

Sterling Highway MP 45–60 Project

Project Overview

Updated January 2016



Originally completed in 1950, the Sterling Highway is the only road that links western Kenai Peninsula communities (Kenai, Soldotna, and Homer) to the rest of the state. Since 1978, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) has recognized the need for improved safety and traffic flow to accommodate the increased Kenai population growth, recreation, and tourism.

DOT&PF has prepared a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation that examines alternatives for improvements to the Sterling Highway between mileposts (MP) 45 and 60. With public input, FHWA and DOT&PF will select an alternative that meets the best overall public interest based on a balanced consideration of these transportation problems and the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts.

Purpose and Need

There are three major needs that the MP 45–60 Project would address:

- » Need 1: Reduce Highway Congestion.
- » Need 2: Meet Current Highway Design Standards.
- » Need 3: Improve Highway Safety.

The purpose of the project is to bring the highway up to current standards for a rural principal arterial to efficiently and safely serve through-traffic, local community traffic, and traffic bound for recreation destinations in the area, both now and in the future. In achieving this transportation purpose, DOT&PF and FHWA recognize the importance of protecting the Kenai River corridor.

Project Benefits

Any of the build alternatives would:

- » Increase safety for motorists and pedestrians,
- » Improve access to local properties and recreation opportunities along the existing highway,

- » Improve travel time through the area,
- » Reduce the risk of fuel spills in the Kenai River by moving some traffic away from the river, and
- » Reduce noise, dust, and traffic in Cooper Landing proper.

None of the alternatives would induce further residential or commercial development more than would be anticipated under the No Build Alternative because of DOT&PF's decision to prohibit driveway or side street access to new sections of highway from adjacent property.

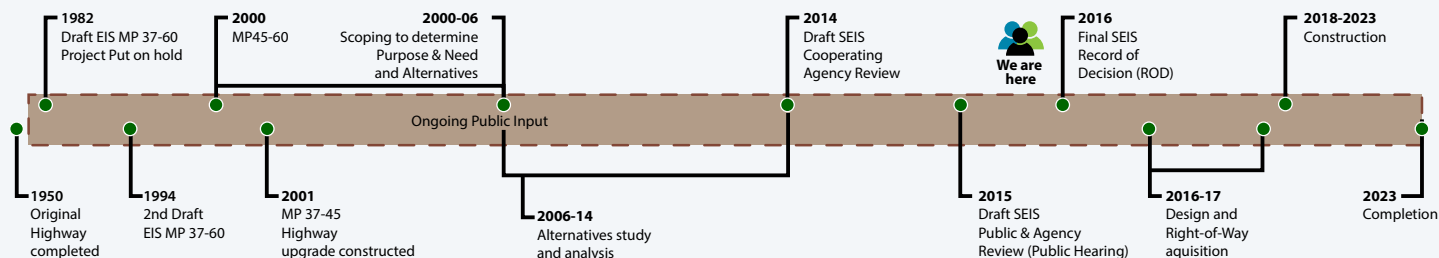
The Issues

The SEIS process considers several important issues.

These include:

- » Increased traffic flow and safety in areas where there are many vehicles turning onto and off of the highway.
- » How to balance the need for safe and efficient transportation and the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts
- » How to balance local desires to keep traffic passing existing businesses with alternatives that would route traffic away from existing businesses.
- » The potential changes in the community of Cooper Landing that may result from a highway upgrade.
- » How to balance desires to avoid impacts to Kenai River with desires to avoid impacts to bear, moose, and other wildlife habitat and movement corridors.
- » How Cooper Landing area's undeveloped private, borough, and state lands are likely to develop with and without the project.
- » Impacts to Federal public lands important for recreation, cultural resources, and wildlife protection.
- » An evaluation of "Least Overall Harm" to support decision making.

Project Schedule



Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Project

Project Overview

Updated January 2016



Alternatives under Consideration

Five alternatives are considered in detail in the Draft SEIS – four build alternatives and the No Build Alternative. All build alternatives would have 12-foot wide lanes, 8-foot-wide shoulders, and passing lanes in new and rebuilt sections of the highway. Many other alternative alignments were considered, but not advanced for full analysis. These were dismissed for engineering or environmental problems, or were very similar but not as good or preferable as the proposed alternatives.

Cost and Funding

This is a Federal Aid Highway project, and Federal Highway Trust Funds are anticipated to cover 90% of costs, with the State covering 10%. Construction costs are estimated in 2014 dollars and are as follows:

- » No Build Alternative, \$0
- » Cooper Creek Alternative, \$290.7 M
- » G South Alternative, \$303.5 M
- » Juneau Creek Alternative, \$249.6 M
- » Juneau Creek Variant Alternative, \$257.0 M

Comments or Questions? Contact us!

- » Via the project website www.sterlinghighway.net
- » Email: sterlinghwy@hdrinc.com
- » Standard mail:
- » DOT&PF Central Region
- » Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Project
- » PO Box 196900 Anchorage, AK 99519-6900

G South Alternative Preferred

On December 11, 2015, DOT&PF and FHWA announced the identification of the G South Alternative as the preferred alternative for the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 project. DOT&PF and FHWA have examined the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and technical reports, and have considered the issues raised in hundreds of public and agency comments on the Draft SEIS. G South provides the best balance between meeting the project needs and minimizing impacts to the human environment. The routing avoids impacts to the Resurrection Pass Trail, the Juneau Falls Recreation Area and important cultural properties, and avoids using designated wilderness land within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. The alternative skirts the Cooper Landing community to reduce community impacts associated with traffic, noise and property acquisition.

The G South Alternative largely avoids the Cooper Landing community to the north, would not impact undeveloped lands to the extent that the Juneau Creek alternatives would. Its natural environment impacts are between those of the Cooper Creek Alternative and the two Juneau Creek alternatives, but its function for traffic would be much better than the Cooper Creek Alternative, and it would have much less impact on the community. The G South can be seen as a compromise between the Juneau Creek alternatives and the Cooper Creek Alternative.

