacuation.**

The Knik Arm Crossing would provide Alaska's most populous region with redundant routes for improved safety, disaster preparedness, and emergency response. In addition, emergency response times between the Mat-Su Borough and Anchorage would be greatly reduced. Currently, there is only one primary and continuous north-south transportation corridor in the region, the Glenn Highway. In the event of a disaster, interruption of this single transportation corridor would leave Anchorage, all communities south of Anchorage on the Kenai Peninsula, and the Mat-Su Borough to the north without an overland route for emergency response or evacuation.

Emergency transportation operations involve coordination with authorities regarding the closure, re-opening, configuration and operation of the transportation system under emergency conditions. In emergencies, a Knik Arm Crossing would serve as an alternate evacuation route should the only other route between Anchorage and the Mat-Su Borough be rendered unusable. If the existing north-south route remained usable, the Crossing would provide additional capacity and routing as an alternative evacuation route.

Local emergency operation and preparedness plans indicate as assumptions in the case of disaster that power would be out and transportation systems damaged. The 1994 Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) includes annexes to provide for the safe evacuation or in-place shelter of part or all of the population of the MOA. The MOA Office of Emergency Management stated that should a major evacuation be necessary, the population would be evacuated north on the Glenn Highway. While the CEMP is currently being updated, and is scheduled to be released in late 2005, the same concept still applies. As identified in the State of Alaska and Anchorage All-Hazards Mitigation Plans, Anchorage is vulnerable to many natural hazards including earthquake, wildfire, flood, volcano, avalanche, tsunami, and severe weather. Due to the proximity to two major military installations and the presence of an international airport, the Anchorage is also vulnerable to man-made hazards such as air transportation accidents and terrorist activities.

The Anchorage population, combined with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough core area population, currently is approximately 333,000 people and by 2050 is projected to be more than three-quarters of a million. The 2000 Census found that almost 16,000 people commuted from the Mat-Su Borough to Anchorage. This number is approximately 52 percent of the Mat-Su Borough labor force. The Glenn Highway is currently the only north-south continuous principal arterial to accommodate those commuters. If the Glenn Highway were closed because of accident, earthquake damage, or other disaster, regional travel could cease entirely and emergency surface response would be substantially impaired. A Knik Arm Crossing would provide redundant road transportation to ensure that regional traffic flow and emergency response could be carried out.

The Anchorage Bowl is the primary transshipment point for goods arriving by barge or air and bound for distribution throughout Alaska. The trans-shipped goods include hazardous materials such as petroleum, chlorine and ammonia. Catastrophic explosion or leaks from industrial areas,

the rail line, or trucking routes would warrant emergency response and/or evacuation that could be hindered with the current transportation system.

The entire region is subject to earthquakes, and coastal areas are subject to tsunamis. A wildfire along the Glenn Highway could halt traffic for long periods, as could highway damage from earthquakes or other natural disaster. Relatively minor automobile accidents on the Glenn Highway cause extended delays and loss of service. A winter storm combined with an accident and other emergency could be catastrophic. Redundant access would help to relieve this problem and would support a more reliable emergency response system in the region.

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