

West Dowling Road Connection Project
Scoping Summary Report

AKSAS Project No. 55012



Prepared for:

**Alaska Department of Transportation
and Public Facilities
Central Region**

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November 2003

**WEST DOWLING ROAD CONNECTION
SCOPING SUMMARY REPORT
NOVEMBER 2003**

Public and agency issues summary and appendices

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is developing an environmental document regarding the proposed connection of West Dowling Road to serve the long-term transportation needs of the City of Anchorage. The project would connect West Dowling Road from the Old Seward Highway west to Minnesota Drive.

The reasons for the project are to relieve traffic congestion on nearby arterial roads and improve cross-town access. The proposed connection will provide east/west traffic flow, reduce traffic on Tudor Road, and help implement the goal of developing a more connected roadway pattern in Anchorage as identified in the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The LRTP has identified this project as one of the top three projects to complete and anticipates the roadway will be a minimum of four lanes wide.

1.2. SCOPING OVERVIEW

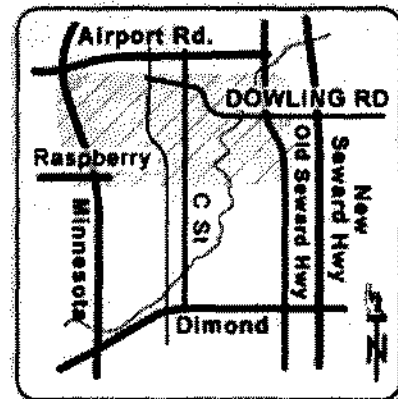
Scoping is the process through which project team members listen to ideas and concerns of people and agencies affected by the project and identify a range of alternatives and issues needing further study. Scoping ensures that alternatives and future studies associated with the project reflect community and agency input. The purpose of the Scoping Summary Report is to document the results of the public and agency scoping conducted from September 2002 through September 2003.

Scoping is the first stage in the development of a comprehensive environmental document that meets the statutory requirements for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA.)

The purpose of scoping is to:

- Provide early notification to local, state and federal agencies and the public of the NEPA process being undertaken by DOT&PF.
- Provide an opportunity for agencies and the public to discuss the project with DOT&PF staff.
- Provide forums and other means to gather input, ideas, questions and concerns.
- Ensure early data gathering from coordinating agencies and entities (e.g., utilities).
- Engage stakeholders in identifying alternatives.

Project Area Map



The West Dowling Road Connection scoping process:

- Developed a mailing list of interested parties and property owners.
- Informed area residents, businesses, and interest groups of the NEPA process.
- Provided forums to gather input and ideas.
- Provided opportunities for local, state and federal agencies to be involved.

1.3. TASKS OVERVIEW

The public outreach approach for the West Dowling Road Connection project included the following tasks during the scoping phase (documentation is provided in Appendices A through D):

- Task 1. Develop an approach and budget
- Task 2. Schedule, conduct, and document Stakeholder interviews
- Task 3. Develop and maintain an interested parties mailing list
- Task 4. Develop and maintain an interested parties e-mail list
- Task 5. Develop distribution methods for public information materials
- Task 6. Coordinate development of a project website
- Task 7. Develop and distribute newsletter #1
- Task 8. Develop and distribute press release #1 and display ad #1
- Task 9. Coordinate, develop materials for, conduct and document combined public and agency scoping meetings #1 & #2
- Task 10. Develop and distribute postcard #1
- Task 11. Develop and distribute press release #2 and display ad #2
- Task 12. Coordinate, develop materials for, conduct and document combined public and agency scoping meetings #3 & #4
- Task 13. Coordinate and document communication with interested parties, agencies and neighborhood groups and businesses
- Task 14. Develop, distribute and document agency scoping letter and attachments

2. SCOPING MEETINGS

Two types of scoping meetings were conducted for the West Dowling Road Connection project: individual stakeholder interviews, and combined public and agency scoping meetings. Stakeholder interviews provide an early, informal opportunity to meet with agency representatives to assess their expectations for involvement and to begin identifying agency-specific issues and concerns regarding the project. During the interviews, agency representatives encouraged the project team to combine the public and agency scoping meetings and follow up with agencies individually or in writing to gather formal agency input, rather than conduct separate agency scoping meetings.

2.2 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The following agencies and organizations participated in the stakeholder interviews.

ORGANIZATION/AGENCY
Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) Transportation Planning
MOA Public Transportation
MOA Cultural and Recreational Services Department; Parks and Beautification Division
Alaska Railroad Corporation
Anchorage School District Transportation
Taku Campbell Community Council
State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Habitat and Restoration Division
Anchorage Fire Department/EMS
Alaska Center for the Environment
Davis Constructors and Engineers, Inc.
Central Paving Products
Anchorage Citizens Coalition
Chugach Electric
US Army Corps of Engineers
Assembly District 4
Assembly District 3
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Anchorage Chamber of Commerce

Some common themes emerged from the Stakeholder interviews:

- There is broad support for the development of an east/west arterial in the project area.
- There is a high level of understanding of the need for an east/west arterial and the transportation problems such an arterial will resolve.
- There is much support for coordinating with the Taku/Campbell Community Council.
- The majority of people interviewed did not know the project was one of the top three transportation projects for the city.
- The majority of people interviewed would like to be involved in the process.

Concerns and comments expressed during the stakeholder interviews included comments on the following topics:

Congestion

- Tudor gets jammed up and there is no way to get from Tudor to get across town east/west. The section of Dowling from Old Seward to C Street is a poor road.
- How is it that all new road projects in the city are to resolve the congestion at Tudor and Lake Otis? Unsure how this project relates to that connection.
- The congestion at the intersection with International Airport Way and Little Minnesota is terrible. An off ramp like at 76th would be good.
- 64th and C is terribly congested – need a traffic light there or at least a right-in/right-out only.
- Currently there is no access from the residential area bounded by Minnesota, Arctic, Raspberry and Diamond except onto Arctic – causes congestion on Arctic and unfair traffic distribution in the neighborhood.
- At-grade railroad crossing at C Street contributes to the congestion.

Mix of traffic

- Concern about industrial traffic mixing with local residential and through traffic.
- Proximity of residential to industrial areas is a problem – these are not compatible uses.

East/West access - connectivity

- Need a better connection to New Seward and International Airport Way.
- The current east/west movement is very difficult. (6)
- The city needs east/west arterials in order to make the transportation system work.
- Transit coordination – Arctic is one of the top five transit routes in the city. (2)
- Any improved or new east/west connections help improve the school district transportation work more efficiently.
- When Arctic was closed for construction recently, it really illustrated the problem of trying to get out of the industrial areas.
- This project provides a logical linkage.

Property impacts

- The most important need is to provide good access to the area and to minimize residential property impacts.

Safety

- We've seen several accidents in this section of C Street in the project vicinity.
- Arctic only has a few intersections with traffic lights, which makes it difficult to make left turns and/or cross traffic.
- New fire station is planned at Tudor – emergency services need better access to the area.
- Intersection of Arctic and Dowling seems dangerous.
- Seen a lot of accidents at 64th and C. The Carrs distribution center is located on one side.
- At-grade railroad crossings mean that school buses need to stop at each one, which causes congestion.
- The at-grade crossing at Arctic makes it difficult to get across – the geometry is poor. This project needs to resolve the Arctic crossing.
- The proposed improvements at the C street railroad crossing will help.

Local circulation

- The industrial areas need internal circulation issues resolved. We are limited in our ability to grow because the system is so bad.
- The at grade crossings for the railroad at Arctic and C need to be removed, at least the C street crossing needs to be grade-separated. (5)

Suggested ideas for alternatives

- Interested to know if the existing system can be upgraded without building a new roadway. This will need to be addressed in order to consider impacts to Tina Lake.
- Would like the improvements done so that the road does not appear to be a major thoroughfare – give it a residential feel, make it pedestrian friendly.
- Would like to see smaller fixes to the system and where that gets us, i.e., frontage road, overpass at International Airport Way, Raspberry-to-Arctic connection.
- Build the road to the same standards as Tudor – two lanes, center turn lane.
- Rebuilt bridge over Campbell Creek needs to have abutments pulled back as far as possible.
- Arctic is a good example of nice street-scaping – have the Dowling extension look like that.
- 68th Street seems like a straight shot, why not go around Briarwood?
- Need an interchange or at least an overpass at International Airport Way and New Seward.

Industrial/Commercial

- There are dust control issues currently along the unpaved section of Dowling.
- As long as the industrial traffic stays in industrial areas, noise and dust do not impact the residential areas.
- Currently, in the unpaved section of Dowling along Chugach Electric, there is no access to water/sewer, which limits the growth potential of the industrial area. Would like to better utilize the current property before buying new industrial land.
- The right-of-way for Dowling does not extend to Little Minnesota; the industrial users in this area have an informal agreement with Chugach Electric to use the road as a through road to get to International Airport Way.
- Quality Asphalt Products is currently using the Raspberry Rd. extension through an agreement with the Municipality of Anchorage to access a job site at the airport.
- Industrial users will track rocks, mud, etc., and material onto the new roadway, need to work through this issue.
- Narrow streets are a problem for trucks.
- Frontage roads are the next best thing for freight movement to overpasses and interchanges.
- Need access to the airport for commercial/industrial users.
- There may be economic development issues to help connect fish plant with airport.
- All railroad spurs are active and well used.
- Quality Asphalt Products and Wilder Construction need to use the main track to off load – railroad is adding a double track to allow industrial users to use the line, and still move passenger trains through the area.

Residential

- 600 – 700 new homes will be built in the Sand Lake area over the next 5 to 7 years or sooner. The current transportation system can't handle what we have now.
- The 250 acres of residential development near the airport is poised for development – will put additional burdens on the transportation system. (Same development as above.)
- The Sand Lake gravel pit residential development has been appealed, in part because of traffic issues.
- Need to look at where people are working and where they are living. What are the demographics for the residents in the project area? What are the projected demographics for the new Sand Lake development?
- Employment centers are too far from homes – can't walk or bike to work.

- Need buffers and transitional areas from higher density to lower.
- Protect neighborhoods.
- Air quality concerns in the residential areas, we need to get the traffic through the neighborhoods.
- Minimize traffic impacts to the residential area bordering Raspberry by allowing several access points into the neighborhood and not just one at Rovenna. We don't want to see traffic volumes increase dramatically in front of Campbell Elementary School.
- Campbell and Taku elementary school boundaries were determined in part because of the arterials in the area. These two schools are among those with the largest area to cover.
- Romig Middle School on Minnesota relies heavily on Arctic to transport kids – school starts at 8:15 a.m. – peak time – very difficult to get the bus through the project area.
- Concerned about increased traffic in the neighborhoods, need to tackle this head on.

Environmental

- Don't understand why Tina Lake is a concern; it is currently completely surrounded by industrial uses.
- A very high threshold needs to be met in order to issue a permit for a development that would impact a high-grade wetland. The burden is on the permit applicant to show there are no other reasonable alternatives, there is a demonstrated high need for the facility, and the facility has broad support.
- Pile structures are preferable to conventional construction techniques (fill.) If the road is elevated and/or the lake is completely spanned and the applicant uses innovative design to minimize impacts than it is more likely that a permit could be issued.
- Tina Lake is an "A" grade wetland demanding the highest level of protection. (2)
- The Anchorage Wetlands Management Plan shows Tina Lake protected.
- A clear span bridge over Campbell Creek is O.K.
- A local business was allowed to fill along one side of Tina Lake – this has caused drainage problems in the area that need to be resolved.
- Improve air quality.
- Minimize impacts to Campbell Creek. Keep number of crossings to a minimum, wouldn't object to an additional crossing if necessary.
- If crossing Campbell Creek, maintain setbacks, clear span, cross at a location with little contiguous wetlands.
- No known sensitive/endangered species in Tina Lake

Pedestrian and Transit

- Concerned about how this project will address pedestrian issues – this is not a pedestrian friendly city, especially in the winter.
- Need pedestrian and transit routes for east/west- walkways, not just sidewalks, but separated pathways like on 15th so that the plowed snow doesn't cover the walkway.
- Arctic Blvd is a primary transit corridor – a good transit corridor supports a mix of residential, retail, and offices.
- The transit corridors that are currently designated are not tailored to what is in place currently. Ensure the project is transit/pedestrian friendly.
- Increase transit opportunities.
- Better interface with public transit and school transportation. Difficult for kids at Polaris and ABC to walk to school.
- Pedestrian access to transit routes is critical.
- Diamond Center is a transit hub – the concept is to feed the hub with feeder buses in the neighborhoods.
- Need to provide bus service to major employers – seafood plant, for example.
- Airport express service will start next year.
- Inefficient bus service.

Related Projects

- Concerned about potential linkages to Bragaw project – against the Bragaw connection.
- Supportive of the Bragaw connection – important link for businesses.
- Ensure good connections to the airport. Current airport work will increase capacity and opportunity.
- Use the Comprehensive Plan for guidance (3).
- The Comprehensive Plan is a good plan, concerned about how it is being implemented. The strategies to implement don't match the goals in the plan.
- We have heard that funding has been identified to connect Raspberry to Arctic – the project team needs to follow up on this.
- The school at New Seward (Polaris)– is difficult to access.

Other

- Use existing right of way where possible.
- Need to know who the major employers are for the area and what the travel patterns are from the project area.

- The existing right of way was purchased using federal money, if a different alignment is developed, will the money need to be paid back?
- Understand the need for infrastructure.

A copy of the stakeholder summary is included in Appendix B.

2.3 PUBLIC AND AGENCY SCOPING MEETINGS: OCTOBER 2002

The first set of public and agency scoping meetings was held on October 30, 2002. One open house was held from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in the DOT & PF conference room at 4111 Aviation Dr., and a later open house was held from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Campbell Elementary School. Fifty-six people signed in at the lunchtime meeting, while eighteen signed in at the evening meeting.

The public meetings were advertised through a newsletter mailing to 5,126 residents, businesses, agencies, property owners, and interested parties. The meetings were also advertised through two display ads in the Anchorage Daily News, a press release distributed through email to several hundred people, and a newspaper article in the Anchorage Daily News the day of the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to provide participants an overview of the project and to hear their input regarding issues that should be addressed and potential ideas for making the needed road connection.

There was broad agreement in the meeting that an east/west connection was needed and that Dowling road was the logical connection. Participants were very aware of the traffic issues to be resolved and offered suggestions about how to approach the alternatives.

A complete summary of the meetings, sign in sheets, comment forms, and PowerPoint slides are included in Appendix C.

2.4 PUBLIC AND AGENCY SCOPING MEETINGS: MAY 2003

The second set of public and agency scoping meetings was held for the West Dowling Road Connection Project on May 14, 2003. One open house was held from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Alaska Seafood International lobby and a later open house was held from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Campbell Elementary School. Forty-four people signed in at the lunchtime meeting and twenty-three signed in at the evening meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to share the issues and ideas that had been heard to date. The meeting also served to present the preliminary concepts for public input.

The meeting was announced through a postcard mailer distributed to all properties within the study area and to the interested parties mailing list. The meeting was also announced through two display ads placed in the Anchorage Daily News and a press release distributed by email to all of the community councils, assembly offices, agency contacts and the media.

A complete summary of the meetings, sign in sheets, comment forms, and PowerPoint slides are included in Appendix C.

3. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS RECEIVED

One hundred and seventy individuals and agency representatives have provided comments in the West Dowling Road Connection project during the scoping process. Thirty-eight written comments have been received to date.

3.1. AGENCY COMMENTS

Agency comments were provided through the stakeholder interviews in August 2002, through participation in scoping meetings in October 2002 and May 2003, and again in response to the agency scoping letter and packet in September 2003. The following summarizes the agency comments received.

FEDERAL AGENCIES

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – Region 10 (EPA)

- Concerned about affecting Tina Lake, Blueberry Lake, and wetlands associated with Campbell Creek.
- Supports clear span crossings of lakes and wetlands.
- Supportive of the “S” Curves concept or the Raspberry – Dowling Concept.

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)

- The project, as proposed, may adversely affect EFH and anadromous fish resources.
- There are measures that can be incorporated into the project which may lessen or eliminate potential adverse effects to EFH, such as careful alternatives analysis, design stipulations, and best management practices.
- Encourage early involvement of resource agencies in bridge designs and wetlands crossings.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

- Permitting authority for Tina Lake impacts.
- Tina Lake needs to be protected as an open space/wetlands. The Corps can regulate the surrounding development in response to complaints (none on the books at this time.)

U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife

- Need to avoid impacts to Tina Lake – show that there is no reasonable alternative.
- Responsible for providing information and comments on 404 permitting.

STATE AGENCIES

Department of Natural Resources – Division of Mining, Land and Water (DNR)

- Supports replacing the bridge crossing Campbell Creek.

- Concerns about Tina Lake and Blueberry Lake.
- Recommends adopting the “S” Curve concept for the project. The “S” Curve alternative avoids more forested and wetland habitat than the Frontage Road and Rovenna concepts, and it avoids crossing Tina and Blueberry lakes.
- Recommends a few design and route alterations to the S-Curve concept to mitigate potential impacts to wildlife.

Department of Fish and Game – Restoration Division

- There are no protected species in the project vicinity.

ALASKA RAILROAD

- Railroad is currently working on developing double tracks through the area. Passenger train ridership is increasing – now running six times per day through Anchorage.
- Railroad will not support anymore at grade crossings – trying to eliminate what is currently in place.

LOCAL AGENCIES

Municipality of Anchorage (MOA)

- The project and alternative concepts are consistent with the *Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan*, LRTP, and related policies.
- Supports a modified Raspberry Rd – Dowling Rd. alignment.
- Does not support a new road across Tina Lake.

Anchorage School District – Transportation

- Supportive of a new road connection to relieve bus transportation coordination and timing issues in the area.
- Middle school, high school and special education routes are the most difficult with the existing road configuration.
- Has a 3-tier system for moving buses through the area.

Anchorage Fire Department

- Very supportive of a new east-west road connection.
- Department goal is 90% of calls to be responded to in under 4 minutes, which is difficult to achieve in the project area due to lack of east/west arterial.
- Currently looking at response time issues in the Arctic Blvd. area and where to site a future station.

3.2. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public comments were provided through the stakeholder interviews in August 2002, through participation in scoping meetings in October 2002 and May 2003, and through email and telephone communication.

The following are specific comments provided by local business and organizations.

- Busiest season – May 1 through end of October.
- Understand the need for this project and supports the development of an east/west arterial like Dowling.
- Don't move the transmission lines – too costly.
- Offset the road from the section line as there are plans for future additional lines through the corridor, and a second set of lines down RR corridor at Arctic. International Airport Way is a future transmission connection.
- Will be conducting independent modeling of three new east/west connections: Dowling, 68th, and 92nd.

Comments from members of the public included:

- Movement of traffic from within the project area to an interchange.
- East-West needs a corridor to link Old Seward to Minnesota.
- Traffic on Arctic and C Street will increase and a new 3-lane won't be of much use!
- Traffic on New and Old Seward highway is too heavy already.
- Traffic on Tudor heads to Muldoon and Eagle River and further points.
- Need more north/south roads west of Minnesota.
- Need more east/west roads west of Minnesota to connect to north/south ones.
- Train crossings at Arctic and 64th need to be resolved.
- High-density development in Anchorage bowl and especially west and south of Airport. West to east connection to major highways extremely poor causing major congestion.
- Exit from my subdivision on 72nd to Arctic, then south to Dimond, then west to Minnesota, north to Raspberry is a total of about 2.5 miles. Also for fire and police, access to this large subdivision is very much hindered from any direction!
- We need better access to our subdivision. We need to complete Raspberry Road to Arctic and complete the intersection of Rovenna and Raspberry and Chad and Raspberry. This will relieve the constant traffic on our streets (70th and 72nd) of people who are going deep into the neighborhood.
- Hazard on Potter eliminated through B Street access.
- Access to Dowling from B Street is difficult.

- 68th has more industry. Potter is more residential.
- Coordinate with the city's Trails Plan.
- Need grade separated trail and foot crossings of new Dowling Road.
- Potter can be improved and the high power lines removed and placed elsewhere. No need to condemn Potter land. There is wide enough road easement.
- Most of the difficulty is that no long range planning was made—city departments did not (do not) work together. Residences and businesses have been built on what should have been highway (street) right-of-way and it is continuing to happen.
- Too much noise.
- Land use and zoning should be coordinated with traffic created by the cross town movement.

4. ALTERNATIVES SUGGESTED BY THE PUBLIC

The "Frontage Road" concept and the "S" Curve concept were developed from agency and public suggestions. The "Frontage Road" concept was developed based on conversations with industrial businesses in the project area. Their primary concerns are to move industrial traffic to Minnesota or International Airport Way as quickly as possible, and avoid mixing industrial and residential traffic. The "S" Curve concept was developed as a result of input from agencies and the public to avoid impacts to Tina Lake.