

**ALASKA CENTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT * ALASKA
CONSERVATION ALLIANCE * ALASKA PUBLIC INTEREST
RESEARCH GROUP * ALASKA TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES
PROJECT * ALASKA WILDLIFE ALLIANCE * COOK INLET KEEPER *
SIERRA CLUB (ALASKA REGIONAL OFFICE)**

July 11, 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 very much for your ongoing interest in a full and complete scoping process for the Knik Arm bridge draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as shown by the still-open public comment docket and the newly-scheduled July 12th and 13th public meetings to discuss additional bridge corridor alternatives. As Mr. Springer stated in the July 2005 Knik Arm Crossing newsletter, the new alternatives suggested by the public are “one of the positive aspects of the scoping process. We welcome the infusion of new ideas – it’s part of the EIS process.” Along these lines and because we also are interested in keeping Anchorage’s Government Hill and other city neighborhoods intact, the undersigned organizations respectfully request that the draft EIS include analysis of the following “transportation package” alternative which meets the project’s draft purpose and need for intercommunity-connectivity and congestion relief:

Proposed alternative:

- 1) Institute regular car ferry transit to Point MacKenzie,
- 2) Invest in commuter rail between the Mat-Su Valley and Anchorage,
- 3) Provide carpool and vanpool incentives for travel from the Mat-Su Valley to Anchorage,
and
- 4) Expand bus service and institute streetcar transit in Anchorage

This four-component alternative will meet the needs of a Knik Arm Crossing project potentially at lower cost, while still stimulating economic development and allowing for population growth.

Additionally, this alternative will provide significant societal benefits since it minimizes the adverse effects of sprawl development, helps downtown businesses which rely on pedestrian traffic, provides construction and operational jobs for Alaskans, does not degrade air quality, and protects the Cook Inlet beluga whale (a National Marine Fisheries Service "depleted" species) and Cook Inlet salmon. This alternative permits cargo movement between Port MacKenzie and Anchorage via ship, relieves commuting congestion and allows for population growth, provides multiple transport routes for emergencies and other purposes, and addresses the need for mobility within Anchorage.

We urge the Federal Highway Administration in the strongest possible terms to add the above four-component alternative for evaluation in the draft EIS, just as it recently added new bridge access routes through military land for evaluation in the draft EIS.

Last, we are concerned that KABATA is placing an undue emphasis on Port of Anchorage-Port MacKenzie interconnection as a primary purpose and need for the bridge. Given the planned \$236 million dollar expansion of the Port of Anchorage, the Port of Anchorage will not need a connection to Port MacKenzie for overflow cargo for several decades. While the Port MacKenzie area might need assistance from the Port of Anchorage, the reverse is not true and that should be made clear in any final purpose and need statement.

Thank you very much for your attention to this four-component alternative and to our concerns about the purpose and need for the bridge. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lois Epstein at (907) 929-9371 or lois@inletkeeper.org

Sincerely,

✓Randy Virgin, Executive Director
Alaska Center for the Environment

✓Emily Ferry, Coordinator
Alaska Transportation Priorities Project

✓Tom Atkinson, Executive Director
Alaska Conservation Alliance

✓John Toppenberg, Director
Alaska Wildlife Alliance

✓Steve Cleary, Director
Alaska Public Interest Research Group

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

✓Betsy Goll, Alaska Regional Manager
Sierra Club (Alaska Regional Office)

Michelle Wilbur, Conservation Chief

cc: Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich
Palmer Mayor John Combs
Wasilla Mayor Dianne M. Keller
Mat-Su Borough Mayor Tim Anderson
Representative Don Young
Senator Lisa Murkowski
Senator Ted Stevens
Colonel Joe Torres, Alaskan Command
U.S. DOT Secretary Norman Mineta