



Meeting Notes

Subject	Non-Government Environmental Groups Meeting	Sheet 1	of 10
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Project Number	21132 – 003
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Meeting Date	August 9, 2005	Meeting Location	HDR 4 th Floor Conference Room
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Notes by	Katherine Ericson	Office	RISE Alaska
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Attendees:	Rosetta Alcantra HDR Alaska	Carla SlatonBarker HDR Alaska	Kevin Doyle HDR Alaska
John McPherson HDR Alaska	Edrie Vinson Federal Highway Administration	Henry Springer KABATA	Dale Paulson KABATA
Randy Virgin Alaska Center for the Environment	Steve Cleary Alaska Public Interest Research Group	Andre Camara Alaska Center for the Environment	Mike Frank Trustees for Alaska
John Toppenberg Alaska Wildlife Alliance	Bruce Carr Alaska Railroad Corporation	Murph O'Brien Mat-Su Borough	Tom Brigham HDR Alaska
Michelle Wilbur	Jon Spring Municipality of Anchorage		Katherine Ericson RISE Alaska

Handouts

Formal Agenda	Modes Handout	07-11-05 NGO Letter	Newspaper Insert
Regional Transportation System Map	Regional Public Transportation Services		

Boards Presented

Traffic Model of NE Anchorage	Regional Transportation System Map	Ferries
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Summary of Main Points



Meeting Notes

- The signers of the July 11, 2005 letter would like to have the project team develop a non-bridge alternative that is different from the no-action alternative. Their request is to create and evaluate a non-bridge alternative to try to meet the purpose and need statement as much as possible. The non-bridge alternative would include an augmented ferry system (beyond the proposed Mat-Su ferry) capable of handling freight, roads to support freight on the Mat-Su side, and modified port operations. The non-bridge alternative would also include the proposed transit improvements in the MOA LRTP and commuter rail as feasible.
- The signers of the August 8, 2005 letter would like to have another meeting to discuss the purpose and need statement.
- The NGOs, Murph O'Brien and Jon Spring expressed concerns about funding for the Knik Arm Crossing and how SAFETEA-LU earmarks would affect funding for other local projects.

Topics Discussed

Introductions

Carla SlatonBarker gave a welcome and stated that the goal of the meeting was to flesh out the 4-point alternative that was put forward in the July 11, 2005 letter from the NGOs.

Brief introductions were exchanged.

Edrie Vinson noted that this meeting was scheduled in order to fulfill a commitment she made to Lois Epstein after she received the July 11, 2005 letter from the NGOs.

Transit

Jon Spring gave an overview of the planned transit improvements to the Glenn Highway Corridor and in the Municipality of Anchorage. All these improvements are written into the MOA's LRTP. In sum, in order to address Glenn Highway congestion in 2025, approximately 2,000 to 2,500 person trips will need to be accommodated to keep the highway functioning at a level E service. Jon talked about Bus Rapid Transit, vanpools, carpools, roadway projects, employer incentives, an HOV lane and traffic management systems to help decrease the number of person trips in 2025. Within the Anchorage Bowl, Jon discussed planned improvements and restructuring of the existing bus system as the main strategy to meet growing transit needs over the next few decades.



Meeting Notes

Steve Cleary asked if the Knik Arm Crossing was included in the MOA LRTP. Jon Spring replied that without a specific route, growth rates or information necessary to evaluate the Knik Arm Crossing, it was not possible to include it in the current LRTP. Jon Spring also clarified that all recommended improvements in the LRTP will be compatible with a bridge.

Randy Virgin asked about the timeframe on the implementation of the Highway to Highway project. Jon Spring answered that funding is the largest challenge to that project, and that it is planned for implementation sometime between 2015 and 2025.

Murph O'Brien asked if the current MOA LRTP addresses SAFETEA-LU earmark funds. Jon Spring replied that SAFETEA-LU was passed after the MOA LRTP was written; however, Jon Spring expressed confidence that the MOA LRTP is conservative and has some room to work with changing funding.

Commuter Rail

Next, Bruce Carr spoke about commuter rail. First, he said there is no planned commuter rail. ARRC is currently building infrastructure so that when communities request commuter rail it is ready. Bruce Carr listed the current stations that ARRC has built and is developing; he also stated that track between the MSB and the MOA now allows for a 55 minute commute. However, what ARRC needs to move forward on commuter rail is for the communities to form a regional transit authority. Bruce also stated that planning efforts for commuter rail include working with Matanuska-Susitna Community Transit (MASCOT) and PeopleMover to create a regional transit system.

Bruce commented on the Knik Arm Crossing project. He argued that the 4-point alternative mitigates traffic on the Glenn Highway, but that Glenn Highway congestion relief is not the main purpose of the Knik Arm Crossing. Bruce Carr said that the people in the Point MacKenzie area will not benefit from commuter rail along the Glenn Highway corridor, but they will benefit from a bridge. The existing rail system only serves the eastern side of the Knik Arm. Therefore, the Knik Arm Crossing and commuter rail are compatible in that they serve different markets. He did not think commuter rail would serve as a viable alternative to the Knik Arm Crossing. Rather, the Knik Arm Crossing serves a regional transportation need, best met by a roadway from Point MacKenzie to Willow.

In terms of funding, Bruce Carr also stated that ARRC is a self sufficient, independent organization that can't lose money on providing commuter rail service. Currently, ARRC doesn't have the funding to subsidize commuter rail.

Steve Cleary asked if ARRC's funding was commensurate to that of D.C. or New York.



Meeting Notes

Bruce Carr responded that 10% to 20% fare box recovery is average. He argued that what people want are transit/transportation choices and commuter rail does that, however, the bridge is valuable for more than commuters.

Ferries

Murph O'Brien presented the Mat-Su Borough ferry that is under development. The prime purpose of this ferry is port to port transit for workers, with some commuter capacity. The ferry is a variable mode craft, and the trip takes about 30 minutes including docking, loading and unloading. Right now, only one vessel is programmed; other vessels may be added in the future, but the system won't accommodate the traffic that bridge would.

Tom Brigham also presented on the Mat-Su Borough ferry and gave specifics on the Navy's involvement with the vessel development. The vessel that the Mat-Su Borough will purchase is a Navy prototype at 1/8 scale, and the ongoing use of the vessel will be monitored by the Navy. The vessel allows operation at docks and other points that don't have docks; also the vessel can later be deployed elsewhere in Cook Inlet. Ridership will likely be 25 to 50 cars per day; primary ridership will come from primarily from industrial users. In five years, anticipated ridership is 400 to 500 trips per day, and it is anticipated to be maxed out at peak commuter times. When this happens, the Mat-Su Borough will have to consider other vessels if they are to meet demand.

Steve Cleary asked about estimated tolls.

Tom Brigham responded that polling has shown the sweet spot for toll tolerance and funding to be between \$10 and \$20 per round trip. The \$10 figure allows for the largest ridership; the \$20 figure creates the largest revenue.

John McPherson asked if walk-on passengers would be accommodated. Murph O'Brien responded that the vessel has accommodations for up to 115 walk-in passengers, but that they don't anticipate that many initially.

Carla SlatonBarker asked if a park-and-ride facility was planned. Murph O'Brien responded that the Mat-Su Borough may eventually look at a park-and-ride facility, but that the primary use is to transport industrial workers between ports.

John McPherson asked if people would be able to ride in their vehicles on the ferry. Murph O'Brien responded that for short trips, people will be able to stay in their vehicles.



Meeting Notes

Mike Frank asked if the toll polling included commuters who would use the service on a regular basis. Tom Brigham explained that the poll was not detailed enough to address that question. Murph O'Brien added that usually a savings in time means that commuters are willing to pay more. Bruce Carr added that in the Alaska Railroad's focus groups in the valley, commuters were willing to pay \$5 to \$10 for a trip. He also added that today's numbers and tolerance might be different due to rising gas prices. He also added that there are not currently a lot of commuters coming from the Point MacKenzie area. Tom Brigham added that the demand for the Mat-Su Borough ferry will depend upon new residents and industrial development in the Point MacKenzie area.

John McPherson asked Bruce Carr about the parking garage and transit that the Alaska Railroad has planned for their Ship Creek development. Bruce Carr explained their focus groups revealed some commuters would be willing to use the train if they had access to a vehicle in Anchorage. The notion is that they would drive into Anchorage on Monday, leave their car in the parking garage during the week, ride to and from Anchorage on a commuter train, use their car for trips around Anchorage, and then drive home again on Friday.

John McPherson asked for clarification from Tom Brigham on the way that changing modes or making transfers during travel decreases ridership. Tom Brigham responded that people don't like to transfer, and that he anticipates the main market for rail to transit transportation will primarily serve the downtown and midtown Anchorage areas, and possibly Dimond.

The Non-Bridge Alternative

After a short break, the signers of the July 11, 2005 letter from the NGOs were given the floor to describe their 4-point alternative in more detail. Randy Virgin began by first stating that the signers of the letter are very pleased with the response that has come from FHWA and the project team, that they had not before been given such response to their concerns, did not expect to have their comments received in an individual meeting, and thanked FHWA for this meeting and the opportunity for dialogue. Randy Virgin went on to state that the July 11, 2005 letter signers also care about meeting regional transportation needs and that they would like to see a non-bridge alternative other than the no-action alternative that addresses these needs. He argued that three bridge alternatives and a no-action alternative would not be a full range of alternatives. The July 11, 2005 letter from the NGOs was meant to be a list of ideas about constructing a systems alternative. Randy Virgin said that the four points are flexible, that what the July 11, 2005 letter signers really want to see is a viable non-bridge alternative developed by the project team. The July 11, 2005 letter signers would rather that this project address real demands being made by existing communities. The bridge, Randy Virgin stated, is a huge commitment to make to a non-existent community. They would rather see the



Meeting Notes

funds being spent on projects identified in LRTPs to serve existing population centers, not a speculative population center at Point MacKenzie. Randy Virgin stated that he does see the need for recreational access to Point MacKenzie, but that that need could be met by the planned Mat-Su Borough ferry.

Steve Cleary added his comments and stated that he endorsed what was said by Randy Virgin. He also added that he would like to discuss the Purpose and Need statement further, and that the no-action alternative does not fulfill the intent of the July 11, 2005 letter. The advantage of a non-bridge alternative is systems integration. Steve Cleary also added that it was shortsighted that the Knik Arm Crossing is not included in the Municipality of Anchorage LRTP.

Murph O'Brien interjected that the Mat-Su Borough LRTP does include with and without bridge scenarios.

Tom Brigham added that the draft Mat-Su Borough LRTP will be available in October.

Carla SlatonBarker responded to Randy Virgin and Steve Cleary's comments with the observation that there were two themes on the table: Purpose and Need, and the non-bridge alternative. She stated that the team would like to table the Purpose and Need topic, as the Purpose and Need letter from the NGOs was only received yesterday and the team hasn't had a chance to digest or respond to their comments.

Randy Virgin responded that he was amenable to that request with the recognition that the Purpose and Need and alternatives are connected. He added that he would like the team to commit to planning a non-road alternative.

Carla SlatonBarker replied that the team has been working on this and is trying to develop a viable alternative.

Edrie Vinson interjected that as a federal authority, the Federal Highway Administration doesn't have the authority to plan; only local authorities can plan.

John McPherson added that he assumes that the non-road alternative being asked for was more than the planned improvements already described by the service providers.

Randy Virgin responded that he would like to see the Knik Arm Crossing resources put to use on real projects, and to do more than the existing plans.

Bruce Carr responded to John McPherson by saying that the Mat-Su Borough LRTP will contain a discussion of all these elements that may be more up to date than existing



Meeting Notes

documents. He also added that the construction of the gas pipeline will be a dramatic step forward in building infrastructure. He argued that access to Point MacKenzie will become important for the gas pipeline.

Carla SlatonBarker asked the group to brainstorm more on how a non-bridge alternative could meet the other functions of purpose and need, such as freight. She also asked other NGO representatives to add their comments to what was said by Randy Virgin and Steve Cleary.

Andre Camera stated that the discussions did not take into account the Mat-Su Borough infrastructure that will be needed to support additional population in Point MacKenzie.

Murph O'Brien responded that KABATA has funded a study on land use on the Mat-Su Borough side that will help predict infrastructure needs. Edrie Vinson also added that the EIS will address cumulative and secondary in the Mat-Su Borough.

John Toppenberg seconded Randy Virgin's comments and also added that he was concerned about beluga calving in Knik Arm. While he stated that there is no scientific evidence to support beluga calving in Knik Arm, he did have some anecdotal evidence.

Steve Cleary then asked how many alternatives will be carried forward in the EIS.

John McPherson responded that there are currently 2 bridge routes and 6 to 8 alternatives on the Anchorage side, and that the alternatives carried forward in the EIS will represent some combinations of the existing alternatives portrayed in the newspaper insert. Carla Slaton Barker also added that the newspaper insert portrayed alternatives, not all of which would be in the range of alternatives carried forward in the EIS.

John McPherson again addressed the difficulties of defining a non-bridge alternative without knowing what kind of ferry the NGOs were proposing, what the demands would be, and what might actually materialize.

Randy Virgin agreed that this whole project faces the difficulty of predicting the future, and that they didn't have recommendations for types of service or frequency, but that they were interested in a non-bridge alternative that met the project's needs.

John McPherson stated that the purpose of the Knik Arm Crossing is not to eliminate congestion on the Glenn Highway.

Randy Virgin requested more clarification of the purpose and need.



Meeting Notes

Murph O'Brien added that the project keeps changing, and that with SAFETEA-LU earmark projects being deducted from the overall allocation, the Mat-Su Borough is concerned about losing funds. Randy Virgin added his concern that SAFETEA-LU earmark projects are taking money away from other projects. He asked if the community could request that Congress shift the funding to other projects. The total cost of the Knik Arm Crossing project, he said, is large.

John McPherson then asked for more clarification on the non-bridge alternative, if it could use the MSB ferry plan and the MOA LRTP transit plans. Randy Virgin again stated that he wanted the project team to find an alternative that could meet the purpose and need without building a bridge.

John McPherson asked about how the non-bridge alternative might meet the need for an alternate evacuation route. Randy Virgin responded that the commuter problem is the biggest problem facing local people. He stated that the non-bridge alternative may not meet all the project's needs, but it would meet the most important one. Bruce Carr joined the conversation adding that there is no prioritization of needs in the purpose and need statement, and that the trucking (freight movement) north is essential and could result in a great cost savings, as well as support continuing growth. Randy Virgin agreed to this point.

John McPherson asked then if the non-bridge alternative needs to include ferries that carry freight. Murph O'Brien clarified that the purpose and need of the Mat-Su ferry is not the same as the purpose and need of the Knik Arm Crossing.

John Toppenburg then suggested that other ferry systems worldwide be examined as models to help develop the non-bridge alternative.

Carla SlatonBarker asked if she was hearing a suggestion to augment the Mat-Su ferry plan to fit into the non-bridge alternative. She asked for more help brainstorming, or at least a vote of confidence from the July 11, 2005 letter signers that the project team could carry forward with the development of the details of a non-bridge alternative. Randy Virgin agreed and said he'd like to see the team determine what a meaningful, real alternative would look like.

Steve Cleary then asked why the ports need to be connected. Murph O'Brien addressed this question, saying that the ports meet different needs, and that in order to provide efficient freight and goods movement, more roads would be required to support a freight ferry system.



Meeting Notes

Randy Virgin suggested that a ferry be kept in the non-bridge alternative, but that the ferry service be capable of moving containers and the alternative include road upgrades to support that service.

Bruce Carr clarified that Port MacKenzie is a bulk resource port and that Port of Anchorage is a container freight port. He added that Port MacKenzie has no interest in becoming a container port to compete with Anchorage, as 70% of containers stay in Anchorage and 30% go north. Randy Virgin asked if the cost of the Knik Arm Crossing justified increasing service for only 30% of the freight received at the port.

John McPherson also mentioned the cost of upgrading the docks at Port MacKenzie. To this, Randy Virgin stated that a cost of tens of millions to upgrade the docks at Port MacKenzie was still small in comparison to the expenditure suggested for a bridge. He reiterated that he would like to see the team study port and freight options with ferry service.

Carla SlatonBarker asked about the level of commuter rail included in the non-bridge alternative. Randy Virgin stated that they would like to see the Alaska Railroad plans in the non-bridge alternative, and that they would like to see the highway to highway connection and transit improvements in the non-bridge alternative. Andre Camera pointed out that these improvements are already included in the no-action alternative, and asked how those were being studied. Carla SlatonBarker clarified that the no-action alternative includes all proposed and planned improvements for the Mat-Su ferry, commuter rail, and transit.

Kevin Doyle added that the MOA and MSB LRTPs for 2025 are the base model for all traffic modeling on the project. He expressed the difficulties of exceeding those recommendations without creating an alternative that would fail. He also noted that if the non-bridge alternative cannot meet peak demand, that it would not be viable. Kevin Doyle also stated that KABATA is not a regional transportation authority, that this project is meant to address roadway vehicles, and that the no-action alternative already includes ferry, rail and transit.

Randy Virgin stated that the Knik Arm Crossing project is not about Palmer-Wasilla commuters, but about Point MacKenzie commuters, and that there is no existing transportation demand from Point MacKenzie.

Carla SlatonBarker added that the EIS will have projected population numbers for the Point MacKenzie area.



Meeting Notes

Henry Springer offered some closing comments to address the unique nature of the Knik Arm Crossing project and to thank the meeting attendees for their participation. He stated the public policy on the Knik Arm Crossing project is unique due to the following facts:

1. The Knik Arm Crossing is founded in Alaska Statutes
2. Congress passed a language specific bill that cannot be changed for six years
3. Congressional language gives the Knik Arm Crossing national significance and priority
4. DOT&PF is the regional authority
5. AMATS and the Mat-Su Borough are involved in the Knik Arm Crossing project, but the project is regional in nature and holds state and federal interests
6. As a toll facility, there is an actual cap on funding; if the project costs exceed \$600 million, it will not be constructed.

In light of these points, Henry Springer stated that it behooves everyone to look at the larger picture and regional/federal nature of the project to make a good decision.

Steve Cleary stated that he would rather see the \$600 million spent on strengthening ferry, rail and transit, and on fully funding local projects included in LRTPs.

Carla SlatonBarker remarked that the group did not have consensus on the purpose and need of the project, and that would be addressed at a later time. She stated that the non-bridge alternative would be developed to try to meet commuter needs and freight and goods movement.

Edrie Vinson requested that the NGOs give more lead time on their letters so that the team has time to digest and respond to them in full before meetings. She also stated that the purpose and need for the Knik Arm Crossing comes from planning and legislation that FHWA and the project team cannot alter.

Steve Cleary asked about the project's timeline and next steps. Carla SlatonBarker stated that the team is developing the non-bridge and other alternatives, and will then screen the alternatives to create a range of reasonable alternatives to be studied in the EIS. The draft EIS is anticipated in fall of 2005.

Steve Cleary asked about the contents and delivery date of the Wilbur Smith report. Henry Springer stated that the report would address a rough order-of-magnitude cost on the toll, that KABATA is looking for a chief financial aid officer and that KABATA is doing more financial work. The Wilbur Smith report, he said, would be available at the end of August.

With this, the meeting was adjourned.