

Alternatives Development Workshop Summary

Tuesday, July 19, 2022, 12:30 pm – 4:30 pm

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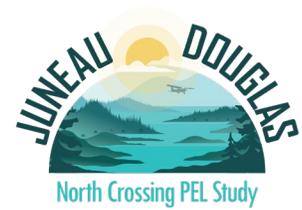
Workshop Purpose:

To collaborate and develop alignments for a potential north crossing between Juneau and Douglas Island. Provide an overview of the study, the project purpose and need, and the alternative screening criteria development process that will guide the project team in the screening, evaluation, and refinement of alternatives.

Attendees:

Marie Heidemann (DOT&PF)
Steve Noble (DOWL)
Irene Gallion (CBJ)
Renee Whitesell (DOWL)
Nina Keller Horne (DOWL)
Morgan McCammon (DOWL)
Marella Gungob (DOWL)
Morgan McCammon (DOWL)
Theresa Dutchuk (DOWL)
Sean Holland (DOWL)
Michael Horntvedt (Parametrix)
Joanne Schmidt (DOT&PF)
Greg Lockwood (DOT&PF)
Nathan Purves (DOT&PF)
Nick Murray (DOT&PF)
Doug Kolwaite (DOT&PF)
Phil Adams (Juneau Airport)
Jesse Kiehl (State Senate)
Michelle Hale (Juneau Assembly)
Margo Waring (Resident)
Rebecca Bellmore (Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition)
Brian Holst (Juneau Economic Development Council)
Margaret Custer (Southeast Alaska Land Trust)

Brenda Taylor (Resident)
Molly Zakeski (NOAA)
Mike Stanley (North Douglas Neighborhood Association)
Steven Sahlender (Goldbelt, Inc.)
Craig Dahl (Greater Juneau Chamber of Commerce)
Katie Koester (City and Borough of Juneau)
Rob Morgenthaler (US Forest Service)
Teri Tibbett (Bonnie Brae Neighborhood Association & Douglas Advisory Board)
Robert Venables (Southeast Conference)
Winston Smith (Juneau Audubon Society)
Royal Hill (Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska)
Roy Churchwell (Alaska Department of Fish & Game)
Stephanie Banua (KIRA Services LLC, subsidiary of Tlingit Haida Tribal Business Corporation)
Greg Smith (Juneau Assembly)
Ron Somerville (Mendenhall Wetlands Study Group)
Ray Thibodeau (Alaska Marine Lines)
Alec Venechuck (CBJ)



Summary:

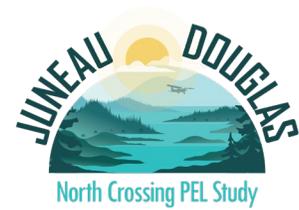
The Alternatives Development Workshop commenced with a welcome and introductions given by Marie Heidemann, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) Project Manager, and Steve Noble, DOWL Project Manager.

Presentation

After providing an overview of the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study, the schedule, and the process, the project team covered the following topics:

- **Existing conditions:** An overview of traffic, the existing Douglas Island Bridge, developable land constraints, and baseline environmental information within the study area (parks and recreation facilities, wetlands, contaminated sites, wildlife habitat, anadromous streams, navigable waters, zoning and land use, and airport approaches).
- **Population observations:** An overview of changes over time to Juneau's population, housing prices, and rent.
- **Purpose and Need:** Participants were reminded of the eight themes identified through the review of existing conditions and baseline information. These themes are economic impact, developable land, emergency response time, redundancy, travel time and congestion, population, active transportation facilities, and recreation.
- **Alternative screening criteria:** An overview was provided of the draft screening approach, which proposes to use two levels of screening. The draft Level 1 screening focuses on whether the preliminary alternatives have the potential to meet the purpose and need of the PEL Study, and Level 2 screening will evaluate the detailed alternatives emerging from the Level 1 screening in greater detail using a range of criteria (both qualitative and quantitative). Participants were reminded that further feedback will be sought from the Advisory Committees on the proposed screening approach and criteria.

Following the presentation, participants were separated into four facilitated break-out groups to explore potential north crossing locations and options for pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular facilities. Figure 1 (page 9) shows all crossing locations (including tunnels) discussed during the break-out sessions. The maps developed by each group are attached to this summary.



Break-out Groups Summaries:

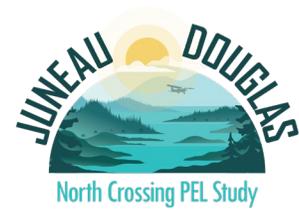
Break-out Group 1

Name	Organization
Renee Whitesell	DOWL, Group 1 Facilitator
Irene Gallion	City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ)
Nathan Purves	DOT&PF
Molly Zakeski	NOAA
Phil Adams	Juneau Airport
Mike Stanley	North Douglas Neighborhood Association
Jesse Kiehl	State Senate
Steven Sahlender	Goldbelt, Inc.
Craig Dahl	Greater Juneau Chamber of Commerce
Royal Hill	Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

Break-out Group 1 focused on alternatives west of the Mendenhall River to provide the best circulatory advantage for Juneau residents. The advantages and disadvantages of a bridge versus a tunnel and how each potentially impacts the environment and wildlife were discussed.

- Mendenhall Peninsula to North Douglas:** Consideration for the north crossing was given to the area around Glacier Fire Station; another potential location was near Douglas Harbor. Douglas Harbor would be a deep-water port, creating fewer environmental impacts, including those on known toad habitat.
- Sherwood Lane or Industrial Boulevard Tunnel:** Two possible locations considered for a tunnel were west of the airport near Sherwood Lane or Industrial Boulevard. As this area is near the airport, the potential for impacts on flight paths were also discussed.
- East of the Airport Tunnel:** The group explored the idea of a tunnel under the east side of the airport, with similar thoughts about avoiding impacts to the flight paths as on the west side.
- Sunny Point to CBJ Owned Lands on Douglas Island:** A Florida-style or pile bridge was suggested, crossing from an area near Sunny Point to an area across the Refuge currently owned by CBJ.
- Salmon Creek to Douglas Highway:** A potential crossing location connecting Salmon Creek to Douglas Highway was discussed. Participants noted this alternative was previously evaluated and discounted, but it is likely a cost-effective crossing location because of the short bridge span and proximity to tie into existing transportation infrastructure.

Crossing Structure Configurations: Crossing configurations were discussed to create a separate bicycle and pedestrian crossing or upgrade the existing bridge to accommodate bicycle usage. The preferred crossing section is two lanes with six-foot shoulders and a ten-foot shared use path to accommodate the traffic, pedestrians, and bicycles. Directional layout (a straight crossing versus a



curved crossing) and carbon emissions were also considered due to these options crossing the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge (Refuge).

The group discussed other ideas surrounding the various options. The idea of abandoning Gastineau Channel as a navigable waterway and the burden that would have on boats in the area was mentioned. Additionally, the group advocated for sub-area planning to provide better insight into the future development of North Douglas in the future, which would better help to understand the potential use of a north crossing.

Break-out Group 2

Name	Organization
Nina Keller Horne	DOWL, Group 2 Facilitator
Marie Heidemann	DOT&PF
Marella Gungob	DOWL
Rebecca Bellmore	Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition
Brian Holst	Juneau Economic Development Council
Margaret Custer	Southeast Alaska Land Trust
Michelle Hale	Juneau Assembly
Greg Lockwood	DOT&PF
Brenda Taylor	Mendenhall Peninsula Resident
Margo Waring	Resident

Break-out Group 2 focused on alternative crossing locations believed to reduce overall impacts, on ease of permitting, and emergency response time, seeming to prefer alternatives within Gastineau Channel. Overall the group was split with support/opposition to Mendenhall Peninsula crossings, with some commenting that a crossing too close to the existing bridge would only result in minor improvements to traffic. A member updated the group on failed CBJ ballot initiative proposing funding for a north crossing due to the expense involved. The group also noted the public seemed skeptical of funding a project that would not make a substantial difference. Emergency response time was discussed as a “real need.”

A north crossing that shortens the drive to the Eaglecrest ski area would likely be desirable for the community. A crossing in the vicinity of Fish Creek was considered undesirable due to conservation efforts in the area and it being a popular fishing spot.

During the discussion, a preference was given to a crossing close to the airport. It was discussed how close to the airport a crossing could be located, and options for a tunnel going underneath the airport.

One participant raised concern that access points on both sides of the existing bridge could generate increased traffic volumes on North Douglas Highway and potentially create more conflicts at intersections.

Development at North Douglas for residential purposes was discussed; CBJ has previously not rezoned land for this purpose because the current Douglas Island Bridge is viewed as being at capacity and unable to accommodate additional traffic.

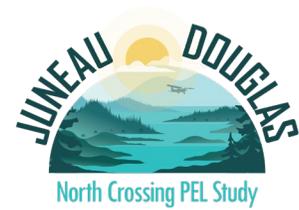


Viewshed impacts for bridge alternatives close to the airport and the Mendenhall Peninsula were discussed. The Airport Dike Trail is heavily used, and a crossing would impact views. A ferry or tunnel were considered to be better options in this area.

Brian Holst and Rebecca Belmore left the workshop early, but the remaining members reviewed the typical sections, preferring a multi-purpose path to serve the growing bicycle community in Juneau.

The group discussed the following alternatives:

- **Sunny Point:** A crossing near Sunny Point would offer better access to the hospital and shorter access to the Mendenhall Valley. A crossing closer to the Mendenhall Valley would not be as beneficial due to the distance to the hospital. There is no Fire Department on North Douglas, and emergency response time is an identified need for a north crossing. The group discussed a curved bridge as an alternative to avoid conservation lands around Sunny Point and also to maintain the necessary distance to the airport runway needed to avoid impacts to flight paths. Even with the curved alignment, there was concern that this alternative would be difficult to permit, lengthening project delivery time.
- **Peninsula - Spuhn Island - North Douglas:** The group discussed concerns regarding impacts to the Refuge and the benefits of a crossing in deeper water, including fewer environmental impacts and permitting obstacles. The group considered the cost of this compared to shorter crossings closer to Sunny Point. Notwithstanding some benefits to wetland impacts and permitting, the group was concerned that a potential crossing in this location would not improve the emergency response time.
- **Industrial Boulevard:** A crossing between Industrial Boulevard and North Douglas might be too close to the river and the airport runway for a bridge but could be a good option for a tunnel.
- **Upgrading Existing Bridge:** The group discussed options to upgrade the existing bridge or to add a pedestrian bridge. Pedestrian bridges are considered costly to maintain so the party responsible for maintenance was discussed.
- **Vanderbilt Hill:** In the past, this option was considered to have fewer environmental impacts but was rejected as being too close to the existing crossing. It was mentioned that the vote for crossing at this location might be different today due to lack of information at that time. A concern was potentially displacing homeowners.
- **Ferry Route:** A ferry was discussed as an option. It would be better around the airport and the Peninsula to avoid viewshed impacts and recreational uses in the area, including the Airport Dike Trail usage, kayaking, and fishing.
- **Tunnel:** The group considered a tunnel to be a great option if economically feasible.
- **Salmon Creek Area:** The group discussed potential crossing locations near the Hospital and Salmon Creek area to points along North Douglas Highway near Neilson Creek (North Douglas Heliport).



Other concerns:

It was mentioned that the team needs to make sure that the public understand the purpose and need of a north crossing.

Preferred crossing locations:

The group looked at all discussed alternatives and preferred a tunnel, a crossing by the hospital, Vanderbilt Hill, or Sunny Point. Some team members liked the Spuhn Island alternative but did not believe it would improve emergency response times.

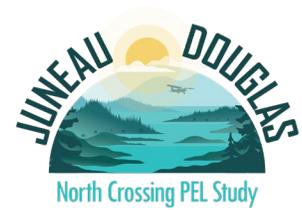
Other topics discussed included access capacity on North Douglas highway, consideration of isostatic rebound and uplift, limits of the study area, the cost of a tunnel, the process of right-of-way (ROW), traffic, previous concerns for Sunny Point, and waterfront access on the peninsula.

Break-out Group 3

Name	Organization
Theresa Dutchuk	DOWL, Group 3 Facilitator
Morgan McCammon	DOWL
Katie Koester	City and Borough of Juneau
Nick Murray	DOT&PF
Rob Morgenthaler	US Forest Service
Teri Tibbett	Bonnie Brae Neighborhood Association & Douglas Advisory Board
Robert Venables	Southeast Conference
Winston Smith	Juneau Audubon Society

Break-out Group 3 focused on feasibility of options based on perceived cost, environmental impacts, and viability. Some group members had actively participated in prior processes and did not want to yield another failed attempt. Group 3 presented three alternatives and offered suggestions for configuration of a crossing structure:

- Salmon Creek:** This alternative would cross the Gastineau Channel near Salmon Creek nearly straight west to a point on Douglas Island. This potential crossing would avoid the Refuge and impacts to a nearby barge location. It would have the potential to meet the project purpose and need by providing redundant access to Douglas Island, being located near the existing populations of Juneau and Douglas, and potentially shorten travel time to North and west Douglas Island. This option was viewed as a shorter, potentially cheaper, crossing as it could be built with more causeway than bridge structure.
- Mendenhall Peninsula to Fish Creek:** This alternative would cross from the Mendenhall Peninsula to a point near Fish Creek. This option was viewed as requiring supplemental infrastructure development due to constraints of the current roads (narrow with housing directly adjacent) on Mendenhall Peninsula and navigation concerns with large watercraft needing access to the port on the Mendenhall River, requiring a new road through CBJ lands down the middle of the Peninsula and a high bridge structure. This option was therefore viewed as costly and likely to lead to opposition. It would likely reduce travel time more than options closer to the existing bridge.



- Lemon Creek/Vanderbilt/Sunny Point:** This crossing alternative would start at Lemon Creek or Vanderbilt Road to tie into existing intersections at Egan Drive and cross to avoid impacts to the airport with a causeway and bridge combination structure. This alternative would have greater impacts to the Refuge, leading to the likelihood of greater opposition.

Crossing Structure Configuration: The group indicated the Douglas Island bridge is too narrow for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians together. The group suggested the new structure have one lane of vehicle traffic in each direction, ten-foot shoulders on each side for bicycles, a multi-use path on at least one side of the structure, and potentially separating bicycles and pedestrians on different sides of the structure.

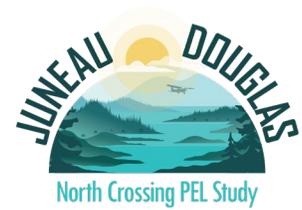
The group discussed other topics including whether the study boundaries were broad enough to encompass all potential alternatives, the cost of a tunnel, and the idea of a tunnel under downtown for freight traffic.

Break-out Group 4

Name	Organization
Sean Holland	DOWL, Group 4 Facilitator
Michael Horntvedt	Parametrix
Joanne Schmidt	DOT&PF
Doug Kolwaite	DOT&PF
Alec Venechuk	CBJ
Roy Churchwell	Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Stephanie Banua	KIRA Services LLC (a subsidiary of Tlingit Haida Tribal Business Corporation)
Greg Smith	Juneau Assembly
Ron Somerville	Mendenhall Wetlands Study Group
Ray Thibodeau	Alaska Marine Lines

Break-out Group 4 reviewed the study area and each member identified their preferred crossing location. The following locations were identified:

- Mendenhall Peninsula to North Douglas Island:** This crossing was preferred because of no impacts to the wetlands, a quicker route to North Douglas, and because it could create economic development opportunities to a tribe. It was suggested that many people avoid North Douglas because it is so far away from existing population centers. If more people use this new access point, it would reduce traffic traveling through downtown Juneau and Douglas.
- Mendenhall Peninsula/Industrial Boulevard:** A shorter route adjacent to the Mendenhall Peninsula/Industrial Boulevard was another preferred crossing location. The shortest distance in this area would have the lowest cost because it could be built with fill instead of a bridge structure (or a shorter bridge) and is the best grade to tie into existing roads.



- **Vanderbilt Hill Road Intersection:** This crossing was preferred because of the existing traffic infrastructure with a signalized intersection at Egan Drive. The shortest span would have the least impact on water fluctuation and bird activity in the Refuge. The Refuge is a popular recreational area for birding and hiking near the interchange and airport area. Evaluation of environmental impacts is needed and should be shared publicly to assist with building consensus on a potential north crossing in this location. Regardless of location, any crossing within the Refuge would potentially impact duck hunting activities.
- **Span Near Existing Bridge:** The short span close to downtown Juneau past the hospital was mentioned. This alternative is likely to have the least impacts to people and wetlands. Also suggested were improvements to the existing bridge and added capacity as a participant considered it at maximum capacity for level of service (LOS).
- **Gastineau Channel Area Concerns:** This area was discussed; however, primary concerns are the navigability of the channel and any impacts to shipping. Land closer to the Industrial Boulevard termini would be favorable. Also, areas past Sunny Point would impact fewer property owners.

Other comments included that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) does not support the “build it and they will come” philosophy, access for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is an issue, and a participant had not heard many complaints about traffic delays on the existing bridge.

Draft Crossing Locations

The following figure shows all crossing locations the groups discussed during the break-out session.

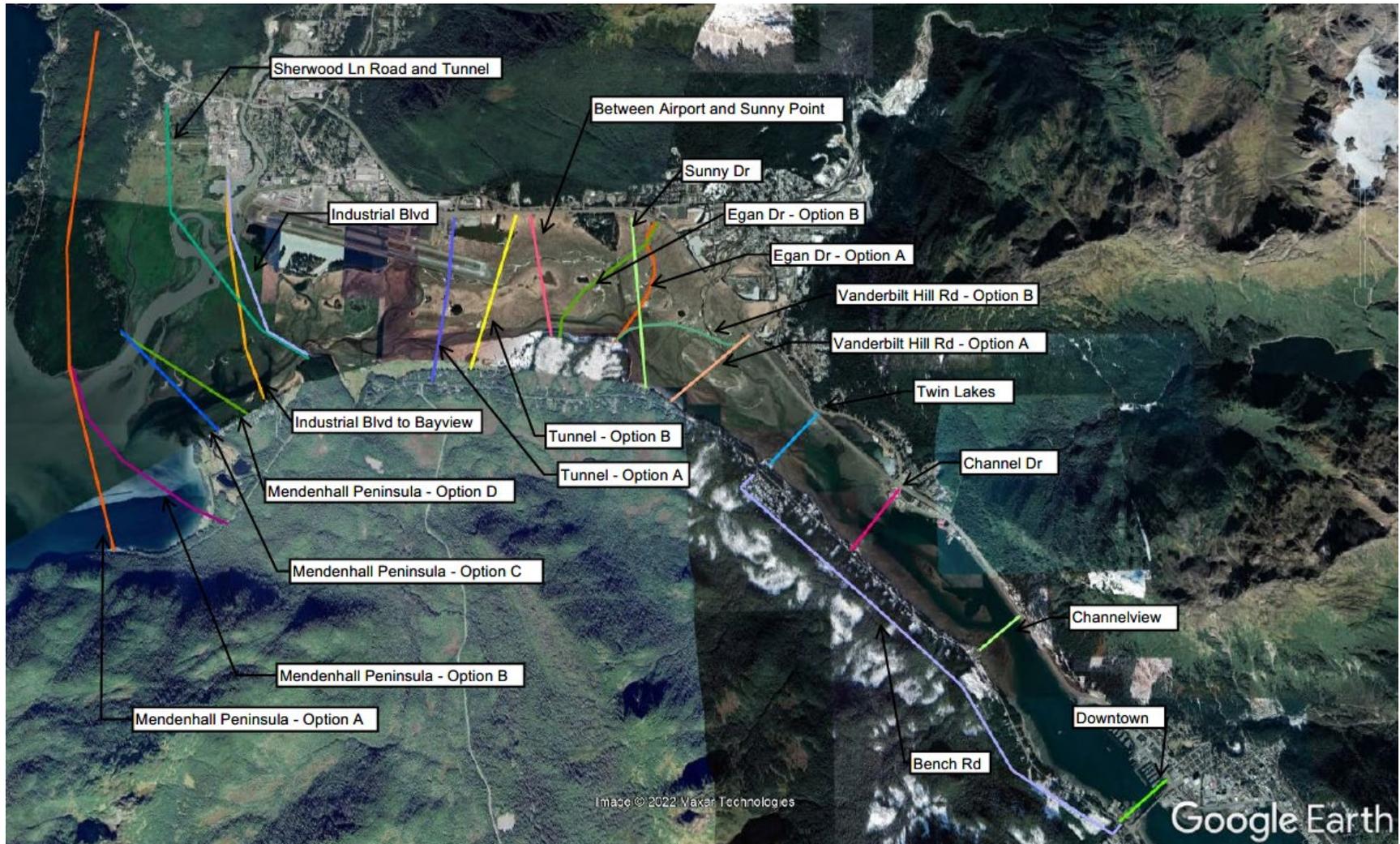


Figure 1: Draft Crossing Alternatives

Q&A at the end of the workshop

Q: What is the plan for public engagement?

A: Steve reviewed the public involvement schedule.

Q: Will the public meeting be in person?

A: Yes.

Q: Will the presentation be available?

A: The meeting notes will be posted on the project website, and the presentation will be sent via email.

Q: Is Big Data being used for the study?

A: Yes, the team is using mobile phone data to identify existing traffic patterns and estimate future traffic needs.

Q: Will advantages and disadvantages of each alternative be made available?

A: That will be something we look at presenting at the next meeting or sooner.

Comments:

More public outreach was suggested.

With any crossing, it would be important to minimize impacts to residents.

DRAFT

