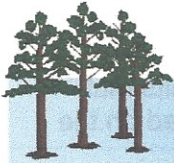
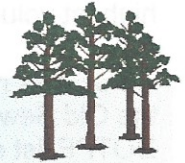


Correspondence



RABBIT CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL (RCCC) A Forum for Respectful Communication & Community Relations



1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100 / Anchorage, AK 99503

Wolfgang Junge, P.E.
Regional Director, Central Region
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
4111 Aviation Ave.
Anchorage, AK 99519

September 10, 2020

Dear Mr. Junge:

For many years, the Rabbit Creek Community Council (RCCC) has endorsed a variety of requests around improving Old Seward Highway from south of its intersection with Rabbit Creek Road to its intersection with Potter Valley Road. It was one of our top priorities in our recommendations on the 2021 Capital Improvements Program. Pedestrian, bicycle, and other non-motorized uses of this corridor have greatly increased in recent years, along with visitors and use of the adjacent Potter Marsh (Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge) for bird watching, photography, and winter sports. An additional visitor destination for several community events now exists at the Bird Treatment and Learning Center, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has received grants allowing them to increase access and use at the south end of Potter Marsh.

All these activities and the increase in non-motorized uses along this narrow, shoulderless road are resulting in greater and greater safety hazards for all users, both motorized and non-motorized. Thus the RCCC respectfully requests that DOTPF take two, very low-cost, actions to reduce the risks of injury and death on the Old Seward Highway east of Potter Marsh, from Rabbit Creek Road to Potter Valley Road:

1. Reduce the current posted speed limit. In comparison with other roadways, 30 mph seems to be a safe and practical limit (as explained below). Alaska Department of Fish and Game estimates that tens of thousands of visitors per year use the highway pull-outs along the south end of Potter Marsh and the mailbox pull-out. The mailbox pull-out is expected to attract thousands of additional visitors following upgrades to be completed in 2021, which will include two boardwalks, toilets, picnic tables, and interpretive signs. Some of these visitors will also proceed along the Old Seward Highway for wildlife viewing and recreation, adding to the slow-moving traffic and mixing of vehicle and non-vehicle uses within those traffic lanes.

2. Post signs that direct motorists to share the lane with pedestrians, cyclists and wildlife.

Numerous studies of collisions illustrate how drastically speed increases fatality rates for pedestrians. For example, a British study analyzing frontal vehicle collisions with pedestrians, showed that at a vehicle speed of 30 mph, the pedestrian fatality rate is 10 percent; at 40 mph, 50 percent fatality rate; and at 45 mph, 75% fatality rate (and 95% fatality rate for pedestrians aged 60+) (<https://nacto.org/>). This correlation is clearly shown by graphs by Propublica on the <https://usa.streetsblog.org/> website:

20 mph results in 7% fatalities and 40 mph results in 45% fatalities.

RCCC requests that site studies to document current vehicle speeds and non-motorized uses be conducted as soon as possible, preferably beginning immediately, as summer is the time of the highest volume of both non-motorized use and vehicle traffic.

RCCC has reviewed the factors that DOTPF investigates in a speed limit study. RCCC submits that the Old Seward Highway east of Potter Marsh has significant hazards and user conflicts based on the DOTPF list of factors. These include:

1. Physical characteristics of the road.

- Several hills that have short crests and poor sight lines.
- Curves have limited sight lines at the intersection of Windjammer, and south of the pump station.
- Curb and shoulder are entirely absent. The white line is periodically interrupted where the pavement has crumbled or the vegetation has encroached.
- Pavement is cracked and buckled, and deteriorates rapidly despite periodic re-surfacing.
- Steep drop-offs, some with 10 to 30 vertical feet, line numerous stretches of the roadway.

2. Potential for conflict amongst different road users.

- **Non-motorized users must share the traffic lane.** There are no shoulders, paved or unpaved.
- There are no separated pathways or parks in the neighborhoods along this stretch of road. Therefore, residents use the roadway for recreation and travel.
- This is a safer option than the Seward Highway for through-cyclists.
- Recreationists of all sorts gravitate to this roadway because it has less gradient than nearby Hillside roads, and offers a vegetated, natural setting along the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge (Potter Marsh).
- Athletes, including school teams, train on this road: cyclists, roller skiers, runners.
- Wildlife viewers frequently park half-way blocking the lanes, because there is no shoulder. Wildlife attractions include an eagle's nest, owl nests, various waterfowl and upland birds, moose, muskrats, and even occasional bears and wolves.

3. Nearby development

Although this is a low-density residential area, the wildlife refuge means a high density of wildlife. Many non-motorized users come here from other parts of Anchorage.

4. Current driver speeds

Most drivers appear to not drive the maximum speed limit. However, there is an exponential risk to non-motorized users with every 5 mph increase in speed. Studies show that pedestrians die at a 95 percent rate if hit by a 40 mph vehicle, 50 percent rate if hit at 35 mph, 30 percent at 20 mph, etc. Therefore, the goal should be to reduce the maximum speed, as well as the median speed.

In addition to reducing the speed limit, RCCC seeks to inform drivers to be wary of non-motorized users, and to share the road. This could be achieved with road markings as well as with signs. There are two suitable, complementary signs in the US Department of Transportation collection of warning signs: W11-15, which displays both a bike and a pedestrian symbol; and W16-1P, "Share the road".

Please let RCCC know that you have added the Old Seward Highway to your list of speed studies, and advise us when field studies and observations will take place. We are happy to answer questions and may be able to help document our concerns with photos or observations if these will help to create a record for the purposes of determining speed and signage.

We hope to hear from you soon, ideally prior to our October 8th meeting. We would also be happy to

discuss these suggestions via phone (Ann Rappoport: 907-230-3187).

Sincerely,



Ann Rappoport, Co-chair
Rabbit Creek Community Council



Ky Holland, Co-chair
Rabbit Creek Community Council

cc: John Weddleton, Anchorage Assembly
Suzanne LaFrance, Anchorage Assembly
Mayor Ethan Berkowitz
Joe Meehan, Manager, Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge, ADFG