



METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
4700 Elmore Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

Dear Seward to Glenn Connection Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Project Team,

In an effort to improve safety conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians in the AMATS area, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) would like to make the following recommendations on the AMATS: Seward Highway to Glenn Highway Connection Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study, including the Draft Detailed Alternatives Report¹ and the Draft Pedestrian and Bicycle Study².

The BPAC supports the draft AMATS letter to the PEL team as included in the Technical Advisory Committee agenda for 3/7/24³. The comments below are additional.

Top priority recommendations

- Only the “interim” alternative (also called the “2050 MTP (No Highway Connection) Alternative”) meets the overall purpose and need for the PEL and is feasible. **The PEL team should offer additional “no highway connection” alternatives in the next round of development and screening** so the public can provide feedback on a full suite of options that are similarly feasible and meet the project purpose and need.
- **The PEL team should also develop and screen solutions that include public transit and shifting freight and commuting to rail to reduce overall vehicle use.** This should include regional commuter transit (bus and/or rail), local transit, and regional transportation of freight by rail (i.e., from the port to points north and south of the Anchorage Bowl) to reduce freight traffic in the PEL area. Such a shift would reduce negative impacts of traffic on Fairview, avoid relocating those impacts to other neighborhoods, and separate travel functions, thus supporting the project purpose and need.

General comments

- Overall, the draft alternatives all include some community priorities, including returning Gambell Street to a mainstreet and the “regional trail” that connects the Chester Creek and Ship Creek greenbelt systems. These are positive features for the city’s active transportation network.
- We appreciate the opportunity to better evaluate the active transportation network in these alternatives by separating the “roadway” and “non-motorized” alternatives maps.
- This corridor is one of the most dangerous areas in Anchorage, with 43 crashes resulting in fatalities and life-changing injuries in 2008-2017 and a high density of crashes

¹ https://sewardglennconnection.com/documents/Alternative%20Report_020624.pdf

² https://sewardglennconnection.com/documents/2024-02-06_Ped-Report_v6_Clean.pdf

³ https://www.muni.org/Departments/OCPD/Planning/AMATS/Technical_Advisory_Committee/2024/030724/5B_AMATS_Letter_on_PEL_Alterantives.pdf

involving pedestrians and bicyclists⁴. As such, the BPAC urges the PEL team to prioritize safety over traffic flow in scoring and selecting an alternative.

- The System Performance Memo states, “the Seward-Glenn PEL Traffic Model does not indicate a large increase in traffic demand on the roadways within the study area; therefore, the need to increase capacity to serve traffic demand in the Seward and Glenn Highway corridor is not proposed as a purpose and need factor” (p. 33). Though the PEL team describes the projections as “modest” growth, the modeling does not justify massive investments in the highway alternatives A-D, which do not currently show projected costs, relocation impacts, and more.
- Alternatives A through D prioritize regional mobility rather than balancing it against other needs, such as livability and community connection. Each option would also require massive amounts of new infrastructure at high costs to build and higher still to maintain. Please provide estimates of these costs for public consideration, especially in light of the failure of these alternatives to meet community priorities.

The Interim or “No Highway Connection” Alternative

- The “2050 MTP (No Highway Connection) Alternative” is directly drawn from the priorities, needs, and desires of the public as expressed through the draft 2050 MTP and fits the PEL’s overall purpose and needs for: accessibility, safety, livability, social equity, and economic development. As such, this alternative should be fully developed and considered, not presented with only partial information as is currently the case.
- Section 4.2.2 says that “Regional and local traffic would continue to mix on the project corridor, which would not satisfy the purpose and need.” However, none of the other alternatives would guarantee segregation of regional and local traffic either. The project needs include “*reduce* conflicting travel functions” rather than eliminating them entirely. The 2050 MTP Alternative would help reduce the conflict presented by regional traffic by ensuring that traffic moving through the corridor is in the context of neighborhood safety and livability, thus mitigating the effects of that conflict and meeting the project needs.
- Though there are fifteen projects listed in the draft alternatives report, the public outreach materials do not clearly show what projects the PEL team considers for this alternative. Please indicate how these projects are being considered and evaluated.
- Please also provide a map of this alternative, similar to the maps provided for the other alternatives.
- Given the large number of 2050 MTP projects that could fit together in various ways, and given that this alternative is much more financially feasible than the others, please fully develop and score multiple alternatives drawn from the projects listed in the 2050 MTP to evaluate what combination(s) of projects would meet the PEL purpose and needs.

Depressed Freeway Alternatives through Fairview: A, B, AB1, and AB2

- The depressed freeway alternatives routed along Hyder or Ingra Streets do not meet the overall goals of the PEL to improve accessibility, livability, neighborhood connections, and quality of life.
- In every route, the east-west connectivity within the study area suffers, restricting pedestrian and bicycle transportation routes to only a handful of bridges.
- These routes would also require taking the surrounding private property. In each case, hundreds of businesses and homes would need to be relocated, which would be expensive or impossible given the current low rate of building and low vacancy rates for housing. The loss of housing calculated by the MOA Planning Department for

⁴ https://sewardglennconnection.com/documents/22-12-06_B13_3%20SGM_System%20Performance%20Memo_Draft_20230109_website.pdf (Section 9.2.1)

Alternatives B and AB2 (555-568 units⁵) would be larger than the number of housing units Anchorage is currently building each year (400 units⁶).

Bypass Freeway Alternatives: C1, C2, and D

- Alternative D would significantly impact the Chester Creek greenbelt, imposing traffic noise, and the process of clearing snow from the highway would endanger trail users and impede winter maintenance of the trail. Chester Creek Trail is a backbone of the Anchorage non-motorized transportation network, so these impacts are a major concern for the BPAC.
- These routes would come with the high cost of building a massive freeway. The cost and impacts are not justified based on traffic patterns reported or predicted by the PEL System Performance Memorandum⁷, which shows stable traffic counts over 2010-2019; or the 2050 MTP travel demand model⁸, which predicts only small increases in vehicle-miles traveled (11% over 31 years).

Pedestrian and Bicycle Study

- The BPAC is pleased to see this first-of-its kind study for active transportation within Anchorage. The methodology should be captured and provided for future neighborhood studies of this kind.
- However, as written, it is unclear how or if the Pedestrian and Bicycle Study informed the development of the alternatives. The Draft Alternatives Development Report should describe how findings of this study shaped the alternatives and will be incorporated into the next phase of development.
- The study shows higher pedestrian counts and exposure indices at intersections on Gambell St. than on Hyder or Ingra St., supporting options to reduce traffic volumes and/or speeds on Gambell.
- AARP Alaska recently conducted a walk audit of Gambell-Ingra St & 5th-6th Avenues, corresponding to the analysis on turning actions, which should be incorporated into this study for additional context and qualitative information.

The BPAC feels that by following through on the above recommendations, this project will provide improved safety and mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Sincerely,

Darrel Hess – BPAC Chair

⁵ https://fairviewak.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/LRP_SewardGlennComments2024.pdf

⁶ https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6530950aab23d34df6f63a5b/t/65452ee5ed67f0701e304558/1699032806886/01_Klouda+Housing+Week+Presentation.pdf

⁷ https://sewardglennconnection.com/documents/22-12-06_B13_3%20SGM_System%20Performance%20Memo_Draft_20230109_website.pdf (Table 3)

⁸ <https://publicinput.com/Custom/Full/4f8a1124-5989-40c8-9b79-4d89770bb15e> (Table 8)