

DRAFT CONCEPT REPORT

AMATS: Fireweed Lane Rehabilitation

State/Federal Project Number: CFHW00528/0001661



Prepared for:

State of Alaska
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July 2024

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

AADT	Annual Average Daily Traffic
ACDA.....	Anchorage Community Development Authority
ACS	Alaska Communications Systems
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AMATS	Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions
AWWU.....	Anchorage Water & Wastewater Utility
CEA	Chugach Electric Association
CIRI	Chugach Inlet Region, Inc.
CSS	Context Sensitive Solutions
DOT&PF	State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
EJ	environmental justice
GCI	General Communication Inc.
HSIP	Highway Safety Improvement Program
LEP.....	limited English proficiency
LUP.....	Land Use Plan
MOA	Municipality of Anchorage
MTP	Metropolitan Transportation Plan
NEPA.....	National Environmental Policy Act
NMP.....	Non-Motorized Plan
OS&HP	Official Streets and Highways Plan
PBL.....	Protected Bike Lanes
PE.....	professional engineer
PIP.....	Public Involvement Plan
PEL.....	Planning and Environmental Linkages
PTA.....	Parent Teacher Association
ROW.....	right-of-way

1.0 PROJECT TEAM

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2.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

The State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), in cooperation with the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), proposes to rehabilitate Fireweed Lane from Spenard Road to the Seward Highway to improve safety and to bring the roadway and non-motorized facilities up to current design standards. This road is jointly owned and maintained by the MOA and DOT&PF, and the project is funded through the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) program. Design will be led by DOT&PF with support from the MOA. It is anticipated at the conclusion of this project, the MOA will assume full ownership and maintenance responsibilities.

The project team will analyze and design alternative roadway configurations to rehabilitate Fireweed Lane to improve motorized and active transportation needs, as well as business circulation and access along the corridor.

The project will follow federal aid funding constraints including compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the MOA's Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) approach.

2.2 Project Area

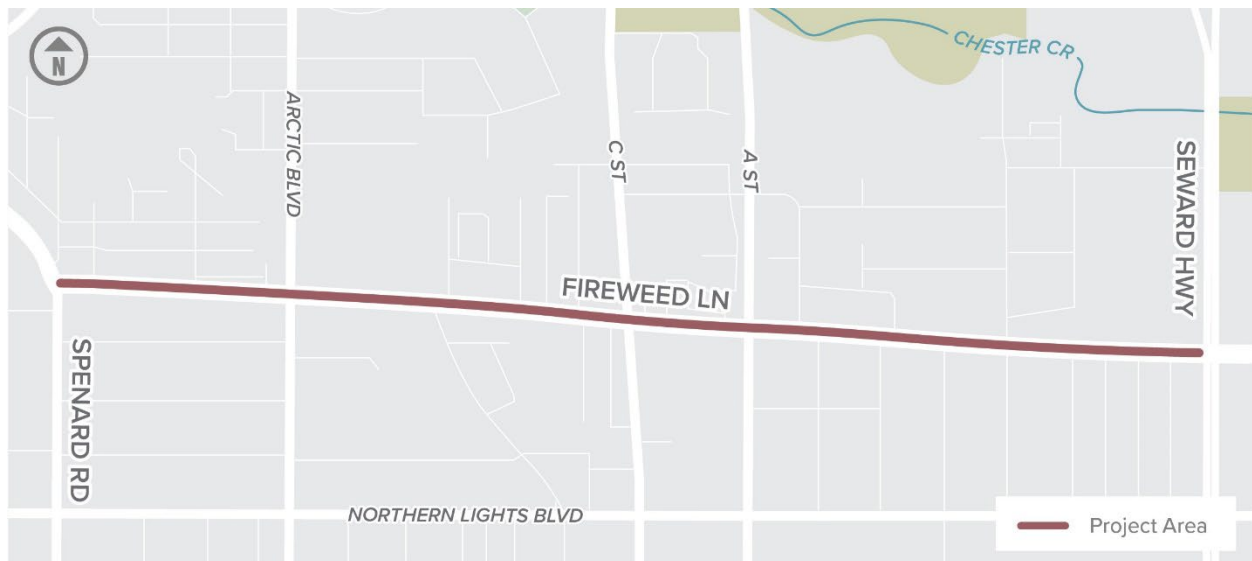


Figure 1: Project Area

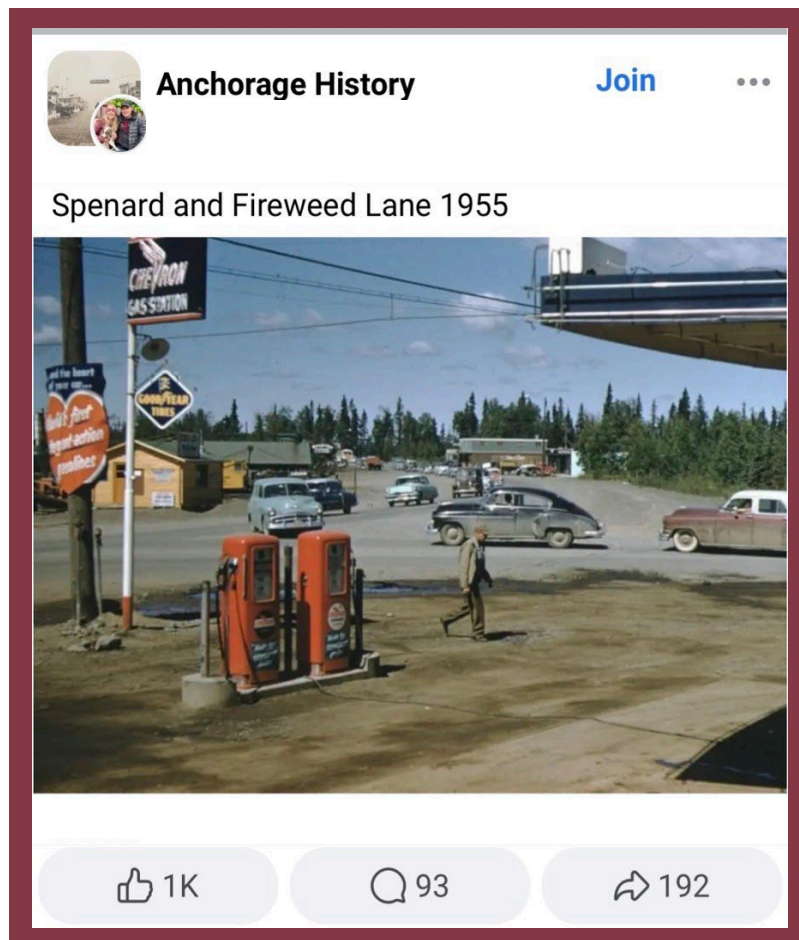
2.3 Background

This project was originally initiated by DOT&PF in the 1990s under the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) to address vehicle crashes and the lack of pedestrian, public transit, and bicycle facilities.

DOT&PF conducted traffic and safety studies, public outreach, typical section analysis, and preliminary engineering and recommended Fireweed Lane be converted to a three-lane section

by using a road diet technique. In the mid-2000s, the MOA took over the project and continued detailed engineering, surveying, public outreach, and design studies. Local businesses raised concerns about perceived impacts associated with reducing traffic by removing through lanes and design was not completed.

Since then, many successful road diet projects have been constructed in Anchorage and have been well received by the community. Local businesses and the traveling public have seen firsthand well-designed road diet projects slow traffic and improve safety by incorporating dedicated turn lanes and narrower cross sections reducing rear end and side swipe crashes. Because of this, AMATS, the DOT&PF, and the MOA have re-initiated the project.



Source: Facebook.com

Figure 2: Historic 1955 Fireweed Lane and Spenard Road

3.0 AREA CONTEXT

The area for this project is Fireweed Lane between Spenard Road to the west and Seward Highway to the east. The project area is located in or adjacent to four Community Council areas:

- Midtown
- North Star
- Rogers Park
- Spenard

Development along the corridor is primarily commercial with a range of uses including restaurants and other small businesses. There are two public schools and one private school directly on Fireweed Lane and the area is surrounded by neighborhoods with single- and multi-family housing. The 2018-2022 American Community Survey estimated within a one-mile radius, Fireweed Lane has approximately 11,711 households with 25,686 residents. Children under 18 make up 16 percent of household residents, 16 percent are senior citizens, and 45 percent are people of color. This population area reports as diverse, with approximately 19 percent primarily speaking a language other than English at home.¹

3.1 Existing Conditions

Fireweed Lane is a four-lane minor arterial between Spenard Road and the Seward Highway; however, MOA and DOT&PF are pursuing a change in the functional classification of Fireweed Lane. The project corridor extends approximately 1.25 miles with a right-of-way ranging from 60 to 70-plus feet. Figure 3 shows the existing typical section along the corridor.

¹ EPA. 2021. One-mile radius around Fireweed Lane between Spenard Road and Seward Highway ACS Estimates for 2018-2022. Accessed July 10, 2024. <https://ejscreeen.epa.gov/mapper/>

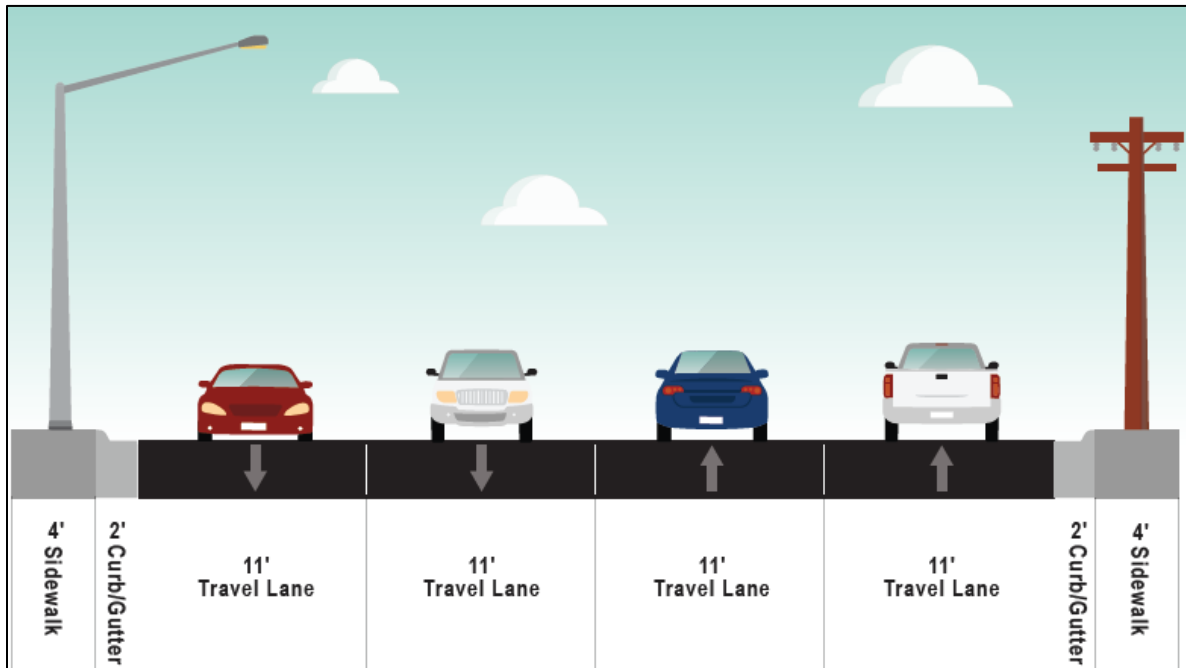


Figure 3: Existing Roadway

The 2022 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) shows traffic volumes along Fireweed Lane ranging from approximately 4,000 vehicles per day between Spenard Road and Arctic Boulevard to 6,500 vehicles per day between Arctic Boulevard and the Seward Highway. There are six signalized intersections (Spenard Road, Arctic Boulevard, C Street, A Street, Denali Street, and the Seward Highway) and approximately 20 additional approach roads along the corridor. Approximately 110 driveways use the project corridor for property access. These driveways are dense and are often near each other and side streets.

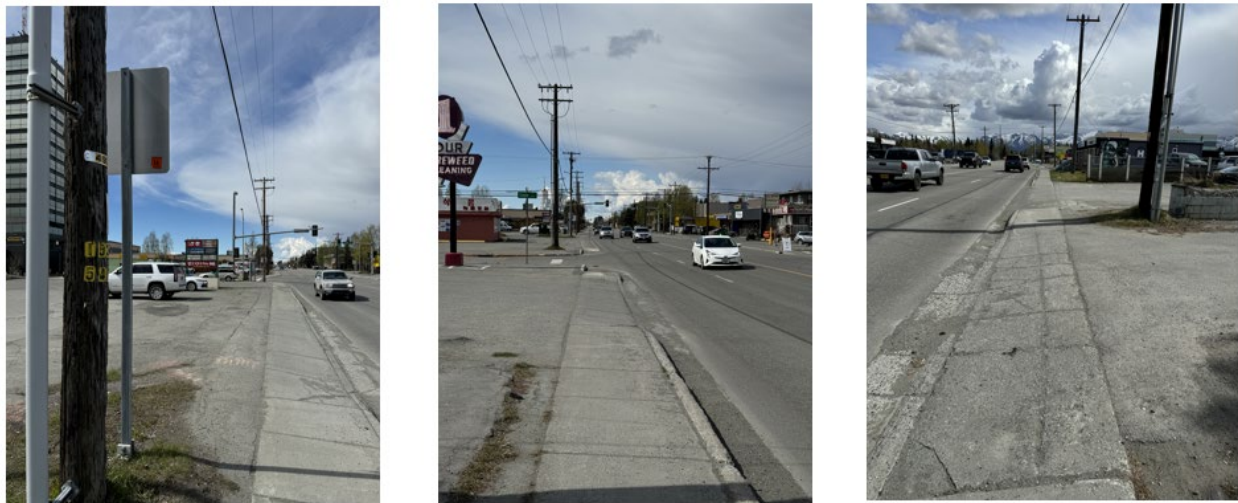


Figure 4: Dense Driveways, Non-ADA Compliant Cross Slopes, and Other Issues

Sidewalks in the project corridor are narrow and are non-compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). There are many driveways with open curb cuts and steep ramps that

create conflicts with pedestrians and there is not a buffer from the travel lanes. Impediments such as utility poles and roadway signage are often located in the sidewalk. No on-street bicycle facilities exist, and the narrow, crowded sidewalks are difficult for bicyclists to use.

In addition to the pedestrian crossings at the six signalized intersections, an additional signalized pedestrian crossing exists near Blueberry Road to accommodate pedestrians accessing the schools. There are few pedestrian refuge islands along the project corridor.

Fireweed Lane does not have public transit routes traveling along the corridor; however, routes cross Fireweed Lane at Spenard Road, Arctic Boulevard, A Street, and C Street. Anchorage School District student transportation routes travel Fireweed Lane.

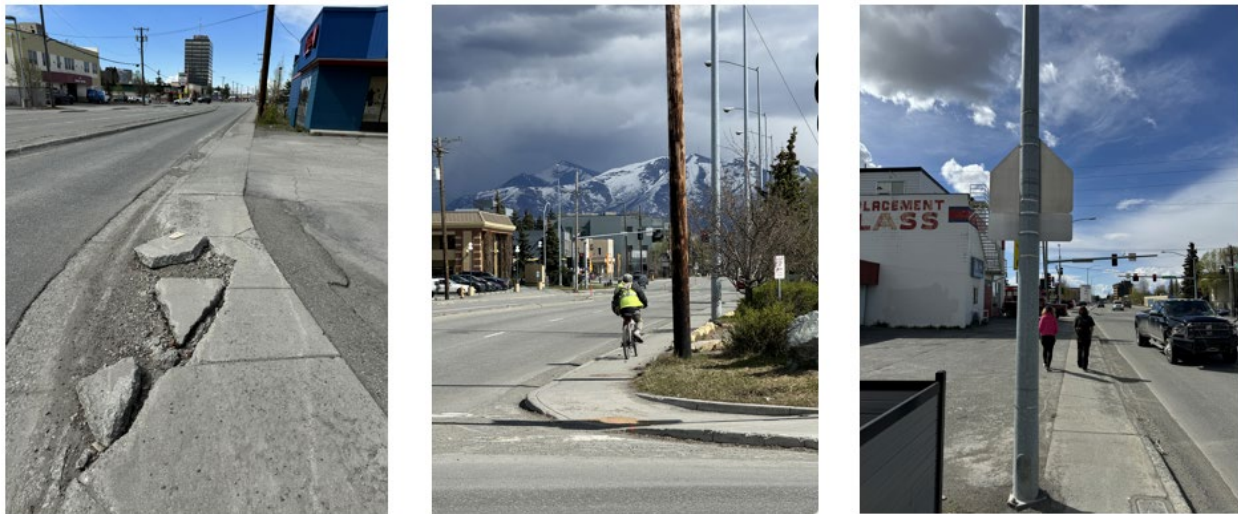
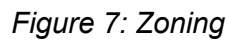
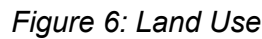


Figure 5: Narrow Sidewalks and Utility Pole Conflicts

Between 2013 and 2022, 533 crashes occurred in the project corridor:

- 31% Injury crashes
- 85% Occurred at three signalized intersections
 - A Street
 - C Street
 - Seward Highway
- 11 Bicycle and pedestrian crashes
 - 3 at A Street
 - 2 at Seward Highway
 - 1 at Spenard Road
 - 1 at Denali Street

- Fireweed Lane is a minor arterial characterized as a Main Street Corridor in the Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan (2040 LUP). The corridor is primarily zoned for commercial uses. Residential zoning areas surround the project corridor to the east, west, and north.



4.0 GUIDING DOCUMENTS

This project is guided by a range of local plans.

4.1 Official Streets and Highways Plan

The Official Streets and Highways Plan (OS&HP) provides a means for the community to prepare for future development. It does this by establishing the location, classification, and minimum rights-of-way of those streets and highways required to accommodate the community's future highway transportation needs. The OS&HP complements the MOA's Comprehensive Plan by contributing to the implementation of the community goals expressed by that plan. Streets and highways are closely linked with community development. Planning for land use and the highway system should be integrated as much as is practicable.

4.2 Spenard Corridor Plan (October 2020)

The Spenard Corridor Plan serves as the primary area-specific policy guide for future development and public improvements in the Spenard Corridor Plan Area. It documents the community's vision and provides a framework for review of future development and public improvements. While this Spenard Corridor Plan focuses on planning and design for the properties and blocks immediately adjacent to Spenard Road, it also promotes improved connectivity to surrounding blocks, neighborhoods and corridors for bicyclists and pedestrians.

The Spenard Corridor Plan recommends lane configurations, design features, and landscaping, including wayfinding, decorative, and hardscape features.

4.3 Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan

The 2040 LUP supplements the MOA's Comprehensive Plan for the Anchorage Bowl. Anchorage 2020 – the Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan serves as the framework for the 2040 LUP. Building on this framework, the 2040 LUP incorporates the adopted neighborhood and district plans, public facility plans, and recent analyses regarding population, housing, commercial, and industrial needs over the next 25 years. The 2040 LUP features a land use plan map, which recommends the future land development pattern. It shows where land uses may occur within the Anchorage Bowl to accommodate anticipated growth. It also includes strategies to carry out the plan and manage growth.

4.4 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is the primary tool used by AMATS to plan for long-range transportation needs and recommend solutions based on anticipated funding availability over a minimum 20-year horizon. The MTP includes the whole transportation system in the Anchorage Bowl and Chugiak-Eagle River: streets, sidewalks and pathways, trails, public transit, freeways, highways, and freight mobility. Relevant goals from the 2050 MTP include:

- Goal 1 Maintain Existing Infrastructure: Maintain transportation infrastructure in a state of good repair.
- Goal 2 Improve Safety and Security: Provide safer and more secure places to live, walk, bike, ride the bus, and drive.

- Goal 3 Improve Access and Mobility Options: Support an efficient, reliable, and connected transportation system that equitably improves access and mobility to all activities.
- Goal 4 Support the Economy: Develop a transportation system that supports a thriving, sustainable, broad-based economy, while maintaining or enhancing the surrounding area's land use character.
- Goal 5 Promote a Healthy Environment: Protect, preserve, and enhance the natural environment to promote sustainability and public health.
- Goal 6 Advance Equity: Promote equitable transportation options, improvements, and maintenance activities for vulnerable populations.

4.5 AMATS Non-Motorized Plan (November 2021)

The Non-motorized Plan (NMP) provides the vision for a non-motorized network within the AMATS Metropolitan Planning Area that, when implemented will help residents travel more safely and efficiently throughout the AMATS Planning area without the need of a motor vehicle in all seasons. The NMP merges bicycle, pedestrian, and shared use pathways planning efforts simultaneously. The NMP identifies Fireweed Lane as a high priority bicycle facility but not a prioritized pedestrian facility.

4.6 Coordination with Other Projects and Studies

The project team has identified five other current or recently completed projects and studies in and around the Fireweed Lane project corridor.

4.6.1 Midtown Congestion Relief PEL Study

The Midtown Congestion Relief Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study, led by DOT&PF and completed in April 2020, identified changes to the intersection at Fireweed Lane and the Seward Highway as a medium-term project.

4.6.2 Seward-Glenn Connection PEL Study

The Seward-Glenn Connection PEL Study, led by DOT&PF and expected to be complete in spring 2025, aims identify and evaluate options to improve safety, livability, regional travel between the Seward and Glenn Highways, and local travel within the surrounding neighborhoods. The project area for this study is analyzing alternatives adjacent to the Fireweed Lane and Seward Highway intersection and could result in recommendations for changes to the east end of the corridor.

4.6.3 E 23rd Avenue and Eagle Street Reconstruction

Led by MOA, this project is a neighborhood streets reconstruction project near Fireweed Lane at Eagle Street. This project is expected to be constructed in 2028.

4.6.4 Midtown District Plan

The Midtown District Plan, as an element of the 2020 Anchorage Comprehensive Plan, is being developed by the Anchorage Community Development Authority (ACDA) to address issues, including land use, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, housing, public spaces, quality of life, and environmental considerations in the Midtown area. Fireweed Lane falls within the boundaries of this planning area. This plan may identify recommendations for the corridor and is expected to be complete in spring 2025.

4.6.5 2024 Anchorage Protected Bike Lane Pilot Study

The Protected Bike Lane (PBL) Pilot Study, led jointly by DOT&PF and MOA, aims to learn how protected bike lanes can be implemented to improve and provide safe, reliable access for pedestrians, bicycles, and transit riders. Fireweed Lane was identified as a potential pilot project corridor.

5.0 PROBLEMS TO BE SOLVED

The purpose of the project is to:

- Rehabilitate Fireweed Lane from Spenard Road to the Seward Highway.
- Improve safety for all users.
- Bring the roadway and non-motorized facilities up to current design standards.
- Improve business circulation and access.

6.0 ISSUES IDENTIFIED

The project team has identified the following initial set of potential concerns. Additional issues and concerns will be documented throughout the design phase.

Table 1: Identified Issues

Issue	Detail
A desire for the project to incorporate the goals and objectives of the Spenard Corridor Plan	The roadway amenities and features recommended in the Spenard Corridor Plan, could set an expectation that these items will be incorporated into the project, which may not be the case.
Area is used by a broad range of stakeholders (residents, businesses, commuting public)	There will be some who support the project and some who do not because of higher perceived impacts than benefits.
History with business community	This project is preceded by several projects not well received by the business community. Local business owners have historically been concerned about a perceived reduction of business traffic on the corridor associated with reducing the number of through lanes. These business owners may need additional outreach for the project team to understand and effectively address their concerns.
Right-of-way (ROW) impacts	Access changes for property owners could be perceived negatively. Impacts to over 80 parcels are expected.
Coordination with adjacent projects	This is a relatively small corridor with several transportation and land-use projects currently underway.
Disruption to businesses and residents resulting from construction	Unavoidable disruption and inconvenience could have a negative impact on stakeholders, including temporary loss of direct access to some properties.
Request by bike advocates for protected bike lanes	Bike advocates want protected bike lanes. This topic will need proactive expectation management.
Lack of parking	Lack of parking poses a safety hazard.
Narrow sidewalks do not meet ADA standards	These issues will be addressed where possible in design. Addressing these deficiencies may result in concerns from business owners regarding changes to their access.
Utilities	Overhead utility lines throughout the corridor reduce space in the cross section. The corridor has a six- to eight-inch ENSTAR gas line and an eight-inch Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility (AWWU) water main.
Drainage issues	Drainage issues include ponding at several driveways.
School traffic	There are three schools in the project area. Considerations for increased traffic during school drop off and pick up times.

Issue	Detail
Environmental justice (EJ)	The project area has significant EJ populations. Input from these populations will need to be sought and may need additional types of outreach, such as limited English proficiency (LEP) services, to be effective.

7.0 PROBLEM SOLVING CONCEPTS

Reconstructing Fireweed Lane has been considered through other efforts since the 1990s. Since then, many successful road diet projects have been constructed in Anchorage and have been well received by the community. Local businesses and the traveling public have seen firsthand how well-designed road diet projects slow traffic and improve safety by incorporating dedicated turn lanes and narrower cross sections, reducing rear end and side swipe crashes. These features improve safety for non-motorized transportation and could provide space for improved non-motorized facilities.

The project team is looking at three families of concepts: two-lane, three-lane, and four-lanes. When evaluating preliminary design concepts, the project team is considering the following:

- Design standards and criteria
- Safety concerns, corridor speeds, and crash rates
- Non-motorized facilities, accommodations, and accessibility
- Consistency with relevant planning documents
- Driveway and side-street spacing
- ROW
 - Maximum practical width 60 - 65 feet
 - Impacts to business and circulation
 - Parking
- Drainage and stormwater management
- Utility undergrounding/reconstruction
- Landscaping and lighting

8.0 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY

Public involvement efforts for this project began at project kickoff in spring 2024.

8.1 Stakeholder Identification

Fireweed Lane is used by a broad range of stakeholders. Stakeholders are identified as people and organizations such as government agencies, businesses, residents, and the public who are actively involved in the project, or whose interests may be positively or negatively affected by the project.

Stakeholders identified for this project are summarized in Table 4. Where possible, these entities will be included in the project outreach/mailing list. This list will expand throughout the project.

Table 2: Identified Stakeholders

Type of Stakeholder	Stakeholder
Public and Other	• Business owners and non-profit organizations within 500 feet of the project area • Property owners and residents within 500 feet of the project area • Cook Inlet Housing Authority • Bike Anchorage • Anchorage Chamber of Commerce • Anchorage Economic Development Corporation • Spenard Chamber of Commerce • Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) in the project area • Federation of Community Councils – Spenard Community Council – Midtown Community Council – Rogers Park Community Council – North Star Community Council
Government, Tribal, Regulatory, and Resource Agencies	• State of Alaska Senators and Representatives in the project area • MOA – Mayor's Office – Anchorage Assembly – District 1 – Planning Department – Parks and Recreation – Public Transportation Department – Anchorage Fire Department – Anchorage Police Department – Department of Economic and Community Development

	– Planning and Zoning Commission – Project Management and Engineering – Traffic Engineering – Maintenance and Operations – Urban Design Commission – Anchorage School District • AMATS – All committees • Cook Inlet Region, Inc. (CIRI) • Federal Highway Administration • State of Alaska Historic Preservation Office • State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game • State of Alaska Department of Public Safety – Division of Alaska State Troopers • State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation • State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources • Anchorage School District • United States Army Corps of Engineers • United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Utility Companies	• Alaska Communications Systems (ACS) • Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility (AWWU) • Chugach Electric Association (CEA) • ENSTAR Natural Gas Company • General Communications Incorporated (GCI)

8.2 Spring 2024 Stakeholder Outreach

In spring 2024, members of the project team attended AMATS and Community Council meetings to introduce the project and gather preliminary comments and questions from stakeholders:

- February 20, 2024: Midtown Community Council Board of Directors
- March 4, 2024: Rogers Park Community Council
- March 6, 2024: Spenard Community Council
- March 7, 2024: AMATS Technical Advisory Committee
- March 21, 2024: AMATS Policy Committee
- April 10, 2024: Midtown Community Council
- April 10, 2024: North Star Community Council

In addition, members of the project team attended the Anchorage Transportation Fair on March 28, 2024, to introduce the project and gather preliminary comments from the public.

A summary of the comments received during the spring 2024 stakeholder outreach is included as Appendix A.

8.3 Planned Public Involvement

The project team has developed a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) outlining how the project team will work with stakeholders to communicate the goals of the project and gather input. The PIP defines how the project team will meet relevant Federal, DOT&PF, and MOA requirements (including the CSS Process) for public involvement. Key outreach strategies from the PIP are shown in Table 5. The full PIP is attached as Appendix B.

Table 3: Key Outreach Strategies

Strategy	Details
Project website and email	www.FireweedLane.com FireweedLane@dowl.com
Public meetings	Fall/Winter 2024: Introduce the project and present alternatives under consideration to stakeholders for input in support of the environmental document. Spring 2025: Present the alternatives analysis and recommendation to stakeholder in support of the environmental document finalization. In addition to formal public open house style meetings, the project team will engage in community events, such as farmer's markets and food truck pods, to engage a broader group of stakeholders.
Community Councils and Other Interest Group Meetings	The project team will maintain regular interaction with various stakeholder groups within the corridor, including attendance at up to 15 Community Council meetings at key milestones during the project. The project team will be available to present and solicit comments from other interested groups upon request. Because of the more than 110 driveways in the corridor, the project team will meet with individual property owners in fall and winter 2024 to discuss potential changes to property access points needed to meet current design standards and allow for updated non-motorized facilities largely within the existing ROW.

Government/Agency Presentations	Presentations will be made to the AMATS Technical and Policy Committees as well as the AMATS Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee and Freight Advisory Committee (if requested) at relevant project milestones. Assembly members representing this part of Anchorage and members of the MOA Planning and Zoning Commission and Urban Design Commission will be included in all project outreach. If requested, additional government/agency presentations will be scheduled.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Spring 2024 Stakeholder Outreach Summary

Appendix B: Public Involvement Plan

Appendix A: Spring 2024 Stakeholder Outreach Summary



Spring 2024 Stakeholder Outreach Summary

Project Number: State CFHWY00528 / Federal 0001661

Dates/Locations:

February 20, 2024	Midtown Community Council Board of Directors
March 4, 2024	Rogers Park Community Council
March 6, 2024	Spenard Community Council
March 7, 2024	AMATS: Technical Advisory Committee
March 21, 2024	AMATS: Policy Committee
March 28, 2024	Anchorage Transportation Fair
April 10, 2024	Midtown Community Council
April 10, 2024	North Star Community Council

Summary

The project team kicked off the project in Spring 2024 by visiting area community councils, presenting to AMATS committees, and participating in the Anchorage Transportation Fair. The goal was to introduce the project and gather preliminary comments and questions from stakeholders.

Primary Project Team Messaging:

- This is an AMATS-funded project, led by Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) in partnership with the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA).
- Fireweed Lane is a shared DOT&PF/MOA facility; the MOA will ultimately own and maintain the corridor after this project is complete.
- Project purpose is to rehabilitate Fireweed Lane to improve safety and to bring the roadway and non-motorized facilities up to current design standards.
- Other issues to address in the corridor include:
 - Multiple utilities in the corridor and a desire to underground and/or upgrade some
 - Large number of driveways/access points and many signalized intersections
 - Limited right-of-way (ROW)
 - Drainage issues
 - Three schools and other school routes along the corridor
- The project must follow three laws/policies:
 - National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
 - Federal Uniform Relocation Act (ROW process)
 - MOA Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process
- The project team will start by looking at three families of cross-sections to determine whether they meet the project purpose and need. It is likely the final project design will include a combination of these families
 - 4-lane
 - 3-lane
 - 2-lane
- The fastest schedule would be final design complete in 2028, but it's more likely 2029-2030.
- The project team is gathering initial data and anticipates additional public outreach in Summer/Fall 2024.

Comment Summary

- Questions/concerns about the project timeline.
 - This project has three owner groups and is federally funded. It is complex and time-consuming due to the broad range of stakeholders, limited ROW & ROW process, NEPA process, utility coordination, etc.
- Requests for interim improvements.
 - The road was resurfaced about three years ago. The project team is not aware of any other interim projects.
- Questions about lessons learned from the Spenard Road project
 - Concerns from business owners about converting from a 4-lane to a 3-lane on Spenard Road were unwarranted. The general speed on Spenard Road has come down and traffic volumes have returned to prior numbers.
- Desire to see more data from Spenard Road to guide the Fireweed Lane design.
 - The project team is conducting a traffic and safety study. They will look at crash data, volumes, and other metrics from the broader project area that will help guide design decisions.
- Discussion about non-signalized crossings, their effectiveness, and yield rates at certain speed limits. Desire to see the project team approach unsignalized crossings in a different way.
- Discussion about protected bike lanes.
 - The design team will be looking at protected bike lanes. There are a number of configurations that are considered protected bike lanes.
- Concerns about design standards, snow storage and removal.
 - The project is following the current MOA design standards. Federal funding dictates most decisions and state standards must be met. The MOA makes the final call on design because they will own the roadway in the end.
 - The project team can only design with standards that are in place at the time the design is occurring.
- Concerns about snow removal and impacts to access for children to school facilities.
 - Once the project is complete, the MOA will be responsible for snow removal.
- Questions about design speed.
 - Design speed is determined by law and policy and the MOA will make that final decision. The design team does not dictate the speed limit of the project, it is a policy decision that is based on a speed study (i.e. 85% in a speed study). The MOA is already studying the existing speeds and a speed limit decision will come after an alternative is selected.
- Concerns about impacts to ROW and access to businesses.
- Questions about how this project plays into the long-term vision for housing in Anchorage.
 - Federal funding requirements limit what this project can do. These funds can only be used for work and design within the ROW.
- Questions about Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.
 - Any changes to the roadway will necessitate updates to meet ADA requirements
- Questions about the 4-lane alternatives.
 - NEPA requires that the project team look at both a no-build and a rehabilitation for the 4-lane option, even if the no-build doesn't meet the project purpose and need.

Appendix B: Public Involvement Plan

PUBLIC & AGENCY INVOLVEMENT PLAN

AMATS: Fireweed Lane Rehabilitation Design Services

State/Federal Project No: CFHW00528/0001661



Prepared for:

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January 2024

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

ACS	Alaska Communications Systems
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADEC.....	State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
ADNR	State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources
AMATS	Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions
AWWU.....	Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility
CEA	Chugach Electric Association
CIRI	Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated
CSS	Context Sensitive Solutions
DOT&PF	State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
EJ	Environmental Justice
EPM.....	Environmental Procedures Manual
FHWA	Federal Highways Administration
GCI	General Communications Incorporated
HSIP	Highway Safety Improvement Program
MOA	Municipality of Anchorage
NEPA.....	National Environmental Policy Act
PAIP	Public and Agency Involvement Plan
PI	Public Involvement
PZC	Planning and Zoning Commission
ROW.....	Right-of-Way
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office

1.0 PROJECT TEAM

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2.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

2.1 Project Overview

The State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), in cooperation with the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), proposes to rehabilitate Fireweed Lane from Spenard Road to the Seward Highway to improve safety and to bring the roadway and non-motorized facilities up to current design standards. This road is jointly owned and maintained by the MOA and DOT&PF, and the project is funded through the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) program. Design will be led by DOT&PF with support from the MOA. It is anticipated that at the conclusion of this project, the MOA will assume full ownership and maintenance responsibilities.

The project team will analyze and design alternative roadway configurations to rehabilitate Fireweed Lane to improve motorized and active transportation needs, as well as business circulation and access along the corridor.

The project will follow federal aid funding constraints including compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the MOA's Context Sensitive Solutions approach.

2.2 Project Area



Figure 1: Project Area

2.3 Project History

Fireweed Lane is a 4-lane minor arterial between Spenard Road and the Seward Highway. This project was originally initiated by DOT&PF in the late 1990s under the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) to address vehicle crashes and the lack of pedestrian, public transit, and bicycle facilities.

DOT&PF conducted traffic and safety studies, public outreach, typical section analysis, and preliminary engineering and recommended that Fireweed Lane be converted to a 3-lane section by using a road-diet technique. In the mid-2000s, the MOA took over the project and continued detailed engineering, surveying, public outreach, and design studies. Local businesses raised concerns about perceived impacts associated with reducing traffic by removing through lanes so the project was shelved.

Since that time, many successful road-diet projects have been constructed in Anchorage and have been well received by the community. Local businesses and the traveling public have seen firsthand that well-designed road-diet projects slow traffic and improve safety by incorporating dedicated turn lanes and narrower cross sections that reduce rear end and side swipe crashes. Because of this, AMATS, the DOT&PF and the MOA have re-initiated the project.

2.4 Purpose of the Public and Agency Involvement Plan (PAIP)

This Public and Agency Involvement Plan (PAIP) details the proposed methods for communicating information with agencies, Tribes, organizations, and the public for the project.

The objectives of this plan are to:

- Provide opportunities for all stakeholders to be informed and participate in the project
- Serve as a guide for the project team to meet the relevant federal, DOT&PF, and local government requirements for public involvement

Public and agency involvement on transportation projects completed by the DOT&PF within the MOA is guided by a range of documents including:

- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
- Executive Orders 11990, 11988, 12898, and 13166
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Environmental Impact and Related Procedures (23 CFR Part 771)
- FHWA TA 6640.8a
- Alaska DOT&PF Environmental Procedures Manual (EPM)
- Alaska DOT&PF Preconstruction Manual
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Title 21 of the Anchorage Municipal Code (Chapter 21.03.190) (MOA)
- A Strategy for Developing Context Sensitive Transportation Projects (MOA, 2008)
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

DOT&PF is required by federal agreement to include a disclosure regarding Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) compliance as part of agency outreach and public involvement. DOWL will work with the DOT&PF Civil Rights Office to confirm the most current disclosure language prior to publication. The following is the current disclosure at the time of writing the PAIP.

When space is limited or there is an added cost, e.g., newspaper ads, flyers, and postcards:

The DOT&PF operates Federal Programs without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. Full Title VI Nondiscrimination Policy: dot.alaska.gov/tvi_statement.shtml. To file a complaint go to: dot.alaska.gov/cv/rts/titlevi.shtml

The DOT&PF complies with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Individuals with disabilities who may need auxiliary aids, services, and/or special modifications to participate in this public meeting should contact Rachel Steer, (907) 562-2000, or TDD number 711. Requests should be made at least three days before the accommodation is needed.

Individuals with limited English proficiency who may need translation services and/or special modifications to participate in this public meeting should contact Rachel Steer, (907) 562-2000, or TDD number 711. Requests should be made at least three days before the accommodation is needed.

When space is not limited and there is no additional cost; e.g., online notices:

It is the policy of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) that no person shall be excluded from participation in, or be denied benefits of any and all programs or activities we provide based on race, religion, gender, age, marital status, ability, or national origin, regardless of the funding source including Federal Transit Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, Federal Highway Administration and State of Alaska Funds.

The DOT&PF complies with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Individuals with disabilities who may need auxiliary aids, services, and/or special modifications to participate in this public meeting should contact Rachel Steer, (907) 562-2000, or TDD number 711. Requests should be made at least three days before the accommodation is needed.

Individuals with limited English proficiency who may need translation services and/or special modifications to participate in this public meeting should contact Rachel Steer, (907) 562-2000, or TDD number 711. Requests should be made at least three days before the accommodation is needed.

Full Title VI Nondiscrimination Policy: dot.alaska.gov/tvi_statement.shtml. To file a complaint go to: dot.alaska.gov/cv/rts/titlevi.shtml

When advertising for something other than a public meeting, e.g., project update or road closure:

The DOT&PF operates Federal Programs without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. Full Title VI Nondiscrimination Policy: dot.alaska.gov/tvi_statement.shtml. To file a complaint, go to: dot.alaska.gov/cvlrts/titlevi.shtml

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Individuals with limited English proficiency who may need translation services and/or special modifications to participate in this public meeting should contact Rachel Steer, (907) 562-2000, or TDD number 711.

DOT&PF Civil Rights Offices notices will be published with all public announcements and Title VI documents will be displayed at public meetings and documented in the meeting record. DOWL will provide documentation of compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 immediately following each project-related public meeting, hearing, presentation, or community involvement activity.

DOWL will offer meaningful services to limited English proficiency persons, as described in the DOT&PF's Limited English Proficiency Plan, including proactively using available DOT&PF resources.

2.5 Communication/Public and Agency Involvement Plan Updates

This PAIP is a “living” document. Communication strategies and methods identified will be assessed for effectiveness and may be revised.

3.0 STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION

Identifying stakeholders is the process of distinguishing people and organizations impacted by the project and documenting relevant information regarding their interests and bearing on project success. Project stakeholders are persons and organizations such as government agencies, businesses, residents, and the public that are actively involved in the project, or whose interests may be positively or negatively affected by the execution of the project. Stakeholder information will be documented and maintained for the purpose of managing communications in a way that is relevant, meaningful, and effective for facilitating a high level of public involvement.

Below is an initial list of stakeholders. Where possible, these entities will be included in the project outreach/ mailing list. This list will expand throughout the project.

3.1 Public and Other Stakeholders

- Business owners and non-profit organizations within 500 feet of the project area
- Property owners and residents within 500 feet of the project area
- Cook Inlet Housing Authority
- Bike Anchorage
- Anchorage Chamber of Commerce
- Anchorage Economic Development Corporation
- Spenard Chamber of Commerce
- Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) in the project area
- Federation of Community Councils
 - Spenard Community Council
 - Midtown Community Council
 - Rogers Park Community Council
 - North Star Community Council

3.2 Government, Tribal, Regulatory, and Resource Agencies

- State of Alaska Senators and Representatives in the project area
- MOA
 - Mayor's Office
 - Anchorage Assembly – District 1
 - Planning Department
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Public Transportation Department
 - Anchorage Fire Department

- Anchorage Police Department
 - Department of Economic and Community Development
 - Planning and Zoning Commission
 - Project Management and Engineering
 - Traffic Engineering
 - Maintenance and Operations
 - Urban Design Commission
 - Anchorage School District
- AMATS
 - All committees
- Cook Inlet Region, Inc. (CIRI)
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
- State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- State of Alaska Department of Public Safety – Division of Alaska State Troopers
- State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC)
- State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR)
- Anchorage School District
- United States Army Corps of Engineers
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service

3.3 Utility Companies

- Alaska Communications Systems (ACS)
- Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility (AWWU)
- Chugach Electric Association (CEA)
- ENSTAR Natural Gas Company
- General Communications Incorporated (GCI)

4.0 STAKEHOLDER ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The project team has identified the following initial set of potential concerns. Additional issues and concerns will be documented throughout the design phase.

Issue	Detail
A desire for the project to incorporate the goals and objectives of the Spenard Corridor Plan	The roadway amenities and features recommended in the Spenard Corridor Plan could set an expectation that these items will be incorporated into the project, which may not be the case.
Area is used by a broad range of stakeholders (residents, businesses, commuting public)	There will be some who support the project and some who do not because of higher perceived impacts than benefits.
History with business community	This project is preceded by several projects that were not well received by the business community. Local business owners have historically been concerned about a perceived reduction of business traffic on the corridor associated with reducing the number of through lanes. These business owners may need additional outreach for the project team to understand and effectively address their concerns.
Right-of-way (ROW) impacts	Access changes for property owners could be perceived negatively. Buildings abut the ROW, and impacts to over 80 parcels are expected.
Coordination with adjacent projects	This is a relatively small corridor with several transportation and land-use projects currently underway.
Disruption to area businesses and residents that may result from construction	Unavoidable disruption and inconvenience could have a negative impact on stakeholders, including temporary loss of direct access to some properties.
Request by bike advocates for protected bike lanes	Bike advocates want protected bike lanes. This topic will need proactive expectation management.
Lack of parking	Lack of parking poses a safety hazard.
Narrow sidewalks do not meet ADA standards	These issues will be addressed where possible in design. Addressing these deficiencies may result in concerns from business owners regarding changes to their access.
Utilities	Overhead utility lines throughout the corridor reduce space in the cross section. The corridor has a six- to eight-inch ENSTAR gas line and an eight-inch AWWU water main.
Drainage issues	Drainage issues include ponding at several driveways.
School traffic	There are three schools in the project area. Considerations for increased traffic during school drop off and pick up times.

Issue	Detail
Environmental justice (EJ)	The project area has significant EJ populations. Input from these populations will need to be sought and may need additional types of outreach (LEP services) to be effective.

5.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT METHODS

The following subsections identify the methods proposed to reach agencies and stakeholders with project information. The project team will discuss outreach efforts and select other tools for involving the public and agencies if needed.

5.1 Branding

To create a consistent look and feel for project documentation, the project team will create a project logo and templates with color specifications. All project communication materials will be developed using the project logo and color specifications. Color specifications will accommodate colorblind individuals.

5.2 Stakeholder Mailing Lists

The project team will create and maintain a mailing list for communications distributed through the post and email. The list will be maintained with all property owners, businesses, and residents within 500-feet of the project area and other key project stakeholders.

5.3 Project Website, Email, and Social Media

A project website has been established at www.fireweedlane.com using the State of Alaska Look and Feel Standards (<http://alaska.gov/LookAndFeel/>), which is ADA compliant. The website will be maintained with current information on the project status, as well as access to significant environmental and design documents, and project team contact information. All public meetings will be advertised on the project website a minimum of two weeks prior to the event. The website will allow the submission of public comments and will include a mechanism for interested persons to request to be added to the project's email communication distribution list.

The project email address, fireweedlane@dowl.com, will be included on all communication materials. The email address will be linked to an internal distribution list that includes members from the DOT&PF, MOA, Lounsbury, and DOWL project team.

Upon request, DOWL will create and provide social media materials to DOT&PF and MOA for posting to their website and social media sites.

5.4 Project Postcards & Newsletters

Both the print and emailed versions of the postcard will contain graphics and text explaining the project and requesting public input. Additionally, email updates will be sent at relevant project milestones.

Up to eight email newsletters will be sent via Constant Contact to provide the public and stakeholders with periodic updates about the project.

DOWL will submit draft postcards and newsletters to DOT&PF for approval prior to distribution.

5.5 Public Meetings

The project team will host two open house style public meetings to gather input on project development and to share information on project schedule and outreach efforts. These meetings are planned to be in-person, with the project team coordinating locations and refreshments, preparing meeting materials, and set-up and removal of information. Meeting participation information and materials will be posted to the project website, including pre-recorded presentations for stakeholders who are unable to attend in person. Virtual meetings will be conducted in accordance with FHWA's NEPA Assignment Program Guidance on Virtual Public Meetings. Proposed open house schedule:

Open House #	Milestone	Topic(s)
1	Concept Report/ Project Initiation	Introduce project Stakeholder outreach in support of NEPA document
2	35% Design	Alternatives analysis and recommendation Stakeholder outreach in support of NEPA document finalization

Stakeholders will be notified via the following methods for the two open house meetings: postcard mailed at least two weeks prior to the meeting, public notice on the State of Alaska website, advertisement in Anchorage Daily News, email via Constant Contact, and posts on the statewide DOT&PF Facebook page. Meeting advertisements will be prepared in advance to allow for DOT&PF approval. DOWL will provide DOT&PF an affidavit of publication for any newspaper advertisements.

Meeting summaries will be prepared with attendance, materials, and a summary of verbal and written comments and responses as documentation for project records.

Additionally, the team will participate in up to three annual Anchorage Transportation Fairs.

5.6 Community Council Updates

The project team will maintain regular interaction with various stakeholder groups within the corridor, including attendance at up to 15 meetings for Spenard, Midtown, North Star, and Rogers Park Community Councils at key milestones during the project.

5.7 Government and Agency Briefings

AMATS staff will brief the AMATS committees at key project milestones. Project team staff will be available to provide a presentation and answer questions.

The project team will support DOT&PF and MOA on a concept development meeting with agency representatives in Spring 2024.

The project team may present additional updates to government, regulatory agency, resource agency, and planning organization leadership at key project milestones. These briefings will use a presentation format and provide opportunity for comments and questions.

Meeting materials and summaries will be prepared for these meetings. Documentation for project records will include attendance, meeting materials, presentation, and a summary of verbal and written comments and responses.

5.8 MOA Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) Process

The project team will prepare an initial Concept Report for the MOA Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) describing the project area, history, and key stakeholder concerns. At 35 percent design, the project team will submit a Preliminary Engineering Report, or Design Study Report, to PZC for approval.

5.9 Agency and Stakeholder Site Walk/Bike Audit

The project team will invite agencies and stakeholders to walk the project corridor and take a short survey on transportation habits, perceptions of the corridor's safety and access, and provide an opportunity for input in certain design decisions.

Documentation for project records will include attendance, audit materials, and a summary of survey results and comments.

5.10 Individual and Small Group Meetings

The project team identified over 80 parcels along the project corridor. The team will likely request meetings with each property owner early in the design process to share project information specific to each property.

The project team will participate in meetings with small groups or individual stakeholders, as requested. Approval will be sought from DOT&PF prior to these meetings.

Documentation for project records will include attendance, meeting materials, presentation, and a summary of verbal and written comments and responses.

5.11 Media Communications

Media communications will be led by DOT&PF with support from the project team as needed. Support from the project team may include drafting press releases, talking points, or other materials needed for media briefings, telephone interviews, and communication with elected officials.

5.12 Public Involvement Report

At completion of the design phase, the project team will prepare a Public Involvement Report documenting the public outreach efforts, comments received, and responses to comments. All correspondence and supporting documentation will be included as an appendix to the report.

5.13 Additional Public Involvement and Communications Support

The project team will conduct additional public involvement, as required, throughout the project. Additional public involvement may include (as directed and agreed to by the DOT&PF Project Manager):

- Additional project update emails
- Targeted literature drops to key stakeholders
- Responses to informal requests for information from individuals and/or agencies
- Prepare draft press or media releases
- Translation services
- Regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document
- Regular emailed updates to the Community Councils in the project area
- Presentations to project area business and community organizations
- Provide project information at community events, such as farmer's markets and food truck pods, to engage a broader group of stakeholders

6.0 COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC AND DOCUMENTATION

Comments received via email, mail, phone, or in written form will be distributed to the project team and archived in a project comment database. All comments and questions will be replied to within two business days pending DOT&PF's prior approval of a draft response.

7.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Guidelines for a successful public involvement process using context sensitive solutions requires a strong commitment from all members of the project team to reach out to potentially affected interests. Below are goals for obtaining public input throughout the project.

- The roles of the project team and the public will be defined.
- A working relationship between the community and the project team will be formed.
- Goals and expectations will be clearly defined.
- The project team will keep an open mind on all points of view.
- The project team will keep the public informed, listen and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how public input has influenced project decisions.
- Information will be shared openly and directly to help the public become familiar with the issues and the public process.
- Milestones in the process will be clearly defined, acknowledged, and communicated to the public.

- Visualizations and illustrations will be used to convey project design.
- The project team will encourage the public to provide feedback on elements of the design that are affected by input (landscaping, lighting, etc.).
- Feedback opportunities will be designed in a way that stakeholders can communicate in their desired form.
- The project team will follow up on all inquiries and comments during project development.