



ADOT&PF Project No. IM-04-1(23)/57178

Meeting Notes

SUBJECT: Parks Highway, MP 44-52
PROJECT NO.: IM-04-1(23)/57178
GROUP: Meadow Lakes Community Council
DATE: February 14, 2007
TIME: 7-9 PM
LOCATION: Meadow Lakes Elementary School
Meadow Lakes, Alaska
MEETING OUTREACH: Regular Community Council Meeting notice
MEETING ATTENDANCE: Approximately 100
MEETING MATERIALS: 1) *Handouts:* Schedule Update; Frequently Asked Questions; Indirect Left Turns; Alaska Snowmobile; Comment Sheet (copies attached);
2) *Graphics:* Annotated aerial photos showing the proposed alignment.
STAFF PRESENT: *ADOT& PF:* Jennifer Witt, Planning; Mary Jane Sutliff, Mat-Su Area Planner; Tana Stone, Environmental;
HDL: Dennis Linnell; Jeff Fuglestad
Green Engineering: Jenny Kuentzel
Brooks & Associates: Anne Brooks

MEETING INFORMATION:

In October 2004, the State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) began seeking comments on environmental and design activities for the Parks Highway from milepost 44, Lucas Road, to milepost 52.3, Big Lake Road. The Meadow Lakes Community Council asked the team to appear at their regular meeting held on February 14, 2007 to present the preferred alternative developed by the engineering consultant, Hattenburg Dilley & Linnell (HDL) and to answer questions the community has about the design. Residents residing in the Meadow Lakes Community Council area attended the meeting.

The project team started their presentation after the Community Council completed their business. They had a microphone and a timer to limit comments to 3 minutes so all individuals who signed up to speak could be heard.

Anne Brooks began the presentation by introducing herself and the project team. She then handed the mike over to Jennifer Witt who introduced the DOT staff in attendance. Then Dennis Linnell began the presentation by walking through the handouts. He spoke to the schedule. He

spoke to the questions that had been asked most recently, and he talked about the indirect left turns and then walked from one end of the corridor to the other end describing the changes envisioned by the project team for the corridor.

When we began the Q&A session, we were handed a list of people who signed up, and we just began by going down the list and calling those individuals to the table. Below are the names of the folks who spoke with their question or comment. These comments are written as documents in team members' notes. The project team's response is in *italics*.

Talyne – why are all u-turns or indirect left turns are on blind corners where there's a lot of wrecks? *We have looked at the site distance and so forth. But we will take another look at it and make sure that there are not any problems with it.*

When was this decided by DOT to be a divided highway? *Jennifer Witt spoke to the group about the guiding document, the Parks Highway Visioning Document that provides a long-range vision for the national highway system corridor. This is the ultimate vision for the corridor and the department will work towards this vision. There are safety problems on this highway – trying to reduce the number of conflict points and reduce crashes by providing as much divided highway as possible.*

What's a conflict point? *A conflict point is anywhere in an intersection or along a stretch of highway where two vehicles could potentially cross paths when on or the other is making a turn.*

Talyne indicated that she hated the plan, but she was not entirely opposed to the plan. She wanted us to please consider their community. They view this as a super highway. To them this is a really big change. She believes that this is not consistent with their vision of the community. The community input, this is just a piece of the puzzle. She recognizes that change is hard to take, but there is a need to do something because there are too many accidents in the corridor.

Sherri Rusher – Sherri feels that at the Holiday Gas Station, we need to move the highway over and make more room for the highway. Her second thought is that the idea of a 4-lane divided highway isn't sitting well with her. She thinks that we need to have 45 mph speed limit and bring it to 5-lanes all the way through Pittman, like has been done in Wasilla. And, make frontage all the way. More development is planned. They need the frontage road. She mentioned that left turns are a problem, particularly on Sunday evenings or on the 4th of July. The cars trying to merge are going to be difficult and that traffic will back up. Her third point had to do with ATV, horse, and snow machine travel. She said that people from 3 years old to 80 years old use these means of getting around. Without providing a trailhead, particularly at Pittman, we're cutting folks off from trails that are on the other side of the highway. She is concerned that if we leave it at-grade, there are 8 lanes that people would have to walk across. It's not going to make it faster or safer for those pedestrians.

Mitch Hull – He likes the plan, but we have to take a look at some type of crossing. There's a dog sled tunnel, not an 8' pedestrian tunnel, but a tunnel for dogs. He spoke to a similar tunnel that was further up the highway. The Parks Highway near Linda Pletner's place has a dog sled

tunnel that you could walk through it. He thinks that we need some type of ATV or snow machine tunnel in the Pittman Area.

Jeff LePage – He has problems with the left turning proposal in our plan.

Betty Vehrs (former Assemblymember) – there is a problem at Vine Road with site distance. She wanted to know if there was a number, a traffic count that triggered the divided highway? They would like to know what that trigger is. She wanted to know if the funding source was secure. She spoke about the business of the fireplace shop. Folks are tired of going to Wasilla to do business and we don't want to discourage those businesses developing in the Meadow Lakes area. Some businesses have talked about moving if this plan goes through. She thinks that we need to find a solution that will support the businesses because they are valuable to the area. She believes that businesses will leave unless they are a destination business, if they're a business where people would drive by and be attracted to going in, the indirect left turns are going to make it very difficult for those people to remain viable.

She mentioned a road name that is wrong and that needs to be fixed on our base maps. That's marked on the maps. *The team noted the change and will correct the base maps.*

Donnie Darilek – she has reviewed the plans and has some ideas for moose crossing. She handed the project team seven pages of drawings she had produced showing potential locations for moose crossings in the area. She spoke to the need for the project to do more at Pittman Road. She said in this vicinity there are four liquor stores, the super store, and four schools. She is very concerned about emergency service, ambulance traffic, and the train--overall it is just a very dangerous intersection. She mentioned moose crossings in the Johnson Road area. She believes a light; traffic signal needs to be installed at Big Lake Road.

Michael Janecek – He appreciated what we've done. He supports 4-lanes. He does think that in some areas, the 5-lane should be in the plan from Vine Road to Johnson Road. He asked for a show of hands when he stated that. Most hands in the room were up at that suggestion. He said the community is serious and they're asking us to consider 5-lanes from Vine to Johnson. He also indicated that he felt that additional enforcement is bearing fruit—the additional enforcement that comes with the highway safety corridor. This is a little town. They want to keep our project consistent with their plans. He said that they are a lot of conflicts in the area. He thinks the left turns would stack up about 30 cars and then on Friday evenings with motor home traffic; there are thousands of ATVs out there. He has concerns in the Meadow Lakes to Pittman area because of the volume of traffic, and would really like to see some type of ATV/off highway vehicle underpass developed at Pittman. He thought we should come out and watch on a Saturday afternoon. He said it is quite entertaining to watch people try to cross the road at Pittman Road.

Lana Malone – Lana was quite emotional and spoke of the loss of her husband at Rainbow Street near the post office. She was rear-ended at the Meadow Lakes Discount store. She spoke about his accident and the need to do something for safety in the corridor.

Gary Olson – He was representing the Alaska Moose Federation. He wanted to applaud DOT for coming out and speaking to the group. He said that one of the benefits is that we have a new administration that doesn't need to read a memorandum to understand that change is being made and in this growing area. He noted that the Alaska Moose Federation had a seat at the Strategic Highway Safety Plan meetings and that this was a very important corridor, it is important to mitigate damage. He noted that as we've sped up cars, the cars are getting faster, the cars are getting smaller, but the moose aren't getting any smaller. He says that DOT knows where moose crossings are by looking at historic collision data. He believes solutions are being done all over the nation. There are a lot of moose areas in the lower 48 that are doing moose crossings and corridors. He mentioned that he has been working with Departments of Natural Resources and Public Safety, on plans to accommodate moose crossings in highway corridors. He said federal funding is available for moose crossings. Gary mentioned that the Hiland Interchange has moose mitigation. In Montana, they have 6 wildlife corridors, 398 miles of highway. He believes that the state is open to liability if we don't begin to do something about this.

Diana Ramstad – Diana stated that we need to keep in mind that people live there. This is her home. She has lived here for 35 years in the Meadow Lakes area. A highway divides their home. She mentioned that there are horses, ATVs, bicyclists, and pedestrians crossing the highway to go to the trails on the other side. There are areas where she feels they'd lose their access to the trails on the other side—horse crossings would be impossible, as would pedestrian/bike crossing of the divided highway. She felt that since this is their home that their comments and opinions and concerns should count more than the weekenders that frequent the highway.

Karen Akers – She believes that snow machines need to be accommodated. She has concerns about emergency vehicles and the critical time that might be lost for a victim, as the emergency vehicles negotiate the indirect left-turns. She wanted to know what happens with the school buses. She stated that by law, the school buses couldn't make u-turns. She is also concerned about pedestrian traffic because there are a number of school bus stops on the highway—children having to cross the highway to get to the bus. She strongly supports a better highway system, but the left and right-hand turns don't seem practical to her and she is concerned about semi's, large trucks, making those turns with doubles.

Gordon Benedict – he suggested that we take a 15-minute break and take a look at the maps that were posted by the project team. And that break was taken.

Jan Richardson – Jan spoke of the section between Vine to Pittman and the businesses along the stretch impacted by change in access because of the divided highway. She thinks it's a business corridor and the 5-lane should be accommodated there. She mentioned a 122-space RV park, with a lot of big campers that are 45' long plus some type of SUV. She is concerned about how they get onto the highway. She thinks they're just going to have to turn left and head to Denali because it's going to be difficult to take a right turn and head south. We're taking some of the appeal away. The 5-lane provides for the right and left turning movements and a better solution for the big motor homes. She needs right turn and left turn access to her RV Park.

Kermit Ketchum – He said what we’re looking at in Meadow Lakes is 1980’s Wasilla. Wasilla has a 5-lane highway today. He wanted to know if the project team has studied the number of people that live on the northside that want to make left turns to go south and if we had looked at fire trucks and emergency response time going from the south side with the proposed changes. He questioned whether or not there was sufficient space for queuing vehicles when they negotiate the left turns without having some of those vehicles in the fast lane, or the left-hand lane of the highway. He also mentioned an old saying that there’s a lot of Lower-48 ideas coming up here. And, he said, I don’t know if you folks remember it, but “We don’t really give a damn how they do it on the outside”.

Keith Akers – He has concern that the trucks won’t be able to get into the left-hand turn lane. And that part of the truck would encroach into the passing lane. That when they turn, they will need a lot of space to align and more time and turning are to make that turn. He thinks there will be conflicts with recreational vehicles and larger trucks, or longer trucks, like snow machine trailers. He thinks the 55 mph speed is too high and that we should consider 45 mph speed. He believes that in 10-years the [Wasilla] bypass will be in place and that there is no need to restrict access in this corridor.

Stan Long – Stan said we needed to widen our horizon a whole bunch. He said that this highway was a dirt road behind Wasilla. In 1965, Dames & Moore talked about a causeway. He thinks the answer is that the Fairbanks traffic is going to use the Knik Arm crossing and come up near Big Lake and that the section of the Parks Highway that we’re talking about will become part of the local road and we won’t see all that Anchorage to Fairbanks bound traffic in this corridor. He mentioned that he used to be an engineer with Alascom and that we need to think long-term. He noted that through Eagle River the Old Glenn is carrying more traffic, but still safe. He thinks we should detour through Wasilla but he knows that we don’t have budget to do so.

Mike Alexander – he thanked the project team for coming out. He said this is kind of a sore subject with him. This is the national highway system. He mentioned that Dowling had been looked at 32 years ago, and its finally looking like it’s going to get fixed. He believes the project team needs to use common sense when looking at those left-hand turns and is concerned that trucks with double trailers are not being considered, and whether all these changes need to be made when the bridge [Knik Arm] goes through.

Kristen S. - Kristen had two questions. She wanted to know what was happening with lighting? *The team indicated that they’re recommending continuous lighting, but generally it is maintenance and operations funding question and that it may be just the intersections are lit. The decision is up to the DOT.*

She’d like to see the 5-lanes like Wasilla and the 45 mph speed limit. And she wanted somebody from DOT to explain why we couldn’t do 5-lanes through Meadow Lakes Area. *The team explained that we were trying to comply with the Parks Highway Visioning Document. The analysis shows that the Parks Highway needs to be 4-lanes now and for the future with or without bridge [Knik Arm].*

Vanessa Liston – She has a home in the Meadow Lakes area and a home off Milepost 92/Randall Drive. She mentioned that she lost her son on this highway and she had sued DOT and won. She is concerned about bypassing businesses that invest their lives and their children in the area. We need to accommodate ambulance and semi-trucks in the corridor. She mentioned Milepost 9. Vanessa believes we have to accommodate businesses and RV drivers. She likes 5-lane section just like Wasilla. She said they are a growing community. People are business owners. This project will put the little people out of business. She thinks that they would have to fight to get into the left turn lane. She said that folks don't want to know each other as insurance cardholders. She thinks that the access is important and that this project is sort of a slam-dunk to the community. She stated that we should not focus the needs on the highway to the semi-trucks and to tour buses – we have to consider Meadow Lakes businesses.

Lana Gross – first thing she said was that she thought she had heard that there was a Wal-mart store going in near Pittman. It wasn't clear if this was said in jest or in reality. Second think, she indicated that she was a Meadow Lakes resident. She wanted to know why a 5-lane wouldn't work through Meadow Lakes. She indicated that she feels the moose cause more accidents and that their undercrossings need to accommodate moose. She talked about the impacts to the community and wanted to know if we had taken a look at their comprehensive plan. And could coordinate that. She was aware of two accidents at Rainbow Street. *The team responded that 5-lanes is less safe in high-speed conditions than the 4-lane roadway. The response was got when that comment was made was that we need to lower the speed limit.*

Ron Eggleston – He's from Big Lake and he believes that we need a traffic signal at Big Lake because it's hard to turn left. There's significant bottleneck there at different times of the year. He thought we should go to 45 mph and that area wouldn't be safe. The indirect left turns that we've been talking about have folks really baffled. He indicated that he had gotten rear-ended by somebody going 55 mph on a nice hot summer day. There are streams of people and he's not sure that you can get into the turn lanes and be able to negotiate the move. He thinks you have to be brave to jump to the outside. He thinks lights at Big Lake, in summary, and something about a roundabout, which caused some gasps to arise from the audience. It's a local concern, I guess. He said with the ferry coming in, they need the interchange at Big Lake.

Steve Belka – he wanted to talk about the u-turns and the indirect left turns. He said that you have to turn right and then get across into the left turn lane. He felt that with the mentality of most commuters who want to just speed through at 55 mph, that it would be a difficult maneuver. He said that if the highway were signed at 45 mph, to actually get through Meadow Lake, it would only cost the commuter about 2-1/2 minutes. Make their commute about 2-1/2 minutes longer. He mentioned that this area of the Parks Highway is killing people. He thinks the DOT vision is a spit in the face of the community. They want nothing more than Wasilla has, which is a 5-lane section.

Gilbert Tripton – he indicated that in his life he's driven millions of miles, trucks, and millions of miles of roads all over the states. He's been through a lot of towns that have lower speed limits as they go through town, and he thinks many small towns have been killed by highway projects where the high-speed traffic was routed through a community and access was controlled.

He doesn't believe the state idea of indirect u-turns will work. He thinks that DOT needs to get some sense into their head.

Toni Klewein – she asked the crowd if they had driven the Glenn Highway and Seward Highway and weren't they also dangerous highways and also divided. He felt that the project team needed to have some credibility with the group and bring some information forward, answer some questions. One question he asked was why won't the 45 mph zone work? He says you're going to put stop signs in that area and what is just going to cause is people to zoom from one stop sign to another.

One speaker mentioned that one year during the Iditarod re-start there was a fatality. She had an idea of parallel adjacent roads that allowed her to jump around the queue waiting for the accident to go around the queue on the southbound parks highway. She questioned how difficult it would be to get home if that accident had occurred in the northbound lanes. How would you redirect traffic in accidents with divided roads?

One gentleman had a question about snow control. He thought with the center turn lane there would be snow removal and snow storage problems.

Another speaker mentioned it's not unusual to have slower traffic. She had just been in the lower 48 for a kidney transplant over the summer. She drove a lot of miles in New York. She would go from a 65 mph to 45 to go through a town, to 65 and then back to 45.

A gentleman asked how wide the median was? *The team noted that it varies from 42 to 30'.*

Donnie spoke again and asked if this is the state vision, she was referring to the Parks Highway Visioning document, that she queried the audience, "aren't we the state?"

On commenter noted that the flyer on the Indirect Left Turns stated, "Snow removal difficult in the loons." *The team clarified that the "loons" were the name given to the additional area constructed to provide the turning radius for large vehicles – recreational vehicles and semis at the u-turn areas.*

One gentleman asked if DOT plans to do the [Wasilla] bypass? He noted that the by-pass would remove the need for this high-speed highway. *Jennifer Witt from DOT Planning responded that the state has begun reconnaissance level studies to define an alternate corridor to be shared by the highway and railroad to go around Wasilla. The intent is to identify a corridor then to preserve the right-of-way so that corridor can be constructed in the future.*

Donnie spoke again indicating that she felt that their concerns were not being met. She felt that what we saw in the room was a small wave of the people in the area that have concerns about the project. She has felt like DOT is wasting their money. She has interviewed folks and 90% are opposed to the plan as presented. She felt we are not listening to folks and that we are using the same map as last time.

One gentleman said that he doesn't have a problem with the divided highway, but we need frontage roads on both sides, lights at the intersections, he thinks the problem is we need to clear our right-of-way. He's never seen area where right-of-way hasn't been cleared, like along this stretch, there's a bad curve and you have to clear some trees. He requested permission from DOT to clear right-of-way and DOT said no because of some liability concerns. So he was out in the middle of the night clearing the trees. He felt that if you cut down on the trees that you cut down on the moose collisions. He believes the 45 mph speed limit should be used just like the 45 mph speed limit through Houston.

Another gentleman stood up and said that they need to make Meadow Lakes a town. He felt that there would be more power in and more influence, if they were actually an incorporated city.

Betty Vehrs again spoke. She supports the 45 mph speed limit. She wanted to get more answers from the traffic engineers and she doesn't want their attendance at the meeting to be an exercise in futility. She wanted to understand completely what the, there was a trigger, a traffic count number or something that triggers going from a 5-lane section to a divided highway. And, she wants to understand why we can't do a 5-lane, why we are going to the divided highway. She felt that their questions weren't being addressed.

How are you going to let us know results? *Come back to council with answers.*

Steve spoke about the corridor through Wasilla, 55 mph with stoplights. How do you define needing a freeway?

Another gentleman got up and spoke about the days Anchorage, the February 14 Anchorage Daily News that said the planning commission in Anchorage voted down the bridge, referring to the Knik Arm Bridge. He said Valley folks want a bypass, they're every bit as important as the Anchorage folks.

Nancy House spoke. She said she was a 31-year residence in the Meadow Lake Area. She wanted to know why we weren't looking at the overpass at Pitman Road with on and off ramps. It had been a plan in the past. It would make more sense. She's a painting teacher. She has a lot of students coming from Wasilla. When they leave, she doesn't want to have them go through some circuitous route to get back to Wasilla – increasing gasoline use.

What happened to the Pittman Overpass over highway and railroad?

What is the length of the left turn pockets at the u-turns? *The pocket length is 480-500 feet.*

This concluded the public comment. The community council thanked the project team for their appearance and presentation. The team promised to respond to the questions ask at this meeting.

Related documents on file:

Handouts

Graphics

Speaker Sign-Up Sheet

Meadow Lakes
Community Council, Inc.

P.O. Box 298666 Meadow Lakes, Alaska 99629-8666 907-376-1698

7:00 p.m. Wednesday February 14, 2007

Meadow Lakes Elementary School

PERSONS TO BE HEARD

Print Name

Signature

1. Talyne TALYNE

2. Sherri Risher

3. Mitch Hull

4. Jeff LePage

5. Betty Vehrs

6. DONNIE DARILEK

7. MICHAEL JANECEK

8. Lana Malone

9. Gary Olson

10. _____

11. Toni Kloewer

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

15. _____

16. _____

17. _____

18. _____

SHERRI RYSHER

Mitch Hull

Jeff LePage

Betty Vehrs

Donnie Darilek

Michael Jancek

LANA J MALONE

Gary Olson

Meadow Lakes
Community Council, Inc.

P.O. Box 298666 Meadow Lakes, Alaska 99629-8666 907-376-1698

7:00 p.m. Wednesday February 14, 2007

Meadow Lakes Elementary School

PERSONS TO BE HEARD

Print Name

Signature

19. Diana Ranstad Diana Ranstad

20. Karen Akers _____

21. Garland Benedict _____

22. Jan Richardson _____

23. Kermit Ketchum Kermit R. Ketchum

24. Keith Akers _____

25. STAN LONG _____

26. Mike Alexander _____

27. Walter Seim _____

28. VANESSA LISTON _____

29. Lana Gross Lana Gross

30. Ron Eggleston Ron Eggleston

31. Steve Belka _____

32. Milbert Tipton _____

33. _____

34. _____

35. _____

36. _____