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Answers

1. Why is this project being constructed?

This portion of the Seward Highway, Milepost (MP) 17-22.5, has narrow shoulders, restricted sight distances, limited passing opportunities, narrow bridges, and inadequate ditches. With this project, the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) will extend the service life of the facility and enhance safety, provide passing opportunities, and replace or rehabilitate deteriorated bridges.

The current project is the second phase of a larger project, Seward Highway: MP 18-25.5 – Snow River to Trail River (Project No. NH-031-1(27)/53919). The first phase of the larger project rehabilitated the highway between MP 17 and MP 25.5 and replaced bridges at Ptarmigan Creek, Falls Creek, and Trail River near Crown Point, and was constructed in 2012 and 2013.

2. Will this project move the roadway from its existing location?

For the most part, the roadway will remain in the same location. The Seward Highway MP 17-22.5 Rehabilitation Project will widen the existing roadway to 37 feet, including two 12-foot lanes and 6.5-foot paved shoulders in most locations. The current roadway is 28 feet wide, including two 12-foot lanes with 2-foot shoulders.

There will be two minor realignments of the roadway: (1) just south of Victor Creek, a few of the curves will be reconstructed to accommodate the posted speed limit of 55 miles per hour (mph); and (2) near MP 21 or the “Horsepasture” avalanche area, the roadway will shift eastward to add a slow-vehicle turnout and to avoid impacts to Alaska Railroad facilities.

Due to the proximity of the Alaska Railroad, electrical transmission lines, the Chugach National Forest, and the area’s natural topography, major changes to the existing roadway location are not feasible.

3. How is the project funded? What will it cost?

This project is included in the Alaska Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and is a Federal-Aid project funded by the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act or "FAST Act" as administered by FHWA. On December 4, 2015, the FAST Act was put into law. It is the first federal law in more than a decade to provide long-term funding certainty for surface transportation infrastructure planning and investment. The FAST Act authorizes \$305 billion in Federal funds for states over fiscal years 2016 through 2020 for the nation's highway, safety, public transportation, and other transportation programs. This Act allows the State of Alaska to plan our STIP with a high degree of certainty. <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/fastact/>

The Seward Highway MP 17-22.5 Rehabilitation Project is estimated to cost approximately \$60 million (including design, right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, and construction), and will be funded by a combination of State and Federal funds.

4. This area was just repaved. Why were these improvements not done in 2013-2014?

The project (Seward Hwy MP 17.5-22.5 Pavement Preservation #55256) that was constructed in 2013-2014 was a Pavement Preservation project. The 2013 project only repaved the existing road and installed minor drainage improvements—work that was necessary to extend the life of the facility until the more extensive project could be designed and constructed. The 2013 project was, in a sense, a stopgap project. Because the design team and DOT&PF knew that the larger Seward Highway MP 17-22.5 Rehabilitation project was coming along behind this project, they deferred many features such as guardrail replacement to the later project to avoid having to replace them again in a few years.

5. How many new passing lanes will this project provide?

While passing lanes were originally considered for this rehabilitation project, their ultimate length was determined to be too short. Given the topography and other constraints in the project area, there is not sufficient room to make passing lanes as long as desirable. In place of passing lanes, DOT&PF has designed three long slow-vehicle turnouts (SVTs) and five smaller SVTs. A northbound and a southbound SVT will be located between MP 20.5 and MP 20.8, north of Victor Creek, and another southbound SVT will be between MP 21 and MP 21.2, in the MP 21 "Horsepasture" avalanche area. One shorter northbound SVT is located at MP 22.5, ½ mile south of Ptarmigan Creek. Four shorter southbound SVTs are located at MP 18, at the south end of Kenai Lake; MP 19, 1 mile south of Victor Creek; MP 21.8, ½ mile north of Rocky Creek; and MP 22.8, just south of Ptarmigan Creek.

6. Will this project result in higher speed limits in the project area?

No. The posted speed limit is currently 55 mph. After construction, the speed limit will still be 55 mph. There are no plans at this time to raise the speed limit through the area.

7. Will the speeds be reduced through the Lakeview community?

No. At this time, there are no plans to reduce the speeds through the community.

8. What are you doing for pedestrians and cyclists on the project? Will a separated pathway be provided?

The shoulders will be widened to 6.5 feet. The roadway shoulders will function as a shared-use thoroughfare for bicyclists and pedestrians. An attached pedestrian walkway will be incorporated into the existing Snow River bridges.

9. When will construction begin? Why is it going to take so long to begin construction?

At the earliest, construction will begin in fall 2021 and is estimated to take 2–3 years to complete. The timeframe is contingent upon funding availability in the STIP, and appraisal and acquisition of necessary properties.

More information on the STIP can be found at: <http://dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/cip/stip>.

10. What can drivers and residents expect during construction? Will the roadway remain open at all times?

During construction, road users can expect temporary traffic delays and detours. Nighttime road closures will occur as a part of construction. Rock blasting will create noise and dust.

DOT&PF is seeking public feedback on construction traffic control and would appreciate your thoughts on how best to minimize construction impacts. Construction requirements will be outlined by DOT&PF and provided to the construction contractor.

DOT&PF understands that coordination with/notification of the public, agencies, emergency services, and others will be needed during closures.

11. Will the scenic aspects of this portion of the Seward Highway be affected by this project?

While much of the highway will maintain its current location, the project will widen the shoulders and deepen the ditches to improve drainage. The new roadway will have a look and feel similar to the Seward Highway between MP 22.5 and 25.5, where a rehabilitation project was completed in 2013. New pullouts will provide views of Kenai Lake and the surrounding mountains.

Though DOT&PF has minimized the size of rock cuts by staying close to the existing roadway alignment, extensive cuts into roadside bedrock will be needed in most sections. Wide ditches at the base of rock cuts will be provided to improve safety of errant vehicles (vehicles that leave the roadway either as accidental run-off-the-road incidents or for intentional safety maneuvers) and provide an area for rockfall.

12. Will you be making any changes to the Victor Creek Trail or Trailhead as a part of this project?

Currently, the trailhead to Victor Creek can accommodate only a few vehicles and is located within the State's right-of-way. In order to replace the Victor Creek Bridge, the current Victor Creek Trailhead must be relocated. A detour and temporary bridge will be constructed upstream of the existing bridge to enable installation of the new bridge. Efforts will be made by the State to minimize impacts to the trail and to keep the trail open for recreational users during construction. DOT&PF will work with United States Forest Service to construct a new Victor Creek Trailhead facility. The new parking facility and trailhead will be relocated 150 feet north of the bridge, with 12 designated parking spots and additional recreational vehicle and bus parking.

13. Will you be clearing trees next to the roadway?

Yes. There are many reasons to clear trees along the roadway: to improve visibility along the roadway (especially in areas with curves), to provide ample space for DOT&PF road maintenance crews to clear snow, to reduce roadway shadows that can lead to icing, to accommodate utilities, and to provide a clear zone or hazard-free area adjacent to the roadway for errant vehicles. All of these things improve roadway safety. DOT&PF may clear trees up to the limits of the proposed/acquired right-of-way line.

14. What will happen to the trees that are being cleared?

This will depend largely on the area from which the trees are removed. Depending on removal location, the trees may be provided to the United States Forest Service or the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, or may become the property of affected landowners or the construction contractor. Trees may also be available to the public for collection. If trees do become available for public collection, the location, dates, and times of availability will be posted on the project website or be sent to the project email distribution list.

15. How much right-of-way will be needed for the project? Will my property be affected?

The State's existing right-of-way varies greatly throughout the project area. Right-of-way will need to be acquired to improve the roadway. Acquisitions are needed from both private parties and public agencies. The project's right-of-way acquisition phase began in late 2015; DOT&PF has contacted affected property owners and agencies. More information on right-of-way can be found at www.dot.state.ak.us/stwddes/dcsrow/resources.shtml.

16. What will happen to driveways that directly adjoin the highway in areas where the roadway is being widened?

DOT&PF will replace existing driveways at or near their current locations where driveway design standards can be met. DOT&PF will work with property owners to achieve satisfactory driveway configurations if significant driveway relocations are necessary. For more information, visit the permit application website at www.dot.state.ak.us/permits/index.shtml.

17. How will the project handle mailboxes along the highway?

DOT&PF will relocate and/or replace any mailboxes that are affected by the project. DOT&PF will work with the United States Postal Service to best accommodate mail service to affected residents.

18. How are you addressing the bicycle races through the area during construction?

Cycling events will be coordinated with the construction contractor.

19. Will rumble strips be installed?

Yes. Rumble strips, while noisy, save lives. Rumble strips will be installed along the shoulders, which is common along the Seward Highway. Milled-in rumble strips have been used in Alaska for many years to reduce vehicle run-off-the-road crashes. They are widely used across the country and have shown to provide crash reductions. We will follow the DOT&PF Central Region's standard details for installation, which include gaps for cyclists, breaks at roadways and driveways, and breaks over bridges.

20. Who can I contact to get more information?

If you would like to request additional information or share your ideas, visit our website at www.sewardhighway17to22.com. You can sign up for the project mailing list or leave a comment online. You may also contact the project managers; their contact information is listed below.

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