

► Northern Access to U-Med District



SCOPING SUMMARY REPORT

April 2011



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NORTHERN ACCESS TO U-MED DISTRICT

Prepared for:

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

APU.....	Alaska Pacific University
DOT&PF.....	State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
UAA.....	University of Alaska Anchorage
U-Med.....	Northern Access to University-Medical

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

The State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is initiating the Northern Access to University-Medical (U-Med) District Reconnaissance Study on access and circulation needs in the U-Med District. One of the main objectives of this project is to evaluate alternatives to improve access to the U-Med District from the north and east.

Over the last two decades, growth in the U-Med District has been rapid. Construction of new medical offices, university buildings, and hospital wings is continuing, and the area's roads are experiencing increased traffic pressure. Data from major employers shows that over 30 percent of U-Med staff, employees, and patients live north and east of the district. An access route that improves traffic flow to the U-Med District from the northeast will increase connectivity in the area, reduce out-of-direction travel, relieve traffic pressure on adjacent area roads, and decrease traffic congestion on Northern Lights Boulevard, Lake Otis Parkway, Boniface Parkway, and Tudor Road. In addition, a proposed northern access could improve emergency services access between northeast Anchorage and the medical services in the U-Med District.

This reconnaissance study includes public involvement, preliminary environmental fieldwork, and reconnaissance level engineering design to evaluate potential options. This process will aid the development of an engineering reconnaissance report that will focus on conceptual alternatives and costs. The objective of the public involvement process is to work directly with the interested public to ensure that their issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.

The process of gathering initial information from the public and agencies is called scoping. The purpose and need for this project, potential alternatives, and the possible issues and concerns that need to be addressed during the environmental review and design are addressed during the scoping process. This section of the report summarizes the public and agency scoping process for this project. Comments were received from a variety of stakeholders (or interested parties) including local residents, resource agency representatives, and interested organizations and institutions.

1.2 Project Team

The project team is listed below.

2.0 CONTRACTING AGENCY

DOT&PF

- Kelly Petersen, P.E., Project Manager
- Alvin Talbert, Consultant Coordinator

DOWL HKM

- Steve Noble, P.E., PTOE, Project Manager
- Stewart Osgood, P.E., Public Involvement Facilitator
- Kristen Hansen, Environmental Task Leader
- Joe Christopher, Environmental Specialist
- Timothy Potter, Planning Lead
- Maryellen Tuttell, AICP, Public Involvement Task Leader

2.1 Public Involvement Method

The following methods were included in the Public Involvement Plan and were used to inform the public – along with the local, state, and federal resource agencies – about the project, its objectives, and the reconnaissance process:

- Public Meetings
- Agency Meetings
- Campus Student and Faculty Meetings
- Stakeholder/Institutional Meetings
- Community Council and Other Interest Group Meetings
- Project Website
- Project E-Mail Distribution List

- Project Flyers
- PowerPoint Presentations and Display Boards
- Comment Analysis

2.1.1 Mailing List of Potentially Affected Interests

Two mailing lists have been developed for the project. They include a general public list and an agency list. The general public list was assembled by identifying all residents and property owners within the vicinity of the project corridor and adding to it those persons who indicated an interest in this project via e-mail or at a project meeting, or had expressed an interest in previous projects in this area. The mailing list contains approximately 7,100 addresses.

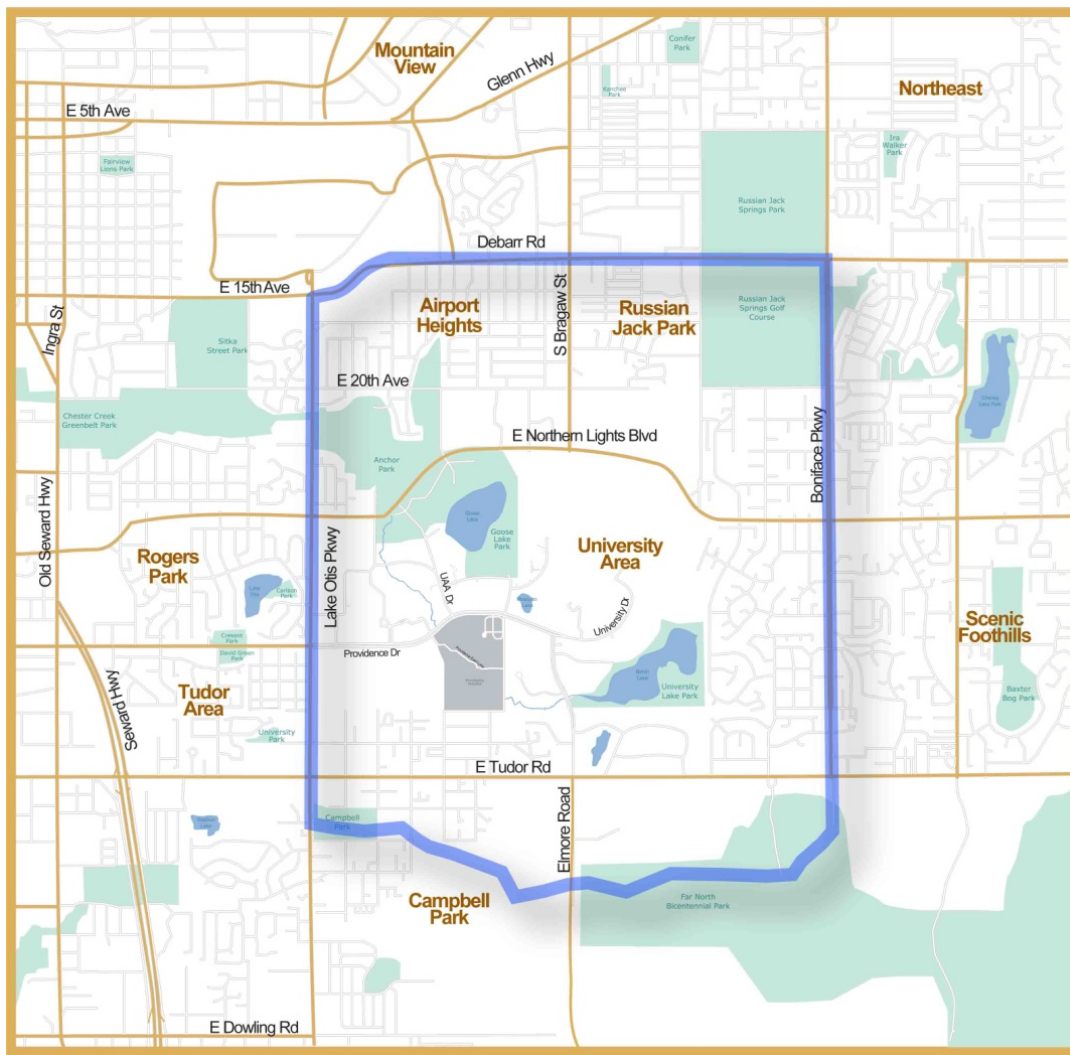


Figure 1: Northern Access Project Mailing List Boundary Map

The agency list includes local, state, and federal resource agencies and officials who might have an interest or concern, environmental or otherwise, in the project.

In addition to the mailing list, an e-mail distribution list was created. The e-mail list contains approximately 180 e-mail addresses, including project team members. The mailing and e-mail lists can be provided on request.

2.1.2 Informational Flyer/Meeting Announcement

An informational flyer was developed, mailed, and e-mailed to members of the general public list to announce the upcoming public meeting on May 5, 2009. The flyer contained a project description, meeting overview, an area map, and project contact information. The meeting was also circulated in the University of Anchorage's e-newsletter "Green and Gold" on May 5, 2009.

In addition, posters were displayed around both the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) and Alaska Pacific University (APU) campuses.

The first campus meeting for staff, students and faculty of the UAA and APU was announced in the University of Anchorage's e-newsletter "Green and Gold" on May 27, 2009, and e-mails were sent to the students, staff and faculty at APU. In addition, posters were displayed around both the UAA and APU campuses.

The second campus meeting for staff, students and faculty of UAA and APU was announced in the University of Anchorage's e-newsletter "Green and Gold" on November 5, 10, 12, 17, and 19, 2009, and e-mails were sent to the students, staff and faculty at APU and the project e-mail list. In addition, posters were displayed around both the UAA and APU campuses. All the public meeting materials are attached as Appendix A.

2.1.3 Advertisements

An advertisement for the public meeting appeared in the *Anchorage Daily News* (weekly circulation approximately 1,400) on May 5 and May 18, 2009.

2.1.4 Project Website

DOWL HKM hosted the project website, www.umednorthernaccess.com. The website was developed to provide specific information regarding the project area, objectives, schedule,

project documents, and team members, in addition to providing a place to review and make public comments. A copy of the website is attached as Appendix B.

2.1.5 Project E-Mail Address

Comments about the project could be sent to the project-specific e-mail address, umednorthernaccess@dowlhkm.com. This address was included on the public meeting flyer, the newspaper announcements, and the comment form passed out at meetings, and was also announced at the public meeting.

2.1.6 Comment Forms

A project comment form was developed and passed out at the public meeting. The form includes an area to add contact information for those who wanted to be added to the project mailing and e-mail lists.

3.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

3.1 Public Meeting

The public meeting was held at Wendler Middle School on Tuesday, May 19, 2009, from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Community members signed in and met with project staff one-on-one to discuss individual issues and concerns. Boards with project information were displayed around the meeting room. At 6:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., project staff gave a half-hour presentation. The following topics were included in the presentation:

- Meeting Purpose
- Project Description
- Project Purpose and Need
- Project History
- Existing Conditions
- Project Schedule
- Public Involvement Process

At the conclusion of the presentation, the meeting was opened up for public questions and concerns. At the end of the question and answer period, the one-on-one discussion with individuals resumed and lasted until 9:00 p.m. Approximately 84 people, not including project team members, signed-in at the meeting.

A meeting was also held on campus at the Consortium Library on Wednesday, June 3, 2009, from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Students, faculty, and staff from UAA and APU signed in and met with project staff one-on-one to discuss individual issues and concerns. Boards with project information were displayed around the meeting room. Approximately 9 people, not including project team members, signed-in at the meeting.

An additional meeting was held on campus at the Consortium Library on Thursday, November 19, 2009, from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. to enable students, faculty, and staff from UAA and APU another opportunity to learn about and comment on the project during term time. Project staff were available to meet with the public one-on-one and discuss individual issues and concerns. Boards with project information were displayed around the meeting room and a presentation was given at 1:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. Approximately 11 people, not including project team members, signed-in at the meeting.

In addition to the public meetings stakeholder meetings were held with the following institutions and groups:

- University Alaska Anchorage - April 16, 2009
- Alaska Pacific University - April 17, 2009
- Providence Alaska Medical Center - April 27, 2009
- Alaska Public Telecommunications, Inc. - May 1, 2009
- Anchorage School District - May 1, 2009
- Municipality of Anchorage Transit - May 14, 2009
- Anchorage Fire Department - May 15, 2009
- Alaska Regional Hospital - May 19, 2009

- Alaska Psychiatric Institute - June 4, 2009
- South Central Foundation and Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium - June 9, 2009
- Municipality of Anchorage Planning - June 9, 2009
- McLaughlin Youth Center - June 10, 2009
- Utilities (AWWU and ML&P) - June 11, 2009
- U-Med Green District - September 11, 2009
- Alaska Public Telecommunications, Inc - September 24, 2009
- Alaska Center for the Environment - October 12, 2009

The team also presented project information at the following community council meetings:

- Airport Heights Community Council - April 16, 2009
- University Area Community Council - May 6, 2009
- Rogers Park Community Council - May 11, 2009
- Russian Jack Community Council - May 13, 2009
- Campbell Park Community Council - May 14, 2009

Notes from the stakeholder meetings are attached as Appendix C.

3.2 Documentation of Public Comments

A total of 168 comments were received from the start of the project through December 4, 2009 (the conclusion of the comment period). These have been reviewed and analyses and are included as Appendix D. Some of the main themes that emerged through analysis of the public comments included:

- Different opinions on the purpose of the project (regional circulation vs. local access).
- Different opinions on the need for the project.
- Interest in non-road alternatives (increased transit, park and ride facilities, transportation demand management).

- Interest in innovative construction practices such as cut-and cover.
- A desire for pedestrian bridges or other accommodations to maintain trail integrity.
- Opposition to any road corridor through the project area.
- Concerns about maintaining recreational use of undeveloped university lands.
- Concerns about pedestrian safety (on and off campus).
- Support for the traffic benefits a new access would provide.
- Questions about impacts to roads outside U-Med.
- Concerns about splitting UAA lands and the integrity of the UAA and APU campuses.
- A desire to evaluate a wide range of possible transportation improvements.
- Concerns about impacts to wetlands and wildlife habitat.
- Concerns about impacts to natural open space and quality of life.

4.0 AGENCY PARTICIPATION

4.1 Agency Meeting

A flyer was sent to the agencies that provided background information on the project and announced the agency meeting. The agency meeting was held at DOWL HKM's office at 4041 B Street, Anchorage, on Wednesday, May 20, 2009, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Agencies representatives signed in and met with project staff. Boards with project information were displayed around the meeting room. Project staff gave a half-hour presentation followed by a question and answer session. Approximately 6 people, not including project team members, signed-in at the meeting. Materials and notes from the agency meeting are attached as Appendix E.

4.2 Agency Comment Summary

Although no written comments were received, the major issues discussed at the scoping meeting are summarized below:

- How will the traffic numbers be affected by the new sports arena?

- The U-Med district is an area with moose, bear, coyote, and smaller mammals living in the vicinity. Concern we noted regarding the interface between traffic and moose which use the area as a pass through.
- There is an outlet at the northeast corner of Goose Lake, which drains along the trails between the lake and Northern Lights Boulevard. There are also some wetlands on the southwest side that parallel UAA Drive. Would those be impacted?
- What does the “green district” designation entail?
- Could the project could be funded to provide an internal shuttle system and not just a new roadway?
- Helping movement within the campus would be a good idea.
- People would be more likely to use a shuttle system if it ran on a more frequent schedule.
- Does DOWL HKM have any soil data from the project area?
- Would routing a road underground be a feasible option?
- It is important to see how much congestion could be relieved with shuttles and upgrades of existing roads (such as UAA Drive) first, before considering other options.
- Will the Highway 2 Highway project have any impact on the out-of-direction traffic?
- Data on Anchorage Fire Department routes and travel times would be helpful.
- Possible historic structures within the project area may need to be evaluated if the project moves forward.

5.0 SUMMARY

The above public and agency comments provide valuable insight into the issues that would need to be resolved if a project is proposed to move forward in design and permitting.