

Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan 2014 Draft Juneau, Alaska / Meeting Summaries

Introduction

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) issued a draft Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (SATP) for public review in June 2014. On August 6, 2014, DOT&PF held an evening open house and public meeting in Juneau, Alaska, at the Centennial Hall.

A combined total of 79 people attended the meeting (see attached attendance list).

DOT&PF Presentation at Open House/Public Meeting

The public meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed:

- The DOT&PF statutory obligation to conduct overview of the Southeast Alaska transportation planning, as a component of the Alaska Long Range Transportation Plan. The SATP directs investment in the regional transportation system over a 20-year period, identifying current priorities and guiding development of projects.
- The SATP was first published in 1980 and was updated and revised in 1986, 1999, and 2004 as an approved component of the Statewide Transportation Plan. To prepare the current update, DOT&PF conducted a scoping process in 2011, which led to development of the Draft SATP document in 2014.
- The comment period for this Draft SATP document is open until September 30, 2014. Written comments can be submitted to DOT&PF via email, mail or fax.
- There are also current National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) processes for several projects that have separate comment periods and official administrative records. These include the proposed East Lynn Canal Highway, Angoon Airport and the proposed road connection from Kake to Petersburg. Comments intended for consideration by an EIS must be submitted to the project manager of each EIS during its open comment periods.
- Trends for the Existing Transportation System – The Draft SATP analyzed and responds to trends that show a *decrease* in Southeast Alaska population, traffic on the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) and funding for transportation projects, coupled with *increases* in operations, maintenance and construction costs.

- Since 2006, AMHS annual Southeastern Alaska maintenance and operation costs have increased from about \$110M to nearly \$140M, while ferry sailings have dropped from about 6,500/year to 6,000 year in that period.
 - From 1991-2012, passenger ridership has declined from approximately 370,000 to 310,000/year, with vehicle traffic holding fairly steady at approximately 100,000 vehicles/year. Over that time, the ferry fleet has increased from six to ten ferries.
- The SATP considers many factors: three aging mainline ferries, comments received on the Scoping Report, interest in continuing existing ferry routes, cost to maintain the existing transportation system, regional transportation needs, current priorities and projects, and funding forecasts.
- Recommendations – The Draft SATP recommends maintaining all existing highway and ferry routes and provides improvements that will further increase the mobility of people and goods, such as new road links. It also includes measures to help reduce some system costs, such as retirement or replacement of aging mainliners and use of day boats. It recommends the following specific changes to the transportation system, that would (1) better match capacity to demand, (2) keep ferry service to Bellingham, (3) keep cross Gulf ferry service, and (4) emphasize labor and fuel efficiency:
 - 2016 & 2017 (now 2018) – Two new Alaska Class Dayboat (ACD) ferries to service Lynn Canal
 - 2018 – Angoon Airport completed
 - 2020 – Lynn Canal Highway to Katzehin and ferry terminal completed
 - 2020 – Haines-Skagway shuttle ferry service initiated
 - 2020 – Kake-Petersburg Road (gravel single land), Wrangell Narrows shuttle ferry, and terminals completed
 - 2025 – New mainline ferry on-line; potential for a second mainline ferry to follow
 - 2028 – Fast ferry replacement
 - 2033 – Sitka-Warm Springs Bay road EIS completed (planning, environmental, design). Construction is not anticipated during the 20-year planning period.
- Capital costs over the next 20 years to maintain and implement the preferred alternative total \$1.3B for system refurbishments and \$1.2B for major projects (construction, procurement), respectively. The Plan reduces the annual operation and maintenance expense of the overall regional transportation system three percent.(Noted that the preferred alternative is not the least expensive alternative to operate and maintain, as maximizing the use of existing roads or constructing Highway Route 7 would reduce annual system costs by 15% to 16%, respectively.)
- The Draft SATP document also includes information about continuing efforts to maintain and improve the transportation system in Southeast Alaska, provides an overview of the existing system, identifies undeveloped essential transportation and utility corridors in the region (App. A), describes the scoping process and public comments (App. B), compares the

four planning alternatives (App. C) and provides public and government involvement plans (App. D).

- The Draft Plan recommendations would have the following impacts on Juneau:
 - (1) With completion of 2 Alaska Class Dayboats (ACD) in 2017 (now 2018)
 - (2) One mainliner is replaced; road and ferry terminal anticipated completion in 2020.
 - One ACD Skagway-Katzehin
 - One ACD Haines-Katzehin
 - Shuttle ferry Haines-Skagway
 - (3) Greater opportunity to travel to Haines and Skagway at reduced cost to traveler.

Questions & Answers, Comments

key

- Comment or Question
 - DOT&PF Response

Juneau Access Road

- Is the cost of the Juneau Access Road current? There will be frequent road closures due to avalanches. Do the costs include snow avalanche sheds?
 - Yes, costs are current. When avalanches close the road the Alaska Class Dayboats can travel Lynn Canal with passengers and vehicles until the road is cleared.
- Will the West Lynn Canal route for Juneau Access Road be included in the supplemental EIS?
 - Yes
- The projected cost of the Juneau Access Road has changed many times over the years. What is the new annual estimate for building the highway? What is the cost of the Katzehin Terminal?
 - Please refer to the SATP Summary sheet distributed at the meeting. Costs are separated by phase and project and listed individually.
- How is the loss of 60 miles of coastal wilderness factored into planning for the Juneau Access Road? For example, there is a sea lion colony and old growth forest? Highways change places forever.
 - The EIS will address these considerations
- What happens to the SATP if there are major changes to the Juneau Access Road?
 - The SATP is updated on a regular schedule and if needed can be revised according to the EIS outcome and decision.
- Is the SATP is part of the state's Long Range Transportation Plan?
 - Yes
- In the current Auke Bay planning effort there has been discussion about the need for a bike path to Katzehin, this should be addressed in the SATP.

- Who will be responsible for the costs incurred by the Juneau Access Road, such as highway maintenance, law enforcement, and Emergency Medical Services.? What is the burden to local tax payers?
 - Local tax payers will be impacted minimally. DOT&PF will assume the cost of highway maintenance, state troopers will assume the cost of law enforcement, and CBJ will assume the cost of EMS services. (CBJ will likely assume law enforcement of the portion of the highway within the Borough.)
- How many years will it take to construct the Juneau Access Road?
 - It is dependent on available funding. It may take as little as 3 to 4 years or it may take longer.
- It seems like we can't talk about the Juneau Access Road or operational issues regarding ferries. What is the public allowed to comment on?
 - The SATP identifies a 20-year capital improvement plan for the regional transportation system, it does not address ferry rates, schedules, or individual projects. Any comment is welcomed though.
- Suggest that at future meetings someone from the Juneau Access Road project be present to respond to questions and concerns from the public. Although this is a regional transportation plan, Juneau Access Road is a large part of the plan.

Consideration of Greenhouse Gases and Climate Change

- The reason to revise the plan every five years is because conditions change. The biggest change is our increased attention to problems associated with burning fossil fuels: climate change, sea level rise, ocean acidification, and species extinction. How is climate change considered in the plan, both in the operation of the vehicles and in the embodied energy of the facilities that the plan proposes? For example, the Juneau Access Road encourages the automobile use as DOT&PF stated it expects an 8-10 fold increase in the amount of vehicle traffic. Isn't that the last thing we want to encourage?
 - The ferry is an inefficient way of moving vehicles and people. Highway infrastructure encourages efficient automobile use. Also, Alaska's highways will join national trends seeing increases in hybrid, electric, and LP vehicles in the future.

Transit and Movement between Terminals for Ferry Foot Passengers

- Is there a plan to get foot passengers from Auke Bay to the Katzehin Ferry Terminal?
 - No. It will be the responsibility of the foot passengers. Options might include car-pooling, public, or commercial transit.
- Page 13 of the SATP states that, "If demand warrants, commercial bus service may be provided to terminals." To date, the Juneau community has not been successful with implementing an intermodal system (e.g. Capital Transit) between the ferry terminal, airport and town.
- The SATP needs to do a better job of addressing how federal, state, and local dollars (capital and O&M) can work together to implement a comprehensive intermodal transit system, which would really benefit (1) individuals with or without vehicles and (2) commercial

systems that take on the challenge of being profitable while also complementing the regional system.

Alaska Class Dayboat (ACD) Ferries

- Has the ACD gone through many alterations during the design process? Does the ACD design still include an open deck?
 - No, the ACD is no longer an open deck configuration. It will be 280 ft. long, end-loading, and has a side door. It is larger than the LeConte and smaller than the Taku with a carrying capacity of 53 standard vehicles.

Traveler Costs

- Does the plan include an estimate of user fees for passengers? For example, a toll road to Katzehin?
 - I don't believe anyone has been talking about a toll road for Katzehin. We have left the Katzehin predictions to the Juneau Access Road. The supplemental EIS may address this. User fees for other projects were prorated by distance to destinations. Reduced marine miles will be a significant decrease to the cost of anyone traveling.

Parking at Ferry Terminals

- Does the SATP address parking capacity at the ferry terminals? For example, overnight parking at Auke Bay ferry terminal is now prohibited. Will there be parking at the Katzehin terminal? Many people come to Juneau from other communities for access to (for example) the hospital and they have to stay overnight and need a place to leave their car before they get back on the ferry. Regarding parking at Katzehin, what about people who want to park at the terminal and walk-on to Haines. Will there be a place at Katzehin to leave their car?
 - Auke Bay does have a parking issue. I do not believe there will be parking at Katzehin; Juneau Access Road EIS will address this.

Ferries are Versatile, Reliable and Safe

- SE Alaska recently had an earthquake. Ferries provide versatility (we can send them where they need to be) that roads do not offer, as is the case in an earthquake. The SATP does not acknowledge this. The SATP is road-heavy for a changing world. There should be some value placed on the versatility of the ferry system.
- The handout states, "Keep Alaska moving through service and infrastructure. To do this, we provide for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods." How is Juneau Access Road safer than riding on the ferry from Auke Bay? The ferry system has had no casualties.
- Regarding injury or loss of life, how does DOT&PF account for the safety of the highway versus the ferry system? How is DOT&PF factoring in the inevitable highway deaths on the Juneau Access Road compared to the ferry system, which has seen no deaths? How is the value of a lost life calculated when project costs are considered?
 - DOT&PF cannot place a value on a human life; each one is important. DOT&PF's goal for the highway system is to have zero fatalities. Most highway deaths are attributed to

alcohol. DOT&PF does keep track of where accidents occur and we have highway safety funds to address problem areas.

SATP Project Construction Timing

- What is the timeline for the completion of the SATP, where are construction and operations of projects addressed?
 - The plan will identify the routes and the proposed frequency of service, but it will not identify the fares or schedule for each project. These are matters address by ferry schedulers annually and in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan.

Considerations in Developing SATP

- How was the preferred alternative selected? Was a cost effective analysis conducted for the planning effort?
 - A cost analysis was conducted, see Appendix C. The SATP is also based on other factors in addition to cost. For example, the Highway 7 Alternative is the most cost effective, but not the SATP recommended alternative. The public desired retaining mainline ferry service to Bellingham and cross-sound; this had a strong influence on the SATP. It is a compromise between public input, costs, and traffic volumes and patterns, and more.
- Why was there no consideration given to changes in revenues under the new alternatives?
 - The SATP assumes that revenues will remain flat. The Alaska Department of Labor population forecast for the region does not anticipate population growth – so no fare box revenue increase is expected. Ferry ridership has decreased or remained flat. Also, note that the ferry system is heavily subsidized, so decreasing ferry service actually saves the state money. No ferry routes are profitable.
 - The SATP cost projections assume stable prices and ignore inflation. It looks at changes in annual expenses over the next 20 years.
 - The ferries experience cyclical demand depending on season and direction. For example, a southbound trip to Bellingham from Juneau is packed in September, but the return trip is virtually empty, so the state loses money.
- If Southeast Alaska population, traffic, and funding are decreasing, why is there an urgency to increase the capacity for moving traffic? On page 10, the SATP says, “To provide capacity to meet transportation demand in the corridor.” What is the demand actually?
 - The investments recommended by the SATP are to make the system at large more efficient.
- Are ferry refurbishment costs included with the major systems project total costs? Are the costs available in an itemized list?
 - Refurbishment costs are included, but there is not an itemized list.

Travel Demand

- In what way has the DOT&PF assessed the travel needs of individual Southeast Alaskans between Juneau, Skagway, and Haines? For example, have surveys been conducted?
 - The EIS will address this. On a regional level, we looked at traffic demand and public input.

- DOT needs to do a Need Assessment of the citizens who travel on the ferry system. Their needs may not have been reflected during the scoping process. You should ask the users what they need and what they want.

Variable Ferry Pricing

- How might the plan improve the operations of AMHS in terms of variable pricing? There are times when the ferry is at full capacity and times when ridership is very low. The plan should consider variable pricing in terms of optimizing our ability to travel for recreation, increase service to communities, and increase revenue.
- AMHS is in the process of doing a rate study now to consider this. There are some equity issues with variable pricing and recovering those costs.

Funding Questions

- Southeast Alaska did very well under the SAFETLU federal transportation bill, but now under Map-21, we lost Shakwak Highway funding, and transportation funding for the whole state is in decline. How is the decline in federal funding going to affect us?
 - We do not know. It remains to be determined by Congress, but it is a concern. In addition to federal challenges, Southeast Alaska represents a smaller percent of the state's total population too, another concern that affects state funding. Anchorage's population is increasing while Southeast Alaska's population – currently 10% of the Alaska total - is projected to decline to 7% in the future. Lack of representation may affect funding.
- Federal funding will be decreased. What is the priority for funding? People are fearful that the Juneau Access Road might just be a highway out to Kensington Mine and then project will run out of money.
 - The priority is to maintain funding for what we already have.

Draft Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan
Attendance at Juneau, Alaska meetings
August 6, 2014

Open House and Public Meeting

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Alex Viteri | 28. Eric Taylor | 55. Lori Blood |
| 2. Alpheus Bullard | 29. Frank Schneider | 56. Lorna Wilson |
| 3. Anissa Berry | 30. George McGuan | 57. Luann McVey |
| 4. Beth Leibowitz | 31. Hal Hart | 58. Mal Menzies |
| 5. Betty McDonough | 32. Hannah McCarty | 59. Marie Darlin |
| 6. Bill Leighty | 33. James Sullivan | 60. Marie Messing |
| 7. Bob Sauerteig | 34. James Thompson | 61. Marlin Bowls |
| 8. Brian Lieb | 35. Janet Kussart | 62. Martin Niemi |
| 9. Brian Messing | 36. Jean Hoegler | 63. Mary Ann Dierckman |
| 10. Brita Rice | 37. Jenny McBride | 64. Merrill Sanford |
| 11. Britt Watters | 38. Jessie Kiehl | 65. Michael Crabb |
| 12. Bruce Conant | 39. Jim King | 66. Michael Vigue |
| 13. Buck Liwdekuger | 40. Jim Wilson | 67. Nancy Waterman |
| 14. Butch Laughlin | 41. John Hudson | 68. Paulette Simpson |
| 15. Cathy Munoz | 42. John Roxburgh | 69. Pete Christensen |
| 16. Christine Niemi | 43. John Shedd | 70. Rich Moniak |
| 17. Christopher Clark | 44. Jonathan Lange | 71. Richard Steele |
| 18. Clarke Damon | 45. Jordan Hall | 72. Sally Willson |
| 19. Clay Frick | 46. Karie Moritz | 73. Sam Kito |
| 20. Connie McKenzie | 47. Karla Hart | 74. Sarah Bronstein |
| 21. Costa J. Aaron, Jr. | 48. Katherine Eldemar | 75. Sarah Dunlap |
| 22. Dennis Egan | 49. Kathi Wineman | 76. Summer Dorr |
| 23. Denny Dewitt | 50. Kelly Magee | 77. Toni Wolf |
| 24. Don Bullock | 51. Larry Hooton | 78. Veronica Clasmeyer |
| 25. Dot Wilson | 52. Laura Stats | 79. Vicki Campbell |
| 26. Elizabeth Hoffman | 53. Lesley Thompson | |
| 27. Elizabeth Lange | 54. Loren Jones | |

DOT&PF Team

Andy Hughes, DOT&PF
Verne Skagerburg, DOT&PF
Barbara Sheinberg, Sheinberg Associates
Holly Smith, Sheinberg Associates
Jan Caulfield, Jan Caulfield Consulting