

# JOINT TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE | MEETING 5

March 7, 2024, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. via Zoom

Zoom, Meeting ID: 817 2653 5695, Passcode: 904248

## Meeting Objective

Present Level 2 Screening preliminary results and receive comments on the analysis.

## Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- PEL Study Process and Schedule Update
- Fieldwork Update
- Level 2 Screening Process and Preliminary Results
- Discussion
- Wrap Up and Next Steps

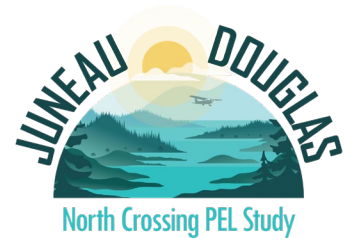
## Attendees — PEL Study Team

### Name

Greg Lockwood, Project Manager  
Marie Heidemann, Project Planner  
Christy Gentemann, Environmental  
Christopher Goins, Southcoast Region Director  
Sam Dapceovich  
Steve Noble, Project Manager  
Renee Whitesell, PEL Study Lead  
Morgan McCammon  
Talli Vittetoe  
Tim Jameson  
Nate Geary  
Denise Koch  
Bridget LaPenter  
Katie Koester

### Organization

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
DOWL  
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City and Borough of Juneau  
City and Borough of Juneau  
City and Borough of Juneau



## Attendees — Technical & Stakeholder Advisory Committee Members

### Name

Patty Wahto  
Linda Shaw  
Kate Kanouse  
Roy Churchwell  
Sue Rodman  
Jesse Lindgren  
Elyse Applegate  
Nina Keller  
Betsy McCracken  
David Gann  
Molly Zaleski  
Margaret Custer  
Rebecca Bellmore  
Randal Vigil  
Sarah Markegard  
Wade Bryson  
Christine Woll  
Ashley Heimbigner  
Matt Robus  
Adam Anderson  
Teri Tibbett

### Organization

Juneau Airport  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Alaska Department of Natural Resources  
Alaska Statewide Environmental Office  
Environmental Protection Agency  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
Southeast Alaska Land Trust  
Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition  
United States Army Corps of Engineers  
United State Fish and Wildlife Service  
City and Borough of Juneau Assembly  
City and Borough of Juneau Assembly  
City and Borough of Juneau Assembly  
Mendenhall Wetlands Study Group  
Alaska Marine Lines  
Bonnie Brae Neighborhood Association and Douglas Advisory Board

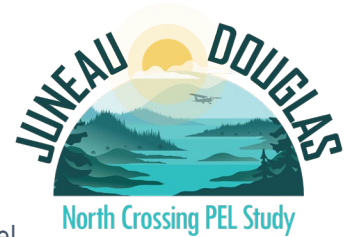
## Presentation Summary

### Welcome and Introductions

Greg Lockwood, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) Project Manager, opened the meeting by welcoming committee members, sharing Zoom requests and functions, reviewing the agenda, introducing the study team, and establishing the meeting purpose.

### PEL Study Process and Schedule Update

Steve Noble, DOWL Project Manager, presented an updated schedule, highlighting the previous milestones, public meetings, and listening sessions. He shared the status of the additional fieldwork, noting most of the fieldwork is complete, and stated the draft Level 2 Screening preliminary results are ready for review.



## Fieldwork Update

Steve Noble presented an update of the field studies completed in support of the Level 2 Screening process. He noted reports for wetland delineation, eel grass survey, intertidal habitat mapping, and migratory bird survey and upland bird habitat mapping are available on the project website. Reports for geophysical surveys and visual analysis are being drafted. Steve emphasized the fieldwork completed as part of the Level 2 Screening process is the beginning of environmental work; additional environmental data would be collected during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) phase for any alternative carried through to a proposed project.

### Wetland Delineation

Wetland delineation was conducted from September 19 through 22, 2023. It was used to re-calculate the wetland impacts of the proposed alternatives.

### Eelgrass Survey

The eelgrass survey was conducted from September 27 through 29, 2023, within four hours of low tide. A pedestrian survey was completed in the intertidal areas of each alternative. The project team documented one location of dwarf eelgrass *Zostera Japonica* on the south side of the Salmon Creek alternative.

### Intertidal Habitat Mapping

Intertidal habitat mapping confirmed information from prior efforts. It documented the vertical gradient of habitats based on proximity to deeper marine water and freshwater sources.

### Migratory Bird Survey and Upland Bird Habitat Mapping

A migratory bird survey and upland bird habitat mapping were conducted from September 19 through September 28, 2023. Biologists conducted field surveys in 13 areas with 10 habitat types, observed 55 bird species, and identified the Bog/Fen cover type, recommending it be incorporated into GIS data.

### Geophysical Surveys

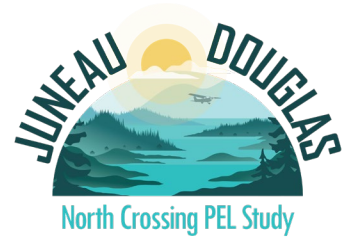
The geophysical survey report is expected to be completed March 2024. Two non-destructive geophysical survey methods were used: Seismic Refraction and Multichannel Analysis of Surface Waves (MASW) and Electrical Resistivity. The studies were conducted during low tide at times with sufficient ambient lighting through publicly available access points. The data collected will assist in confirming feasibility and future detailed cost estimates.

### Visual Analysis

The visual analysis report is expected to be completed April 2024. Visual analysis was conducted using detailed design to create crossing simulations. Photos were used to create simulations of each alternative to assist in review of visual impacts.

### Fish & Game Fish Stream Surveys

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game conducted fish stream surveys between October 19 and 31, 2023. They surveyed all streams in the study area for fish presence using backpack electro fisher and baited minnow traps. The surveys resulted in 20 nominations to the anadromous waters catalog based on finding of rearing juvenile coho salmon. The data has been incorporated into the Level 2 Screening Analysis.



## Level 2 Screening Process and Preliminary Results

Renee Whitesell, DOWL PEL Study Lead, reviewed the steps the project team has taken as part of the alternative development and screening process. She then reviewed the purpose and need, and additional goals of the project. She noted the screening criteria used on this PEL study has been developed to evaluate how well each alternative performs in relation to transportation needs, what plans have been adopted in a particular area, and whether an alternative is reasonable or feasible from an engineering and cost perspective. The criteria also evaluate the reasonability and practicability of each alternative in relation to NEPA, the Clean Water Act, and to Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation. Section 4(f) resources include publicly owned parks, recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites. Specific conditions apply before these locations can be used for transportation projects.

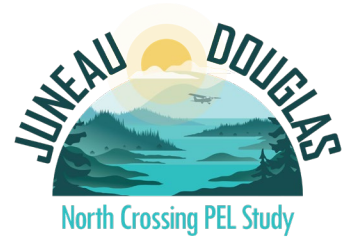
Renee reminded participants of the six alternatives carried forward to Level 2 Screening, including Mendenhall Peninsula, Sunny Point West, Sunny Point East, Vanderbilt, Twin Lakes, and Salmon Creek. She noted, to enable the project team to quantify the impacts of each alternative, conceptual alignments were developed with start and end points, or termini, that tie into existing transportation facilities on either Douglas Island or Juneau. Conceptual bridge deck and approach typical sections were shared. She noted these typical sections were applied and adjusted based on the unique characteristics of each alternative to quantify the potential impacts of each alternative.

Renee shared the scoring criteria performance matrix, noting for environmental impacts, it was assumed any impacts would require additional evaluation prior to determining their extent, so the scale used for environmental impacts started at zero, where no impacts were identified, and used a negative scale to -2 to enable differentiation between lower and higher potential areas of impact. As many of the criteria used reflected environmental characteristics, this resulted in all the alternatives having negative scores.

Renee presented the alternatives in order from highest scoring to lowest scoring, noting all the build alternatives score relatively well in relation to the PEL study's purpose and need, as they all provide alternative access and transportation infrastructure resilience, improve travel time for non-motorized users, reduce idling and congestion, improve emergency response times, and improve access to emergency healthcare and services, as well as access to workplaces and critical resources. In relation to the additional goals, all the build alternatives also perform relatively strongly by creating additional traffic capacity to support future housing and economic development opportunities and protect and enhance the health and safety of communities transportation facilities serve. Because all the build alternatives create potential environmental impacts, they score relatively poorly in relation to avoidance, minimizing and mitigating effects of the environment, and a future NEPA process will need to evaluate the extent of impacts in greater detail for any alternatives that advance. Impacts on residential areas and the visual, cultural, and scenic identity also scored relatively low, with some alternatives having likely more impacts than others, depending on locations and build features.

### Sunny Point East

The greatest potential impacts quantified are to protected lands, neighborhoods that are potentially divided or disrupted, and the need for residential property acquisition. Other environmental impacts include wildlife habitat impacts, eagle nesting trees, Section 4(f) and 6(f) resources, residential uses and land, commercial uses, and the need for additional right-of-way (ROW). Although these impacts were identified, they are lower total areas or likely impacts than some of the other alternatives, as noted on the draft impact table and scoring sheet.



The Sunny Point East alternative has a relatively high level of public support when compared to other alternatives, and the updated planning level cost estimate indicates the cost of the Sunny Point East Alternative is approximately \$420 million.

### **Twin Lakes**

The greatest potential impacts quantified are to the intertidal zone, essential fish habitat, impervious surfaces added, neighborhoods that are potentially divided or disrupted, and impacts to vacant commercial land. Other environmental impacts included wetlands directly impacted, wildlife habitat effects, migratory bird habitat impacts, eagle nesting trees, Section 4(f) and 6(f) resources, commercial uses, and the need for commercial property acquisition. Although these impacts were identified, they are lower total areas or likely impacts areas than some of the other alternatives, as noted on the draft impact table and scoring sheet.

The Twin Lakes alternative has a relatively lower level of public support when compared to other alternatives, with it being the second least favored of the build alternatives. The updated planning level cost estimate indicates the cost of the Twin Lakes Alternative is approximately \$320 million.

### **Sunny Point West**

The greatest potential impacts quantified are to wetlands, anadromous streams, important migratory bird habitat, impervious surfaces added, neighborhoods that are potentially divided or disrupted, and impacts to and within 100 feet of residential property. Other environmental impacts included intertidal zone impacts, stream and riparian habitats, wildlife habitat effects, eagle nesting trees, Section 4(f) and 6(f) resources, residential uses, vacant residential land, and ROW impacts. Although these impacts were identified, they are lower total areas or likely impacts than some of the other alternatives, as noted on the draft impact table and scoring sheet.

The Sunny Point West alternative has a relatively high level of public support when compared to other alternatives. The updated planning level cost estimate indicates the cost of the Sunny Point East Alternative is approximately \$390 million.

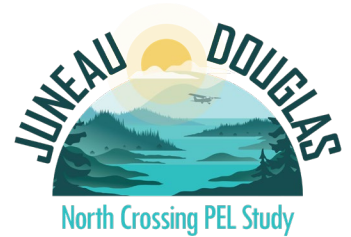
### **Vanderbilt**

The greatest potential impacts quantified are to wetlands, intertidal zones, streams and riparian habitats, essential fish habitat, wildlife habitat, impervious surfaces added, residential uses, total ROW needed, and impacts from residential property acquisition. Other environmental impacts included anadromous stream impacts, important migratory bird habitats, Section 4(f) and 6(f) resources, potential impacts to environmental justice populations, neighborhoods divided or otherwise disrupted, proximity to residential properties, and areas of vacant residential land potentially impacted. Although these impacts were identified, they are lower total areas or likely impacts than some of the other alternatives, as noted on the draft impact table and scoring sheet.

The Vanderbilt alternative has a relatively high level of public support when compared to other alternatives. The updated planning level cost estimate indicates the cost of the Vanderbilt Alternative is approximately \$270 million, depending on the intersection type on Egan Drive.

### **Mendenhall Peninsula**

The greatest potential impacts quantified are to wetlands, wildlife habitat, eagle nesting trees, Section 4(f) and 6(f) resources, impervious surfaces added, vacant residential properties, commercial use impacts, and ROW needed. Other environmental impacts included intertidal zone impacts, stream and riparian habitats, and essential fish habitat. Although these impacts were identified, they are lower total areas or likely impacts than some of the other alternatives, as noted on the draft impact table and scoring sheet.



The Mendenhall Peninsula Alternative has a moderate level of public support when compared to other alternatives. The updated planning level cost estimate indicates the cost of the Mendenhall Peninsula Alternative is approximately \$1.7 billion.

## Salmon Creek

The greatest potential impacts quantified are to residential and commercial land uses, and proximity to commercial land uses. Other environmental impacts included wetland impacts, intertidal zone impact, stream and riparian habitats, essential fish habitat, important migratory bird habitat, eagle nesting trees impacted, Section 4(f) and 6(f) impacts, impervious surfaces added, environmental justice populations or public spaces, neighborhoods divided or disrupted, proximity to residential properties and impacts to vacant residential and commercial land. ROW impacts and the need for residential and commercial property acquisition were also noted. Although these impacts were identified, they are lower than some of the other alternatives, as noted on the draft impact table and scoring sheet.

The Salmon Creek alternative has a relatively low level of public support when compared to other alternatives and is the least favored of the build alternatives. The updated planning level cost estimate indicates the cost of the Salmon Creek Alternative is approximately \$330 million, using a grade-separated interchange. The planning level cost estimate is based on a crossing that is low in relation to the water level. If a higher crossing is needed to retain the navigable channel, then the cost of the alternative will be significantly higher.

## No Build

The No Build alternative does not provide for any action. It does not generate impacts. The No Build alternative does not meet the purpose and need but will be carried forward into any future NEPA process to provide a baseline against which to evaluate the other alternatives.

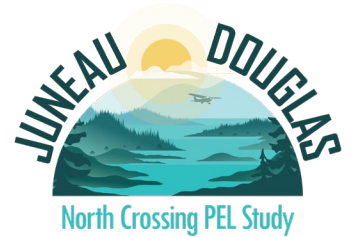
## Planning Level Cost Estimates

After reviewing the preliminary Level 2 Screening results, Steve shared the planning level cost estimates for each alternative, noting the cost has not yet been scored in the draft Level 2 screening and property acquisition for ROW is not yet calculated or included.

## Group Discussion

One participant from the Southeast Alaska Land Trust (SEALT) commented the acreage was not correct. Steve asked for clarification on which acreage they were referring. The participant responded SEALT owns and manages wetland mitigation sites set aside for the Juneau Airport's expansion in 2009 that would be impacted by both the East and West Sunny Point alternatives at the Juneau and Douglas termini. She added the Sunny Point West alternative does not avoid impacts and requires an additional extension of road parallel with Egan Drive that directly crosses a SEALT mitigation site. She has identified these impacts in two different comment letters, but DOWL's reports and scoring tables continue to assert there are no impacts at Sunny Point West, and minimal impacts at Sunny Point East. She asked when a consultation will occur where SEALT can confirm the correct impact acreage.

One participant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asked where the impacts for Salmon Creek were quantified. Steve responded the impacts for all the alternatives are quantified in the documents that were distributed as part of Level 2 Screening in the impacts table. Renee added the results in the impact table fed



directly into the scoring process to enable scores to be assigned. Steve noted the team would be happy to pull up the GIS database and have a conversation if there were additional questions.

One participant from National Oceanic and Atmospheric (NOAA) Fisheries commented she had a chance to review the information and wanted to offer clarification on what designates and defines fish habitat in the area. She noted mapping in the wildlife fish figure is misleading, stating essential fish habitat text descriptions should be used to back up mapping. She commented every alternative will impact fish habitat and additional study should be done on impacts to prey species, including herring, dolly varden, and trout. She would include a link in the chat with more resources for text descriptions and contact information. She would like early coordination to avoid data gaps. Steve responded Theresa would be reviewing these comments and would respond to NOAA Fisheries.

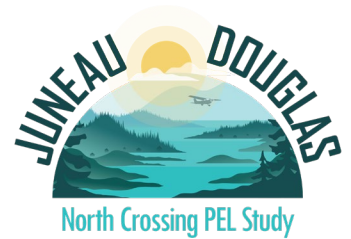
One participant asked if the wildlife and fisheries technical memorandum from Parametrix could be made available so they could evaluate that document against the findings the team has made. Steve responded the team could provide that information. Renee clarified which document he was referring to and pointed him to study website to find the wildlife and fish technical memorandum under project documents and links.

One participant from the CBJ Assembly was surprised to see natural environment impacts at Sunny Point East were much lower than the Sunny Point West or Vanderbilt alternatives. She asked if there was an obvious reason this alternative has less impact than the options nearby. Steve reminded her the project team is still early in the environmental stages of a project, even though the PEL study is coming to an end. He added there is still flexibility in design as the alignments are general. Renee added the designs are conceptual and additional analysis would be completed as part of the potential future NEPA process. She referred participants to the scoring matrix and noted this alternative has less impact to residential properties and impervious surfaces. The participant clarified lower impacts to the natural environment is more related to the structure than the inherent value of the fish and wildlife habitat in that area.

One participant from the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) noted she felt like a disservice has been done to the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge (Refuge) by not displaying the boundaries in project materials. She added the management plan for the Refuge has not been commonly acknowledged. Renee asked Steve to go back to the slide showing the alternatives in relation the Refuge. Steve responded the study team heard this comment early in the PEL study process and has reviewed materials for this. He added the study team has tried to show the Refuge in project materials.

One participant from ADF&G asked for clarification on the acreages shown for the Sunny Point alternatives. Steve responded the team would check the acreage impacts to the wetlands for each alternative.

One participant from SEALT commented given the importance of estuarine wetland functions and the requirements for protection nationally, regionally, and in the setting of a public wildlife refuge, estuarine wetland acreage should be tallied separately. She stated both footprint within the displayed alignment strip and affected acreage beyond that (for example from drainage changes caused by fill, shading from a structure, or compaction and erosion from construction) should be included in the decision matrix, and freshwater emergent and forested wetland acreage should be included separately. She noted it appears the Sunny Point alternatives potentially impact the highest acreage of estuarine wetlands, followed by Vanderbilt, and Sunny Point would also potentially impact the highest acreage of freshwater emergent palustrine wetlands. She asked why fill acreages are so different between East and West Sunny Point. She asked how tidal acreages were calculated, and why more was not measured at Sunny Point and Vanderbilt alternatives. She commented the wetland and resource acreage within the reports seem inconsistent the best data available. She added 4(f) resources affected should be reported by acreage within the alignment strip displayed, and there should be



consideration of effects on 4(f) resources outside the displayed alignment strip. She continued this should include the size of the overall 4(f) and the location of the disrupted area within it, noting crossing through the center of a large refuge affects more users and more wildlife. She stated the PEL study report titled “Wetlands Delineation and Functional Assessment Report” does not include any functional assessments, and the delineations are not complete. She commented the report leans heavily on NWI to fill in gaps in the surveys, which is unreliable for Alaska. She asked when DOWL was planning to produce functional assessments of the wetlands and waters to be impacted according to the work plan, and what protocol would be used. Steve responded the team would set up a meeting with SEALT in the coming weeks.

One participant from NOAA Fisheries commented both Sunny Point alternatives are underestimating impacts to essential fish habitat because of the way that metric was calculated.

One participant from the CBJ Assembly asked if the table showing public support and comments received for each alternative was depicting the number of comments in favor of the alternative, number of comments opposed, or comments generally. Renee responded the public support measure is the number of survey respondents who indicated supported for alternatives from the public comment survey sent out after Open House No. 2. She added over 1,000 people responded to that survey, and participants were able to indicate support for more than one alternative.

One participant from ADF&G asked for clarification on the definitions for wildlife habitat in environmental screening and important migratory bird habitat. Renee responded the environmental team would respond to the question later.

One participant from the Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition asked if there have been conversations about how criteria are weighted during scoring, including more qualitative information. She noted there are five criteria related to residential impacts and one criterion related to safety, which infers residential impacts would be weighted more heavily than safety. Steve responded the study team worked through the screening criteria and presented it to the advisory committees, the DOT&PF Statewide Environmental Office (SEO), and other agencies throughout the process. He added screening criteria has been adjusted based on feedback and encouraged further feedback from participants. He noted there are more environmental criteria than other criteria. Renee added the scoring evaluation process will help the team recommend which alternatives could move forward into the NEPA process, and there are a lot of environmental impacts that need to be considered for each of the alternatives. She also encourages feedback from participants on improvements to scoring criteria.

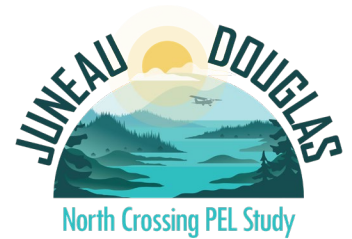
One participant from ADF&G commented it would be helpful to score recreational impacts, especially hunting. Steve responded the project team has incorporated recreational impacts into scoring. Renee added she would find more specific information.

One participant from the Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition commented transparently scoring different categories (e.g. environmental, residential, safety, traffic improvements, etc.) individually would be helpful.

One participant from SEALT asked why aviation safety is not listed as criteria under transportation safety, noting if aviation safety is important, it merits a score. Steve responded the study team has had many conversations with the Juneau Airport and has committed alternatives impacting aircraft approaches would be modified to avoid impacts or not progress.

One participant from the Mendenhall Wetlands Study Group asked about the difference between the approaches and the bridge structures shown in the footprints on the maps and asked for clarification on how





far out into the wetlands the approaches would extend. Steve responded the approaches are in the abutments, and the issue would need to be evaluated in more detail in the NEPA process.

One participant from NOAA Fisheries commented essential fish habitat (EFH) is not typically used in and of itself as an acreage metric and does not fit in the way it was used to compare alternatives using acres, rather it is a qualitative presence/absence of EFH species combined with a determination of adverse effects. She added in the analyses of adverse impact, the wetlands and anadromous waters are themselves and more broadly support EFH are sought to be avoided, minimized, and compensated for in their acreage impact. She noted each alternative adversely impacts EFH and the relative impact as defined by acreage would be more accurately defined by wetland and riparian impact. Further, the quality of that impact would be higher for example, for estuarine wetland fill, as they are functionally more supportive of EFH than forested wetlands. Steve responded the study team would discuss how EFH is scored and used.

One participant from the Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition commented a publicly available online mapping tool with all the data layers and alternative structure footprints would be very helpful for the advisory committees and public to review these scores and think about impacts more holistically. She noted difficulty in comparing different PDF maps with spatial data. Steve responded the study team would review and discuss the feasibility of this within the timeline.

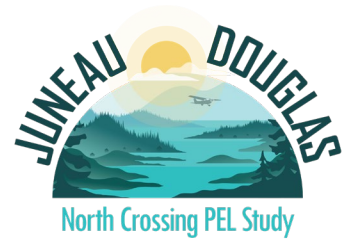
One participant from the EPA asked if the project team could speak to the 4(f) process. Steve responded for the purposes of the PEL study, the team identifies what the 4(f) properties are, what they think the potential impacts to 4(f) resources could be and determines if there are ways to avoid or minimize impacts to those resources. He added 4(f) permitting would happen during the NEPA process.

## Wrap Up and Next Steps

Steve reviewed project funding, noting there is \$7 million designated in Congressionally Designated Spending (CDS) along with \$16 million in a Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant obtained for moving this project forward into the NEPA phase. He also noted the project is in the draft Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP).

He then shared information on what will happen after the PEL Study wraps up, noting preliminary engineering and NEPA, engineering design and ROW acquisition, and construction.

Steve closed the meeting by reviewing study team contacts, email address, and website, and thanked participants for their involvement in the process. He asked committee members to provide feedback by March 28, 2024, and noted the project team would be happy to meet with members who have additional comments or questions. He reviewed the project schedule for the next few months, including the draft PEL Study Report to be released for comment by the end of May, a Public Open House in June, and the Final PEL Study Report to be completed by the end of July.



## Action Items

### Study Team:

- Post meeting materials and meeting recording to the study website.
- Put together a list of responses to questions that could not be answered during this meeting and share with committee members.

### Committee Members:

- Provide additional feedback by March 28, 2024. Subsequent the meeting, advisory committee members requested additional time to provide feedback and the deadline was extended to April 11, 2024.