



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Transportation and
Public Facilities

Office of the Commissioner

3132 Channel Drive
P.O. Box 112500
Juneau, Alaska 99811-2500
907.465.3900
dot.state.ak.us

January 9, 2024

Thank you for commenting on the West Susitna Access Road Project, STIP ID 34206.

This project is a newly proposed project in the STIP and would be funded by Surface Transportation Block Grant funding (STBG).

The public was highly interested in this project, with approximately 380 people commenting on the project, and around 30 people left contact information for us to respond directly.

The public brought up several issues that we will cover in this response, including:

- Concerns that this project would compete with other needs statewide.
- Concerns about whether or not the road could be used by mining companies.
- Concerns about AIDEA and the Port MacKenzie Rail extension.
- Concerns about both maintenance on the road and the impacts to other state-owned roadways.
- Concerns about whether or not the project was a public or private project.
- Concerns about costs and cost overruns.
- Concerns about economic development.
- Concerns about salmon, wetlands, wildlife, and impacts to the natural environment.

Funding:

West Susitna Access Project will be funded with STBG funds and does not compete with National Highway Performance Program. NHPP highways include the Parks, Glenn, Seward, Sterling, Richardson, and Steese Highways, for example. Alaska DOT&PF allocates approximately \$385M in NHPP, and \$195M in STBG annually.

Maintenance:

Maintenance funding is paid for with state dollars and that level is determined by the Alaska State Legislature. No decision has been made about the level of service for the road, however, the proposed West Susitna Access Project would likely be a gravel surface and built to frontier road standards.

Public Road

Alaska DOT&PF builds roads for the public to use. This project purpose is to allow greater access to recreational opportunities in the Susitna Basin, west of the Parks Highway. This project is not a mining project, however, public roads may be used by all members of the public, including commercial and industrial traffic.

Alternative Projects:

This project is not an AIDEA project. AIDEA is continuing to pursue mining opportunities in the West Susitna Basin, independently of Alaska DOT&PF's work.

The Point MacKenzie Rail Extension is a Mat-Su Borough project, and the right of way is owned by the Mat-Su Borough. Comments about this project should be routed to the Mat-Su Borough.

Costs and Cost Overruns

Construction is a significant investment, which is why the department conducts a thorough investigation in project development, including geotechnical analysis of the route, and material sources in the area.

Transportation projects are competitively bid, so much of the risk of construction falls on the private sector partner.

Concerns about Economic Development

Transportation infrastructure is a key factor in economic development. New routes, such as West Susitna Access Road would improve access to recreational opportunities and improving the quality of life for those seeking natural environment experiences. New housing or recreation cabins are also possible depending on the land ownership.

Concerns about the Natural Environment

Alaska DOT&PF shares the concern about how transportation project impact the natural environment. DOT&PF adheres to the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) which examines the projects impacts to the natural environment, human environment and mitigates for impacts to the environment. Some commenters specifically shared their concerns about salmon habitat. We have learned a lot more about fish passage over the past few decades and will adhere to modern engineering proven to support safe fish passage.

Thank you again for commenting on the 2024-2027 STIP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ryan Anderson".

Ryan Anderson, P.E.

Commissioner

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities