

6.0 Public Involvement & Agency Consultation

During the North Douglas Crossing Public Involvement Project, the project team spoke with 14 stakeholder groups and received 79 written comments (letter, email or on-line form) and a copy of a petition from the “Build the Bridge Committee.” Thirty-four people testified during the two public meetings held in January 2007. The project team also met with local, state and federal agencies.

This section summarizes all comments received, indicates what was heard from stakeholder groups and from individual respondents, and reports input from agencies. Appendices to this report include notes from stakeholder interviews, public and agency meeting summaries, a matrix summarizing all stakeholder and public comments, and copies of all written comments.

Stakeholder and public comments do not give a statistically reliable indication of Juneau’s opinion on the crossing project, but offer the depth of thinking of people who took the time to become well-informed about the alternatives being considered by the CBJ, other approaches, and the advantages and disadvantages of each. They tend to be those most interested in potential effects on the community attributes or resources they value, and most vested in the outcome of the selection of a community preferred alternative.

A Community Opinion Survey was also used to provide a statistically reliable poll of Juneau residents about the crossing project and alternative crossing routes. Results of the survey are presented in Section 7.0.

6.1 Agency Consultation

On November 9, 2006, the project team met with representatives of local, State of Alaska and federal regulatory and resource management agencies to obtain background information and discuss key issues relative to the crossing project.¹⁶ The morning session focused on airport, navigation, transportation and technical issues; the afternoon on environmental permit requirements. Agency meeting summaries are included in Appendix D.

FAA and Airport staff, Airport Board members, and an Alaska Airlines representative discussed plans to improve the Runway Safety Area and approach lighting on the runway’s east end and reviewed regulations requiring surface and airspace setbacks for obstruction. They urged that the alignment be routed farther east (e.g., Vanderbilt Hill

¹⁶ Agencies and others represented included Alaska Airlines, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, ADFG, ADOT&PF, CBJ Community Development Department, CBJ Engineering, CBJ Ports and Harbors, DNR, FAA, JIA managers and Board members, National Marine Fisheries Service, USCG, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Road or Sunny Point) to avoid future conflicts with airport operations and expansion needs. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) confirmed that a new crossing would be required to meet the same navigational clearances as the existing bridge and indicated that if a movable span bridge was installed, the USCG would consult with the public and determine the method and schedule for operation.

State and federal regulatory agencies discussed the environmental values of the project area and permitting requirements. Under the federal Clean Water Act (regulating placement of fill in wetlands), the Corps of Engineers must permit the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative. Permitting agencies will consider the crossing location (e.g., routing through areas with lower environmental value), design (e.g., length of crossing, size of fill footprint on wetlands), and other factors that influence the impact of the project on the environment. Agency staff emphasized that the “least fill footprint in wetlands is best.” Mitigation will be required for unavoidable impacts.

Regarding a crossing of the MWSGR, agencies discussed the requirements of Section 4(f) and the Refuge Management Plan that require the crossing project to avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts to the Refuge (see Section 4.3). If a Refuge crossing is pursued, agencies urged that the shortest crossing be constructed, and they preferred an alignment near one end or the other of the Refuge, rather than crossing through the middle. The project must consider impacts to fish and wildlife populations and habitat, and to uses and users of the Refuge. There is concern about impacts on waterfowl hunting (including the potential for establishment of no-hunting zones). Hunting is most intensive between Lemon Creek and the airport.¹⁷

6.2 Stakeholder and Public Comments Regarding Alternatives

The CBJ Assembly asked the Juneau public which crossing area it prefers: Vanderbilt Hill Road, Sunny Point or Yandukin Drive (Figure 1). Forty-one stakeholder groups or individuals express a preference for one (or more) of these areas. Strictly in terms of the number of responses, there is greatest preference for the Vanderbilt Hill Road corridor (17-21 favorable responses), followed by Sunny Point (12-17 responses), and then by a crossing at Yandukin Drive corridor A, B or C (7-8 responses). Supporters’ comments and rationale are summarized in Sections 6.2.1 - 6.2.3, below.

An additional nine comments express their support for the North Douglas Crossing project, but do not express a preference among the alternatives. These include the following stakeholder groups: Capital City Fire and Rescue, Douglas Indian Association, Douglas Service Area Advisory Board, Goldbelt, Inc., Juneau Economic Development Council, Juneau Police Department, Totem Creek, and West Douglas Development Working Group. Several urge the CBJ to select whichever alternative best meets project objectives, is most likely to be permitted, and is most feasible to construct.

¹⁷ ADFG letter to Sheinberg Associates, February 26, 2007 (See Appendix C).

Twenty-seven stakeholder groups and individuals suggest a different alternative: a crossing at Salmon Creek or another non-Refuge location, a crossing west of the Airport, or a No Build alternative. Their suggestions are discussed in Section 6.2.4, below.

Finally, twenty comments were received stating that it is premature for the CBJ to be selecting a community preferred alternative for the crossing. The North Douglas Neighborhood Association stakeholder group made this comment, along with neighborhood residents.

A summary of stakeholder interviews is provided in Appendix E. Public meeting summaries are in Appendix F, a matrix of stakeholder and public comments in Appendix H, and a copy of all written comments in Appendix I.

6.2.1 Vanderbilt Hill Road Corridor

People or groups who prefer the Vanderbilt Hill Road corridor offer the following reasons (in random order):

- Shortest route; smallest wetland fill footprint; most likely to receive environmental permits.
- Of routes in Refuge, would have the least impact on fish and wildlife, habitats, uses and users, and areas used by waterfowl hunters.
- Lowest estimated project cost.
- Least airport impact.
- Good transportation connection to Lemon Creek commercial area.
- Intersection on Egan Drive is closest to Bartlett Memorial Hospital.
- Connects to an existing intersection on Egan (intended for upgrade).

Seventeen comments favor a crossing at Vanderbilt Hill Road, and four prefer either Vanderbilt Hill or Sunny Point (including the Airport Board).

People who do not prefer the Vanderbilt Hill Road crossing say that it is too close to the existing bridge; would fragment the North Douglas neighborhood and route traffic onto the greatest length of North Douglas highway; potentially require a high embankment across the wetlands with greater hydrologic and visual impacts; and may cross unstable soils in the channel.

6.2.2 Sunny Point Corridor

People or groups who prefer the Sunny Point corridor offer the following reasons (in random order):

- Connects to Egan intersection being upgraded to a grade-separated interchange in 2007-2008.
- Avoids airport area.

- Balanced location: Farther west than Vanderbilt Hill; accessible to Mendenhall Valley and Lemon Creek.
- Can route through CBJ property at Hendrickson Point (on Douglas Island) and give more flexibility on North Douglas Highway intersection location.
- Estimated project costs reasonable.

Twelve comments favor a crossing at Sunny Point, four prefer either Sunny Point or Vanderbilt (including the Airport Board), and one either Sunny Point or Yandukin Drive.

Those who do not support a crossing at Sunny Point say that it is longer than the Vanderbilt Hill crossing and would have a larger fill footprint and higher cost; would bisect the open expanse of the Refuge wetlands and impact higher value estuarine wetlands; and would affect areas intensively used by waterfowl hunters. They note higher fish and wildlife values at Sunny Point than at Vanderbilt Hill Road. Finally, they state that the intersection with North Douglas Highway would fragment the North Douglas neighborhood and route traffic onto a substantial length of North Douglas highway; would have visual impacts; and may cross unstable soils in the channel.

6.2.3 Yandukin Drive Corridors (A, B or C)

People or groups who prefer one (or more) of the Yandukin Drive corridors offer the following reasons (in random order):

- Furthest west crossing; best meets objective of transportation access to farther north and west Douglas for development, recreation and emergency response.
- Central location for accessing North Douglas Highway and conveying sewer lines to Douglas Island.
- Yandukin B and Yandukin C, which intersect North Douglas Highway at Fish Creek (Eaglecrest) Road, would: 1) minimize fragmentation of North Douglas neighborhood, 2) have least traffic impacts on North Douglas residential areas, 3) offer best access to Eaglecrest.
- Yandukin B (tunnel under airport runway) would have less visual impact and less Refuge and wetlands impact than other Yandukin alternatives.
- Yandukin C would cross higher elevation wetlands, which are lower value than the low estuarine marsh at Sunny Point.
- Personal observation that fewer hunters, hikers, fishers may use the Yandukin C crossing area than Vanderbilt or Sunny Point areas.

Seven comments favor a crossing at one of the Yandukin Drive corridors; one prefers either Yandukin Drive or Sunny Point.¹⁸ Eaglecrest prefers the Yandukin B or C crossings, but notes that a crossing at any location would improve access to the ski area.

¹⁸ Yandukin A – 2 comments in support; Yandukin B – 2; Yandukin C – 1; Yandukin B or C – 2; any Yandukin option – 1.

Capital City Fire and Rescue expresses strong support for any crossing because of the importance of a secondary emergency access, but notes the Yandukin Drive corridors' proximity to the Glacier Fire Station.

Those who do not support a Yandukin Drive alternatives note the potential for impacts to airport operations and future expansion with Yandukin A or C; the long crossings that bisect the open expanse of Refuge wetlands; and potential visual impacts. They also note that the Yandukin B tunnel raises airport impact, management and security issues, and is too costly. The Airport Board specifically recommends against the Yandukin A and C corridors, which would be located immediately east of the airport runway safety.

6.2.4 Comments Suggesting Other Alternatives

6.2.4.1 Salmon Creek or Non-Refuge Alternative

People or groups who suggest that the CBJ consider a crossing at Salmon Creek or another non-Refuge location give the following reasons (in random order):

- Complies with Section 4(f); avoids impacts to MWSGR, its fish and wildlife, habitats, uses and users.
- Shorter route than alternatives being considered by CBJ; could span with fixed span bridge, provide navigability, avoid wetlands fill.
- Lower estimated project cost than alternatives being considered by CBJ (based on 2005 *Summary Report*).
- No airport conflicts.
- Closest to hospital, for improved emergency response.
- Less impact on Sunny Point neighborhood than a Sunny Point crossing.
- Focuses future growth on Douglas Island closer to downtown Juneau, encouraging a more compact and affordable pattern for community development than developing the West Douglas New Growth Area.

Thirteen comments favor a crossing at Salmon Creek, four recommend any non-Refuge location, and one recommends either Salmon Creek or west of the Airport. These comments included responses from the Juneau Audubon Society, Mendenhall Refuge Citizens Advisory Group, Sunny Point Neighborhood Association, and Territorial Sportsmen/Ducks Unlimited.

Comments that do not support a Salmon Creek location note that it is too close to the existing bridge, would intersect North Douglas Highway in a location that would fragment that neighborhood, and would route traffic onto a greater length of North Douglas Highway than the alternatives being considered by the CBJ.

6.2.4.2 West of the Airport Alternatives

Five comments recommend consideration of a crossing west of the airport, and one recommends either Salmon Creek or west of the Airport. They note that it would allow a connection farther west on North Douglas Highway, potentially through CBJ-owned land (e.g., at Peterson Point). They felt that a route farther west would provide the most direct connection to West Douglas; facilitate travel between north and west Douglas Island and the Mendenhall Valley, and minimize impacts on the North Douglas neighborhood. They further suggest that it would have less impact to Refuge resources, uses and users than a crossing through the broad wetland area east of the Airport.

6.2.4.3 No Build Alternative

Four comments recommend a No Build alternative. They question the need for the crossing and feel that Juneau's future development needs can best be met within its existing road system. They feel that project costs are too high and potential impacts from a crossing too great to pursue it.

6.3 Factors Important to the Public and Stakeholders When Evaluating Alternatives

When indicating which alternative they prefer, stakeholders and the public were asked to indicate the factors they think are most important to the decision of where to locate the North Douglas Crossing. The following factors are listed in order, from those most frequently mentioned in public comment to those least often mentioned:

- 1) Refuge & environmental impacts – including impacts to wetlands, fish and wildlife, hunting, other uses
- 2) Impacts to neighborhoods and property owners
- 3) Meets transportation objectives (access, convenience)
- 4) Project costs
- 5) Airport impacts
- 6) Emergency response
- 7) Feasibility (likely to be permitted; feasible to build)
- 8) Facilitates sensible future community development
- 9) Transportation safety
- 10) Access to recreation
- 11) Visual impacts
- 12) Navigation

These responses, as well as responses from the Community Opinion Survey, were considered by the project team in determining which key evaluation factors were most relevant to identifying a community preferred alternative (see Section 8.0).

6.4 Comments Regarding Key Issues Related to the North Douglas Crossing

In addition to commenting on a preferred alignment for a North Douglas Crossing, many stakeholders and individuals commented on general issues related to the North Douglas Crossing project. These comments are summarized in this section.

6.4.1 View of Importance of North Douglas Crossing

Twenty-five comments from stakeholder groups or individuals view the crossing as a high transportation priority for Juneau. They note that it will improve emergency response; relieve traffic on the existing bridge; and facilitate Juneau's long-term growth, including near-term opportunities to developing West Douglas for recreation, housing and tourism. They note that it will save fuel and time, and reduce emissions, and that delaying the project will increase its eventual cost. Stakeholder groups that view the project as a high priority include: Capital City Fire and Rescue, Douglas Indian Association, Douglas Service Area Advisory Board, Eaglecrest, Goldbelt, Inc., Juneau Economic Development Council, Juneau Police Department, Totem Creek, and West Douglas Development Working Group.

Twenty comments question the crossing project's urgency. West Douglas development is questioned by some as unnecessary and speculative (given Juneau's recent growth rate), and not the best community planning solution to meet Juneau's needs (including affordable housing). A number of comments suggest that growth could occur in other locations (e.g., in-fill on the mainland) with lower cost and less environmental impact, and that funds should be spent on other community transportation needs. Some suggest construction of a third lane on the Juneau Douglas Bridge as a less expensive solution to existing bridge congestion. Stakeholder groups that do not view the project as a high priority include: Juneau Audubon Society, Mendenhall Refuge Citizens Advisory Group, Sunny Point Neighborhood Association, and Territorial Sportsmen/Ducks Unlimited.

6.4.2 Process for Selecting a Community Preferred Alternative

Twenty-three comments express concern with the CBJ's process for selecting a community preferred alternative, stating that the process is premature. They state that the CBJ narrowed the range of alternatives too soon, without the benefit of a more complete alternatives analysis in an EIS or other decision document. Others that the process did not adequately involve affected parties (especially property owners) and did not make a specific commitment to and description of mitigation for impacts to neighborhoods and the Refuge. Several people suggest that a more deliberate, collaborative multi-stakeholder process be convened to build consensus about the best location and approach for the North Douglas Crossing. The following stakeholder groups share some or all of

these concerns: Juneau Audubon Society, Mendenhall Refuge Citizens Advisory Group, North Douglas Neighborhood Association, Sunny Point Neighborhood Association, and Territorial Sportsmen/Ducks Unlimited.

6.4.3 Impacts on North Douglas Neighborhood and Property Owners

The North Douglas Neighborhood Association (NDNA) and many North Douglas residents participated very actively in the public involvement process. NDNA has approximately 150 active members, has been involved in the crossing issue for over three years, participates on the West Douglas Development Working Group, and conducted a recent survey of North Douglas residents regarding the crossing project and potential construction of a Bench Road.¹⁹

The NDNA does not oppose the crossing project, but has strong concerns with its potential impact on the neighborhood, and with the process the CBJ is using to select a community preferred alternative (see Section 6.4.2). NDNA comments state that they are guided by a strong desire to maintain and enhance their neighborhood and the quality of life that led them to live in North Douglas. They are specifically concerned with impacts to highway and pedestrian safety, recreation, wetlands, the quality of life in the neighborhood, and impacts to the value and quality of personal property.

The Association and many residents have not identified a preferred alternative from the alignments being considered by the CBJ. Instead, they recommend that the following steps be taken before the Assembly decides on a community preferred alternative.

6.4.3.1 Inclusion of the Bench Road in the North Douglas Crossing Project

The NDNA and others urge the CBJ to include the Bench Road in the North Douglas Crossing project. Comments from thirty-two individuals or stakeholder groups (including the North Douglas and Sunny Point Neighborhood Associations) support the Bench Road to route traffic associated with the crossing and the West Douglas New Growth Area off of the North Douglas Highway. Many note that their support for a crossing is linked to their support for the Bench Road.

Comments express concern that without a Bench Road to carry heavy traffic loads, the neighborhood will face severe impacts to its quality of life, rural character, and safety, and property owners will be impacted by highway widening. They remind the CBJ that the 1995 CBJ *Comprehensive Plan* said that: “a comprehensive traffic evaluation [that evaluates both the crossing and the Bench Road] should be completed before either of the two alternatives ... is pursued in detail”, and ask that this study be done.

¹⁹ The NDNA survey found that 75% of the 135 residents who responded favored a crossing, while 60% favored a Bench Road. Support of the two projects was often linked. The highest ranked crossing route among the survey respondents was from Yandukin Drive to the Fish Creek (Eaglecrest) Road intersection.

In contrast, four comments do *not* support the Bench Road. They question the need for the road and express concern that linking the two projects would delay or derail the crossing project.

6.4.3.2 Community Development Issues

Fourteen comments request that a comprehensive neighborhood and transportation plan be prepared for North Douglas Island, before a community preferred alternative for the crossing is selected. They suggest that the plan address safety, recreation, transportation analysis, housing growth, utilities, Eaglecrest, parks, tourism growth and impacts, and other issues related to future development. This request was made by the NDNA stakeholder group and many neighborhood residents.

In addition, five comments urge that the CBJ reconsider designating West Douglas as the best place for Juneau's future growth. They question locating new development this far from existing developed areas, note the high public cost for infrastructure and services, and suggest that growth be accommodated through in-fill of mainland locations. The Sunny Point Neighborhood Association stakeholder group expresses this concern.

6.4.3.3 Completion of a North Douglas Impact Analysis

Seventeen comments request completion of an impact analysis, which would analyze the impacts of the crossing project on North Douglas. They suggest that the impact analysis address the economic, social and environmental impacts of all proposed alternatives, to maximize the mitigation of detrimental impacts such as the loss of property and homes, highway safety and reduced property values.

6.4.3.4 Property Values and Compensation

Nineteen comments express concern about the effect of the North Douglas Crossing project on property owners, and want assurance that there will be adequate compensation for property owners who are directly impacted by the crossing or the intersection, or whose property is indirectly impacted (e.g., by noise, lights).

Some comments also raise concern that depicting potential crossing routes in project planning documents will lower property values or reduce its attractiveness to potential buyers, and raise the issue of compensation for this loss in value or for difficulty in selling their property.

Finally, some comments ask the CBJ to consider crossing locations that would have less impact on private property, such a route from west of the Airport to CBJ-owned property at Peterson Point.

6.4.4 Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge and Section 4(f)

Eighteen comments recommend that the crossing be built at Salmon Creek or another non-Refuge location. They note that Section 4(f) and the MWSGR Management Plan require that a non-Refuge alternative be used if prudent and feasible, and that impacts

must be minimized and mitigated (see Section 4.3). The advantages of a Salmon Creek location, as suggested by these comments, are listed in Section 6.2.4.1, above.)

Comments state that the Refuge is exceptionally valuable to the community of Juneau for many reasons, including: support for fish and wildlife populations, recreation, open space and scenic value, tourism, and waterfowl hunting. The Refuge was designated by the National Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area because of its importance to migratory waterfowl. The Refuge is important to waterfowl hunters and serves a special purpose in that it is readily accessible via the Juneau road system (increasing accessibility for youth and others who cannot travel far to hunt). There is strong concern that a no hunting zone will be established along the road corridor.

Concern with a crossing in the Refuge is expressed by the following stakeholder groups: Juneau Audubon Society, Mendenhall Refuge Citizens Advisory Group, Sunny Point Neighborhood Association, and Territorial Sportsmen/Ducks Unlimited.

In contrast, two comments note that the state law establishing the Refuge provides that the CBJ could obtain land for a future transportation corridor.

6.4.5 Additional Comments

The following additional comments were received about a variety of issues:

- **Bridge design:** Four comments favor a fixed span bridge, due to lower cost for construction, operation and maintenance and less inconvenience for vehicle and vessels. One comment favors a movable span bridge.
- **Navigability:** Three comments suggest that the CBJ pursue a waiver from the navigability requirement. One comment states that it is essential to retain navigability.
- **Infrastructure/Services:** One comment suggests extending the North Douglas Highway and providing public infrastructure/services to West Douglas as soon as possible, prior to crossing construction. Another recommends that the crossing carry a sewer line to serve North Douglas.
- **Travel convenience:** One comment suggests that a new crossing might reduce frustration with the roundabout intersection at the existing bridge.
- **Boat ramp:** One comment suggests the need to upgrade the North Douglas boat ramp to accommodate the additional use it will receive after the crossing is constructed.
- **Surface runoff:** One comment urges that road runoff be kept out of the wetlands and the channel.
- **Transit:** One comment urges that West Douglas development be served by light rail or mass transit.