



Richardson Highway MP 266-341 Passing Lanes

Project Number 0A23021/Z607150000

PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

SUBJECT:	Richardson Highway MP 266-341 Passing Lanes
PROJECT NUMBER:	0A23021/Z607150000
GROUP:	Public
DATE:	May 19, 2022, 6 to 8 pm
LOCATION:	Zoom and by phone
OUTREACH:	See Table 1 - Meeting Outreach Methods
ATTENDANCE:	33 people joined the meeting
RECORDING:	https://bit.ly/384O1OR
MATERIALS:	Presentation, comment form
STAFF PRESENT:	ADOT&PF: Carl Heim HDL: Stephanie Mormilo, Jessica Carlson, Owen Means Brooks & Associates: Anne Brooks, Camden Yehle

MEETING INFORMATION:

The team provided a presentation overview of the project and answered questions throughout. Verbal comments and questions fell into categories, which are summarized below. Most attendees expressed support for the project with reservations about the proposed passing lanes' effectiveness for passing ore hauling trucks and military convoys.

Locations of Passing Lanes

What are the mile posts of the locations? Stephanie Mormilo (HDL) listed the milepost numbers of each of the proposed passing lane locations.

Are there passing lanes at the curve at Birch Lake? Stephanie: No, there are none in that area.

Do the figures in the presentation match figures 4 to 11 in the packet? Stephanie: What packet are you referring to? The letters at each passing lane location are to make the locations easier to refer to. We will post the presentation with all the figures on the website.

It seems like a passing lane on flat ground has limited usefulness because people will be up to speed. Stephanie: Flat areas are easier to fit a passing lane than in steep areas and curves. Carl Heim (ADOT&PF): It is safer to pass if there is a smaller speed disparity, which is another good reason to pick flatter locations for passing lanes.

If the project will cost \$40,000,000 already, can we add a little more to make this a better project? Were other locations considered? What about the Tower Hill area? Stephanie: No, there were not any other locations besides the original 16 considered. Carl: Five locations were eliminated because they could double the cost of the project. The project is not fundable at double the cost. The remaining 11 are practical. Funding was part of reason the project was

previously shelved, and we want to deliver a feasible project. Jessica Carlson (HDL): Part of the selection of the original 16 locations included considering optimum spacings for the passing lanes. There are recommended ideal spacings to make passing lanes work better. We didn't want to get rid of any of the original 16 passing lane locations; however, an engineering evaluation based on cost, environmental impacts, utility location costs, and right-of-way issues showed that some of the locations were not feasible.

Is there a passing zone near Orchid? It is a bit of a blind spot that makes it difficult to turn onto the Richardson Highway. It's in the Harding Lake area. Also, is the traffic counter on Orchid part of this project? Jessica: Unfortunately, those are the location C passing lanes that had to be eliminated. Carl: The counter could be from the ADOT&PF traffic counting group or it could be for a Borough project. Carl confirmed that it is the ADOT&PF traffic group, but not part of this project. Stephanie: The southbound location C (milepost 320.4-319.1) passing lane was eliminated because there is not enough space next to the existing powerline. The northbound C (milepost 316.5-318.4) passing lane was eliminated because it would require blasting rock slopes, leading to significant impacts.

Are the locations final? Carl: We are collecting comments, but the eliminated locations were removed for a collection of concerns.

Length of Passing Lanes

How long will the passing lanes be? Jessica: They should be at least a mile long to be effective. The passing lanes are between 1.2 miles and 2 miles in length.

Passing long trucks is different than passing a car. Carl: Passenger vehicles should have no problem passing haul rigs.

Is there a model that shows that the passing lanes will work with the ore haulers and military convoys? Carl: There is already significant truck traffic on the highway and the passing lanes will help. The existing highway has plenty of vehicular capacity. There will be a one-to-two-mile opportunity to pass.

Signage

On Alaska highways, signage states that if you have five cars following, you are required to pull over. Will there be signs posted on this project to that affect? Are military and or mining trucks exempt? If the signs don't mean anything they should be taken down. Stephanie: The difficulty is enforcing these signs if people with traffic behind them are going the speed limit. Carl: We will post standard passing lane signage for "Slower Traffic Keep Right" and will work with Pam Golden, Northern Region Traffic Engineer, to discuss the signage regarding queuing vehicles.

Bridges

Are any bridge reconstructions included with this project? Stephanie: No, this project does not impact any of the bridges. Carl: There are a couple of bridges that are being looked at by other project teams. For this project we are trying to build as many passing lanes as possible for \$40,000,000.

Is the Gerstle River Bridge still in the planning stage? Carl: I'd have to check and get back to you. Follow up note: The Gerstle River Bridge replacement project is in the environmental and design phase.

Highway Safety

Thank you for recording the meeting. I have a statement I'd like to read into the record. I represent Advocates for Safe Alaska Highways (ASAH). We submitted detailed comments in writing. We oppose our public highways becoming ore hauling roads. The traffic data collected in 2016 is no longer relevant. The study should be redone and consider the ore haulers. Regarding northbound traffic, there would be a 10% increase in areas to pass. Southbound, the project would add 6% in areas to pass. Is the data collected in 2016 appropriate to use for this project? Carl: No, we have traffic counters and extrapolate growth over time to design the road. The current design will be able to accommodate an additional 200 legal loads of truck traffic. The road won't have additional damage because they will be legal loads. The passing lanes already consider the existing 2,500 cars per day plus the trucks. Stephanie: We did add in the additional loading from the truck traffic. Additional clarification: The two-lane Richardson Highway should accommodate up to 1,900 vehicles per hour per lane and maintain free-flow conditions. The current average daily traffic (ADT) in the project area is around 2,500 vehicles per day. The projected ADT includes a standard growth rate on the existing traffic and adds the ore haul projections of 200 vehicles per day. According to State Statute (<https://dot.alaska.gov/mseve/webdocs/17AAC25.pdf>) all traffic must be legal highway loads. The ore haul is expected to meet the legal limit by spreading the load using multiple axle vehicles.

Rumble Strips

Will there be growler (rumble) strips or changes to the center line rumble strip? Carl: We are supposed to put rumble strips back whenever there is a major reconstruction, but we will take a closer look at that based on comments we've heard.

There were center line rumble strips installed on the Richardson Highway with no input from the public and they are loud. We don't think the centerline rumble strips are as effective as the shoulder rumble strips, especially where people pass.

Maintenance

Is anyone from Maintenance and Operations on this call? Carl: No but we coordinate with them routinely.

In the winter, using the passing lanes can be a hazard because they are not plowed right away. This would make the passing lanes unusable. Carl: We are aware maintenance staff do the best they can with a slashed budget and a reduction of 10 staff this year. We will discuss with them because this project does add lane miles to maintain.

Trucks throw a plume of snow that make it difficult to pass. We should have double yellow lines wherever there are passing lanes. Jessica: If there is a passing lane there will be a solid line on that side. If there is available sight distance on the other side, there can be a dashed line.

Maintenance and Operations staff are struggling to maintain what we have. How are they going to be able to maintain an extra eight miles? If the passing lanes and the shoulders are not maintained, then there is not a safety benefit. Maintenance needs to be funded. Carl: You are right, there will be downstream impacts and maintenance staff needs more funding to keep a higher level of service. Stephanie: That is a hurdle for which we do not have a good answer.

The [26th Annual Highway Report](#) ranks Alaska low. What is going to happen to the rest of the highway? It is in terrible shape. Carl: There are about 10 active projects on the Richardson Highway. It is time for investment in the Richardson Highway. Anne Brooks: All the active Richardson Highway projects are listed at <https://dot.alaska.gov/nreg/projects/>.

Asphalt Thickness

You mentioned thicker asphalt for this project. What are the axle loads? Carl: It is a thicker typical section than usual, but the axle loads will be within the legal limit. Additional detail: State Statute regarding legal loads on highways can be referred to at <https://dot.alaska.gov/mscve/webdocs/17AAC25.pdf>.

Wayside Pull Offs

Have pull offs been considered? Carl: No, wayside pull offs were not considered; however, there will be eight-foot shoulders for people to pull off onto.

I am working to revitalize the Scenic Byway program and I think it is a safety issue to not have pull offs. The long-term dream is for a bike path the whole way. Pull offs may encourage people to slow down instead of speed up.

Scenic Byways

A commenter is working to revitalize the Richardson Scenic Byway plan and encouraged the team to consider providing pull offs or waysides so drivers can enjoy the beauty of the corridor.

Table 1 - Meeting Outreach

Date	Outreach method	Description
4/26/2022	State of Alaska Online Notice	Notice posted to the State of Alaska Online Notice System
5/3/2022	Mailer	Postcard sent to area residents, businesses, organizations, elected officials, etc.
5/3/2022	Website notice	Meeting notice posted to the project website https://dot.alaska.gov/nreg/richardsonpassinglanes/
5/5/2022	Newspaper advertisement	Print advertisement published in the <i>Delta Wind</i>
5/5/2022 5/18/2022	Email notice and reminder	Invitation to the meeting sent to subscriber list
5/5/2022	Request to forward	Meeting notice sent to interested groups with the request to forward to subscriber lists
5/6/2022	Newspaper advertisement	Print advertisement published in the <i>Alaska Post</i>
5/6/2022	Newspaper advertisement	Print advertisement published in the <i>Fairbanks Daily News-Miner</i>
5/14/2022	Facebook post	Facebook post on the ADOT&PF Facebook page inviting people to the public meeting and referring them to the project website
5/16/2022	Online advertisement	Advertisement included in the KVAK radio station E-Blast sent to subscribers

Date	Outreach method	Description
5/16/2022	Radio announcement	Meeting announcement aired on the KVAK radio station