

**ALASKA CENTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT * ALASKA CONSERVATION
ALLIANCE * ALASKA PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP * ALASKA
TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES PROJECT * ALASKA WILDLIFE
ALLIANCE * COOK INLET KEEPER * GOVERNMENT HILL COMMUNITY
COUNCIL * SIERRA CLUB (KNIK GROUP)**

August 8, 2005

Ms. Edrie Vinson
Environmental Project Manager
Federal Highway Administration, Alaska Division
U.S. Department of Transportation
709 West 9th Street, Room 851
P.O. Box 21648
Juneau, AK 99802

Mr. Henry Springer
Executive Director
Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority
550 West 7th Avenue, Suite 1850
Anchorage, AK 99501

Dear Ms. Vinson and Mr. Springer:

Thank you for your continued interest in a full and complete scoping process for the Knik Arm Crossing project, as demonstrated by your ongoing acceptance of public comments through August 12, 2005. The purpose of this letter is to comment on the Final Draft Purpose and Need statement released at the July 12th and 13th public meetings. As explained below, the draft Environmental Impact Statement should be based on a broader statement of Purpose and Need, which accurately reflects the transportation challenges faced by the Municipality of Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

The Final Draft of the Purpose and Need statement provides the following:

The purpose of the Knik Arm Crossing project is to further the development of transportation systems in the Upper Cook Inlet region by providing improved vehicular access and surface transportation connectivity between the Municipality of Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough, at the Port MacKenzie District, with a financially feasible and efficient crossing

We urge the Federal Highway Administration to delete the reference in this statement to "improved vehicular access . . . at the Port MacKenzie District, with a financially feasible and efficient crossing" in order to address the complex, future transportation and land use challenges in the Upper Cook Inlet region with a full range of reasonable alternatives.

With respect to "improved vehicular access," this provision contradicts the Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan, which prescribes the creation of a more compact and livable city with reduced automobile usage; thus, the phrase "improved vehicular access" should be deleted from the Purpose

and Need statement. This language also could prevent the study of increased rail travel along existing tracks, which can move passengers and cargo between Anchorage, the Mat-Su Borough, and the rest of Alaska in a manner consistent with the Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan, the Regional Port of Anchorage Master Plan, and other regional plans discussed in the Final Draft of the Purpose and Need Statement. If the area's future fuel storage needs are a concern, we submit that fuel storage can occur at a number of locations within the Anchorage Bowl in areas with rail and/or pipeline access.

With respect to mandating improved connectivity "at the Port MacKenzie District, with a financially feasible and efficient crossing," this provision – by its specificity – ignores the breadth of transportation and land use challenges in the Upper Cook Inlet region. Connecting Port MacKenzie to Anchorage would shorten the distance between the Mat-Su Borough and Anchorage only for a handful of small and remote communities, thus depriving the majority of the Municipality, the Borough, and their respective residents of benefits from the expenditure of these transportation funds.

For these and other reasons, mandating a vehicular connection between Port MacKenzie and Anchorage limits analysis of reasonable alternatives and would do little to meet the complex transportation and land use needs of the Upper Cook Inlet region.

Finally, we address the statements made and distributed ("Local and State Planning Supports a Knik Arm Crossing" sheet) at the recent public meetings that the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) "passed Resolution 1-03 on January 21, 2003, to the Alaska Congressional Delegation, supporting the Knik Arm Crossing as the number one Regional Transportation Priority Project." The RTPO supported a "Knik Arm Crossing with Rail," however, which is different than the currently proposed bridge *without* rail. We recommend that the cooperating agencies not cite Resolution 1-03 as support for the current proposal, or appropriately qualify that support.

Thank you in advance for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Randy Virgin, Executive Director
Alaska Center for the Environment

Tom Atkinson, Executive Director
Alaska Conservation Alliance

Steve Cleary, Director
Alaska Public Interest Research Group

Emily Ferry, Coordinator
Alaska Transportation Priorities Project

John Toppenberg, Director
Alaska Wildlife Alliance

Lois Epstein, P.E., Senior Engineer
Cook Inlet Keeper

Stephanie Kesler, President
Government Hill Community Council

Will Taygan, Chair
Sierra Club (Knik Group)