
SUBJECT: Parks Highway: Lucus to Big Lake Road MP 44-52

PROJECT NO.: Federal: NH-0A4-1(25); ACIM-0A4-1(26); TBD
State: 52914; 52929; 54373

GROUP: Design Open House

DATE: April 30, 2012

TIME: 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

LOCATION: Menard Sports Center, 1001 S. Mack Dr, Wasilla, AK

MEETING OUTREACH: State of Alaska Online Public Meeting Notices (4/17/12); Newsletter sent to 5763 individuals, businesses, elected officials, regulatory and government agencies (4/13/12); Display ad in *Anchorage Daily News* (4/18/12 and 4/23/12); Display ad in *Frontiersman* (4/22/12, 4/25/12, 4/29/12); Constant Contact email notice to the Parks Highway subscribers on 4/17/12 and on 4/25/12 to all Mat-Su projects (Parks Highway MP 44-52, South Mack Dr. Extension, Parks Connectors: Museum Dr & Machen Rd, Fairview Loop Rehabilitation). Meeting posted on online calendars of *Anchorage Daily News*, *Frontiersman*, and *Datebook49*. City of Wasilla posted a meeting announcement on their website as did the Mat Su Borough.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: 172 individuals signed in

MEETING MATERIALS: Aerial photo with design overlay, project fact sheets for Parks Highway 44-52; informational boards regarding traffic volumes and safety, comment sheets; and notice of Fall 2012 Mat-Su Transportation Fair

STAFF PRESENT: *DOT&PF:* Jim Amundsen, Robert DeVassie, Angela Hunt, Lynda Hummel, Sherri Spangler
HDL: Jeff Fuglestad, Danielle Fay, Trevor Strait, Dennis Linnell
Kinney Engineering: Randy Kinney
Brooks & Associates: Anne Brooks, Joann Mitchell, Dawn Groth
Dryden & LaRue: Donna Williams, Dave Williams

MEETING INFORMATION:

Attendees were greeted at the door and ask to sign-in and briefed on the open house format, location of materials, and availability of project staff to answer their questions. Staff members were on hand to answer questions.

Individuals impacted by right-of-way issues were able to discuss concerns with DOT&PF Right-Of-Way (ROW) staff and the ROW subconsultants from Dryden & LaRue. In addition, a court reporter was available to take oral testimony.

Comments made at the meeting to team members include:

- The project should be adding roundabouts along the Parks corridor. *(After listening to the description of what the commenter is looking for, he would like to see large Traffic Circles added to the project).*
- The Veterinary Clinic on Elizabeth Drive is with the access changes the project would affect their business. They would like to see a median opening or a frontage road connection to Ridgecrest Road rather than just the right-in, right-out access. *They are on Phase 3 of the project and the design team will address their comments as that design gets underway.*
- A commenter would like to see Big Lake Road realigned around the lake near the intersection to tie into the 1/2-mile spacing better. This location would allow for more space if an interchange is required in the future.
- One property owner expressed concerns about access to his business off Lamont/Machen. He described his 27-year operations and access challenges and is concerned they will be compromised by the increasing traffic on Machen. He also expressed a preference for a 5-lane roadway rather than the 4-lane divided highway being designed. The project will be acquiring some property from the front of his property. He believes the ROW needs have been modified due to political pressure. Concerns from Tom with Alpine Septic:
- Many comments received were in favor of the 4-lane divided highway and oppose a 5-lane section being carried north.
- The owner of a sign shop on Machen Rd has concerns about access. The owner was directed to set up a meeting with the project team next week.
- Spenard Builders Supply was requesting that the raised median in front of her main entrance be removed. It was discussed that the left turn pocket for the stoplight at Deskas be shortened to allow for more space to accommodate this movement. The east most entrance is her main customer entrance. *The team followed up with Spenard Builders to bring their attention to a design change, which would maintain all existing access to the business.*
- A commenter would like to see a moose underpass just to the west of Spenard Builders Supply. This is where she sees all of the moose crossing the road.
- Several commenters would like to see the extension of W. Trevett Avenue west to the Parks Highway median opening.

- Received several comments that people are happy to see the Museum Drive Access moved.
- A commenter would like to be sure that there would be plenty of speed limit signs posted on Machen Rd.
- Rappe Construction would like us to take another look at the right-of-way needs and configuration on his parcel. He has also recently installed a septic system and wanted to be sure we were aware of this.
- Avanti Corporation provided a proposal for an internal circulation road.
- Received multiple comments in favor of the project.
- A commenter requested that a Museum Access southbound acceleration lane be added to the project.
- Property owners off of Museum Dr were concerned about Calico Dr that was drawn on the "Road Functional Classification Map; Future Parks Highway Study Area Based on Mat-Su Borough Plan" going through their homestead. There was an easement many years ago on this land, but it has since been vacated.
- There was a property owner south of the gas station on the east side of Sylvan that was concerned about the property acquisition affecting her property.
- A commenter who is a local user and also a cyclist in the area made two comments:
 - He had signed the petition opposing the 4-lane section. He is still concerned for the restaurant's business due to this project, but can see why things are working the way they are.
 - As a cyclist he doesn't currently like the sight distance at the intersection at Church Road. He was happy to see that we are going to be modifying that hill and think he will be able to see better.
- Attendees were encouraged to write comments on the strip plots. Comments left included:
 - Roundabout at Vine
 - Extend W. Trevett Ave west to the Parks Highway median opening.
 - Add a driveway at the end of W. Trevett Ave to Poppert's Milling.
 - Build a road on the ROW at the first left off Pittman Rd. Bring this roadway west towards the lake, and then make a 90-degree turn to the south across the railroad tracks to tie into Meadow Lakes Road.

Written and emailed comments

During the time period from April 1, 2012 to May 4, 2012, ninety-seven written or emailed comments were submitted. The comments generally fell into four categories: general support for the proposed improvements, opposition to the proposed design, concerns about specific properties, and then suggested design changes or particular concerns at specific locations. The property owners that made comments specific to their properties have been contacted for one-on-one conversations with the design team. The remaining comments are summarized below.

General Support for the Proposed Improvements (56 similar comments)

During this public comment period (April 1 to May 4, 2012) fifty-six people submitted comments supporting the current 4-lane design. Some of the representative comments were:

- I like the divided highway for safety and future traffic flow. Let's get going.
- As a person who commutes from Big Lake to Anchorage I have a vested interest in the safety of the Parks Highway for commuters. A five lane with a suicide lane is dangerous!! If you are going to upgrade the road put a divider between opposite directions of traffic.
- I like the proposed Meadow Lakes Lake realignment/access. Very important to our growing community. Overall, I think the 4-lane plan is better than the 5-lane alternative and much safer.
- I know that accessibility and convenience are important, but safety MUST come first. I am strongly in favor of the 4-lane divided highway for as long a stretch as possible. I drive that stretch of roadway every day and do NOT want to see a 5-lane highway—the death rate would certainly rise. Thank you.
- Great project! Totally in favor of it. Great design by State of Alaska people. My office is off a 4 lane section of the highway—people still find us. Safety is important. NOT in favor of suicide lanes. Thank you.
- I am in favor of the 4 lane split highway. With this project already in final planning stage, it is foolish to start the process over again. According to the Department of Labor & Workforce Development stats, the projected growth from 2000-2025 in the Mat Su Valley is 300%. Current numbers are: 55% growth Valley-wide; 106% in Knik-Fairview area; 68% Meadow Lakes; 40% Big Lake and 30% Willow. The traffic will only increase, and so will the death toll if we don't consider safety a priority.
- You are probably getting a lot of negative comments regarding the project. I have to admit, I had some concerns about the access to and from Meadow Lakes Loop Road since I live off Seymour Lake. Actually, I am VERY pleased with the access planned for both Phase 1 & 2 and Phase 3 into our neighborhood. I'm glad that there IS going to be a median! And I feel that the access points are within reasonable distances to access businesses on either side of the highway. Thank you for making this stretch of highway MUCH safer!

- Please do not change the already approved 4 lane divided plans! For the safety of those of us traveling these roads—a 4 lane divided is the smartest and safest way to proceed!
- Strongly support the 4-lane divided highway as proposed all the way through the Big Lake intersection. Strongly feel businesses will not be negatively impacted, in fact business should improve with safer access similar to divided highway east of Wasilla. Git er done!
- These improvements to the Parks Highway between MP 44-52 will do so much to improve safety of the highway. The divided highway concept is excellent and will help save lives. Also, the addition of left hand turn lanes will prevent people from being rear-ended and possibly killed, which has happened often on this highway. The four lanes will greatly improve safety as well because it will prevent head-on collisions when people pass on the two lane highway.

Opposition to the Proposed Improvements (10 similar comments)

During this public comment period (April 1 to May 4, 2012), ten people submitted comments opposing the proposed 4-lane section. Some of the representative comments were:

- Don't kill Wasilla economic growth with high-speed traffic and divided roads—Knik Goose Bay and Parks Highway in City and area adjacent.
- Does not provide safe and reasonable access to all—commercial corridor—no place for interstate highway—should be 5 lane and as traffic increases change to 7 lane. Bad idea!!!
- The whole concept of designating the Parks Hwy MP 44-52 as an interstate highway is fatally flawed from the start. Does DOT have a long range planning staff? If so, why are you getting ready to spend \$145M on a Band-Aid fix to relieve congestion on a route that was designed over 100 years ago? This project may relieve traffic congestion for a short period of time, but 10-15 years after the completion you will be forced to find bypass routes to reduce the traffic flow through the Mat Su Core Area, and the core is expanding every year. Each year you delay substantive work on bypass routes, you allow the eventual costs to increase dramatically as the land you'll need for the rights of way become more developed. While this may prove a temporary fix, the business you displace may be permanently affected. Your constant reminder that a 4 lane divided is safer than a 5 lane is undermined by the fact you are introducing a new hazard and traffic flow impediment by forcing motorists to make U-turns, possibly every ½ mile! Finally, I certainly hope your 20% design for Phase III includes proposed traffic lights and that you have a light in the design at the intersection of Parks Highway and Big Lake Road. If this is missing, I'll guarantee that the City of Houston will disapprove your design plan, again.

Other comments

Comments not specific to support or opposition of the project included:

- Include a traffic signal at the Parks Highway/Big Lake Road intersection (this comment was made by 5 people).

- Might look at putting small passages across the medians in the winter for the moose.
- Please consider an extra right short lane for turns off the highway.
- On the proposed airport exit (Museum Drive) provide a shoulder lane for us to gain enough speed for safe entry onto the highway. (This comment was made by 2 people)
- On the south side-Jacobsen Lake: bring left turn lane from Machen access back to include restaurant access; extend road from west across properties to include properties on north-west shores of Jacobsen Lake. Ensure, fund, include Museum (and Wasilla Airport) access.
- There is no turnaround for big trucks, fire trucks, etc. at the Parks/Big Lake intersection (this comment was made by 2 people).
- Assurance bike/ATV path will remain full length of project.
- Cooperation between DOT and Mat Su borough for completion of frontage roads.
- Provision for ATV, horse, bike, etc., crossing Parks Hwy at Pittman Road.
- Still concerned with turning a trailer or boat at a U-turn at the stoplights to go back home after filling with gas, etc. How safe are these U-turns in winter ice or heavy summer traffic? (2 people raised this concern).
- Add a traffic light to Johnson Road intersection.
- Two commenters suggested a series of roundabouts through the corridor.

Oral Testimony

Three people gave oral testimony to the court reporter. Comments made that were specific to their property were passed on to the design team. General comments about the project are summarized below:

- The signal at Stanley and the Parks is much needed. Do not move it to a different location and install it as soon as possible.
- Concern was raised about Scheele Road and the ability of semi trailer trucks being able to cross the highway at this location. Commenter prefers to see the highway widened with turn lanes instead of the divided four lane. Does not believe that signals will alleviate the problem.
- Pave Tweed Court and add pavement markings as part of the Parks Highway project.

Related documents on file:

Sign-in sheets

Handouts

Comment sheets received at meeting

Meeting graphics

Mailing list

Postcard mailer and e-mail reminders

Affidavits of Publication for display advertising