



KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH

144 North Binkley Street • Soldotna, Alaska 99669-7520

Toll-free within the Borough: 1-800-478-4441 Ex. 2150

PHONE: (907) 714-2150 • **FAX:** (907) 714-2377

www.kpb.us

MIKE NAVARRE
BOROUGH MAYOR

MEMORANDUM

TO: Blaine Gilman, Assembly President
Members, Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly

FROM: Mike Navarre, Mayor *MN*

DATE: August 25, 2016

SUBJECT: Resolution 2016- 049, A Resolution Opposing the Selection of G-South as the Preferred Alternative for the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Project and Supporting the Juneau Creek Alternative (Mayor)

This resolution opposes the selection of G-South as the preferred alternative for the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 project, and supports the selection of Juneau Creek Alternative as the preferred route.

The Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Project, commonly referred to as the Cooper Landing Bypass, has been under consideration by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities ("DOT&PF") since the early 1980's. The current Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement ("SEIS") process for the highway was initiated in 2000.

The purpose of the project is to bring the Sterling Highway through MP 45-60 up to current design standards, reduce highway congestion, and improve highway safety. In achieving this purpose, DOT&PF and the Federal Highway Administration ("FHWA") recognized the importance of protecting the Kenai River corridor. Benefits of the project include increased safety for motorists and pedestrians; improved access to local properties and recreation opportunities along the existing highway; improved travel time through the area; reduced noise, dust, and traffic in Cooper Landing proper; and reduced risk of spills in the Kenai River.

After the assessment of various alternative routes for the highway throughout the years, four build alternatives were analyzed in detail in the 2015 Draft SEIS: G-South Alternative, Juneau Creek Alternative, Juneau Creek Variant, and Cooper Creek Alternative. The Draft SEIS was released in April 2015, and DOT&PF and the FHWA announced the selection of G-South as a preferred alternative in December 2015. A Final SEIS and Record of Decision ("ROD") are expected before the end of 2016. There will not be a formal comment period after the release of the Final SEIS before a ROD on the route.

Attached to this memo is the DOT&PF project overview, which outlines the costs and proposed routes of each of the considered alternatives. Of particular note, the G-South Alternative has an estimated construction cost that is almost \$54 million more than the Juneau Creek Alternative.

Concerns with G South Alternative

There are significant concerns with the selection of the G-South Alternative and the continued risk that it poses to the Kenai River. While it is recognized that this is a complicated process and that each alternative will have an impact on important habitat and recreational opportunities, sustained impacts to the Kenai River were shown less concern in the selection process than impacts to the Mystery Creek Wilderness Area, Resurrection Pass Trail, and the Juneau Falls Recreation Area. The selection process also failed to recognize long term protection of the Kenai River Corridor as a key element of the purpose of this project.

Comments from the Kenai Watershed Forum concerning the impacts of G-South are attached to this memo. The G-South Alternative maintains substantial encroachments on the Kenai River Corridor, and does not significantly decrease traffic immediately adjacent to the river. A significant portion of this alternative would be built on the existing alignment near the river, and an additional bridge would be built over the Kenai River. Forty-five percent of the G-South Alternative remains within 500 feet of the Kenai River or other Tier 1 Waterbody, compared to 25 percent of the Juneau Creek Alternative. The separation provided by 75 percent of the Juneau Creek Alternative gives first responders more time to protect the Kenai River in the event of a hazardous spill.

When the Kenai River is given as much emphasis as other significant areas along the proposed route, the G-South Alternative is neither the least harmful nor does it achieve one main purpose of the project – moving traffic away from the Kenai River. The benefit that G-South does offer over other alternatives is an easier path to completion due to avoiding administrative boundaries associated with the congressionally-designated Wilderness.

Your consideration is appreciated.