

# **Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan 2014 Draft Petersburg, Alaska / Meeting Summaries**

## **Introduction**

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) issued a Draft update to the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (SATP) in August 2014 for public review. DOT&PF held an open house at 5:30 pm and a public meeting at 6:30 pm on August 13, 2014, at the Petersburg Borough Assembly Chambers to discuss the Draft SATP. On August 14, 2014, at 10:00 am, DOT&PF staff met with the Petersburg Borough Manager and vice-mayor at the Borough Office.

A combined total of 57 people attended these meetings (see attached attendance lists).

## **DOT&PF Presentation at Open House/Public Meeting**

The public meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed:

- The DOT&PF statutory obligation to develop and maintain the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan, as a component of the Alaska Long Range Transportation Plan. The SATP directs investment in the regional transportation system over a 20-year period, identifying major project priorities, and guiding development of projects.
- The SATP was first published in 1980 and was updated and revised in 1986, 1999, and 2004 as an approved component of the Statewide Transportation Plan. To prepare the current update, DOT&PF conducted a scoping process in 2011, which led to development of the Draft SATP document in 2014.
- The comment period for this Draft SATP document is open until September 30, 2014. Written comments can be submitted to DOT&PF via email, mail, or fax.
- There are also current National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) processes for several projects that have separate comment periods and official administrative records. These include the proposed East Lynn Canal Highway, Angoon Airport, and the proposed road connection from Kake to Petersburg. Comments intended for consideration by an EIS must be submitted to the project manager of each EIS during its open comment periods.
- Trends for the Existing Transportation System – The Draft SATP analyzed and responds to trends that show a *decrease* in Southeast Alaska population, traffic on the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) and funding for transportation projects, coupled with *increases* in operations, maintenance and construction costs.

- Since 2006, AMHS Southeastern System annual maintenance and operation costs have increased from about \$110M to nearly \$140M, while ferry sailings have dropped from about 6,500/year to 6,000 year in that period.
- From 1991-2012, passenger ridership has declined from approximately 370,000 to 310,000/year, with vehicle traffic holding fairly steady at approximately 100,000 vehicles/year. Over that time, the ferry fleet has increased from six to ten ferries.
- The SATP considers many factors: three aging mainline ferries, comments received on the Scoping Report, interest in continuing existing ferry routes, cost to maintain the existing transportation system, regional transportation needs, current priorities and projects, and funding forecasts.
- Alternatives – The SATP considered four options, described in more detail and compared in Appendix C of the draft plan: (1) Baseline system (maintain existing), SATP Preferred Alternative, (3) Maximize Use of Existing Roads, and (4) Highway Route 7
- Recommendations – The Draft SATP recommends maintaining all existing highway and ferry routes and provides improvements that will further increase the mobility of people and goods, such as new road links. It also includes measures to help reduce some system costs, such as retirement or replacement of aging mainliners and use of day boats. It recommends the following specific changes to the transportation system, that would (1) better match capacity to demand, (2) keep ferry service to Bellingham, (3) keep cross Gulf ferry service, and (4) emphasize labor and fuel efficiency:
  - 2016 & 2017 (now 2018) – Two new Alaska Class Dayboat (ACD) ferries to service Lynn Canal
  - 2018 – Angoon Airport completed
  - 2020 – Lynn Canal Highway to Katzehin and ferry terminal completed
  - 2020 – Haines-Skagway shuttle ferry service initiated
  - 2020 – Kake-Petersburg Road (gravel single land), Wrangell Narrows shuttle ferry, and terminals completed
  - 2025 – New mainline ferry on-line; potential for a second mainline ferry to follow
  - 2028 – Fast ferry replacement
  - 2033 – Sitka-Warm Springs Bay road EIS completed (planning, environmental, design). Construction is not anticipated during the 20-year planning period.
- Capital costs to maintain and implement the preferred alternative over the next 20 years total \$1.3B for system refurbishments and \$1.2B for major projects (construction, procurement), respectively. The Plan reduces the annual operation and maintenance expense of the overall regional transportation system three percent.(Noted that the preferred alternative is not the least expensive alternative to operate and maintain, as maximizing the use of existing roads or constructing Highway Route 7 would reduce annual system costs by 15% to 16%, respectively.)

- The Draft SATP document also includes information about continuing efforts to maintain and improve the transportation system in Southeast Alaska, provides an overview of the existing system, identifies essential undeveloped transportation and utility corridors in the region (App. A), describes the scoping process and public comments (App. B), compares the four planning alternatives (App. C) and provides public and government involvement plans (App. D).
- Regarding the proposed road connection between Petersburg and Kake, the following information was shared about the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

Early 2015:

- Prepare a socioeconomic assessment and needs assessment for this proposed road,
- Develop a detailed Purpose and Need statement,
- Interview Kake, Petersburg and Kupreanof residents regarding their travel patterns and needs,
- Interview businesses regarding their transportation patterns and needs,
- Conduct a statistically valid survey of residents in Kake, Petersburg and Kupreanof regarding their opinion regarding the proposed road.
- Compare the alternatives.
- Findings of these assessments and surveys will be presented by DOT&PF at public meetings, and in meetings with municipalities, Tribes, Native corporations, and other stakeholders.

2015 – Conduct environmental baseline surveys and analysis

2016 – Draft EIS issued

2017 – Final EIS and Record of Decision issued

### **Questions & Answers, Comments (from open house, public and borough meetings)**

#### **key**

- Comment or Question
  - DOT&PF Response

#### Ferry Service

- Travel times – There was general concern about the potential for increases in ferry travel time from Petersburg to Juneau, for example if there were an increased number of Sitka mainline runs added that required a stop in Sitka in route to Juneau.
- Rather than spending funds on new capital projects, DOT&PF should get more efficient vessels (smaller, more scalable crews) that improve ferry service.
- Expectation that cost of Alaska Class Dayboat ferries will exceed estimates.
- There are things that could be done to make the ferry service more financially viable – attract people/businesses with wi-fi access, improve concessions.

- May need to change the mix of vessel types – traveling south from Petersburg, people need a mainliner to Seattle; traveling north to Juneau, can use a smaller vessel (e.g., Alaska Class Dayboat). Maybe plan for fewer mainliners in the future?
- Ferries are important for moving heavy equipment around Southeast Alaska for business use. Barge system no longer has competition, so rates are increasing. Ferries are not a feasible option due to scheduling issues.

#### Frequency of Ferry Service

- The crux of the issue is to look at ferry scheduling and compare it to the past service. Why has Petersburg lost so many sailings?
- Ferry schedule is so scaled back that people don't get off in small communities, since they would have to stay too long to catch the next vessel.
- Concern that the draft SATP does not feasibly and effectively address Petersburg's need for ferry service. Petersburg now has only about 30% of the ferry service that it had in the 1980's. It used to have six northbound and six south-bound each week. Need more frequent service.
  - DOT&PF notes that the frequency of mainline service is directly tied to service to Bellingham, vs. service to Prince Rupert.
- Concern that the different sections in DOT&PF "point at each other" when public concerns are raised. For example, when people raise concerns about ferry scheduling, the planning staff puts that off to the AMHS schedulers. This feels non-responsive to members of the public.

#### Data Regarding Ferry System Use

- The draft SATP is based on ferry travel data/trends that show level / declining ridership. However, these declines are due to the poor scheduling that discourages ridership of regional residents and independent travelers, and reduced use by businesses for freight. Do not agree with how trends are shown and used to support the plan's conclusions.
- Specific comments about "clusters" of mainline ferries going by (not all with full ridership), then large gaps in schedule. This reduces demand and ridership.
- Plan is based on trend data from a system that is "broken". Need to recognize that the ferry system schedules have directly led to decreased ridership. Should build a plan to fix trends and turn them around. The plan should not respond to these trends, but approach it from a perspective of what changes can be made in the ferry system to support increased ridership and freight use.
- The SATP assumes that each Alaska Marine Highway Service (AMHS) vessel provides service for 40 weeks/year.
  - Clarified that ferry service is provided in the region 52 weeks/year, but each vessel has some time out of service each year (e.g., for maintenance).

#### Petersburg Ferry Terminal

- It is essential to the community of Petersburg to have a ferry terminal downtown, for the economic benefit of the community. Important for other communities too.

### Proposed Kake-Petersburg Road

- Not anti-road, but roads need to make sense.
- Concern with roads not being as safe as ferry service. Avalanches (Juneau Access), winter road conditions (snow, ice), accidents, and impracticability of keeping the road open to safe winter travel.
- Concern that roads will bring additional costs to communities for police, search and rescue, emergency response – both staff and equipment. State Troopers don't want to cover it.
  - The Kake-Petersburg Road would be open year round. The EIS will provide an analysis of the feasibility and cost of this maintenance.
- Concern that DOT&PF is not currently maintaining existing roads within communities adequately; there is apparently not the capacity or funding to expand their maintenance responsibilities to add new road(s). Specific concerns expressed about the surface on Nordic Drive and the need for additional crosswalks / painting of crosswalks.
  - The Kake-Petersburg Road would be retained by DOT&PF for maintenance, not transferred to a local community's responsibility.
- Concern about inevitable costs to communities for police service, emergency medical services, etc.
  - The EIS will evaluate costs to communities, such as for police and emergency services.
- DOT&PF staff in Petersburg is already fully busy and equipment is fully utilized. Does not seem feasible to take on maintenance of a new remote road.
- Suggest that a survey of public opinion regarding the proposed Kake-Petersburg road ask about alternative ways to use the \$40M construction cost to address regional transportation needs. People would rather have this funding reallocated to ferry transportation improvements. Why spend \$40M on a project that people don't want?
  - Reprogramming the funding is not be within DOT&PF's authority.
- Concern that City of Kake only supported construction of a road in conjunction with a desired power line, but would not support the road in absence of the power line. However, the powerline will not be feasible. It will cost \$70-\$90M to build the line and would not be supported by users. Would have to be State subsidized.
- In a teleconference with the Petersburg Borough, the City of Kake expressed concerns about a road providing access by Petersburg residents and others to subsistence resources important to the Kake community.
- Where will ferry landings be?
  - The SATP calls for a state-funded ferry to provide service for the Kake-Petersburg road connection, but it could be contracted out (paid by state funds). The ferry would operate for certain hours of the day, on-demand during those times.
  - The locations of the ferry landings that would service this road have not been determined. This would be addressed in the EIS process.
- DOT&PF notes that comments regarding the proposed power line, will need to be directed to the Alaska Energy Authority. Expect that the US Forest Service will be leading the EIS process for this project.

### Proposed Warm Spring Bay Road & Terminal

- The road to Warm Spring Bay would include a one-mile tunnel, which is not practicable. Should not propose tunnels in such a tectonically active region. The geology in the area is challenging.
- All options would be prohibitively expensive.
  - The costs of road/tunnel construction will be fully analyzed in an EIS that would be prepared at a later date for this proposed project.

### Proposed East Lynn Canal Highway (Juneau Access)

- Concern that Petersburg will lose visitation if the Juneau Access road is constructed.
- Concern about services for walk-on passengers.

### Roads in Southeast Alaska

- Emphasis on roads is misplaced in an archipelago environment. Need to focus on marine highway system.
- Do not favor the Highway 7 alternative, which would require people to have vehicles or would add to costs of non-vehicle passengers to pay for ground transportation. Concern that the Highway 7 alternative would reduce travelers and impact local economic benefit.

### Sustainability

- Concern that plan does not address issues related to sustainability (environmental, economic, social).

### AMHS & Transportation Policy

- DOT&PF should not expect or demand the AMHS to make money; highways in the Lower 48 do not “make money”.
- Feel that, unfortunately, politics is determining the transportation solutions.

**Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan – Draft Plan**  
**Attendance at Petersburg, Alaska meetings**  
**August 13 and 14, 2014**

**Open House and Public Meeting**

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Arnold Enge         | 29. Karin McCullough   |
| 2. Becky Regula        | 30. Kelly Demko        |
| 3. Bob Lynn            | 31. Kelly Swihart      |
| 4. Brad Taylor         | 32. Linda Herff        |
| 5. Butch Anderson      | 33. Liz Cabrera        |
| 6. Catherine Kowalski  | 34. Martha Smith       |
| 7. Cindy Lagoudakis    | 35. Mary Koppes        |
| 8. Cindy Olson         | 36. Mike Stainbrook    |
| 9. Dana Thynes         | 37. Mindy Swihart      |
| 10. Darcel Schouweiler | 38. Nancy Berg         |
| 11. David Berg         | 39. Nancy Strand       |
| 12. Deb Hurley         | 40. Nicole McMurren    |
| 13. Elizabeth Perry    | 41. Pamela Van Houten  |
| 14. Eric Lee           | 42. Rick Williams      |
| 15. Erica Worhatch     | 43. Rocky Swihart      |
| 16. Erik Kegel         | 44. Ross Nannauck, III |
| 17. George Wood        | 45. Sal Cangialosi     |
| 18. Glo Wollen         | 46. Schouweiler        |
| 19. Harvey Gilliland   | 47. Shannon Foley      |
| 20. Jack Slaght        | 48. Sharon Hunter      |
| 21. Jaime Cabral       | 49. Stephen Giesbrecht |
| 22. Jeff Pfundt        | 50. Steven Samuelson   |
| 23. Jill Williams      | 51. Sue Paulsen        |
| 24. John Birks         | 52. Sue Swihart        |
| 25. John Havrilek      | 53. Susan Erickson     |
| 26. Jona Lynn          | 54. Tamara Evens       |
| 27. Joyce Bergmann     | 55. Theresa Winther    |
| 28. Judy Henderson     | 56. Tom Reinarts       |

**Petersburg Borough Meeting**

1. Steve Giesbrecht, Petersburg Borough Manager
2. Cynthia Lagoudakis, Vice-Mayor & Chamber of Commerce Director

**DOT&PF Team**

Andy Hughes, DOT&PF  
Marie Heidemann, DOT&PF  
Jan Caulfield, Jan Caulfield Consulting