

Sterling Highway MP 45 - 60 Project Update

STERLING

A Little Background

The Sterling Highway Milepost 45 to 60 Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) process is being conducted by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF). The purpose of the SDEIS is to analyze and evaluate a range of alternatives to address traffic flow, seasonal congestion, local access issues, and roadway deficiencies on the section of the highway that parallels the Kenai River through the community of Cooper Landing.

The DOT&PF has met with agencies, community members, interest groups, and individuals in over 18 meetings with thousands of people participating in the past 3 years. The meetings have focused on identifying issues, developing alternatives to solve the problems, and developing evaluation criteria to choose alternatives.

What Have We Heard

- Need to protect the Kenai River.
- Minimize private, business, and historical property impacts.
- Minimize or have no impact to recreational areas including Resurrection Pass Trail.
- Concerns about negative economic impacts to the business community.
- Provide safe/efficient through travel and local access.
- Minimize impacts to wetlands.
- Concern about impacts to habitat – particularly Brown Bear.
- Concern about high speed of travel through town.
- Safe parking and pedestrian access to recreational areas.
- Concern about cultural resources.
- Maintain the scenic quality of the area.

Evaluation of Alternatives

The issues were developed into evaluation criteria that was reviewed and refined with input from agencies and the community in 2002 through meetings and a web survey. The top six criteria that emerged (in priority order) are:

- Minimize impacts to the water quality and fish.
- Minimize impacts to the Kenai River.
- Improve driver and pedestrian safety.
- Move both through traffic and local traffic efficiently within Cooper Landing.
- Minimize impacts to wildlife habitat.
- Maintain the scenic quality of the corridor.

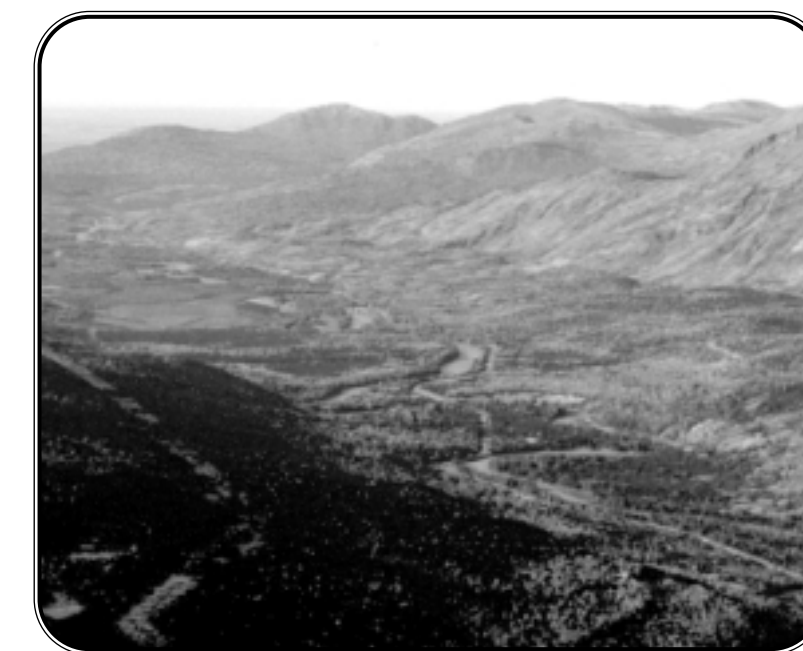
The full evaluation criteria and reasonable alternatives analysis is available at www.sterlinghighway.net. The criteria identified by the agencies and the public together with the Purpose and Need and life cycle cost were used to evaluate the 10 build alternatives that had been identified along with a No Build alternative.

In May and June 2003 we received over 100 comments relating to which alternatives should be analyzed in greater detail and which alternatives should be removed from further consideration.

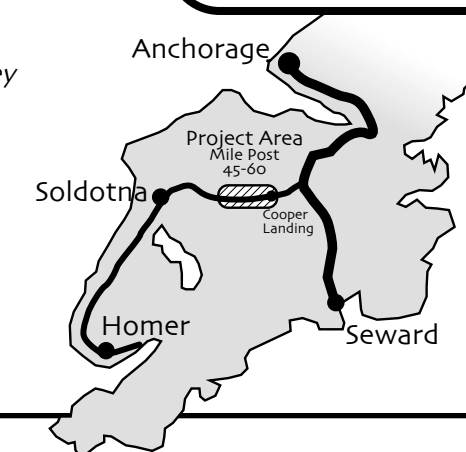
Look inside for maps of the alternatives to be forwarded into the EIS document and frequently asked questions and answers.

The Purpose and Need for the Sterling Highway MP 45 to 60 project is as follows:

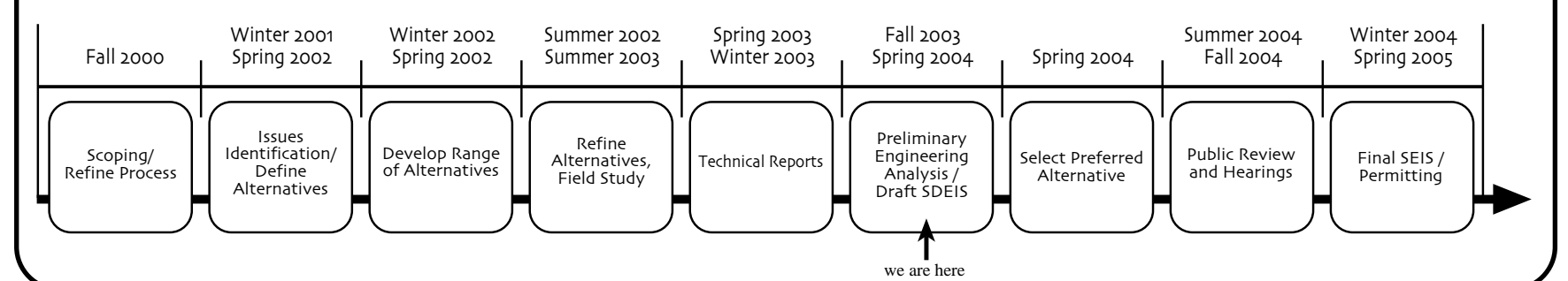
The DOT&PF has identified a need to improve the Sterling Highway in the Cooper Landing and Kenai River area (MP 45-60) to "rural principal arterial" standards. The purpose is to serve through-traffic, local community traffic, and traffic bound for recreation destinations in the area efficiently and safely, now and in the future. The DOT&PF recognizes the need to serve the traveling public while doing its part to protect the Kenai River corridor. The full text of the Purpose and Need statement can be found at www.sterlinghighway.net.



Birdseye view of Kenai River Valley



Project Schedule:



Frequently Asked Questions:

What is an SDEIS and why do we need one?

A supplemental draft environmental impact statement:

- Updates an existing draft with new information (the existing draft EIS is from 1994;)
- Considers a range of reasonable alternatives;
- Discloses the potential impacts of the alternatives on the natural, social and economic environment;
- Recommends a preferred alternative or "the best solution" given the impacts;
- Includes how to minimize or avoid the identified impacts as part of the recommendation;

What are the transportation concerns?

The Sterling Highway was built in the mid-1930s as the only road connecting Southcentral Alaska and the western portion of the Kenai Peninsula. Since that time the communities on the peninsula have grown substantially. Increased traffic from industry, peninsula communities and summer tourism causes the highway to "fail" in its ability to move traffic through the area during the summer. In addition, MP 45 to 60 is the only section of the Sterling Highway not upgraded to widen shoulders, add passing lanes, improve sight distances and reduce sharp curves.

The alternatives seem like big fixes for a seasonal problem; why can't the existing road just be "straightened a little?"

Limited improvement to the existing road will not adequately address traffic issues and does not meet the purpose and need. Changes to the existing road will require an environmental analysis process. Turning and passing lanes cannot be added without impacts to existing businesses, private properties, cultural resources, and the Kenai River. To straighten the curves even "a little" would require either cutting into the hillside to provide space for the road to be straightened or moving the road towards the river. In some cases bridging the river would be required because there isn't enough room between the hillside and the river to widen the existing road.

People are driving too fast through Cooper Landing already! How can we lower speeds through town?

The posted speed through town, regardless of the alternative, can remain the current posted speed. The posted speed on a bypass alternative would most likely be 55mph. As a road is widened and passing/turning lanes added, drivers feel more comfortable driving at higher speeds often in spite of the lower speed limits. However keeping a road narrow and windy doesn't lower speeds either. As local residents know, people drive faster than the posted speed limit today. The state troopers agree that ongoing enforcement is difficult.

What will happen to the existing road if a bypass alternative is chosen?

The state will continue to maintain the existing road. A future project could upgrade the road to local road standards (which are not as rigorous as National Highway System standards), which could include such improvements as new pavement, a pedestrian pathway and traveler information signs.

When will this project be built?

If environmental approval for an alternative is received in 2005 then it will take approximately 2 years to complete final design and acquire right of way before construction can begin. The construction is expected to last at least two years.

For more information

Log onto www.sterlinghighway.net.

Email Miriam Tanaka, ADOT&PF project manager at miriam_tanaka@dot.state.ak.us

Call Mark Dalton, HDR, Inc. project team manager at (907) 274-2000 or email at mark.dalton@hdrinc.com

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Alternatives

Alternatives to Forward into the SDEIS

We are at the point in the process where some of the alternatives will not be forwarded into the SDEIS for more detailed review. The National Environmental Policy Act considers reasonable those alternatives that are practical or feasible from a technical and economic standpoint. The DOT&PF has the discretion to forward alternatives that completely or partially meet the purpose and need. The alternatives have all received the same level of analysis at this time based on the evaluation criteria. Three build alternatives are considered reasonable and will be forwarded into the SDEIS: Cooper Creek, "G" South and Juneau Creek "F" Wilderness. The No Build Alternative is automatically forwarded into the SDEIS. See table for comparison of reasonable alternatives.

SDEIS Alternatives Summary

Issue	Cooper Creek	Juneau "F" Wilderness	"G" South	No Build
Improvements to Existing Highway <i>Shoulders, passing lanes, pavement</i>	10.3 miles	3.6 miles	7.5 miles	none
Level of Service *	Operates at LOS "C" or better 53% of the time	Operates at LOS "C" or better 100% of the time	Operates at LOS "C" or better 44% of the time	Operates at LOS "C" or better 0 % of the time
Meets National Highway Design Standards <i>achieves consistency with other highway sections</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Miles of New Road Alignment	3.5 miles	9 miles	6 miles	0
Number of New and Replaced Bridges	1 new - 2 replaced	1 new	2 new - 1 replaced	0
Potential for Wildlife Displacement & Disruption	Moderate	High	High	Minimal
Private Property Impacts – Potential Right of Way acquisitions	39 properties	4 properties	4 properties	0 properties
Private Property Impacts - Relocations	6 properties	0 properties	0 properties	0 properties
Historic/Archeological Site Impacts	16 sites	7 sites	17 sites	0 sites
Recreation Area Impacts	Visual impact to Cooper Creek South Campground	Crosses Resurrection Pass Trail and Bean Creek Trail	Crosses Bean Creek Trail	None
Lifecycle Costs	\$85 Million	\$70 Million	\$92 Million	N/A
Engineering Issues	Potentially unstable materials along Cooper Creek Valley with major bridge construction	Potentially unstable materials along Juneau Creek Valley with major bridge construction	Potentially unstable materials along Juneau Creek Valley with major bridge construction.	Proximity of private property, Kenai River, and valley walls to road limits ability for improvements.
Wilderness Lands Impacts	No	Yes	No	No
Resurrection Pass Trail Impacts	No	Yes	No	No

* LOS

- A - free flow, with low volumes and high speeds
- B - reasonably free flow, but speeds beginning to be restricted by traffic conditions
- C - in stable flow zone, but most drivers restricted in freedom to select their own speed
- D - approaching unstable flow, drivers have little freedom to maneuver
- E - unstable flow, may be short stoppages
- F - forced flow, road acts as storage for backed up vehicles

social and life cycle cost criteria. While this alternative came from the public and agency discussions, it has received little agency or public support.

Alternatives considered and not forwarded:

There were several alternatives that have been considered and will not be carried forward at this time: Kenai River Walls; Kenai River; Russian River; "G" North; Juneau Creek "F" Forest; Juneau Creek Forest and Wilderness.

The Kenai River Walls Alternative is considered unreasonable because of the engineering challenges due to the failure risk of the up to 180' high walls in extreme freeze/thaw and soil conditions. This alternative has high life cycle costs (\$104 million); potential impacts to the Kenai River, adjacent cultural resources, natural resources, recreational uses, and private properties (46). The alternative results in relatively poor level of service in the design year 2025.

The Kenai River Alternative is considered unreasonable because of the impacts associated with the four new bridges over the Kenai River and one new bridge over Juneau Creek. In addition the impacts to private properties (47), campgrounds, cultural resources, and the lower Juneau Creek delta were found to be unacceptable. The alternative results in relatively poor level of service in the design year 2025.

The Russian River Alternative is considered unreasonable because of the potential impacts to the Kenai River, Russian River, and Cooper Creek recreational areas. This alternative has substantial impacts to cultural resources and high life cycle costs (\$109 million.) This alternative does meet the purpose and need criteria however it is not being considered further because of the environmental,

The "G" North Alternative is considered unreasonable because it does not have as high a level of service for traffic in the design year 2025 as the "G" South Alternative, which is being forwarded into the SDEIS. While the "G" alternatives have relatively high life cycle costs, relatively low levels of service for traffic in the design year 2025, and involve new crossings of the Kenai River, Juneau Creek, and Bean Creek, their avoidance of the Resurrection Pass Trail and Wilderness were compelling reasons to consider further study of a "G" alternative (see the "SDEIS Alternatives Summary Table" for more information about "G" South.)

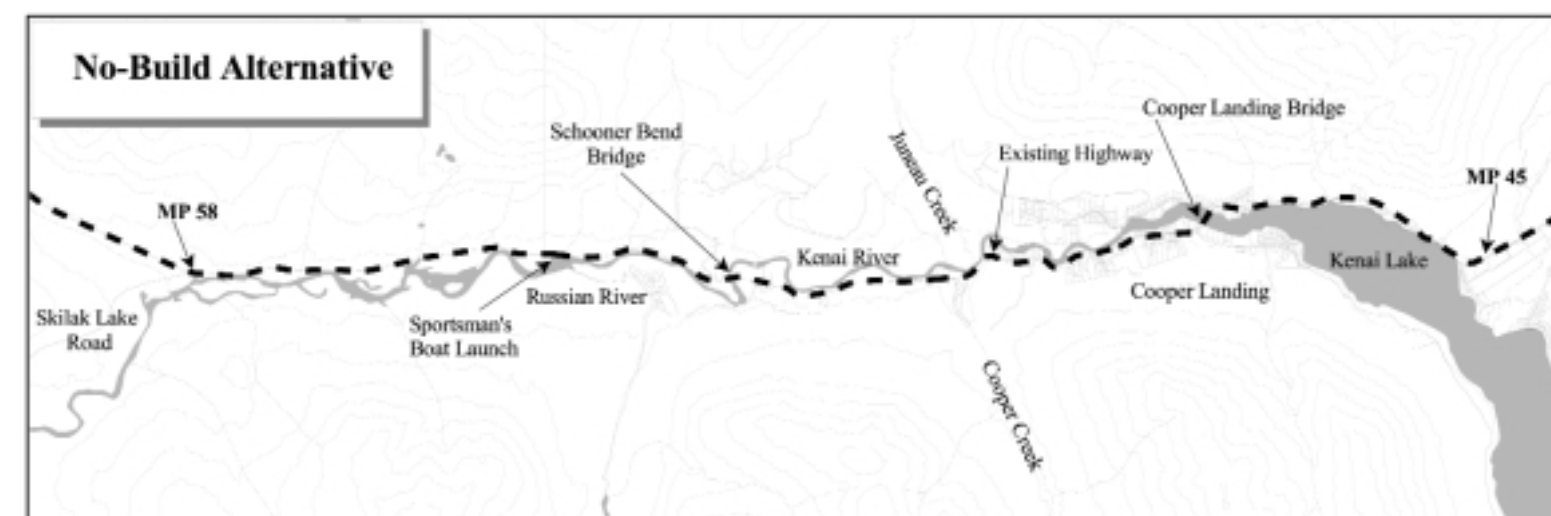
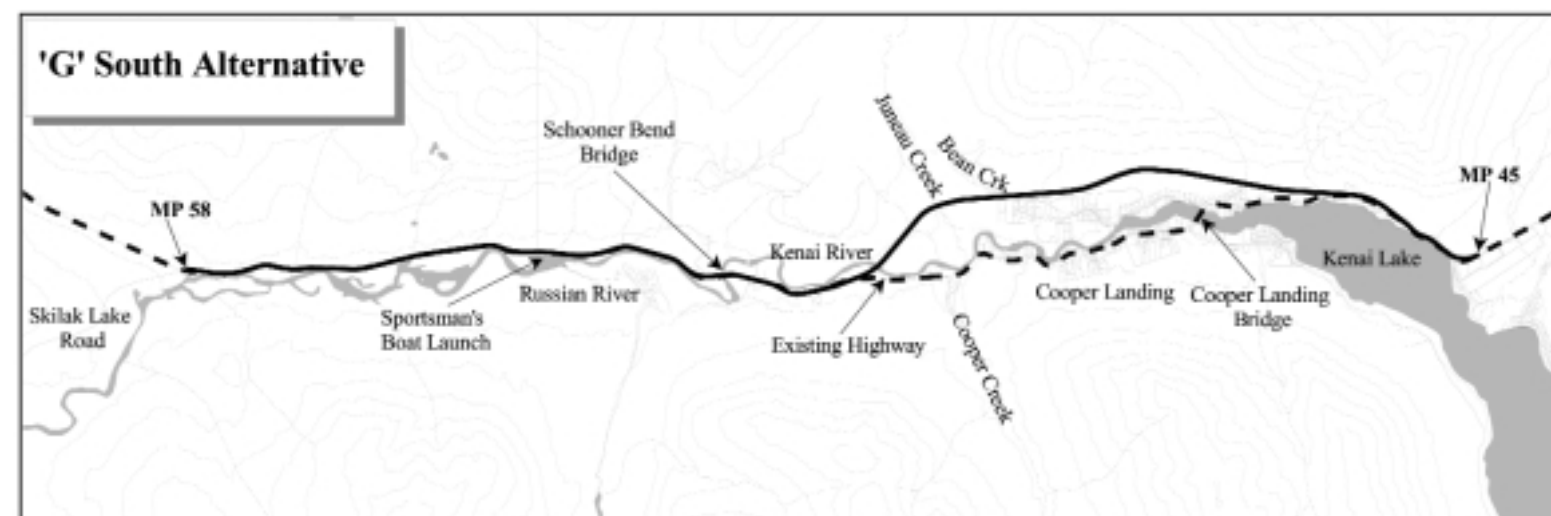
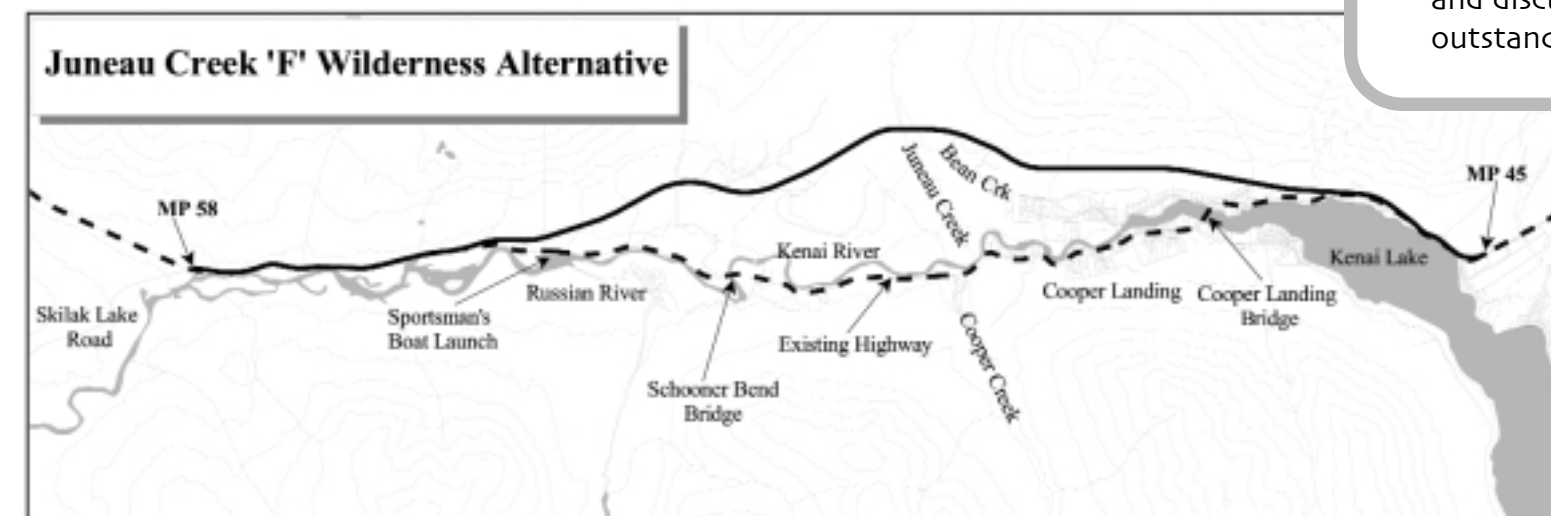
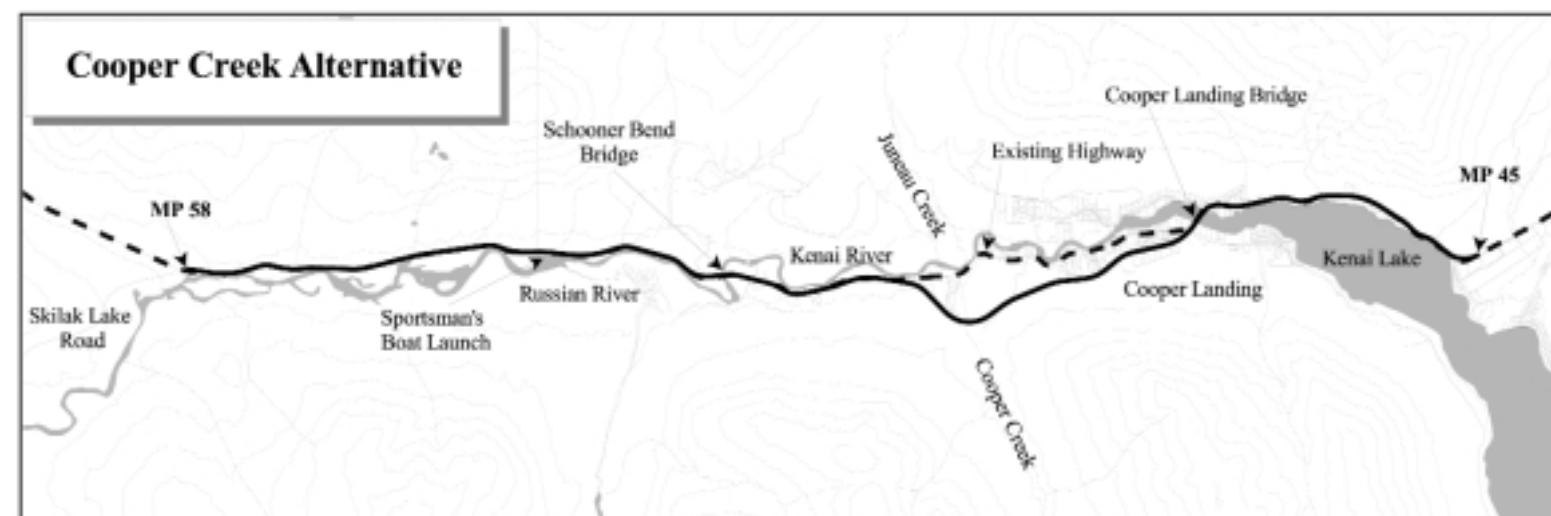
Juneau Creek Wilderness Alternative is considered unreasonable because of the impacts to the Resurrection Pass and Bean Creek Trails, Juneau Creek Falls, as well as impacts to an area that is relatively undisturbed by settlement and logging activities found further south (in the Juneau Creek "F" vicinity.) This alternative does meet the purpose and need and has the lowest life cycle cost (\$52 million), however it does not meet the environmental and social criteria.

Juneau Creek "F" Forest and Juneau Creek Forest Alternatives are considered unreasonable because of the impacts at the intersection near Sportsman's Landing and their inability to meet current design standards. In addition the Juneau Creek Forest Alternative has the same constraints as outlined in the Juneau Creek Wilderness Alternative.

Next Steps for the Alternatives

- Incorporate new technical information gathered from the Summer 2003 field work.
- Analyze engineering issues, potential mitigation needs, and other constraints.
- Meet with the Agency Consultation Committee (ACC) and the Stakeholders Sounding Board (SSB) early in 2004 to refine alternatives and discuss ideas to address outstanding issues.

SDEIS Alternatives





Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

Project No. 53014



INTRODUCTION

The Sterling Highway is the only road that links western Kenai Peninsula communities (Kenai, Soldotna, and Homer) to the rest of the State. Since 1978, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) has recognized the need for improved safety and traffic flow along this highway to accommodate the increase in traffic generated by community growth and tourism. The DOT&PF has contracted with HDR Alaska, Inc. (HDR) to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) that will examine alternatives for improvements to the Sterling Highway between milepost (MP) 45 and MP 60.

THE ISSUES

There are several issues that must be addressed and resolved through the process of developing the SEIS. Some of the major issues include:

- ❖ How to improve traffic flow and safety in areas of high turn movements.
- ❖ How to reduce seasonal traffic back ups from parking and camping areas onto the highway.
- ❖ How to resolve local desires to keep traffic routed past existing businesses with alternatives that reroute traffic away from existing businesses.

- ❖ How to resolve the responsibility of DOT&PF to maintain traffic flow and improve safety with community and environmental concerns.
- ❖ How to improve communication and consultation between DOT&PF and stakeholder groups and agencies.

THE PROBLEM

The Sterling Highway from MP 45 to MP 60 follows the Kenai River Valley through the Kenai Mountain Range and is constricted by the Kenai River, tributary creeks, and steep valley walls. The scenic nature of the area and world-class fishing on the Kenai and Russian Rivers combine to create serious congestion problems for the highway from May through September. This level of congestion has created safety issues for highway travelers, especially in areas where high-speed traffic conflicts with vehicles turning on and off the highway.

THE PROCESS

DOT&PF is in the early phases of preparing a SEIS. The SEIS includes an alternative analysis procedure that will consider an appropriate range of alternatives and then select a preferred alternative for design and construction. The alternative selection procedure will be based upon impacts to local communities, input from local citizens, environmental impacts, impacts on traffic, and how well each alternative solves the



If You Drive on the Sterling Highway...

We want to hear from you!

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) will be conducting a **Listening Post** in your area regarding the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) planning process.

If you are a regular visitor to the area or missed the first Listening Posts held in March, plan on stopping by! The Listening Post will feature informational displays including maps, issues identified-to-date and process steps & schedule. Project staff will be available for questions. Come to the location most convenient for you during any of the times listed below.

ANCHORAGE	SOLDOTNA	COOPER LANDING
August 20, 2001	August 21, 2001	August 22, 2001
4:00 pm—7:00 pm	11:00 am—3:00 pm	11:00 am—3:00 pm
DOT&PF	Visitors Center	Boat Launch
4111 Aviation Drive	44790 Sterling Highway	at the Kenai Lake Bridge

For more information visit the website at sterlinghighway.net
or call DOT&PF Project Manager Miriam Tanaka at (907) 269-0546
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*Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Supplemental Draft
Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS)*

Meeting Notice

Meeting #7 of the Stakeholder Sounding Board for the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) will take place on Wednesday, January 22, 2003. Information displays will be available from 6:00 pm—7:00 pm with the presentation and discussion from 7:00 pm—9:30 pm. Learn about the analysis of the nine alternatives and tell us which of those you think deserve further consideration as we move toward a preferred alternative this summer.

Wednesday, January 22, 2003
6:00 pm—9:30 pm
Kenai Princess Lodge
Cooper Landing

QUESTIONS? Visit the website at www.sterlinghighway.net, or contact:
*Jamie Damon, Jeanne Lawson Associates at (503) 235-5881; jdamon@jlainvolve.com
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Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS)

Spring 2003 Project Update

Reasonable Alternatives Evaluation Nears Completion—Your review and input is needed

After extensive work and review by the Federal Highway Administration, the draft Reasonable Alternatives Evaluation has been posted on the website www.sterlinghighway.net. This document in its final form will provide the initial screening for the reasonable range of alternatives that will be analyzed in greater detail in the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. At this time, the draft falls short of recommending the reasonable range of alternatives, but it does contain the technical information-to-date to make that determination. Please review the draft and give us your input and recommendations on establishing the reasonable range of alternatives through the website or at one of the upcoming Listening Posts. Project team staff will be available to talk with you about the technical analysis, answer questions, and record your input.

Cooper Landing

Wednesday, May 21, 2003

Drop in between 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.
Kenai Princess Lodge Conference Room
Bean Creek Road

Anchorage

Thursday, May 22, 2003

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PROJECT UPDATE

*New information on the website www.sterlinghighway.net
Listening Posts scheduled for May 21 in Cooper Landing & May 22 in Anchorage
See other side of card for details*



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