

Meeting Notes

North Douglas Neighborhood Association Meeting

Tuesday, September 27, 2022, 3:00 — 4:00 PM

Attendees:

Marie Heidemann, Project Manager	Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Alec Venechuk, Project Manager	City and Borough of Juneau
Steve Noble, Project Manager	DOWL
Nina Keller, Assistant Project Manager	DOWL
Mike Stanley	North Douglas Neighborhood Association
Jim Powell	North Douglas Neighborhood Association
Julie Bednarski	North Douglas Neighborhood Association
Barbara Mecum	North Douglas Neighborhood Association
Margo Waring	North Douglas Neighborhood Association

The Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF), City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ), DOWL, and the North Douglas Neighborhood Association (NDNA) met to discuss the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study process, how the PEL study links to future processes and projects, and to discuss neighborhood concerns.

Discussion:

The DOWL staff explained that the purpose and need statement (P&N) is currently going through an internal review, and then followed by the State Environmental Office (SEO) for concurrence.

The DOWL staff explained the difference between the P&N and the screening criteria.

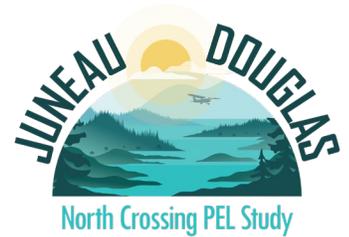
Question from NDNA: When would the screening criteria draft be ready?

- DOWL provided information about the upcoming open house, and that the public will be able to review and comment on the screening criteria. DOWL also shared that during the whole PEL study process, the public has opportunities to engage and discussed transparency.

The DOWL staff talked about the steps of alternatives development and how that tie into the PEL study.

DOWL shared that the alternatives currently on paper are the ideas shared with the team to date.

Question from NDNA: Does the public have any input into the screening criteria?



- DOWL explained that the screening criteria is based on everything the study team has heard so far and the P&N. The team gathers input to develop a draft P&N. After review, more input is gathered, resulting in additional changes before the P&N is finalized.

NDNA requested the following references included in the screening criteria:

- Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge (Refuge)
- Importance of Upper Fritz Cove
- Environmental impacts
- Neighborhood protections

Question from NDNA: Will the input and comments given during this meeting be considered?

- DOWL replied that comments received at this meeting will be treated the same as comments received from other members of the public and in other formats.

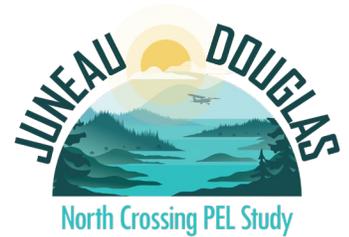
NDNA mentioned the traffic issue, and that it's increased in the past 20 years that some people don't walk on the side of the road anymore. The thought of more people and cars on West Douglas is worrisome.

Question from NDNA: When would selected alternatives be available? How does the PEL study process work compare to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process? How can "preferred alternatives" be identified before the NEPA process?

- DOT&PF explained that the PEL process is unique because it allows alternatives with "fatal flaws" to be screened out.
- DOWL clarified that the alternative analysis completed during the PEL process can be carried forward into the NEPA environmental document. Ultimately, the selection of a preferred alternative is not made until the NEPA document is completed, whether that is an EIS, or EA or CE. That process identifies the alternative moving forward.
- The study team is not completing environmental studies required to narrow alternatives down to a single alternative. The study team will eliminate some alternatives based on screening criteria developed as part of the PEL study. Some preliminary alternatives will not meet the P&N or will have higher impacts, so will not be recommended to move forward in the NEPA process.
- The NEPA process will conduct a more detailed analysis and determine the final preferred alternative.

Question from NDNA: Who decides which alternatives will be recommended to be carried forward in the PEL process? Who will make the decision at the end of the NEPA process?

- The study team will recommend alternatives based on all the information gathered, then DOT&PF and CBJ will review and determine if they agree with these alternatives to move forward.
- DOT&PF added that this process is about screening out alternatives that don't work or don't meet the P&N.
- The NEPA process will move forward with a preferred and the no build alternatives.



NDNA requested a specific additional goal added: *To avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to North Douglas neighborhood.*

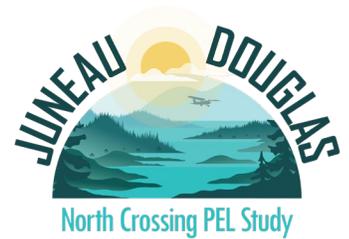
- NDNA commented that more so than other neighborhoods mentioned, all alternatives impact the North Douglas neighborhood. For example, only one alternative impacts the Mendenhall Peninsula. The weight of NDNA should be considered at a heavier weight than just one neighborhood. They suggested North Douglas is a cohesive neighborhood even though it is spread out.
- The team explained, that because there are other residential areas (Bayview, Bonnie Brae, Sunny Point), a more general additional goal talking about residential impacts can be added. DOT&PF suggested adding a more general statement, such as *avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to residential areas or neighborhoods.*
- NDNA agreed to this mechanism adding general neighborhood protections into the additional goals to protect their neighborhood.
- Different zoning (part of their neighborhood is zoned rural residential) and parks that are part of the neighborhood should all be reviewed in terms of impacts. Impacts should include more than the density of the impacted area.
- The study team explained how the screening process works, and that wetlands, contaminated sites, and impacts to quality of life (noise, viewsheds, neighborhood cohesion), are included in the screening criteria. The goal is to find alternatives with the least impacts possible.

Question from NDNA: NDNA brought up traffic impacts, the past studies summary, and a report from 2004 that included traffic projections based on a potential crossing. Are these old numbers still valid? NDNA heard about a traffic study that is being prepared as part of this project and would like information.

- DOWL explained that the previous studies were reviewed. The study team is conducting a new traffic study - Origin-Destination Study. The new tools, compared to those used in the 2004, gather data that shows where people are traveling to and from, and whether they are using the existing bridge. The study will estimate how much traffic would use an alternative crossing and where the traffic would be going.

Question from NDNA: Is the team considering the closure of the existing bridge? What would that look like in terms of traffic using North Douglas Highway to get to the new crossing?

- DOWL explained that the existing bridge has an estimated 40 years of life before it would need major repairs with extended closures. The study team imagines that the traffic would be like the traffic at the current bridge. Closing the existing bridge is not a long-term solution to merely offer the redundancy when it is needed.
- NDNA mentioned that it is very different for South Douglas because they have sidewalks and parking. The road is wide enough and designed for traffic. Question from NDNA: How will traffic for these alternative routes be ascertained, including traffic using the new crossing and utilizing the North Douglas Highway?
- The study team shared that there's a data driven process to predicting where people travel, their travel patterns, and trends based on travel time. While not everyone follows the fastest travel time, vehicles tend to move like water, following the path of least resistance. The fastest route will be modelled, and it can be assumed most people will choose the fastest route. It includes measuring delay in the model.
- The results will be used to estimate how much traffic would use the various crossings and compare the effectiveness. If a Mendenhall Peninsula crossing would only attract about ten percent of the traffic, it



might not be as effective as a different location. The results will be shared at the upcoming advisory committee and public meetings.

Question from NDNA: There are some concerns with developments planned on North Douglas: Eaglecrest Recreational Complex, development of West Douglas, a deep-water port at Point Hilda, a housing project at Fish Creek, the expansion of the boat launch, and others. Concerns are not only the current traffic an alternative would reroute, but about the future traffic based on these developments. In the 2004 study, some attempt was made to estimate that. How will the team factor in current traffic and future traffic?

- After the economic analysis, the study team realized more data was needed to perform an economic forecast. CBJ is now doing a land use study of North and West Douglas, a sub-area study that will be part of a larger comprehensive plan developed in the near future. DOWL's land use planners and CBJ are conducting interviews to gain a better understanding about development envisioned for the area and use that information to inform the PEL study.

NDNA had just heard about the sub-area study and said they should be part of this process. There have not been other sub-area plans that do not involve the neighborhood. NDNA has been asking for a study for a very long time.

- CBJ explained that this is not a plan but a study.
- DOWL described the study area, study goals, and information collected. The economic forecast generated will be made available to the public.
- NDNA said they should be involved as landowners in the area. They expressed concern that the local government considered residential property less important and less valued than development of the area. There is consultation with commercial interests, as if these are the only interests that exist looking at the future. NDNA expressed hope, that unlike past plans where the population and use projections were wrong, CBJ will consider realistic projections.
- NDNA requested funding sources for the sub-area study.

NDNA mentioned the different plans around Juneau and what these mean to North Douglas.

- CBJ shared that a future comprehensive plan update is planned for 2023 or beyond.
- The current comprehensive plan set aside the area starting at the boat ramp along North Douglas Highway as a protected viewshed. This viewshed needs to be considered in the PEL study when developing alternatives. It is important to the residents and the tourism industry.

Question from NDNA: Is the Bench Road part of the PEL study? What is the proposed location of the Bench Road?

- DOWL has heard this concept from many commenters throughout the process and is aware of the interest. A Bench Road concept is expected considered as alternatives are developed.
- Not only is the crossing important, but also the network necessary on Douglas Island to receive that crossing in a way that minimizes impacts to residents.
- Different alternative locations have been brought up by the public including the Bench Road going to Eaglecrest Road. Some people suggested it should go further.



- The team has not determined where the Bench Road should be and is gathering input from the public. The current line drawn on the map is based on the existing right-of-way (ROW).

Question from NDNA: What would the tie-in with the North Douglas Highway look like? Lights, roundabouts, turn lanes, etc.? When would the team share more than a representative idea, how a tie-in would look for each proposed alternative?

- DOWL explained that this level of detail would be part of the recommended alternatives, after the screening is completed and carried forward.

NDNA asked whether that level of detail would include specific properties affected by a potential crossing?

- DOWL explained there is no guarantee for anything moving forward at this point (whether there would be an EIS or a crossing built). At this early stage, the team is cautious about showing specifics of where a crossing might tie-in. When planners and engineers draw a line on a map, this could be moved over a few lots before the final selection is made.

NDNA asked how much detail would be included once the recommended alternatives are selected? Stating that even if a proposed crossing is a 200m [about 650ft] away from a property, it will have an impact. At some point people near a potential crossing location, will want to know what is being proposed, even if would never get built.

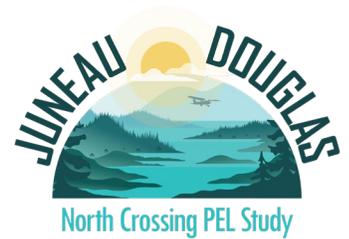
- DOWL will continue sharing information after the December open house. When alternatives are narrowed down, that information will be shared widely, prior to holding the third open house.

Question from NDNA: What would the compensation be for impacted properties; not only the houses that would potentially be taken down, but compensation for decreases in property value due to visual and noise impacts?

- DOT&PF mentioned these would be project specific questions.
- An NDNA member mentioned that this question should be brought before the Assembly, because there is no system in place to address the devaluing of property.
- Another NDNA member mentioned there was a system in place, or at least considered, when the Capital move was being considered. The idea was that anyone whose property was devalued would receive some level of compensation.
- NDNA suggested that it should be evaluated earlier, than when a project is underway. In terms of cost, it would make a difference if one alternative affects two properties and another twenty.
- NDNA confirmed with the study team, that the narrowed down alternatives included connectors, embankments, and structure.

Question from NDNA: Will the cost of the recommended alternatives be included in the PEL study? Will funding sources be included?

- The team is including some high-level estimates for the alternatives shared at the December open house and a more detail cost analysis for the narrowed down alternatives in the spring.
- Is the team considering possible funding sources?



- A funding strategy is part of the PEL study.
- Is there a plan on pursuing funding opportunities that are available from the infrastructure bill?
 - CBJ is working with Senator Murkowski's office for congressionally directed spending for NEPA level design. The team is not aware of the approval status or timeline. For remaining design and construction, DOT&PF anticipates needing a discretionary grant.
- Who is working on the funding at CBJ?
 - CBJ Engineering and Public Works Department.
- What is the strategy working with Senator Murkowski's office?
 - To receive federal discretionary grant funding, some design level work is needed. Once the grant is received, the project needs to be developed within the timeline of the funding availability of those awards. It also helps the project to be more competitive to receive funding, because it shows the project is ready. DOWL will provide CBJ and DOT&PF with funding strategy recommendations. There are around 20 to 30 discretionary grant programs with the new transportation infrastructure bill. The PEL study will identify recommended alternatives and define possible projects for a Juneau Douglas North Crossing.
- Will DOT&PF need to provide a match?
 - That is part of the continued discussions. No funds are currently set aside. If congressionally directed spending is received, that would not require a matching fund, but other sources would. Discretionary grants usually require twenty percent matching funds, and CBJ may be requesting funding from the legislature.
- While the Commissioner is thinking about infrastructure funding being available through the state, was he really talking about federal funding?
 - The infrastructure bill has formula funding that is received annually in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Potentially, some of that funding could be used for this project, but it is unlikely to be able to fund a project of this size with STIP funding.
- It sounds like a no build alternative is off the table for CBJ since they are asking the Senator for design funding.
 - Design funding is to work through the NEPA process, which would include a no build option. The NEPA level design is necessary to get to a preferred alternative and is considered necessary for a discretionary grant.

Question from NDNA: Juneau has seen a lot of projects, like the improvements and the gondola on Eaglecrest, and the road going to the end of North Douglas, including pavement and power. This is a lot of infrastructure projects without a North Douglas Plan. Also, the Sunny Point intersection has been improved by DOT&PF, has there been forward thinking to that? Who is orchestrating all of this? Who is in charge?

- CBJ answered that the projects are all stand-alone projects. Eaglecrest has its own board and functions independently. Currently, community development and a North Douglas Comprehensive Plan are desired by CBJ.
- DOT&PF answered that Sunny Point was part of the Egan Drive Corridor Development Planning that included additional improvements, with some phases to be funded later. The Egan Yandukin PEL Study



was recently completed and came up with a different alternative than was originally planned. Not everything planned gets built, sometimes asset management and funding limits restrain development.

Question from NDNA: How do maintenance costs get evaluated? Is that being considered for this crossing?

- There will be many discussions about how and who maintains a north crossing. Maybe CBJ will take ownership of some local roads that DOT&PF is currently maintaining. That is a lot of discussion related to funding and making it real.

Question from NDNA: Will the team share the comments received with the public?

- The study team maintains a database of all the comments received and responses. That information will be an appendix to the PEL study. DOWL also mentioned that sharing comments earlier could be considered with some discussion about when and the format.

DOWL concluded the meeting and stated that it's possible that this study will result in the recommendation of multiple projects. It is possible to recommend one or more crossing alternatives and the Bench Road, both having independent utility and being stand-alone projects going through the NEPA process separately. These could be prioritized and recommended to be built in a certain order.

DOT&PF added that there's a real benefit to a PEL study because projects can be recommended and are more likely to get funding if they went through the PEL process.

Question from DOWL: Does the NDNA have one area preferred for a crossing? Has the group discussed any areas perceived to have the least amount of impact (empty lots for example)?

- NDNA has not done that. Each member has their own opinion, but no preference as the whole group. Each alternative impacts some members of the NDNA.