



KABATA

# KNIK ARM CROSSING

DOT&PF



## Meeting Notes

Subject	Non-Government Environmental Groups Meeting	Sheet 1	of 5
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Project Number	21132 – 003
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Meeting Date	June 8, 2005	Meeting Location	HDR 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room
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Notes by	Katherine Ericson	Office	RISE Alaska
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Attendees:	Rosetta Alcantra HDR Alaska	Robin Reich HDR Alaska	Kevin Doyle HDR Alaska
John McPherson HDR Alaska	Carla SlatonBarker HDR Alaska	Katherine Ericson RISE Alaska	Mike Frank Trustees for Alaska
Kathy Wells Friends of Mat-Su	Lois Epstein Cook Inlet Keepers	Caitlin Higgins Alaska Conservation Alliance	Suzanne Bessette National Wildlife Federation
Darrell Behymer, Intern Alaska Public Interest Research Group	Steve Cleary, Director Alaska Public Interest Research Group	Emily Ferry Alaska Transportation Priorities Project	Andre Camara Alaska Center for the Environment
Randy Virgin, Director Alaska Center for the Environment			

Handouts -Attached
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Formal Agenda	Staff Agenda	Survey	Vol. 2, August 2005 Newsletter Insert
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## Meeting Notes

Boards Presented -  
Attached  
Economics, Land Use &  
Transportation Flow  
Project Constraints  
Vicinity Map  
Aerial Photo of Project  
Area  
EIS & Permitting Process  
Project History  
AK Statute 19.75  
Project Timeline Diagram  
Map of Military Routes  
Screening Process for  
Reasonable Alternatives  
Map of Beluga and  
Fisheries Study Points

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Topics Discussed	Project Overview	No-Road Alternatives	Purpose & Need
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## Meeting Notes

The meeting began at 1:30 pm with brief introductions by the meeting attendees. Prior to beginning the meeting, Rosetta Alcantra polled the attendees determine issues or topics they would like to discuss at the meeting. The following list includes the topics and questions the attendees identified as important at this time. The list includes:

- Will the Environmental Impact Statement evaluate a no-action alternative, such as a ferry, carpooling incentives, and light rail to handle population growth?
- What are the design and construction costs for the project?
- Will there be an additional public meeting to discuss the project alternatives?
- Will an update regarding new project development be provided since the public scoping meetings?
- Are there proposed tolls at this time?
- Is there a study regarding property values in the Mat-Su Borough and Municipality of Anchorage affected areas?
- How does the project fit into local planning efforts, such as Anchorage 2020?
- How does the Knik Arm Crossing fit into Port planning?

Following the listing of questions and topics, Ms. Alcantra introduced the EIS Team Leader, Kevin Doyle of HDR Alaska, Inc. Mr. Doyle introduced himself and encouraged the group participants to ask questions as he gave the overview of the project. Mr. Doyle began with a brief overview of the project history and background, including a description of the project's purpose and need. Mr. Doyle's presentation included information about the Alaska State statute which created the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority (KABATA) and several posters which illustrated the history, schedule and development of the Alaska Statute. Mr. Doyle commented that there is well over fifty years of studies relating to the Knik Arm Crossing, dating back to the 1920s. Following the history, Mr. Doyle explained the purpose and need for the project. He indicated that purpose and need included elements such as, economic development, land, efficient movement of people and goods and to "further" regional connectivity. The purpose and need also includes the integration into other transportation systems. At this point in the discussion, Lois Epstein from the Cook Inlet Keeper asked for a list of the primary historic documents that are being used to support purpose and need.

Mr. Doyle also presented the general study area and project constraints to the group. Mr. Doyle used the vicinity map to point out where some of the geographical constraints were. These constraints include the military radar area, commonly referred to as the "elephant cage," submarine trough, navigational areas of the ports, channel depth, and shipping lanes. Ms. Epstein inquired about whether or not recent data on beluga habitat was included as a potential constraint? Mr. Doyle asked that Robin Reich, Environmental Planner for HDR Alaska, Inc. respond to the question.



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Ms. Reich provided a brief overview of the environmental studies being conducted. She explained in detail how the beluga observations were being conducted and during what times. Essentially, the beluga observations have been conducted during the daylight hours for the past year, the observers have logged over 300 hours at this point and a findings report will be available in June 2005. Ms. Reich further explained that what the observers are witnessing is the beluga are coming into the Cook Inlet and staying then riding out the tide to the mouth of Eagle River, and as far south as to Six mile creek. There have not been many sightings of belugas in the area around Cairn Point. Ms. Reich also added that in November the whales are rarely seen. In April, an average of 2 whales per week, in and out of the Cook Inlet can be seen.

One of the primary concerns articulated by the group was that data collection time was inadequate for completing the picture of how the beluga population is utilizing Upper Cook Inlet. Ms. Reich informed the group there were other similar studies being conducted by agencies, such as NOAA, that would help complete a larger picture. Also, the issue was raised that the beluga population is much smaller than it used to be, and the year-long study period would not adequately document how the beluga population is recovering. Ms. Reich indicated that NOAA has agreed to the one-year period as an adequate length of study.

Following the beluga report update, Ms. Reich gave a detailed overview of the fisheries studies and shorebirds studies. To study the fisheries, Ms. Reich indicated the scientists have been beach seining and using nets to tow along the mid-channel of the inlet. The findings to date indicate the juvenile salmon are staying close to the shoreline for protection. Ms. Reich indicated that one sample last month showed that juvenile salmon are using the entire arm. The studies will continue through June. A preliminary report would be available later this summer.

In addition to the fisheries report, Ms. Reich updated the group on the bird study. According to Ms. Reich the bird study is new and just getting underway at the request of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. This study will be conducted during April to September with the goal of determining what kind of shorebird migration is happening and what species are using the inter-tidal zone. Ms. Epstein asked if song birds were included in the study. Ms. Reich replied that the bird study is looking primarily at shorebirds, and only looking at songbirds incidentally.

Following Ms. Reich's presentation, the group returned to discussing purpose and need. The general consensus of the NGOs was that a combination of ferry, light rail on the existing corridor, and carpooling incentives might meet purpose and need. The NGO concern was that purpose and need was a circular argument and was being shaped by the bridge concept. Another concern was that the purpose and need was being defined too broadly. A comment was made that the purpose and need statement lacked solid back up.



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Mike Frank from Trustees for Alaska requested the project team create a list of the specific needs the project will meet, so the organizations could create a suite of no-road actions to meet the same needs. The project team agreed to give them a list when purpose and need was finalized.

The purpose and need discussion then moved to a discussion regarding non-road alternatives. Mr. Doyle asked John McPherson, Transportation Planner for HDR, to give an overview of ferries, commuter rail, and heavy rail. Mr. McPherson gave a brief overview of the regional transportation planning efforts. He indicated that in 2007 the Mat-Su Ferry should be in operation. Mr. McPherson also discussed the Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTP) for both the MSB and the MOA. After his brief presentation the discussion reverted back to purpose and need.

The purpose and need of the project, Mr. McPherson said, was to stimulate economic development, to open up access to developable lands, and to create a second corridor north for added safety in emergency situations. According to Mr. McPherson the purpose and need is not to deal with congestion on the Glen Highway or with communities. He pointed to recent articles in the Anchorage Daily News as examples of the need to access the land that is expandable. The KABATA started with focus on economic development, with problems associated with trucks in downtown Anchorage, need for new infrastructure and the need to connect ports to stimulate jobs and the economy. He also assured that non-road alternatives are being studied. He informed the group that the Mat-Su Borough and the Alaska Railroad Corporation have documents available on the ferry and commuter rail respectively. He also stated the LRTPs have information on carpool incentives, which will be incorporated into the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should carpooling meet purpose and need.

Emily Ferry from the Alaska Transportation Priorities Project noted the availability of land in Anchorage needs to be studied more and supported with documentation. It was her sense that there is available developable land in Anchorage.

Mr. Doyle reiterated the purpose and need for the project is a product of needs articulated by the Municipality of Anchorage, Mat-Su Borough, and the ports' planning documents. Mr. Doyle also stated that other needs being met by this project include removing truck traffic from downtown Anchorage, creating a northern corridor out of the Port of Anchorage, and creating efficient freight, goods and people movement. To meet these needs, Kevin stated that the project team is currently combining traffic modeling from Municipality of Anchorage and Mat-Su Borough LRTP efforts to create a regional transportation model.

Following the purpose and need discussion, there were questions relating to the various studies and their respective release date. Mr. Virgin asked about when the purpose and



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need statement would be available and if he could get a copy of the Northern Economic report. Mr. Doyle indicated the purpose and need statement would be ready in July and the survey for the economic report was available, but the full report was not ready to be released. He indicated there are several economic studies, baseline conditions, population forecast that would be available in June 2005. He asked that people coordinate with Ms. Alcantra on those reports.

After discussing the various reports and their release schedule, Mr. Doyle fielded questions from the participants. Randy Virgin, Director of the Alaska Center for the Environment, asked when purpose and need will be finalized and how he could get a copy of the Northern Economics study. The team indicated the first economic report and the purpose and need statement will be available in July. Ms. Alcantra was directed to coordinate delivery of these documents. The team also informed the participants that the preliminary scoping report would be available the same time. The draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is expected this fall.

Mr. Virgin also asked if the project was still on schedule. Mr. Doyle clarified that the recently expanded corridors may impact the project schedule. Mr. Doyle proceeded to explain the additional routes, using the map with the new alignments crossing military lands.

Steve Clearly from AKPIRG inquired about project costs, alternatives costs, and projected tolls. Kevin Doyle responded with a summary of cost estimates that have been completed over the year including new information provided by an independent consultant, Wilbur Smith & Associates. He indicated the current estimate for the project ranges from \$400 to \$600 million, that the costs are order-of-magnitude, and that they have some room to provide for additional contingencies that might be added to the project. Also, Mr. Doyle expressed the project is reliant on \$200 million earmarked in the Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (TEA LU).

Mr. Virgin asked about the financing package and tolls; Kevin Doyle reported the first phase of Wilbur Smith & Associates' work will be out mid-summer, and at this point there is no specific estimate on the toll cost, although studies have been done on toll tolerance. Also, Carla SlatonBarker, HDR, mentioned the Traffic Report will be available mid-July and would complement the toll study.

Lois Epstein asked additional questions regarding alternative costs, if the full range of costs is available, and if costs will be developed for all the alternatives. She asked that the full cost information be included in the draft EIS. Kevin Doyle responded that FHWA would determine how many alternatives move forward for in-depth study; FHWA is the lead agency that will be making the final decision on the project. Also, the team mentioned the anticipated public scoping meetings in July.



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In addition to the cost questions, Kathy Wells from the Friends of Mat-Su first provided general statements about the rate of growth in the Mat-Su Valley. She noted the MSB is already growing beyond infrastructure. Ms. Wells also indicated the MSB is already far behind its current growth, and the MSB does not need any more growth until it can catch up with its present situation. She noted the project timeframe is too short; in five years, the additional growth will not be a help to the community.

Lois Epstein, Mike Frank, and Randy Virgin restated they would like a list of the needs the project will meet and the needs not met by the project so they can convey their perspectives to FHWA. At this point, the group clarified some of their language: no-action means no bridge. Mr. Virgin reiterated that his organization is in favor of a suite of alternatives that do not include a bridge. Kevin Doyle noted the no-action alternative will be included in the draft EIS no matter what.

At this point, the question was raised of what will happen to the project if the no-action alternative is selected. The project team was unsure if the project would be moved ahead by KABATA or if it would be taken over by a different agency.

Overall, the consensus from the meeting attendees was that the project needs, more time to study belugas, more time to develop connecting infrastructure, more time to develop Port MacKenzie, and more time to see if there is still a need for a connecting structure. It was suggested that perhaps some solution could be put in place and then added to later on. The project team noted that a complete bridge, if that alternative were selected and moved forward, would be completed in 2010 in the fastest project scenario. The project team also noted that the bridge concept does not preclude later expansion for alternative modes of transportation such as rail.

To close the meeting, Ms. Alcantra reviewed the list of topics mentioned at the beginning of the meeting. Ms. Alcantra also handed out a questionnaire regarding additional meetings, a boat tour, and who to contact regarding project updates. The participants filled out the survey and indicated they were pleased with the opportunity to meet with members of the project team. The project team also agreed to keep the groups aware of any documents coming out and welcomed the sharing of comments and ideas.

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 pm.