



**HAINES HIGHWAY MP 3.5 TO 25.3
PROJECT NUMBER 68606/SHAK-095-6(28)
CHILKAT BALD EAGLE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING NOTES**

SUBJECT: Haines Highway MP 3.5 TO 25.3

DATE: March 4, 2009

TIME: 1:30 p.m.

LOCATION: Assembly Chambers, Haines, Alaska

PROJECT TEAM ATTENDEES:

State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF)

Jim Scholl
Jim Heumann
Carl Schrader
Arne Oydna

DOWL HKM

Steve Noble
Kristen Hansen
Lana Davis
Michela Spitz

Inter-Fluve

Dan Miller

A meeting for the Haines Highway Improvements was held for the Chilkat Bald Eagle Advisory Council on March 4, 2009 at the Assembly Chambers in Haines, Alaska. The meeting included additional information related to project, work completed to date, environmental data and the project schedule.

Steve Noble (DOWL HKM) gave an overview of the project. He stated that this is a 3-R project (Resurfacing, Restoration and Rehabilitation) with the goal of identifying safety upgrades and curves that do not presently meet safety and sight distance criteria. Steve outlined the alignment study and pointed out the two areas where alternatives still exist. Kristen Hansen (DOWL HKM) then gave an overview of the environmental work and the reports and data that have been compiled up to now.

Below is a summary of questions and comments that were raised during the presentation. Staff responses are in italics.

Will the upgrades to the road take into account the weight of the pipeline structures and trucks?

Steve stated that the upgrades would take into account future projects such as the pipeline and part the reason for the roadway upgrades, was due to the potential for those future projects.

Have the alignments changed from those shown previously?

Steve stated that the changes were pretty subtle. He stated that two areas still have two options that are under consideration; the areas near the airstrip and the bridge. He noted that issues are still being worked through, but generally the alignments are pretty similar to those presented three years ago. Steve said that the project team is trying to balance the roadway reconstruction, the costs, and the environmental impacts, and we are tweaking some the alignments for these reasons.

Who makes the determination if the study will be an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement?

Kristen responded that the decision is made by the lead Federal agency – in this case the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). After scoping, the FHWA decided that they did not see any significant impacts and so decided that an EA would be the appropriate level of study. Kristen noted that this does not mean there are no impacts as a result of the project, but that they can be mitigated, and are not anticipated to be significant. FHWA will review the EA, and if they determine that the project is not anticipated to result in significant impacts, then they sign a decision document that is called a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). If it is determined at any time during the EA process that there may actually be significant impacts, then the FHWA can decide that an EIS is necessary.

Is there any money available for construction, and if money is not available, will the study have to be redone when money is made available?

Jim Scholl – Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) stated that currently there is no money for construction but that the study would not have to be redone once the construction is funded unless the project changes significantly. He noted that the project will probably be split into segments for construction purposes.

Jim Heumann (DOT&PF) added that the first segment would probably be near the bridge as the width of the bridge limits the traffic on the roadway and it is the last bridge along the Haines Highway to be brought up to current standards.

What is your plan for the slide areas?

Steve said that several options have been evaluated, and the plan is to raise the elevation of the road to decrease the probability of the slides engulfing the road. In addition, wider culverts will be installed that can accommodate a dozer to clean out the area. He also noted, however, that without bridges, there will always be maintenance issues in the slide areas.

Are there any plans to put in a new parking lot at the trail heads?

Steve stated that several locations have been looked at to upgrade pull-outs, and the roadway is currently being evaluated to decide the extent to which the pull-outs will be upgraded and improved.

Jim Heumann added that DOT&PF has to commit to maintaining any parking lots it constructs, so they would have to obtain an agreement with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Parks Division; they are planning to meet with them to discuss these issues.

What will happen to property in DOT&PF right-of-way?

Jim Heumann noted that it would have to be cleaned up. DOT&PF will follow the federal guidelines for right-of-way acquisition. Encroachments will have to be cleaned up before construction can proceed

There are issues at mile 13/14. There is a culvert blocking the stream and people use the area as a boat ramp and have trashed the river bank.

Jim Scholl stated that DOT&PF is looking into these issues. Jim Heumann said that he would bring it up when they meet with the parks department.

It would be better to have one good boat ramp rather than people just launching anywhere, as it kills the vegetation. There is not a decent public boat ramp on the whole river.

What determines the decision about the bridge?

Steve stated that many things will affect the decision to replace the bridge. These include property ownership, access to the bridge, environmental impacts to side channels and fish spawning areas, subsistence issues, and eagle nests. He noted that there are pros and cons to both bridge options and this is why both were still being evaluated.

Jim Scholl noted that it would not be an easy decision to make.

Steve mentioned that the project team is also evaluating two alternatives near the airstrip and that one would shorten the runway.

Can the alignment be moved nearer the river so it would not impact the airstip?

Steve stated that this would move the alignment into preserve area and critical habitat.

Jim Scholl stated that they need to meet with the property owner to discuss the options.

How many lanes will the road be?

Steve stated that it is planned to be a two-lane road, with an increased speed limit in many areas and more places to pass.