

CHUGIAK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

P.O. Box 671350
Chugiak, Alaska 99567

February 21, 2009

TO: The Honorable Nancy Dahlstrom, Alaska Representative
The Honorable Fred Dyson, Alaska Senator
The Honorable Anna Fairclough, Alaska Representative
The Honorable Charlie Huggins, Alaska Senator
The Honorable Bill Stoltze, Alaska Representative

SUBJECT: Request for State Funding to Rebuild Eklutna River Bridge

The Chugiak Community Council ("Council") requests your immediate consideration and support in fixing the old Eklutna River Bridge on the Old Glenn Highway in Chugiak (Bridge No. 537):

- Most importantly, allocate sufficient state funds to remove the existing bridge and design/construct a new modern bridge to accommodate vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic. Fixing this bridge is currently the number-one ranked project on Chugiak's capital project list.
- Secondly, transfer the ownership and responsibility of this bridge from the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) back to the State of Alaska.

Ownership & Maintenance History

The Eklutna River Bridge is a steel spandrel arch bridge originally built in 1935. It is 257 feet long. In 1952, the bridge was strengthened and widened to 28 feet total width with a 24 foot wide roadway. According to J. Rand Gaynor, Eklutna River Bridge Project Administrator/MOA Project Management & Engineering, at the time the bridge was constructed, it was more of a "pioneer" structure and not intended for heavy duty, long-term use.

On 01/11/78, for the sum of one dollar, the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) conveyed to Eklutna, Inc. all Old Glenn Highway right-of-way between the Thunderbird Interchange and the Eklutna Interchange including the old Eklutna River Bridge.

On 09/06/85, for the sum of one dollar, Eklutna, Inc. conveyed to the MOA a 60 foot wide Old Glenn Highway right-of-way between the Thunderbird Interchange and the Eklutna Interchange with adjacent roadway slope easements. Also on 09/06/85, for the sum of one dollar, Eklutna, Inc. conveyed to the MOA the old Eklutna River Bridge in an as-is condition.

At that time, the MOA assumed ownership and maintenance of the old Eklutna River Bridge and associated highway area. Maintenance duties have fallen to the Chugiak-Birchwood-Eagle River Rural Road Service Area's (CBERRRSA) Eagle River Street Maintenance Department. Regular biennial bridge inspections are performed by ADOT&PF.

Bridge Functions

The old Eklutna River Bridge and associated Old Glenn Highway right-of-way serve the basic public safety and transportation needs of locals and non-locals.

The existence of the old Eklutna River Bridge provides a critical contingency that is required in case of emergencies. While travelers rely heavily on the (new) Glenn Highway's bridge over the Eklutna River, the old Eklutna River Bridge on the Old Glenn Highway provides the only alternate access across that river.

The existence of the old Eklutna River Bridge achieves the connectivity, transportation, and emergency-preparedness goals described in the Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan Update and in the Chugiak-Eagle River Long-Range Transportation Plan. The bridge benefits the surrounding community by: connecting the Thunderbird and Eklutna Interchanges via a frontage road; connecting neighborhoods and parks; improving traffic circulation; reducing congestion on the Glenn Highway; improving emergency response; providing locations for public transportation; and providing opportunities for pedestrians and bicyclers. The bridge is a primary exit from the Thunderbird Heights Subdivision to the (new) Glenn Highway.

In a 05/19/97 letter to state delegates, the CBERRRSA Board of Supervisors wrote:

This bridge serves a variety of users which use State facilities or are using State maintained roads which connect to the bridge. These include access to the Thunderbird Falls Wayside; the Eklutna Water Plant; Eklutna Lake campground/recreation area; Eklutna Valley residents; school buses and People Mover buses. The road serves the growing tourism industry in this area. A substantial number of the users are visitors. Although owned by the Municipality of Anchorage, this portion of the Old Glenn Highway performs essentially as a State route.

Bridge Deterioration

The bridge has continued to deteriorate since it was transferred to the MOA.

On 07/31/96, Steven O. Bradford, P.E., ADOT&PF Chief Bridge Engineer, wrote:

Please take special note of the very poor deck condition. Bridge inspection reports from as long ago as 1972 have recommended that the deck be repaired. As of our June (1996) inspection, the bridge deck is beyond repair and now requires complete replacement. At the current rate of deterioration, the top surface will be completely delaminated in five years.

In 1996, ADOT&PF applied weight restrictions to the bridge and load limit signs have been posted ever since. Anchorage School District school buses no longer use the bridge and instead detour to the Glenn Highway. The Eagle River Street Maintenance Department cannot take fully loaded equipment across the bridge. There is no enforcement of the load limits.

On 07/03/08, Richard A. Pratt, P.E., ADOT&PF Chief Bridge Engineer, wrote:

This inspection report is under a separate cover letter to draw attention to the immediate needs of the bridge. Gravel and moss filling multiple steel elements made inspection difficult. Corrosion of steel members is the primary structural concern on this bridge. Deck drains are dumping water and debris directly on the primary and secondary structural steel members. Pack rust, heavy laminar corrosion, loss of section in steel members is present throughout the bridge. Some of the secondary steel members have rusted through. Brush and trees around and under the bridge also limit visual inspection.

Over the years, state bridge inspectors have identified extensive and serious issues with the bridge and have requested Eagle River Street Maintenance to make repairs. Unfortunately, Eagle River Street Maintenance is in no position to address such major repairs. In fact, Eagle River Street Maintenance has only been able to satisfy minor work items such as replacing signs, repairing guard rails, etc. Until recently, it was widely believed that the bridge was in the long process of being rehabilitated or replaced via a funded municipal project; therefore, it had not seemed urgent to address major repairs on the bridge.

However, a funded project has not materialized. With extensive repairs still undone and since Eagle River Street Maintenance is unable to repair the bridge to the degree that it should be, the bridge will continue to deteriorate and become more unsafe. The condition of the bridge must now be more closely monitored. No one wants the bridge to degrade to the point that it becomes dangerous like the failed, deadly, L48 bridges one hears about. At some point, the old Eklutna River Bridge might fail and would then have to be closed to all traffic or the structure removed. Please refer to the attached 12/31/08 CBERRRSA letter to the MOA documenting concerns about the future of the bridge.

Should the old Eklutna River Bridge on the Old Glenn Highway fail, the MOA would be less secure and local traffic would be severely impacted by circuitous routing:

- If a disaster such as an earthquake or fire closed down the Glenn Highway's main bridge over the Eklutna River, there would be no roadway evacuation route or access between the MOA and Mat-Su Valley.
- Emergency response times would worsen.
- All Eklutna Valley traffic would need to use the Glenn Highway Eklutna Interchange.
- All Thunderbird Heights Subdivision traffic and Thunderbird Falls Wayside park users wanting to head to Anchorage would need to enter the Glenn Highway via the north-bound Thunderbird Interchange, drive north on the Glenn Highway, exit at the Eklutna Interchange, reenter the Glenn Highway there, and drive back south to Anchorage.
- All returning Thunderbird Heights Subdivision traffic coming south on the Glenn Highway from the Mat-Su Valley would need to pass by their subdivision, exit at Mirror Lake Interchange, reenter the Glenn Highway there, and drive back north to the Thunderbird Interchange to access their subdivision. This detour would add over two extra miles to get to their destination.
- Bicyclists and pedestrians would be forced to use the Glenn Highway where there are no pedestrian pathways along the highway.

Project Status & Way Forward

On 12/15/08, Gaynor gave a status report to the CBERRRSA Board of Supervisors on the project. The following text is excerpted and summarized from the meeting minutes...

Gaynor reported that the first selected alternative was to restore rather than replace the bridge. Design began in 1998 with federal AMATS money. A considerable amount of time was spent on preliminary engineering for the environmental approval process. Two major obstacles were encountered:

- *State Historic Preservation Office's requirement to ensure that the bridge not be changed in character; and*
- *State's requirement for an upgrade to the bridge to current seismic zone 5 standards.*

The result of these requirements, in particular the seismic zone requirement, was to drive the cost estimate up to approximately \$6 million. At that point, the design process was at 65% and a Categorical Exclusion (the lowest level of environmental approval) was approved for restoring the bridge.

A subsequent decision was made to abandon restoration due to cost increases and due to the state bridge engineer's assessment that the proposed scope of work would not be feasible for a contractor to carry out.

The next approach was to revise the preliminary engineering document to illustrate a new modern concrete girder span. Building a new modern bridge would greatly reduce long term maintenance costs by eliminating the need to perform expensive paint jobs on the steel spandrel arch bridge. A paint job on the old bridge would require sanding, capturing and removal of lead materials, and re-painting every 20 to 25 years by CBERRRSA.

Project Funding Options

According to Gaynor, in today's dollars, the cost of replacing the old bridge with a modern one could cost around \$8 million.

Federal funding of the project is extremely unlikely. A local project such as this cannot compete against ADOT&PF projects. Also, the regulations and requirements that are attached to federal money relating to environmental impact studies and preserving historic aspects are cumbersome and add significant cost. For example, the old Eklutna River Bridge was not built to last and has never been designated as an historic structure. It is 74 years old now and was built in a time where building codes were much different than today's. But, with federal funding, there can be no change in the bridge's character, essentially requiring a piece-meal rebuild/replacement/shoring-up of the bridge's elements so it would "look" the same afterwards but meet current building codes. Finally, the design process for a federally funded project is estimated at seven to ten years.

The intent is no longer to preserve the bridge. The better and cheaper alternative, as described above, is to replace the old bridge with a modern span bridge. An Alaska State Grant would allow a modern structure to be built with less restrictions and complications. The design/build process for a state funded project can occur quickly as demonstrated by the recently-completed Bragaw Interchange on the Glenn Highway. The CBERRRSA Board of Supervisors supports funding this project with state money. Please refer to the attached 01/28/09 CBERRRSA Capital Improvements Projects Priority List.

This project is a top priority for Chugiak and a high priority for CBERRRSA. Please do whatever you can, and as soon as you can, to secure state funding for it. We will be eternally grateful.

Please call me at 688-0123 or email me at dbaldwin@chugiakcouncil.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Dave Baldwin
President
Chugiak Community Council

Cc. Acting Anchorage Mayor Matt Claman
Anchorage Assemblymember Debbie Ossiander
Anchorage Assemblymember Bill Starr
CBERRRSA Board of Supervisors
Eagle River Street Maintenance
J. Rand Gaynor, Eklutna River Bridge Project Administrator/MOA Project Management & Engineering
Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Thunderbird Heights Homeowners Association

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CHUGIAK-BIRCHWOOD-EAGLE RIVER RURAL ROAD SERVICE AREA

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
16716 Fire House Lane
Eagle River, Alaska 99577

Date: December 31, 2008

To: Michael Abbott, Municipal Manager

Thru: Alan Czajkowski, Director, Maintenance and Operations

From: Michael Meliello, Chair, Chugiak-Birchwood-Eagle River Rural Road Service Area, Board of Supervisors *MM*

Subject: Eklutna Bridge Status

The CBERRRSA Road Board has gone through a transitional phase over the past 18 months as various community councils have nominated new representatives to the Board. The infusion of new members to the Board has brought new ideas and energy to the planning and implementation of capital improvements to the service area, while providing strong support for the achievements of prior Board representatives. At the request of the Chugiak Road Board representative, the Board has been reviewing the past, present, and future status of the Eklutna Bridge. Mr. Rand Gaynor of Project Management and Engineering attended our December 15, 2008 Road Board meeting in order to help update the Board on the bridge status.

It appears that this bridge structure has a long and interesting history, as the ownership and maintenance responsibilities have changed hands over the years. We understand that there has been substantial debate in the past as to the appropriate governmental agency to assume the future responsibility for the repairs, rehabilitation, or replacement of the bridge as it continues to deteriorate. We further understand that it was determined that the bridge is owned by the Municipality of Anchorage and was identified and prioritized as a project to be federally funded through the AMATS process. As this project worked its way up the AMATS priority lists and was eventually funded for preliminary design work, a requirement to provide "project matching funds" became a major issue with the Road Board. The Road Board was not comfortable with the uncertainty of the match funding requirement percentage, as well as the various federal requirements that seemed to expand the scope and cost of the overall project.

Attachment #1 is a copy of an excerpt of the minutes from the November 20, 2006 Road Board meeting that reflects the Board's discussion and approved motion, to wit: that "further funding for the Eklutna Bridge project be withdrawn." Attachments #2 and 3 are copies of the Road Board's 2007 and 2008 C.I.P. Priority Lists which continued to identify the "Eklutna Bridge Rehabilitation/Replacement at Old Glenn Highway" as the #4 project and #3 project (respectively) under the AMATS Non-NHS Roadways & Safety category. Although the

December 31, 2008

November 20, 2006 motion is vague as to the type of funding the Board wished to withdraw, the current Board is assuming that the motion was specific to the prior Boards' providing CBERRRSA funding for a federal matching grant. We are basing this on the fact that the Board continued to request funding for the bridge in their capital grant requests in 2007 and 2008.

The current CBERRRSA Road Board supports a project for the replacement of Eklutna Bridge utilizing state grant funding. Attachment #4 is a copy of the Board's 2009 Capital Improvement Projects Priority List – For State of Alaska Fiscal Year 2010, which moves the Eklutna Bridge from the AMATS NON-NHS Roadways & Safety category, to the State Grants and Department Appropriations (100%) category and to the State Grants (70/30 Match) category.

Attachment #5 is a copy of the most recent CBERRRSA Road Board motion, approved at the December 15, 2008 Road Board meeting, which identifies the appropriate funding category(ies) for the Eklutna Bridge funding requests.

As a follow up item regarding the Eklutna Bridge, the Board has directed the Chair to advise the Municipality of Anchorage that we are aware of the bi-annual State D.O.T. Bridge Inspection Reports that have identified numerous deficiencies over the last few years. We understand that there could be potential liabilities associated with this bridge for which the Municipality of Anchorage may not wish to assume responsibility in the future. In light of the extent of repairs identified in the bridge reports, the Board supports the long term solution of replacing the bridge, as well as a potential temporary closure of the bridge for safety reasons if the appropriate governmental agency deems it necessary. The Board requests that the Municipality of Anchorage and State of Alaska perform an in-depth safety review of Eklutna Bridge and determine if the Bridge should remain in service in the absence of major work.

The Board looks forward to discussing with you the options for addressing the short and long term solutions to Eklutna Bridge.

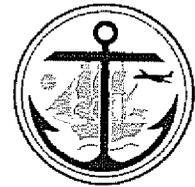
cc: Debbie Ossiander, Assemblyperson
Bill Starr, Assemblyperson
Jerry Hansen, Acting Director, Project Management & Engineering
CBERRRSA Road Board

Attachments: No. 1: Minutes Excerpt, Eklutna Bridge: November 20, 2006 Road Board Meeting
No. 2: 2007 Approved CBERRRSA Capital Improvements Projects Priority List
No. 3: 2008 Approved CBERRRSA Capital Improvements Projects Priority List
No. 4: 2009 Approved CBERRRSA Capital Improvements Projects Priority List (for state fiscal year 2010)
No. 5: Approved CBERRRSA Motion dated December 31, 2008, identifying appropriate funding categories for Eklutna Bridge funding requests

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Municipality of Anchorage
Maintenance and Operations Department
Street and Park Maintenance Division



MEMORANDUM

Date: January 28, 2009

To: Alan Czajkowski, Director, Maintenance and Operations

From: Michael Melielo, Chair, Chugiak-Birchwood-Eagle River Rural Road Service Area, Board of Supervisors *MM*

Subject: **Approved Chugiak-Birchwood-Eagle River Rural Road Service Area - 2009 Capital Improvements Projects Priority List – For State of Alaska Fiscal Year 2010**

The Chugiak-Birchwood-Eagle River Rural Road Service Area, Board of Supervisors has reviewed the Capital Improvements Projects Priority List, and wishes to submit its priorities as follows:

State Grants (70/30 Match):

1. Glenn Highway/Eagle Glenn East Drainage Improvements
2. Areawide Road & Drainage Improvements
 - 1.a. Eagle River Lane Design and Construction
 - 1.b. Complete Homestead Road as a Collector between Oberg Road and Blue Skies Drive to Improve Connectivity
3. Eklutna Bridge (New)
4. Citation Road Upgrade from Eagle River Loop to Eagle River Lane
5. Brooks Road-Chugiak Drive-Cross Drive – Roads and Drainage Improvements

State Grants & Department Appropriations (100%):

1. Hiland Road, Mile 1 to 3.7 – Interim Asphalt Overlay
2. Snow Storage Site Development
3. Old Eagle River Road from Monte Road to Baronoff Avenue (possible T.O.R.A.)
4. Eklutna Bridge (New)

AMATS Non-NHS Roadways & Safety:

1. Old Glenn Highway Reconstruction:
 - Segment #1: Rural Section, from Fire Lake Elementary School to South Birchwood Loop Road
 - Segment #2: Rural Section, from South Birchwood Loop Road to Peters Creek/Ski Road).
2. Hiland Road Upgrade:
 - Segment #1: Mile 1.0 to Mile 2.2
 - Segment #2: Mile 2.2 to Mile 3.7
 - Segment #3: Mile 4.4 to Mile 5.7
 - Segment #4: Mile 5.7 to Mile 6.25
 - Segment #5: Mile 6.25 to Mile 8.4
3. Eagle River Road Upgrade (Mile 5.3 to Mile 12.6)
4. Eagle River Road Upgrade (Mile 0 to Mile 5.3)

AMATS Non-NHS Transportation Enhancements:

1. Old Glenn Highway Safety Trail (Oberg Field to Lake Hill Drive)
2. Birchwood Loop Multipurpose Trail (minimal gravel trail)
3. Voyles Road Safety Trail
4. Oberg Road Safety Trail, Oberg Field to Deer Park Drive
5. Glenn Highway Bike Trail (Peters Creek to Knik River)

AMATS NHS:

1. South Eagle River Interchange (Upgrade access to Artillery Road to include Artillery Road/Eagle River Road/Old Glenn Highway Intersection.) **CBERRRSA BOARD CONSIDERS THIS TO BE THE AREA'S HIGHEST PRIORITY INTERSECTION).**
2. Hiland Road Interchange (Upgrade access to Eagle River Loop Road. For safety and capacity reasons, improve the capacity of Veterans Parkway, Yosemite Drive, Hiland Road and Glenn Highway intersections).
3. Glenn Highway – Widen from Hiland Interchange to South Birchwood Loop Interchange with emphasis on reducing grade to the bridges over Eagle River and construct a sound abatement barrier along the adjoining subdivisions.
4. South Peters Creek Interchange: Correct the vertical and horizontal alignment of the southbound entry ramp to provide more sight distance for vehicles to safely enter the highway.
5. Thunderbird Falls Exit: Realign the intersection of the off ramp from the Glenn Highway to the Old Glenn Highway to eliminate the 90 degree right turn.

cc: Maury Robinson, Administrative Superintendent (MOA Maintenance and Operations)
Jim Lamson, CIP Coordinator (MOA Project Management & Engineering)
Craig Lyon, AMATS Coordinator (MOA Traffic Administration)
Bruce Holmes, Capital Budget Analyst (MOA Office of Management & Budget)
Debbie Ossiander, Assemblyperson, MOA
Bill Starr, Assemblyperson, MOA
David Post, State D.O.T. Transportation Planner
CBERRRSA Road Board

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