



# Meeting Notes

Subject	Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Working Group Meeting	Sheet 1 of 10
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Project Number	21132 – 003
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Meeting Date	September 28, 2005	Meeting Location	HDR 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room
Time	9:00-11:30 AM		

Notes by	Rosetta Alcantra	Office	HDR Alaska, Inc.
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Attendees:	Edrie Vinson Federal Highway Administration	Dale Paulson KABATA	Al Ewing KABATA
Randy Virgin Alaska Center for the Environment	Lois Epstein Cook Inlet Keeper	Justin Massey Trustees for Alaska	Cheryl Richardson Anchorage Citizens Coalition
Elaine Summer EPA Region 10	Rosetta Alcantra HDR Alaska	Carla SlatonBarker HDR Alaska	Jon Isaacs URS Corp.
Lindsey Holmes RISE Alaska	Troy Houstka Carter & Burgess		

<p>Handouts –Attached</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agenda</li> <li>• Purpose &amp; Need Statement</li> <li>• 08/08/05 NGO Scoping Letter</li> <li>• 08/12/05 MOA Scoping letter</li> </ul>
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## Summary of Main Meeting Points

### Revisions to Purpose and Need Statement:

- **The Regional Transportation Planning Organization’s Resolution 1-03 supports “Knik Arm Crossing with Rail,” which is different than the currently proposed bridge without rail. Language will be changed to reflect this clarification.**
- **Revise language implying conditions will worsen without the proposed crossing.**
- **Footnote source for financial feasibility.**
- **Refine/clarify discussion about comprehensive plan’s projections for growth outside the Anchorage Bowl.**

### Alternatives Analysis:

- **The four point alternative system at this time will not be carried forward.**



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- **Carter & Burgess will provide an independent evaluation of the four point alternative system and FHWA evaluate and make a final decision on what is included in the DEIS.**
- **Alignments carried forward to DEIS include: Northern Access and Point Mackenzie Road; Southern Crossing; Below the Bluff with Degan and Erickson variants; and No Build.**

### Conclusion:

- **End of scoping.**
- **DEIS will include both with and without the bridge with full evaluation.**

### Topics Discussed

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#### Introductions

The meeting began at 9:00 am with a brief welcome statement by Carla SlatonBarker, Public Involvement Coordinator for HDR Alaska, Inc. Ms. SlatonBarker explained the purpose of the meeting:

- To review the comments provided in the 8/8/05 NGO scoping letter to the Federal Highway Administration regarding the Knik Arm Crossing Purpose & Need Statement.
- To describe how the Purpose & Need Statement was refined based on comments received.
- To provide an update on alternatives development, including the development and screening of the multimodal/systems alternative (also known as the four-point or transportation-package alternative) requested in the group's 7/11/05 scoping letter and discussed at the 8/9/05 NGO working group meeting.
- To provide an update on project status and direction.

Ms. SlatonBarker also informed the participants that Carter & Burgess has been hired to provide an independent analysis of the development and screening of the multimodal/systems alternative. She informed the participants that Troy Houstka of Carter & Burgess was in attendance at the meeting.

Next, participants were asked to introduce themselves, and then Edrie Vinson, FHWA Environmental Project Manager, provided comments on the importance of the meeting. Ms. Vinson first acknowledged to the participants that she had the opportunity to meet with Emily Ferry in Juneau for the Transportation Priorities Project. Ms. Vinson thanked the participants for attending the meeting to discuss the Purpose and Need Statement. She also extended her appreciation to them for continuing to participate throughout the project's extensive scoping period. She noted that scoping was initially scheduled to end in June, but was extended until the end of September. Ms. Vinson indicated that the project had "scoped" the Purpose and Need Statement for nine months; she noted that the meeting with the NGO working group today concluded the scoping period. She also



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noted that a scoping report will be out soon. Ms. Vinson also informed the participants they will have an opportunity to comment when the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is released. She concluded her comments by encouraging their continued participation in the process.

Following Ms. Vinson's comments, Ms. SlatonBarker noted that because this meeting concluded the series of scoping meetings, it was important that everyone leave the room understanding each other and the project's direction. She also noted that it was important to hear from the group if the group had new comments to add. To that end, she said that she would be asking participants three questions throughout the meeting: "Did you understand the information?" "Has the EIS team failed to consider something?" "Do you have any new comments to add?"

Lois Epstein, Cook Inlet Keeper, inquired whether the meeting was being recorded. Ms. SlatonBarker informed the participants that this was a formal meeting and that Rosetta Alcantra, HDR, would take notes for the record.

### **Review and Discussion of Revised Purpose and Need Statement**

Ms. SlatonBarker asked if Ms. Epstein, Cook Inlet Keeper, could provide a recap of the participants' Purpose and Need scoping letter sent to FHWA on 8/8/05. Ms. Epstein indicated that the two-page letter to FHWA outlines issues the nongovernmental organization had with the Purpose and Need Statement. She said that essentially the final draft Purpose and Need Statement [provided in advance of the meeting to participants by email] is similar to the July draft. Ms. Epstein noted that it is the group's opinion that the statement is too narrow and that the focus on vehicles could preclude looking at non-vehicular transportation in the Upper Cook Inlet region. For example, she noted that increased rail travel for people and cargo could improve transportation for the vast majority of people in the region, and would provide connectivity between the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) and Matanuska Susitna Borough (MSB). Ms. Epstein also suggested that the Purpose and Need Statement contradicted the Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan, and noted this as a concern. Ms. Epstein read an excerpt from the Purpose and Need Statement. Ms. Epstein indicated that growth could be met through other means besides a bridge. She also noted that the Purpose and Need Statement mischaracterized support for the project, specifically the Regional Transportation Planning Organization's Resolution 1-03. She noted that the RTPO supported a "Knik Arm Crossing with Rail," which is different than the currently proposed bridge without rail.

Ms. SlatonBarker asked Randy Virgin, Executive Director, Alaska Center for the Environment (ACE), if he had any comments to add. Mr. Virgin indicated that he was in



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agreement with Ms. Epstein's comments and wanted to explore the concerns expressed in the MOA's 8/12/05 scoping letter.

At this point of the meeting, Ms. SlatonBarker asked if any issues needed more clarification. The general consensus of the participants was to discuss the MOA's scoping letter. Ms. Alcantra made copies of the MOA letter, and it was handed out in the meeting.

Ms. Vinson then asked Jon Isaacs from URS Corporation how the team had taken comments into consideration when preparing the Purpose and Need Statement. Mr. Isaacs indicated that the team reviewed comments from the MSB, MOA, the NGOs, Alaskan Command (ALCOM), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Government Hill Community Council (GHCC), and others. Ms. SlatonBarker asked Mr. Isaacs to summarize comments and describe how the Purpose and Need Statement was refined based on comments received.

Mr. Isaacs introduced himself as one of the primary authors of the Purpose and Need statement. He gave a history of the development of the Purpose and Need Statement, including the legislative intent that created the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority (KABATA), support for the project in planning documents, and comments received during the scoping process.

Next, he highlighted the broad range of comments received, as well as refinements made to address comments.

Following Mr. Isaacs overview of the development of the Purpose and Need statement, discussion followed. A point of discussion was the NGO's statement that the project contradicts "Anchorage 2020's" goal of high-density development. The participants asked that Purpose and Need statement better clarify impacts to growth in the Anchorage Bowl and the goals of "Anchorage 2020." Team members noted that this information will be available as part of the EIS. Mr. Isaacs indicated that the comprehensive plan recognized that lower density residential development would have to be met outside the Anchorage Bowl. He noted that the Purpose and Need had been revised, in response to comments by the Municipality of Anchorage, to indicate that some vacant land to meet such needs was available in Chugiak and Eklutna. Mr. Isaacs stated that he would review the Purpose and Need Statement to see if language could be refined or a footnote used to clarify Anchorage 2020's allocation of forecast growth outside the Anchorage Bowl.

During this discussion, Ms. Vinson reminded the participants that the project spans two governmental jurisdictions. Ms. Vinson also noted that FHWA does not have jurisdiction



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to plan, and that it is important to recognize the governing bodies are charged with making the best choices.

The group then discussed the NGO's request to delete the reference to "vehicular access" in the Purpose and Need Statement. Mr. Isaacs noted the Purpose and Need statement is bound by the legislation that created KABATA and therefore must reference "vehicular access." Two other factors also affected this decision; both the need for financial feasibility and the need for an efficient crossing required a bridge (vehicular crossing).

The group discussed the characterization of The Regional Transportation Planning Organization's Resolution 1-03, which representatives felt supports "Knik Arm Crossing with Rail," which is different than the currently proposed bridge without rail. Mr. Isaacs agreed that the characterization of Resolution 1-03 needed to be corrected in the Purpose and Need Statement.

There was a brief exchange regarding how priorities were developed for the RTPO. Ms. Richardson of the Anchorage Citizens' Coalition indicated there was no discussion of the bridge in the RTPO proceedings, but at the end of the day priorities were listed and that list included "Knik Arm Crossing with Rail." Ms. Vinson expressed the appreciation for this historical account, but she noted that FHWA is not in the position to change the historic record. Ms. Richardson also asked that the statement on page 4 regarding the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) of the Purpose and Need Statement be clarified. She wanted to know what was implied by "average costs". Ms. Vinson suggested that the clarification be included in the EIS.

Justin Massey from Trustees of Alaska asked to make a comment. He said it sounded like the legislative mandate that established KABATA was the crux of the issue. He asked for clarification on this point and encouraged the participants to move on with the discussion and not get bogged down. Mr. Isaacs agreed with Ms. Vinson's comments that FHWA is not in the position to change the historic record.

At this point, Ms. SlatonBarker focused the participants on the question of where to go with the Purpose and Need statement. Ms. Vinson said the Purpose and Need statement can still take into account the "wordsmithing" suggested by the group, but cannot change the historic record. Again, Ms. Vinson explained FHWA does not have jurisdiction to plan, cannot change legislation, cannot change historic documentation, and has no control over Congress. FHWA can analyze an EIS's Purpose and Need statement, study what will happen, fully disclose impacts, and make decisions.

The participants felt they had wasted their time if the study is constrained by legislation. Their opinion at this point was that the Purpose and Need statement is too narrow. Mr.



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Isaacs acknowledged the participants' frustration and indicated that the writers of the Purpose and Need statement did make an effort to address what could be addressed outside of specific language constrained by legislation.

Ms. SlatonBarker suggested taking Mr. Massey's earlier suggestion to focus on the logical introduction of Purpose and Need statement. Ms. SlatonBarker asked if there were new comments, if the participants thought the writers had failed to analyze properly, and whether or not the participants needed more explanation. At this point, Ms. Vinson suggested that "financial feasibility" referenced on page 3 of the Purpose and Need Statement, be explained and a source identified. There was a brief discussion about whether there is an example in FHWA history when a legislative mandate was changed based on public comments. Ms. Vinson said she is aware of an earmark situation where a "no build" alternative was chosen. There was also a brief discussion about whether telecommuting would be looked into or asked of the public.

Before the discussion on the Purpose and Need statement closed, Ms. SlatonBarker indicated that the No Action Alternative would be analyzed in detail in the draft EIS. She also asked if there were additional comments before the group took a quick break. Ms. Epstein asked if the reference to funding for the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) on page 4 of the Purpose and Need Statement could be clarified. She wanted to know what was implied by "average costs". Ms. Vinson suggested that the clarification be included in the EIS. Following is a summary of the discussion on Purpose and Need.

- Some wordsmithing" suggested by the group
- Characterization of Resolution 1-03 needed to be corrected in the Purpose and Need Statement
- Suggested that "financial feasibility" referenced on page 3 of the Purpose and Need Statement, be explained and a source identified.

There were no further comments, and the group took a 3 minute break at 10:21 a.m.

### Discussion of Alternatives

After the break, Ms. SlatonBarker introduced Lindsey Holmes from RISE Alaska to provide summary of the alternatives and which were being carried forward for further evaluation in the draft EIS. Ms. SlatonBarker said that this topic was not on the agenda, but that the delivery of news is part of the team's commitment to keep the NGOs updated.

Ms. Holmes began by first going over what she would discuss. She planned to address each of the transportation systems individually: ferry, heavy rail, and commuter rail. She began by providing background on the proposed MSB ferry system that will link Point



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MacKenzie and downtown Anchorage. The ferry is expected to be running by 2007. Ms. Holmes stated that this ferry does not meet the Purpose and Need for the Knik Arm Crossing. By itself, the ferry is not efficient and can only transport 50 vehicles per hour, and in an attempt to make the alternative more compliant with Purpose and Need, the project team projected an additional ferry. However, even an expanded ferry by itself does not meet Purpose and Need requirements for financial feasibility, efficient vehicular access, or system redundancy.

Ms. Holmes then provided a brief statement on heavy rail. Heavy rail is good at moving freight over long distances and not good at moving people. The cost to build a heavy rail bridge and connection to Willow is estimated at approximately \$1.2 billion. Heavy rail by itself does not meet Purpose and Need requirements for financial feasibility or for efficiency.

Lastly, Ms. Holmes discussed commuter rail within the core area of Wasilla and Palmer. Ms. Holmes indicated that the Alaska Railroad Corporation is looking at commuter rail, and that it is good at connecting existing cities and suburbs, but that at this time commuter rail by itself does not meet Purpose and Need requirements in terms of financial feasibility, and does not connect to Point MacKenzie.

Ms. Holmes indicated the project team looked at the NGO four point system alternative proposal. She explained that the enhanced system would be in 2030. The four point alternative system would include: two ferries carrying 200 vehicles, with a maximum capacity of 12,000 vehicles per day and averaging 8,000 vehicles per day; commuter rail (per LRTP assumptions) would average 2100 trips per day by 2030. Ms. Holmes also added that they looked at carpool and vanpool and assumed incentives, such as federal tax breaks, stipends, preferred riders, and free gas, and anticipate use to triple between now and 2030, this would be an additional 2,500 trips per day. She explained that the project team also looked at Bus Rapid Transit between the Mat-Su core area and Anchorage (assuming additional buses beyond what is projected in the LRTP), and at synchronizing the PeopleMover system with the commuter rail and Bus Rapid Transit system. Bus Rapid Transit is estimated to attract 1700 trips per day by 2030. Altogether, the four point system is expected to attract 12,000 riders per day by 2030.

Ms. SlatonBarker indicated this would be a good place in the agenda to introduce Troy Houstka to discuss the analysis by Carter & Burgess. Mr. Houstka introduced himself and Carter & Burgess. Carter & Burgess is an environmental engineering firm out of Fort Worth, Texas hired to review work done by the HDR Alaska Inc. EIS team, by doing its own analysis and providing a second opinion. Their opinion on the alternative is expected in about two weeks. Ms. Vinson added that Carter & Burgess is known for



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multi-modal solutions and has had success in this area. She further explained that this is an example of how FHWA is taking their comments very seriously.

After introducing Carter & Burgess, there were some general questions. The participants inquired about whether or not the firm would be conducting a sensitivity analysis and if they would be looking at gas prices, level of riders, demand and parking. It was also asked if Carter & Burgess would be accessible to the NGOs.

To close out her briefing, Ms. Holmes stated the four point systems alternative is a great system; it just does not meet the purpose and need for the project. The only system that would connect Anchorage with Point MacKenzie is the ferry, but as previously discussed the ferry failed to meet other aspects of purpose and need.

Ms. SlatonBarker noted the frustration and asked if there was understanding of how the decisions were made, and whether or not the alternative needs to be looked at again. There was no response to her questions. Ms. Vinson said there was a great deal of coordination and cooperation with MOA and MSB.

Mr. Massey inquired about if all the alternatives would include a bridge. Ms. Vinson responded that unless Carter & Burgess indicates otherwise, the alternatives available in the DEIS will be as presented today. Mr. Massey said he completely understands that their dispute is with the State and Congress regarding the mandate and funding for the project. He however indicated he is familiar with NEPA and a project manager may not unreasonably constrain the project.

Ms. Vinson said that NGO four point systems alternative was looked at and was initially found not to be reasonable. Dale Paulson also informed the participants that an economic working group was worked with; they looked at zoning, various plans, developed land and constraints and used this information to provide the best guess on the projected needs.

At this point, Ms. SlatonBarker asked Ms. Vinson if she was comfortable with moving forward with the alternatives identified. Ms. Vinson said that it is important to finish scoping in order to move to the next step of the DEIS.

To close the discussion on the NGO four point systems alternative, Ms. SlatonBarker reminded the participants that the alternative will be evaluated by Carter & Burgess and that FHWA would be evaluating and making a final decision on what is included in the DEIS. Ms. Epstein stated the NGO four point systems alternative needs to be kept in the EIS and evaluated. Ms. Vinson reminded the participants that a full evaluation will be provided of the No Build analysis.



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Road and Crossing Corridor Alternatives: Next, Ms. SlatonBarker asked Ms. Holmes to discuss the road alternatives. Ms. Holmes first addressed the Northern Access Extension and the Existing Point MacKenzie Road on the MSB side. She indicated there was a great deal of feedback and input from the various agencies, including the Alaska Department of Transportation, FHWA and MSB leading to the extension of the approach road corridor up to Burma Road, with a cost attachment to the project. Ms. Vinson added the road would be fully paved and it is anticipated that it will be part of the National Highway System (NHS) funding stream. Ms. Holmes said these two alignments will be carried forward into the DEIS.

There was a question about the length of the crossing. At this point, Ms. Holmes addressed the three crossing alignments; perpendicular, skewed and southern access. She explained that due to military issues, hydrology, resource and agency comments, the perpendicular and the skewed alignments would not be carried forward. At this point, the location corridor would be the southern access alignment that will be carried forward. Two crossing lengths will be fully analyzed in the DEIS: 8,200 feet and 14,000 feet. The design is still being finalized, which will provide impacts on how much fill is used versus piling.

Ms. Holmes then discussed the Anchorage approach; she described the various corridors that had been under consideration. She indicated only the “Below-the-Bluff” corridor would be carried forward; other corridors would not be carried forward due to impacts on military mission and a travel demand analysis. The two variants of the Below-the-Bluff corridor being considered are Degan and Erickson. Either variant would connect in the near term with the A/C couplet, and by 2030 would also connect to Ingra/Gambell. This route was based on a travel demand analysis and it was determined that the A/C couplet has capacity in early years of the project and Ingra/Gambell couplet will be utilized once the programmed Highway to Highway improvement project is constructed.

Ms. SlatonBarker than summarized the alignments that would be carried forward to DEIS: Northern Access and Point Mackenzie Road; Southern Crossing; Below the Bluff with Degan and Erickson variants; and No Build. She also asked for comments.

### Conclusion Comments

Mr. Virgin expressed his thanks to Ms. Vinson, and indicated that never have their concerns been taken so seriously, however, he expressed that three alternatives feels incomplete. He understands the constraints of the legislation, but questioned whether or not the demand projection is a situation of the “chicken and egg”. He added that the



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agency has the authority to add alternatives for policy makers to consider, and that the alternative the NGO groups provided is less expensive than \$600 million.

Ms. Vinson replied that the DEIS will be looking at both with and without the bridge with full evaluation and the choice will still be there. Ms. Vinson indicated she has given the NGO alternative serious consideration and has worked closely with the staff and feels optimistic about what has been accomplished. The military concerns are serious and she will not interrupt their mission. Ms. Epstein offered that the NGO four point systems alternative does not interfere with the military mission; she also expressed concern over the potential impacts on salmon. Ms. Vinson offered that there are a variety of things to look at, for example the further south the crossing location, the less likely the crossing will be in tidal mud flats and affect salmon. At this time, Ms. Vinson also suggested to Ms. Epstein that she may want to talk to the resource agencies and get their perspective on the impacts to the salmon.

Mr. Massey thanked Ms. Vinson for taking the time and expressed he was glad to see Carter & Burgess involved. He encouraged Ms. Vinson to think creatively and to think carefully about moving the four point systems alternative forward for evaluation, he asked her to make it work and include it in the document (DEIS).

Ms. SlatonBarker asked the group if there were any additional comments before the meeting adjourned. She also thanked them for their participation and asked that they continue to contact Ms. Alcantra if they had any questions regarding the project. Ms. Vinson also thanked the participants for their involvement in the process.

The meeting was adjourned 11:30 am.