

Regional Public Transportation Services

The Glenn Highway corridor links Anchorage with Chugiak-Eagle River and the Mat-Su Borough. The only regional public transportation service operating regularly between the Mat-Su Borough and Anchorage is the MASCOT bus service. It offers two trips a day from the Mat-Su Borough.

The Glenn Highway corridor is unusual in that there is no alternative or back-up route in case of crashes or overcrowding. During commute hours, projected 2025 travel demand will exceed the existing corridor capacity, unless remedies are implemented. Figure 7-31 shows the existing road capacity and projected traffic demand along the Glenn Highway corridor from Eklutna Road to Boniface Road. Traffic demand on the Glenn Highway corridor will exceed capacity in 2025 from Mirror Lake to Boniface Road.

Commuter Rail Services

The Alaska Railroad mainline runs parallel to the Glenn Highway from Wasilla and other communities, providing the prospect of a commuter rail option for travel into and out of Anchorage. Feasibility of commuter rail service between the Anchorage Bowl and the Mat-Su Borough has been studied. (One analysis is *South Central Rail Network Commuter Study and Operation Plan*, by Wilbur Smith and Associates et al., January 2002.) Although there are advocates for implementation of a commuter rail service, the recent feasibility studies do not present a compelling case.

Two studies conducted in 2000 produced rider commuter rail rider estimates for 2005 of 152,000 to 190,000 annual riders for weekday service, or 600 to 750 riders per average weekday. For 2015, rail patronage was forecast at 230,000 annual riders, equivalent to about 900 riders per weekday.

Commuter rail passenger estimates were predicated on two morning trains from Wasilla to Anchorage and two trains from Anchorage to Wasilla in the afternoon, plus limited off-peak service. Travel by rail from Wasilla to the Ship Creek Intermodal Terminal in Anchorage would require about 1 hour. Stations in Chugiak-Eagle River provide opportunity for commuters there to use rail service also. Service is assumed to expand 30 percent by 2015 and 75 percent by 2025. Coordinating bus service in the Anchorage Bowl enabling train commuters to get to destination sites beyond walking distance from the rail terminal is assumed to be available.

Table 7-11 summarizes estimated outcomes for commuter rail services between Wasilla and Anchorage between 2005 and 2025. Rail service may take from 600 to 1,750 vehicle trips off the Glenn Highway, mostly commuters in peak hours. Net public costs (subsidy) to support the estimated rail service range from \$2.66 million to \$4.87 million per year (in 2004 dollars). The subsidy works out to be almost \$10 per passenger on the optimistic end and more than \$18 per passenger on the pessimistic end.

Table 7-11. Estimated Operating Outcomes for Commuter Rail

Component	2005	2015	2025
Daily riders	600–750	900	1,050–1,750
Annual riders	152,000–190,000	231,000	266,000–439,000
Annual passenger revenue (\$1,000s) ^a	\$532–\$686	\$809	\$930–\$1,537
Capital cost (\$1,000s) ^a	\$32,000		
Annual operating cost (\$1,000s) ^{a, b}	\$3,350	\$4,310	\$5,800
Annual public funding (\$1,000s) ^a	\$2,664–\$2,818	\$3,501	\$4,263–\$4,870
Public funding per rider	\$14.02–\$18.54	\$15.16	\$9.72–\$18.34

^a Expressed in 2004 dollars.

^b Assumed initial rail service in 2005 is two train schedules inbound in the morning and outbound in the afternoon. Service by 2015 is increased 30 percent and at 2025 by 75 percent.

Sources: CH2M HILL and Wilbur Smith Associates (*South Central Rail Network Commuter Study and Operation Plan, 2002*)

For commuter rail service to be implemented, a number of steps would be required. Foremost is determination of funding responsibilities, mechanisms, and sources. In parallel with the funding steps, creation of an institutional structure and negotiation of management, operations, and sponsorship agreements among the several affected parties is required. Other prerequisite activities include project development planning; engineering, and environmental analyses; operations detailing; equipment procurement and customization; station and facilities development; service specifications; patronage, pricing, marketing, and revenue projection refinements; connector transit service integration arrangements; and related multi-government coordination.