

# **Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan 2014 Draft Skagway, Alaska / Meeting Summaries**

## **Introduction**

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) issued a Draft update to the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (SATP) in August 2014 for public review. DOT&PF held an open house at 5:30 pm and a public meeting at 6:30 pm on September 9, 2014, at the Skagway Borough Assembly Chambers to discuss the Draft SATP. A total of 27 people signed in as attending the open house/meeting. In addition, DOT&PF staff met with the Skagway Borough Manager at 10:00 am on September 9, 2014. (See attached attendance lists for the public and Borough meetings.)

## **DOT&PF Presentation at Open House/Public Meeting**

The public meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed:

- The DOT&PF statutory obligation to develop and maintain the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan, 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, the proposed road connection from Kake to Petersburg, and construction of the Angoon Airport. 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 Southeastern System annual 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 (including ferries operated by the Inter-Island Ferry Authority [IFA]).

- 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 Dayboats (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 initiated (planning, environmental, design). Construction is not anticipated during the 20-year planning period.
- Capital costs to maintain and implement the preferred alternative over the next 20 years 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, as maximizing the use of existing roads or constructing Highway Route 7 would reduce annual 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 essential undeveloped 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 Northern Lynn Canal (Haines and Skagway):
  - (1) Completion of two Alaska Class Dayboat (ACD) ferries operating as day boats, in 2017 (now 2018)

- (2) One mainliner is replaced; road and ferry terminal anticipated completion in 2020.
  - One ACD ferry Skagway-Katzehin
  - One ACD ferry Haines-Katzehin
  - Shuttle ferry Haines-Skagway
- (3) Greater opportunity to travel between Haines, Skagway and Juneau at a reduced travel cost.
- DOT&PF will release the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the Juneau Access Project soon for public review. There will be another series of public meetings and public comment period for the SEIS. It is important that the public also participates in that process and submits comments during that comment period for inclusion in the administrative record for the Juneau Access project.

## Questions & Answers, Comments

### Key

- Comment or Question
  - DOT&PF Response

### Proposed East Lynn Canal Highway (Juneau Access) – Questions/Concerns Regarding the Road

- Walk-on passengers – It will be important to have ground transportation from the Katzehin Terminal into Juneau, to serve passengers traveling without vehicles. Several people expressed concern that commercial service providers will not step up with a reasonably priced or convenient service to take foot travelers from Katzehin to Juneau. Noted that there is currently no service from the Auke Bay ferry terminal to Juneau, except taxi service.
- Travel demand – Since the SATP is projecting a trend for less travel demand, why is a road needed to increase travel capacity?
  - The road will respond to a latent demand for travel. Travel is expected to increase along this route due to a lower cost to travel and more frequent opportunities to travel.
- The SATP indicates there is \$61M per year for new construction. This will not be enough to construct the East Lynn Canal Road.
  - Implementation of the SATP will require an average expenditure of \$61M per year, over 20 years. However, funding for capital expenditures may be substantially higher in some years to construct the larger projects.
- Safety concerns – Concern that the proposed East Lynn Canal Road will not be safe.
- Winter road closures – Concern that there will actually be less access to Skagway, especially when the road is closed due to avalanches or winter road conditions.
- Expense – Very concerned about the cost of the Juneau Access Road construction and maintenance.
- Cost of construction – If the cost of the Juneau Access project inflates, that could cancel the 3% savings now projected for the preferred alternative in the SATP. Concern that there are also cost overruns on these types of mega-projects.
- Utility to the public – The SATP should include a very clear picture of what it will be like to

travel to/from Skagway in the summer and in the off-season. The plan isn't clear about what will happen in winter and uses the vague words "may", not "will". What will be the impact on Skagway travelers in terms of time and expense, especially in the off-season?

- Additional detail about these points will be provided in the SEIS.
- Would prefer to ride a ferry – it provides time for other activities (that can't be done when driving), is safer and less taxing (particularly in winter), and does not require a vehicle.
- The proposed road is a disingenuous political move that will sabotage travel to/from Skagway.
- The road is a horrible idea that does not serve our community. Don't do it.
- Conclusions about the road are not based on data.
- How long will it take to travel from Skagway to Juneau in winter?
  - Expect about one hour on the ferry to Katzechin (not including time to load and unload the ferry) and three hours driving to Juneau; however, the traveler will save time in two ways: 1) will be able to travel when ready, rather than waiting for a ferry; 2) can drive much of the way, which will be faster than a ferry.
- Concern about effect of a road on wildlife along the corridor.
- Comment that after the Klondike Highway was built, use of the railroad for freight and passengers declined as greater use was made of the road. This reduced the number of railroad jobs in Skagway, which were good paying, family-wage jobs. The economy has shifted more to tourism jobs, which are lower paying and seasonal.

#### Proposed East Lynn Canal Highway (Juneau Access) – Support for the Road

- People were initially opposed to the construction of the Klondike Highway to Whitehorse, but it has improved the lifestyle in Skagway.
- Would like to see the road to Juneau constructed, if it is economically feasible.
- The region needs good transportation facilities.
- Seniors can't stay in Skagway because they need access to medical services. The road will improve this access.

#### Skagway Ferry Terminal

- The Alaska Class Dayboat (ACD) ferries will need a different type of float than what was recently repaired at the Skagway ferry terminal. Why wasn't the dock replaced with what would be needed by the ACD?
  - When the float was recently repaired, AMHS found it to be in better shape than they had thought, so they did not completely replace it. AMHS will determine what kind of float is needed to accommodate the ACD and that will be provided.

#### AMHS Ferry Service

- Important to have ferry to be able to travel to Juneau and the Juneau International Airport, particularly when conditions are not suitable for small plane travel.
- During the summer, it is difficult to get vehicle space on a ferry, so difficult to shop in Juneau and bring goods home.

- The Municipality of Skagway had McDowell Group prepare the “North Lynn Canal Ferry Service Analysis”, dated June 2014, including a comparison of rates for ferry travel in the region.
- Ferry rates are not equitable across the system. Sitka-Juneau fare is much less than Skagway-Juneau fare.
  - AMHS has a fare study underway to evaluate and provide greater equity across the system. DOT&PF presenter was not certain when the fare study would be completed. Noted that there has not been a substantial increase in rates over the last several decades.
- How much of the increases in the cost of running the ferry system is due to increasing labor costs, especially due to the 12-hour crew shifts that require additional pay? Will the shorter crew times on the day boats reduce costs for the ferry system?
  - Expected that labor costs will remain about the same, since there will be more sailings.
- The SATP indicates that AMHS costs are \$140M in Southeast Alaska. Is that accurate? Also, the plan should show revenue generated on each route. Lynn Canal routes contribute more revenue than other routes.
  - Clarified that the \$140M is for operation of the AMHS in Southeast Alaska, plus the IFA ferry service. Noted that this is all State General Funds, not paid for with federal transportation funding.

#### Alaska Class Dayboats and Haines-Skagway Shuttle Ferry

- What is the planned ferry service for northern Lynn Canal after the road is constructed?
  - The first ACD ferry (expected end of 2016) will initially transit from Haines to Skagway and return, and will be home-ported in Haines (about 20 jobs). The second ACD (expected in 2017) will transit from Haines to Auke Bay and will be home-ported in Juneau. Once the East Lynn Canal Road is completed in 2020, the two ACDs will move up to the upper Lynn Canal; one will connect Haines to Katzechin, the second will connect Skagway to Katzechin. A third “shuttle ferry” will connect Haines and Skagway.
- Will it be necessary to transfer vessels in Haines in order to travel to Juneau?
  - Transfer in Haines will be necessary until 2020.
- What type of vessel is the ACD similar to?
  - It will be most similar in size to the Tustamena, which is bigger than the Aurora or LeConte.
- Will there be any facility for privacy on the ACD, such as for people with a medical condition?
  - Not sure.
- What will be the cost to take the ferry with a vehicle to Katzechin?
  - Expected travel costs will be presented in the SEIS.
- If two ACDs are capable to carrying the traffic demand and reducing the costs from the mainline ferry service, how would the road save the State or the user money?
  - The shorter ferry connection (Skagway to Katzechin) will reduce the cost of the ferry fare. There will also be more opportunity to travel, with 6-10 ACD trips to/from Katzechin each day.

- Will the ACDs run 6-10 times/day regardless of if there are passengers or vehicles at the terminal to board? There may be empty trips.
  - This will be evaluated in the SEIS, but it is expected that the demand will be there.
- Does the ACD have an open deck?
  - No, it has been redesigned with a closed deck.
- Comment made clarifying that the ACD is a *day boat*. Calling it an “Alaska Class Ferry” does not make it clear that it can operate only as a day boat, not serve as a full substitute for mainline ferries.
- Would the Haines-Skagway “shuttle ferry” have an open deck? Would it provide service in winter season?
  - The design has not been determined. Operation in the winter would depend upon demand. The schedule is unknown at this time.

#### Data Regarding Ferry Use

- The draft SATP (p. 3) provides a graph showing “Southeast Ferry Traffic, AMHS & IFA” that includes data about passenger use. How many of those passengers are foot travelers and how many are traveling with vehicles?
  - That data is not available from the AMHS.

#### Criteria Used to Identify Preferred Transportation Alternatives

- The SATP seems to emphasize cost savings over other criteria and shows charts that address that costs. It should also indicate what other criteria weigh into the analysis of transportation options and selection of preferred options – and present a table that compares all criteria/factors that have been considered. Safety should be one of the most important criteria considered in this process.

#### Warm Spring Bay Road – Sitka

- The Warm Spring Bay Road serving Sitka should have been built 50 years ago – and should not be put off until 2033 as proposed in the draft SATP. Ferry travel times to Sitka lead to deficiencies in the entire ferry system. If the road is built, it will reduce travel time by 12-hours per ferry trip to Sitka and will also replace a perilous route through Peril Strait.
  - DOT&PF needed to develop a SATP based on realistic funding expectations for the 20 year life of the plan. The draft SATP proposes projects that can be done for \$1 billion over the next 20 years. The Warm Spring Bay Road cannot be constructed within that planning budget.

#### “Highway 7” Alternative

- Concerns expressed over the difficulties of travel if the Highway 7 alternative, that was presented in the SATP Scoping document, was adopted. Used student travel from Skagway to/from Ketchikan as an example.
  - Clarified that the Highway 7 option is no longer being considered as an alternative in the draft SATP. There was little support for this alternative during the scoping period and it is not being further considered.

### Other Transportation Infrastructure of Interest to Skagway Borough

- The William Moore Bridge is the weakest link in terms of using the Klondike Highway and Skagway port for industrial uses. It needs to be upgraded.
  - The STIP lists environmental analysis and design for the bridge in 2015, with possible construction in 2016-2017.

Another issue is the asphalt depth on the Klondike Highway to assure mine-haul strength.

- If mine loads increase, it may be necessary to add 2-6 inches of asphalt to the road surface.

**Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan – Draft Plan  
Attendance at Skagway, Alaska public meeting  
September 9, 2014**

**Open House and Public Meeting**

1. Allan Reed
2. Bob Deitrick
3. Buster Shepherd
4. C. E. Furbish
5. Dennis Bousson
6. Dennis Egan
7. Douglas Hulk
8. James McClendon
9. Jan Wentmore
10. John Walsh
11. Karen Dunford
12. Kathleen O'Daniel
13. Kathy Hosford
14. L.G. Reyes
15. Mark Schaefer
16. Mavis I. Henriksen
17. Mike Tranel
18. Nola Lamken
19. Ray Tsang
20. Sam Kito
21. Sam Palmersten
22. Scott Hahn
23. Shelby Surdyk
24. Susan Reed
25. Tamar Harrison
26. Tim Cochran
27. Wade Gruhl

**Municipality of Skagway Borough Meeting**

1. Scott Hahn, Borough Manager

**DOT&PF Team**

Andy Hughes, DOT&PF

Jim Potdevin, DOT&PF

Jan Caulfield, Jan Caulfield Consulting