

# 2011/2012 Update to Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan Sitka, Alaska / Meeting Summaries

## Introduction

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) issued a Scoping Report in August 2011 for public review as part of the update the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (SATP). ADOT&PF held an open house at 5:30 pm and a public meeting at 6:30 pm on October 19, 2011, at Centennial Hall in Sitka, Alaska to discuss the SATP Scoping Report. Also on October 19, 2011 ADOT&PF met with City and Borough of Sitka staff at Borough Offices at 1:00 pm and with Sitka Tribe of Alaska at its office at 2:15 pm.

A combined total of 25 people attended one of these meetings (see attached attendance list).

## ADOT&PF Presentation at Open House/Public Meeting

The public meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed:

- The ADOT&PF statutory obligation to conduct overview of the Southeast Alaska transportation planning
- The last SATP was prepared in 2004, then 1999
- The purpose and need of this SATP update is to ensure there is continued opportunity to travel by maintaining a financially sustainable transportation system. This includes addressing the need to replace three aging ferries within the next 20 years.
- The comment period for this Scoping Report is open until November 4. ADOT&PF will then review comments, conduct a user/benefit analysis, and prepare a Draft SATP that identifies a single Preferred Alternative. The draft SATP will likely be issued in late spring/early summer 2012. There will be another round of public meetings on the draft SATP document. The final SATP will be published in late 2012.
- In 1992, six Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) ferries carried 373,000 passengers and 97,000 vehicles. In 2010, ten ferries (including both AMHS and Inter-Island Ferry Authority [IFA] vessels) carried 304,000 passengers and 92,000 vehicles.
- The SATP Scoping Report identifies six preliminary alternatives:
  - 1 – Baseline: Maintain the Existing System
  - 2 – Ferry Capacity Management
  - 3 – Maximize Use of Existing Roads
  - 4 – Alaska Class Ferries
  - 5 – Highway Route 7
  - 6 – No Action

These six preliminary alternatives were designed to “test” very different transportation scenarios. There is no preferred alternative identified in the Scoping Report. The preferred alternative that will be identified in the Draft SATP will likely combine elements from these preliminary alternatives. Among other factors the six preliminary alternatives consider:

- Seasonality in use of ferry system and related excess capacity during the spring, fall and winter
  - Alaska and Southeast population projections
  - Funding forecasts (federal and state)
  - The fact that 43% of the travel within the region is by ferry, 8% of the travel from the region to the Lower 48 is by ferry, and 2% of the travel from the region to northern parts of the state is by ferry.
  - Replacing mainline ferries with Alaska Class ferries and/or roads and shuttle ferries
- The capital costs (1<sup>st</sup> column from left), annual operation and maintenance costs (2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> column), and annual refurbishment costs (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> columns), and total annual costs in 2010 dollars (excludes capital costs) were reviewed for each of the preliminary alternatives, as shown in the table below.

Alternative	20 year Capital Costs	Annual M&O	% Change from 2010	Annual Refurbishment	% Change from 2010	Total Annual Cost	% Change from 2010
2010 Actual		131		47		178	
2032 Estimates	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
<b>1 – Baseline: Maintain Existing</b>	796	126	-4%	46	-3%	172	-4%
<b>2 - Ferry Capacity Management</b>	526	111	-16%	44	-7%	155	-13%
<b>3 - Maximize Use of Roads</b>	501	95	-28%	41	-13%	136	-24%
<b>4 – Alaska Class Ferries</b>	737	118	-10%	48	1%	166	-7%
<b>5 – Highway Route 7</b>	1,030	97	-26%	44	-7%	141	-21%
<b>6 – No Action</b>	?	?	?	?	?	?	?

- The presentation concluded with ADOT&PF representatives asking the public to provide written comments by November 4, 2011 on matters such as:
  - Your preferred alternative and why – and/or ideas for *additional* alternatives or options that you recommend ADOT&PF consider;
  - What communities do you make most of your trips each year;
  - What method of transportation do you use most and why – air, road and ferry;
  - What attributes are most important to you when you consider how you travel (such as cost, speed, service frequency, reliability, convenience, comfort, etc).
- This information will help ADOT&PF as it assembles the Draft SATP because it will need to consider trade-offs between these factors.

## Questions, Answers

In response to questions raised at the meetings, ADOT&PF offered the following information and clarifications.

### Bellingham Ferry Service

- If the Bellingham ferry route is eliminated, there would still be ferry service to Prince Rupert. Yes, travelers would need a passport and have to pass Canadian customs.
- The US Military are a part of passenger volume from Bellingham to Whittier. Military families choose the mode of transportation they prefer and about 10% choose the ferry. This travel is not discretionary – they will come by whatever means is available.

### Ferry Repairs and Service Life

- About \$25 million will be spent soon to repair the Columbia's engines.
- ADOT&PF expects another 18-20 years of service from the fast ferries. There are currently two lawsuits against the manufacturers of the engines; one related to the extension of the warranty, the other regarding engine replacement.
- Is it possible to maintain the three aging mainliners for longer than the 64 years of age/service life? Answer: The ferry retirement schedule is our best estimate and could vary though at a certain point maintenance costs become too high to reasonably continue operations.
- There is no funding for the second Alaska Class ferry at this time.
- While it is an interesting idea to look for a used vessel to reduce the cost of replacing three mainliners, challenges are that: the Jones Act requires that it be made in the US, there aren't that many used ferries around, and it would be hard to find one that could be used with our terminals.

### Alaska Class Ferries

- The Alaska Class ferries will not have state rooms, however, there will be a couple of rooms that offer a quiet area to lay down for elderly or sick passengers.

### Cost of Ferry versus Driving

- There is a cost analysis for transport of a vehicle to Bellingham via ferry and road; see the tables at the end of the Scoping Report. Transporting a vehicle by barge to Bellingham may cost less than by ferry depending on provider, weight of vehicle and goods, etc.

### Plan and Project Approval

- The current timeline is to submit the SATP to Governor Parnell for approval in late 2012.
- Individual projects will then be selected for the STIP.
- Large projects require an EIS, which commonly takes 3-10 years. Today's EISs consider many subjects, including when relevant, impacts to health. Large projects often cycle through more than one State administration.

### Coffman Cove Terminal and Ferry Service

- The Coffman Cove Port Authority is working now to run a private ferry between Coffman Cove, Petersburg, Wrangell, and Ketchikan. They have applied for a loan to purchase and refurbish a ferry.
- The Coffman Cove ferry terminal was constructed with Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration funding. The terminal is owned and operated by the City of Coffman Cove.

### Break-down of Inter-region Travel

- In response to a question ADOT&PF notes that it cannot say at this meeting exactly how much inter-region travel is hub to hub versus village to hub. However, travel from hub to hub is usually done by plane while travel from hubs to villages is usually done by ferry.

## **Key Comments made during Sitka Meetings**

Comments are grouped by topic.

Comments offered during the **Open House/Public Meeting** are noted by (OH/PM)

Comments offered during the meeting with the **City and Borough of Sitka** are noted by (CBS)

Comments offered during the meeting with **Sitka Tribe of Alaska** are noted by (STA)

### Cost of Ferry Service to Sitka

- If decision-making is all about cost, Sitka will always lose because it is one of the most expensive places to serve on a per passenger or per dollar basis. How can Sitka survive without ferry service? (CBS) Answer: ADOT&PF responds that assuming there is a ferry system, Sitka will always have ferry service; the issue is what frequency, type, and location. However, declining funding means very difficult decisions for all.

### Cross Baranof Road to Warm Springs

- The cross Baranof Road is important for Sitkans. It supports hydro development as well as providing better ferry/transportation access. It is important to more than just Sitkans as it will improve service and reduce travel costs and time for all using this part of the transportation system. Within time period of this SATP we need to accomplish road design at the very least. (CBS)
- Sitka needs this road regardless of the SATP; all alternatives (not just 2 and 5) should include it – including the preferred alternative in the final SATP. Including this in SATP will assist the City and Borough of Sitka by showing how this segment positively affects regional transportation. (CBS)
- It would mean more frequent service for Sitka if a system improvement, such as cross Baranof Road and ferry terminal on Chatham Strait side, reduces tidal constraints and the time it takes to get to and from Sitka. (OH/PM)

- The road from Sitka to Warm Springs Bay would be about 19 miles, from the end of the gravel road at Sawmill Creek. (OH/PM)

#### Need for Ferry Service to Sitka

- A high level of service to Sitka to access the regional SEARHC hospital is crucial to providing patient care; there are few routes that need more service. (OH/PM)
- Some patients cannot fly due to high airfares or the lack of ability to climb stairs in and out of small planes. (OH/PM)

#### Focus SATP on Southeast Infrastructure

- Separate out statewide needs and costs. For example, the cost of the mainline ferry service to Bellingham, Haines, Skagway, and north to Anchorage are in this plan and considered regional expenses yet these are statewide services. Answer: ADOT&PF notes that this is one way to look at it, but those runs service Southeast Alaskans too. (OH/PM)

#### Pacific Northwest Ferries

- Alaska, Washington and British Columbia all have ferry systems that operate out of the Bellingham and Prince Rupert; can't we partner for service and have interline agreements? Answer: AMHS has talked to BC ferries about interline agreements in the past but not sure about the status of these discussions. Washington state ferries are financially challenged now. (OH/PM)

#### Population Projections

- The Southeast population projection used by the SATP seems exceptionally gloomy. Should instead consider a high, medium and low scenario where the high would result in a population gain. These population projections do not favor investment in Southeast compared to Anchorage and other regions. Answer: ADOT&PF needs to use the State's official forecasts, which are prepared by the Department of Labor and Workforce Development. We recognize that some potential economic development opportunities that could increase Southeast Alaska's population, such as mining on Prince of Wales, are not accounted for in the estimates. (OH/PM)

#### Lynn Canal Ferry and Road

- One reason we do not have more ferries to and from Sitka is due to summer tourism demand in Lynn Canal. The ferries are concentrated in Lynn Canal and as a result other parts of Southeast Alaska are underserved. Ferries don't generate income and shouldn't cater to tourist needs; let the cruise ships handle tourism. (OH/PM)
- There is a concern that the Juneau Access road goes through many avalanche zones and this would make maintenance and operation expenses very costly. However, Alaska has built roads in terrain like this in several places, such as the road to Girdwood. (OH/PM)

#### Funding Competition

- Anchorage has transportation projects that are gaining a lot of attention, such as the Mat-Su ferry and Knik Arm crossing; this is major competition for funding. (OH/PM)

#### Design and Build Ferries In-State

- Designing and building ferries in Ketchikan makes sense because same people who design them will be there for the construction process and later to help with operation and maintenance issues; this could eliminate many problems. (OH/PM)

#### Accommodate School Travel

- There are lots of children who travel for sports and other reasons whose travel needs must be considered. (OH/PM)

#### Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

- Communities have needs such as resurfacing streets, providing pedestrian accommodations, and adopting complete streets systems. Are these needs being worked into the transportation system, or is the emphasis on creating state highways? ADOT&PF responds that the STIP is the process where community specific projects get ranked and scheduled for funding. Capital and operating and maintenance funding declines will force choices among projects. (OH/PM)

#### Drive to Bellingham

- Driving the highway from Prince Rupert to Seattle is dangerous in the winter and not a viable option much of the time. (OH/PM)

# **Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan Scoping Report**

## **Attendance at Sitka, Alaska meetings**

### **October 19, 2011**

#### **Open House and Public Meeting**

1. Lucy Phillips
2. John Dull
3. Harvey Brandt
4. Bob Gorman
5. Gary Baugher Jr.
6. Jennifer Robinson
7. Stephen Morse
8. Barbara Morse
9. N. Richard Nelson
10. Ed Ronco
11. Thad Poulson
12. Bart M. Meyer
13. Bruce Christianson
14. Greg Reynolds
15. Susan N. Sturmm
16. Dan Tadic
17. Dan Dunn
18. Charles Bingham
19. Sheila Finkenbinder

#### **Sitka City Meeting**

1. Jim Dinley
2. Marlene Campbell
3. Michael Harmon
4. Christopher Brewton

#### **Sitka Tribe of Alaska Meeting**

1. Gerry Hope

#### **ADOT&PF Team**

Andy Hughes, ADOT&PF  
Verne Skagerberg, ADOT&PF  
Barbara Sheinberg, Sheinberg Associates  
Donovan Bell, Sheinberg Associates