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Volume 6



Gravina Access Project

Thank you for your input!

Community interest and participation in the Gravina Access Project continue to be high in Ketchikan. Earlier this year, the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) received considerable input from the Ketchikan community; local officials; and local, state, and federal agency representatives concerning the reasonable alternatives for Ketchikan's improved access to Gravina Island. The project team would like to thank all those who have participated in the public process.

Formal Public Comment Period on Reasonable Alternatives ends

On January 7, 2002, DOT&PF announced their recommended alternative for the Gravina Access Project—Alternative F3, a bridge alternative that crosses Penock Island. The formal public comment period on all the reasonable alternatives ended in March with overwhelming participation. More than 150 comments were received by fax, mail, and email through mid-April. Since DOT&PF's announcement, comments poured in to the project team and were accepted long after the March deadline. Community members turned out for the two public open house meetings in Ketchikan in February, with more than 150 people signing in.

DOT&PF's recommended alternative was based on numerous engineering and technical studies conducted last year. In order for the project to move forward with more detailed engineering and more rigorous environmental analysis, DOT&PF sought input from the Ketchikan community on the evaluation of all of the reasonable alternatives currently under consideration, including F3 and the no-build alternative.

Public Comments Summarized

Public comments were summarized and published in the June 2002 "Public Comments Summary Document." The document is available on the project website and from the project office in Ketchikan. Comments ranged from pursuing DOT&PF's recommended alternative, creating a hard link to Gravina via some type of modification of the reasonable alternatives, to leaving the ferry service as-is under the no build alternative.

Several recurring issues were:

- Increased navigational risk associated with restriction of East Channel travel
- Economic impact associated with East Channel navigational restrictions
- Desire to develop land and foster economic revival in the community
- Fairness in choosing final alternative

Restricting cruise ship travel in the East Channel appears to be the most common issue raised during the public comment process.

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Geotechnical drilling last month

Public Comments

Here's some of what the Ketchikan community is saying about a hard link to Gravina Island...

Look on the website at <http://www.gravina-access.com/> for a complete summary of public comments

...Economic Impact

East Channel closure has the potential to reduce cruise ship stops and result in less time in port

The real growth industry in Ketchikan is the cruise ship/ tourist industry - and the project should avoid negative impacts to tourism

Desire for more economic impact studies

...Navigational Restriction in the East Channel

F3 limits the use of the Tongass Narrows by large vessels

To substitute a secondary channel for a primary channel with increased risk and congestion is a crippling blow to maritime commerce transiting Tongass Narrows.

Bring back F1 to address navigational concerns

...Desire to Develop Land and for Economic revival in community

The community has significant infrastructure and lands on Gravina Island that cannot begin to realize their potential without improved access.



Bringing back Alternative F1

Many of the public comments showed support for a Pennock Island crossing, but there has been interest in an alternative that allows cruise ships to continue to use the East Channel. Alternative F1—one of the original 18 build options eliminated from consideration as a reasonable alternative because its life cycle costs exceeded the reasonable cost threshold established by DOT&PF—has a 200-foot high bridge over the East Channel and an approximately 120-foot high bridge over the West Channel.

Because many community and some agency representatives requested that the DOT&PF include Alternative F1 as a reasonable alternative, the DOT&PF has decided to reconsider Alternative F1 as a proposed reasonable alternative in the draft environmental impact statement. The DOT&PF has therefore recently requested concurrence from state and federal agencies to include Alternative F1 in the list of reasonable alternatives.

PROJECT

1999

➤ The Gravina Access Project is a high priority project authorized by the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21), which allocated approximately \$20 mil-

lion toward “constructing a bridge joining the Island of Gravina to the Community of Ketchikan on Revilla Island.”

➤ DOT&PF contract with HDR Alaska to conduct engineering and environmental studies of the project area and develop and investigate options for improved access.

2000

➤ Project team develops 18 alternative concepts for crossing Tongass Narrows (these include multiple types of bridges, ferry connections that would augment the existing ferry service, and underwater tunnels).

➤ A screening process, based on input from federal, state, and local



Pulling together the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)

Over the next several months, the project team will perform more detailed economic and engineering analysis in order to refine the build and no-build alternatives for the DEIS. After all of the analysis is complete, a DEIS should be available for public review in early 2003. The environmental impact statement will examine the potential impacts of the reasonable build alternatives and the no-build alternative.

Ongoing studies

In response to the Ketchikan community and agencies, additional studies will be conducted over the next several months. These include real-time marine vessel simulations, additional engineering analysis for Alternative F1, and additional economic impact studies.

Economic studies

The Project Team will revise previous economic studies based on the public comment received at various meetings in Ketchikan. The economic impact studies will include:

- Revising the cruise ship analysis after the real-time simulation is completed and responses have been received from the cruise industry
- Economic effects will be expanded to address potential effects on the cities of Saxman and Ketchikan

Vessel Simulations

Restricting travel in East Channel is a substantial issue raised during the public comment process. A full mission real-time simulation was conducted of all the 200-foot high bridge alternatives to better determine the impact of the alternatives on marine navigation in Tongass Narrows, particularly cruise ships.

The simulator facility in Florida developed a geographical model for the Port of Ketchikan, which accurately depicts the piers, shorelines, aids to navigation, and other distinctive features to insure a high level of fidelity during simulation exercises. Current and wind were modeled to represent the conditions specified in the test plan as closely as possible.

Simulation exercises were conducted in three five-day sessions during the month of May. All runs were conducted in real-time on the Star Center's 360-degree shiphandling simulator. Southeast Alaska pilots participated in the simulation exercises.

Geotechnical and Geophysical field work conducted in May

During the month of May, geotechnical drilling took place at several locations in Tongass Narrows in Ketchikan. The purpose of the drilling was to explore subsurface conditions in the areas presently deemed most suitable for bridge-crossings.



Drilling in Tongass Narrows explored subsurface conditions

agencies, was used to evaluate these options and help identify the proposed reasonable alternatives to be studied in greater detail in the draft environmental impact statement.

2001

➤ Project team conducted additional engineering and environmental studies of the build alternatives to further

refine the design and engineering requirements of the alternatives and to generally characterize the potential environmental impacts that might result from construction and long-term use of the project.

2002

➤ DOT&PF identifies recommended alternative (F3) for community consideration and

discussion.

➤ Reasonable Alternatives public comment period

2003

- Draft EIS
- Final EIS and Permitting
- Engineering Design

TIMELINE



Presented by the Alaska Department of
Transportation and Public Facilities

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Gravina Access Project

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How to Submit Your Comments

You can submit written comments to the project team listed below at any time during the environmental review process. Written comments can be sent via e-mail or through traditional mail. The website also provides a comment submittal form. Please contact either of the project managers for more information. We value your input and look forward to hearing from you.

Contacts:

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Inside this newsletter...

- Public comments on reasonable alternatives
- Drafting the Environmental Impact Statement
- Recent studies and field work in Ketchikan

Check out the project website at: www.gravina-access.com