



DOT&PF Seward Hwy & Alyeska Hwy Intersection Improvements Project **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

1. How did the recommended concept level alternative (trumpet interchange) get selected? How did we get here?

- In 2018, the Girdwood Board of Supervisors (GBOS) passed resolution 2018-16 urging DOT&PF to include the Girdwood Interchange as part of the adjacent Seward Hwy MP 75-90 project to address major safety concerns, projected traffic volume increases, and improve the critical connector to communities south of Anchorage.
- Beginning in fall of 2020, DOT&PF and R&M worked through a comprehensive process of preliminary alternative development, evaluation, refinement, and reevaluation (see summary graphic).
- Preliminary Alternative 7 *Trumpet*, Alternative 9 *Tight Diamond*, and Alternative 11 *Diamond Interchange* were the top 3 alternatives and following further evaluation, a modified alternative 7 was carried forward to the recommended concept level alternative.



2. What public involvement has been done so far? This is the first I've heard of this project.

- Public involvement efforts for this project are being conducted using the Municipality of Anchorage's Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) Policy as a guideline along with the requirements of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for environmental document development.
- **20 engagement events** with the public, agency, and other stakeholders **have been held to date**. The first public outreach was at a GBOS meeting on 9/21/2020. The following are major public engagement highlights (see the DSR Summary Report for details):
 - Public Open House 1 was held virtually on 12/10/2020
 - Anchorage Transportation Fair on 11/18/2020



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- Planning and Zoning Commission appearance on 3/1/2021
- Public Open House 2 on 4/22/2021
- Meeting with Old Girdwood Townsite Neighborhood residents on 6/2/2021 and 6/28/2022
- Public Open House 3 on 7/27/2022
- Girdwood Board of Supervisors Work Session on 9/14/2022
- Planning and Zoning Commission appearance on 12/5/2022

3. This looks like it is going to negatively impact environmental resources including wetlands, habitat and impact our viewshed. What are you doing about that?

The project team understands that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) can only permit the least environmentally damaging *practicable* alternative (LEDPA). With that in mind, the team is looking at feasible ways to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to wetlands and waters in the project area throughout project development to ensure that all necessary permits and authorizations are attainable.

- The project team is continuing to refine the recommended concept level alternative to reduce the footprint of the interchange to lessen potential wetland impacts, while still meeting Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and DOT&PF standards and guidelines for these facilities.
- The refined recommended concept alternative shifts the intersection north of the existing intersection and original recommended concept alternative alignment, reducing viewshed impacts for residents and visitors of the Original Girdwood Townsite neighborhood and reducing potential wetland impacts.
- The study area will be researched and analyzed for wetland, environmental, socioeconomic, cultural, and historic resource impacts in accordance with NEPA, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and all other applicable local, state, and Federal regulations and executive orders.

4. How is this recommended concept level alternative an improvement for residents of the Original Girdwood Townsite neighborhood (Old Girdwood)?

- The only legal access to the neighborhood is currently from the Seward Hwy via Main St. This direct access to a major highway poses a safety risk to all motorists traveling through the area. The key issue here is the speed difference between vehicles traveling to and from Main St mixing with vehicles traveling at highway speeds on the Seward Hwy.
- The recommended concept level alternative separates local and highway traffic by giving the neighborhood legal and dedicated access. The new connection will be via



Gold Ave to the proposed Alyeska Hwy roundabout, which provides safer and calmer traffic movements.

5. The recommended concept level alternative removes direct Seward Hwy access to the Girdwood Station Mall. Will this negatively impact the businesses?

- The existing intersection and driveway configuration does not meet FHWA and DOT&PF standards for separation distance. Regardless of the intersection treatment or future roadway improvements, the existing Station Mall driveways on the Seward Hwy would be removed for safety and reduction of speed and turning conflicts.
- The recommended concept level alternative provides free-flow (no-stop) access to the Station Mall from both northbound and southbound Seward Hwy traffic via the Alyeska Hwy and proposed roundabout. This free-flow movement applies to traffic leaving the mall to travel in either direction on the Seward Hwy as well, thus easing driver stress, improving traffic flow, and increasing safety.
- The proposed access road to the Girdwood Station Mall also provides significantly more room for queuing, on-street parking, and maneuverability by freight trucks and other large vehicles.
- For more information on access management and business, please see the [FHWA's publication *Safe Access is Good for Business*](#).

6. What happens if there's an accident on the on or off ramps? Is there a secondary or emergency access route to get from Girdwood to the Seward Hwy?

The recommended concept level alternative proposes to keep Toadstool Dr connected to the Seward Hwy for secondary emergency access as needed and be gated. First responders and DOT&PF would have access to the gate to respond and use as needed.

7. How are pedestrians and bikers going to navigate the proposed intersection?

- As part of the Alyeska Hwy realignment and bridge replacement over the railroad, a portion of the Bird to Gird pathway will be realigned.
- The new Alyeska Hwy bridge will have a separated pathway to maintain access over the railroad, similar to the existing bridge, and will connect to a new tunnel under Alyeska Hwy. This maintains the non-motorized connection from the Original Girdwood Townsite neighborhood to the existing Alyeska Hwy bike path.
- Current design standards and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines will be followed.



8. This project appears to be too big for the current issues at the intersection. The cost of the project is too high compared to the benefits it provides. Is the size of the proposed interchange warranted?

- The project benefits the year-round residents and seasonal workers of Girdwood, and the countless visitors that travel through the intersection to the Kenai Peninsula. The year-round population on the Peninsula is about 60,000 and the Seward Hwy connects them to Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley. Maintaining the safety and operation of the Seward Hwy for through traffic and Alyeska Hwy for local traffic is essential, as the Seward Hwy is critical infrastructure.
- Projected traffic volume increases are significant over the short, mid, and long-term. This is a long-term solution which provides for more time and costs savings than incremental improvements involving multiple construction projects. The recommended concept level alternative can accommodate a future four-lane divided hwy.
- DOT&PF's mandate is to preserve the functionality of roadways and prioritize safety. This project manages access to the highway to accommodate future growth.

9. What still needs to happen before this goes to construction? Can the public still participate?

We anticipate moving forward with the NEPA process after we present the project to the Planning and Zoning Commission in December 2022 and January 2023. Final design work will follow, as well as environmental permitting, Right of Way acquisition and working with utility companies regarding any necessary relocations or adjustments of their facilities. Construction would follow once these activities are complete and would not be before 2025.

As design continues to move forward, additional opportunities for public input will be held and advertised, including GBOS meetings and public open houses. At 65% design, the project will go before the Urban Design Commission for review and approval at a public hearing.

The project team will take comments and questions at any time.

Contact Information:

DOT&PF Project Manager: **Christina Huber, PE**
907-269-0572 or at christina.huber@alaska.gov

R&M Consultants, Inc. Public Involvement Lead: **Van Le, AICP**
907-646-9659 or at vle@rmconsult.com