

Correspondence



RABBIT CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL (RCCC)

A Forum for Respectful Communication & Community Relations



1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100 / Anchorage, AK 99503

Ryan Anderson, Commissioner
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOTPF)

August 5, 2024

Dear Commissioner Anderson –

The Rabbit Creek Community Council (RCCC) has reviewed Amendment #1 to the Alaska 2024-2027 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Our RCCC Board has approved submittal of the following comments.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The format in which ADOTPF has posted the draft Amendment #1 (Amend #1) to the STIP discourages public comment. With endless tables and multiple identification numbers, it is very difficult to navigate and locate either specific, regional, or statewide projects. Some tables, such as the STIP 2024-27 Summary View, are not organized numerically nor alphabetically nor with an obvious geographic clarity. Nowhere is the change in funding or scope for individual projects that is intended by Amend #1 easily identified. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to understand and comment on changes Amend #1 has made from the original STIP

This is a proposed Amendment. Therefore, DOTPF should highlight the proposed changes in a concise, organized format that the public can understand. Additionally, we suggest there be a search function for all three of the Amend #1 documents, so one can search for a specific project via name or project number.

The DOTPF public input website makes the following claim, but we found no explanatory discussion:

“Strategic Investments: Understand how different projects align and contribute to the overarching state strategy, offering insights into their collective impact and connectivity.”

Thus, it was not possible to see how projects fit into an overarching strategy, especially a fiscally responsible strategy.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Project 34164 Seward Highway Milepost 98.5 to 118 Bird Flats to Rabbit Creek
STIP ID 12641 (AMATS TIP NHS0007)

We are concerned that the tremendous amount of ‘Advanced Construction’ funds designated for this project could foreclose options to consider another very expensive multi-year project or many smaller projects for future funding. This gets at the issue of

'strategic investments' mentioned above: where is there a tradeoffs analysis to consider the best mix of transportation projects for the future of Alaska and Alaskans? This project's constraints on future Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) and ADOTPF budgets are not clear. Designating such large amounts of future funding for this one highway project will significantly preclude future Legislatures and Governors from working with the public to balance and select the suite of projects that is most beneficial and results in the greatest safety for the most users.

Other areas lacking clarity for this project include:

- Comparative worth: If this is foremost a Safety Project, how does the Seward Highway compare to other potential Safety Projects throughout Anchorage, in terms of return on investment?
- External costs: We understand this is a Capital Budget project. However, we are concerned that costs related to future maintenance and future climate change are not accounted for in this project.

RCCC has questions and serious concerns about the mammoth price tag of Project 34164 (in conjunction with Project 34165 which is a different phase of this project). It is critical that the public be able to provide informed input on the trade-offs of committing such a huge sum of transportation funding to any one roadway project. The projected project price tag has almost doubled from the 2023 projection. A source of confusion is that while the project is identified as MP 118-98.5, the STIP describes the project terminus as being south of Potter Valley Road. Further documentation (in the AirTable) includes, "Stage 1 (Milepost 113-116) is within the MPA [Metropolitan Planning Area] will be included on the AMATS TIP and not included in the DOT&PF STIP." As this project does not include associated planned upgrades to Potter Valley Road and Potter Marsh segments of the Seward Highway, we assume that the total price tag is well above \$1.5 billion. This also leaves costs for MP 116-118 unexplained.

RCCC strongly supports safety improvements along this corridor. Specifically, we advocate for a Potter Marsh highway design that maintains the ecological, scenic, and recreational values so appreciated and enjoyed by the entire Anchorage community and visitors.

At a recent Safer Seward Highway Stakeholder Working Group meeting we were pleased to learn of plans to immediately implement safety improvements to the Seward Highway such as improved signage regarding passing lanes and adding milepost markers for pullouts. We hope speedy further attention can be given to other safety measures that can be swiftly implemented at relatively low costs without foreclosing future major construction.

Sincerely,



Ann Rappoport, Co-chair



John Riley, Co-chair

cc: Aaron Jongenelen, AMATS