

SE MID-REGION ACCESS PROJECT

This project provides a preliminary exploration of information and processes needed to construct a road linking the mid region of Southeast Alaska (Wrangell and Petersburg) to the Cassiar Highway in British Columbia (B.C.). Various corridors reviewed would connect Southeast Alaska to British Columbia via a road, although short ferry links would be required under certain alternatives to complete the corridors.

Background: In 1978, B.C. completed a reconnaissance study to link Southeast Alaska with the Cassiar Highway by establishing a route along the Iskut River. In 1984, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities completed a reconnaissance study of multiple alternative routes. In 1998, the U.S. Forest Service considered a route linking Wrangell to Canada along the Bradfield Canal. In 2003, B.C. developed a long-range transportation plan, which included consideration of a link with Southeast Alaska. In 2004, the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (SATP) identified a mid-region access (MRA) highway corridor near the Bradfield Canal. This corridor would connect Southeast Alaska to the Cassiar Highway, part of the continental highway system. To investigate this potential link further, a Southeast Mid-Region Access Draft Study Delivery Plan was completed in April 2007. This document outlined the international delivery process, forecasted delivery time and cost, and strategized potential funding sources.

Why Not a NEPA Notice of Intent (NOI) Now: Before an NOI can be issued, an international agreement between Alaska and B.C. must be in place with a financial plan for construction. To further Alaska and B.C.'s understanding of issues around the project's development and make informed decisions on whether to jointly pursue the project, additional technical memoranda were developed covering the following major topics:

- Traffic Projections
- Engineering Study
- Port and Ferry Terminal Study

Recent Efforts: The Study Plan (Plan) and Technical Memoranda outline the processes needed to link Southeast Alaska to the Cassiar Highway. Road access within Southeast Alaska is limited. Alaskans and the traveling public use water or air to reach destinations, which is costly, as is moving fisheries, timber, and mining products into or out of this area. The Southeast Alaska Mid-Region Access Project would connect Wrangell, Petersburg, and (eventually) Ketchikan and Sitka to the continental highway system. It would reduce out-of-direction travel for several Southeast Alaska communities and may improve the regional economy. An objective of this Plan is developing and documenting the process required to create a new interregional highway connection between the Cassiar Highway in B.C. and a port and ferry terminal in Southeast Alaska.

Traffic studies were conducted to determine annual average daily traffic (AADT) and ridership. The Engineering Study brought all corridors to a common platform for costing purposes. The port and ferry terminal information aided in conceptually locating ferry terminal sites.

The Study Plan and Technical Memoranda assessed the three potential corridors listed below and shown on Figure 1.

The Bradfield Canal Corridor –This route would include a road from the Cassiar Highway along the Iskut, Craig, and Bradfield River drainages to a deepwater conventional ferry terminal near the head of the Bradfield Canal. Via a ferry

system, it would connect the city of Wrangell to a conventional ferry terminal built at Fools Inlet on Wrangell Island. A road would also be constructed as a link to the Zimovia Highway.

The Stikine River Corridor –This route would include a road from the Cassiar Highway down the Stikine and Iskut Rivers to a conventional ferry terminal at Crittenden Creek. A ferry to an opposing terminal on Wrangell Island near the airport would complete the connection to the city of Wrangell.

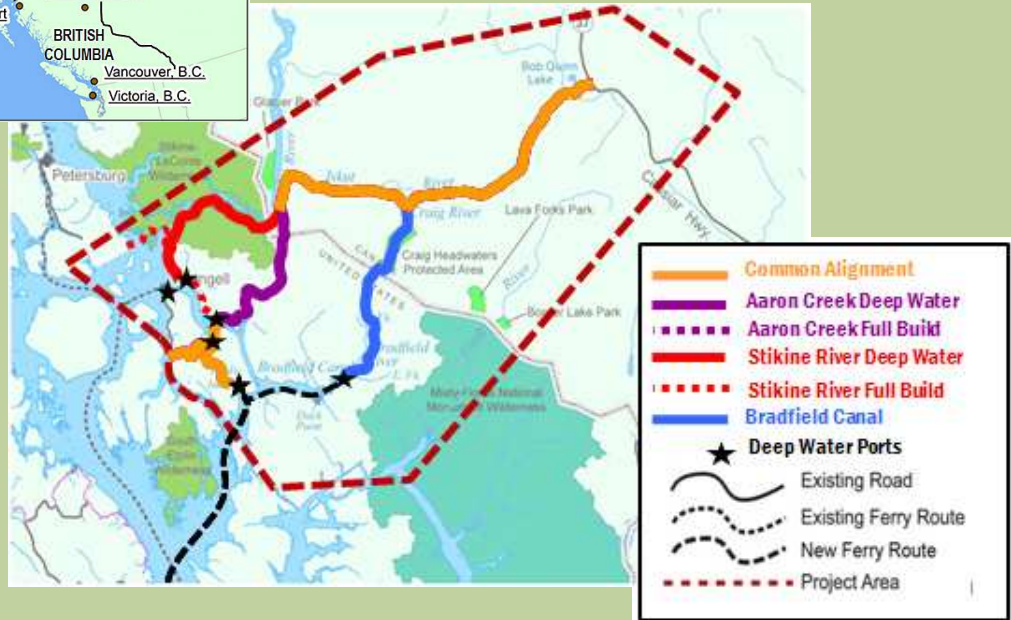
- A road across Dry Strait to the Mitkof Highway would connect Petersburg to the continental highway system.
- Ultimately, a road connection to Wrangell could be made by extending the road south and bridging the Eastern Narrows. The route would then continue to the Zimovia Highway and on to the city of Wrangell.

The Aaron Creek Corridor –This route would include a road down the Iskut River and Aaron Creek to a conventional ferry terminal on Berg Bay. A ferry to an opposing terminal at the Log Transfer Station on Wrangell Island and a new road to the Zimovia Highway would complete the connection to the city of Wrangell.

- Ultimately, a road connection could be made by completing a bridge across the Eastern Narrows to Wrangell Island.



Figure 1: Key Map & Project Corridors Map



	Corridor	AK Length (miles)	BC Length (miles)	Total Length (miles)	AADT (vpd)	AK Cost (approx.) (million)	BC Cost (approx.) (million)	Total Cost (approx.) (million)	Cost Per Mile (approx.) (million)	Net Present Value Cost (million)
Deep Water	Bradfield Canal	50	60	110	180	\$420	\$350	\$770	\$7.0	\$656
Deep Water	Stikine River	40	80	120	230	\$320	\$530	\$850	\$7.1	\$609
Full Build	Stikine River	95	80	175	230	\$710	\$530	\$1.24	\$7.1	N/A
Deep Water	Aaron Creek	45	80	125	180	\$480	\$540	\$1.02	\$8.2	\$721
Full Build	Aaron Creek	65	80	145	180	\$580	\$540	\$1.12	\$7.7	N/A

What next: Moving forward with the project would require a concerted effort between the Alaska and B.C. governments. The next steps are as follows:

- Intergovernmental Agreement (Alaska/B.C.)
- Further Actions
 - Finance plan, including a joint (AK/B.C.) economic study
 - Development of a joint environmental process
 - Alaska EIS and B.C. EA
 - Forecasted cost @ \$20+ million
- Delivery Timeline (7+ Years)