

Submitted by: Assembly Members
Volland and Zaletel, and
Assembly Chair LaFrance
Prepared by: Legislative Services
Reviewed by: Assembly Counsel's
Office
For reading: February 21, 2023

**ANCHORAGE, ALASKA
AR No. 2023-XXX**

1 **A RESOLUTION OF THE ANCHORAGE ASSEMBLY REQUESTING THAT THE**
2 **ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES**
3 **AND ALASKA DIVISION OF THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION**
4 **REVIEW THE VALIDITY OF THE PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT**
5 **CONTAINED IN THE 2006 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE NEW**
6 **SEWARD HIGHWAY: RABBIT CREEK ROAD TO 36TH AVENUE, AS IT**
7 **PERTAINS TO THE NEXT PHASE, THE O'MALLEY ROAD TO DIMOND**
8 **BOULEVARD RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT.**
9

10
11 **WHEREAS**, the New Seward Highway: Rabbit Creek Road to 36th Avenue project
12 includes for the O'Malley to Dimond Reconstruction project phase's ("the project")
13 purpose is to expand the highway from four to six lanes, reconstruct the Seward &
14 O'Malley interchange as a Diverging Diamond Interchange, and add a grade-
15 separated vehicular interchange at 92nd Avenue; and
16

17 **WHEREAS**, this expensive project is programmed for \$105 Million in the Statewide
18 Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) by the State of Alaska Department of
19 Transportation and Public Facilities ("Department" or DOT&PF); and
20

21 **WHEREAS**, the inclusion of this project in the STIP precludes other beneficial
22 transportation projects from having funding and moving forward; and
23

24 **WHEREAS**, roadway maintenance funding is sparse, inconsistent, and creates
25 challenges in plowing the existing roadway network; and
26

27 **WHEREAS**, it is NEPA policy that "[a]lternative courses of action be evaluated and
28 decisions be made in the best overall public interest based upon a balanced
29 consideration of the need for safe and efficient transportation; of the social,
30 economic, and environmental impacts of the proposed transportation improvement,"
31 23 C.F.R. § 711.105(c) (Federal Highway Administration regulations); and
32

33 **WHEREAS**, the Assembly has adopted two new Long Range Transportation Plans
34 (LRTP) since the *New Seward Highway Rabbit Creek Road to 36th Avenue:*
35 *Environmental Assessment*, July 2006, (the "environmental document") was written
36 by the U.S. Dept. of Transportation, Alaska Division of the Federal Highway
37 Administration, and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities,
38 with a third LRTP currently in development; and
39

40 **WHEREAS**, the project's 17-year-old environmental document was written prior to

1 the Adoption of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation's State Air
2 Quality Control Program section III.B: Anchorage Transportation Control Program;
3 and
4

5 **WHEREAS**, the environmental document was written prior to the adoption of
6 Anchorage's Climate Action Plan and the Non-Motorized Transportation Plan; and
7

8 **WHEREAS**, the project's primary goal is to "Increase corridor capacity to
9 accommodate past growth and future demand"; and
10

11 **WHEREAS**, the project's environmental document showed a year 2002 Average
12 Daily Traffic (ADT) of 37,950 Vehicles per Day (VPD) on the Seward Highway and
13 predicted a 1.4% compound growth, yielding an ADT prediction of 60,000 VPD in
14 the year 2035, a 58% total predicted growth; and
15

16 **WHEREAS**, since 2002 to 2021 there has been a complete reversal against the
17 predicted trend in traffic growth on the Seward Highway between O'Malley and
18 Dimond with ADT decreasing by a total of 10%, according to the data available at
19 the Alaska DOT&PF Traffic Analysis and Data website;¹ and
20

21 **WHEREAS**, from 2002 to 2020 the number of Alaskans with driver's licenses as a
22 ratio of the number of Alaskans of eligible driving age has decreased 9% according
23 to the FHWA's annual Highway Statistics Series, Table DL-1C;² and
24

25 **WHEREAS**, the Alaska DOT&PF's Central Region Director stated in a recent
26 Assembly worksession, "If we had some quantitative reason to articulate to the
27 FHWA why we would [restart a project]. So, did the traffic modeling of Anchorage
28 change enough to where that [92nd Interchange] is no longer a requirement within
29 the project? Then we could make that case."; and
30

31 **WHEREAS**, the project's secondary goal is to "Improve system connectivity and
32 linkage of existing roadways"; and
33

34 **WHEREAS**, the project need identified in the Environmental Assessment Section
35 1.3.2 "Improve System Connectivity and Linkage of Existing Roadways" references
36 "[p]revious studies and analysis of recent origin-destination travel patterns" that
37 indicate there is a need for a 92nd Ave. interchange, however, no quantitative data
38 from any of those studies or analysis are presented in the environmental document;
39 and
40

41 **WHEREAS**, volumes on Dimond have decreased by 25% over the last 16 years
42 and volumes on Abbott have decreased by 32% over the last 11 years; and
43

44 **WHEREAS**, volumes on O'Malley west of Seward Highway have decreased by 15%

¹ See https://alaskatrafficdata.drakewell.com/adtecharts.asp?node=AKDOT_ST&cosit=000052308000&minyear=2002&maxyear=2023 (accessed February 14, 2023).

The comparative numbers showing percent changes over years in the recitals of this Resolution are, unless otherwise stated, based on data provided and the mapping interface, available at

<https://alaskatrafficdata.drakewell.com/publicmultinodemap.asp> (accessed February 14, 2023).

² See <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2020/> (accessed February 14, 2023).

1 in the last 17 years, and volumes on O'Malley east of the Seward Highway have
2 decreased by 2% in the last 18 years; and
3

4 **WHEREAS**, AMATS Congestion Management Process, 2016 Status of the System
5 report showed peak hour level of service as an "A" for O'Malley to Dimond for
6 Morning and afternoon rush hour demand on the Seward Highway; and
7

8 **WHEREAS**, cell phone, Bluetooth and GPS data availability have resulted in a
9 fundamental change in the way origin-destination studies can be conducted and
10 analyzed; and
11

12 **WHEREAS**, the project's tertiary goal is to enhance intermodal transportation, which
13 is a valid and relevant need in the project area. However, expanding the highway
14 and adding a vehicular interchange is not required to improve intermodal
15 transportation in the project area; and
16

17 **WHEREAS**, the DOT&PF's 2022 HSIP Handbook cites a Crash Reduction Factor
18 of 100% for "Construct Pedestrian and Bicycle Overpass/Underpass" (Improvement
19 Type 402); and
20

21 **WHEREAS**, the project's fourth goal is to upgrade design features to meet industry
22 standards and improve safety; and
23

24 **WHEREAS**, as an alternative to the enormous reconstruction cost and scope of the
25 project to upgrade design features between O'Malley and Dimond, the DOT&PF is
26 capable of implementing effective and small scale improvements across numerous,
27 smaller, and piece-meal projects as displayed in their effective November 2018
28 earthquake repair program; and
29

30 **WHEREAS**, the Alaska DOT&PF Project Manager stated in the May 2018 Planning
31 & Zoning Commission meeting that a five year crash study showed that there were
32 48 crashing on the Seward Highway between O'Malley and Dimond, with 17 of those
33 crashes resulting in some injury. At the two interchanges of O'Malley and Dimond
34 there were 953 crashes with 297 of them resulting in injuries. There should be no
35 expectation that adding an additional interchange will reduce the total number of
36 crashes and injuries in the project area; and
37

38 **WHEREAS**, the DOT&PF's 2022 HSIP Handbook does not have a documented
39 Crash Reduction Factor for adding a lane to a highway; and
40

41 **WHEREAS**, the FHWA TechBrief publication Safety Assessment of Interchange
42 Spacing on Urban Freeways (FHWA-HRT-07-031) says "Assuming all other factors
43 are equal, inserting a new interchange will increase expected fatal/injury crash
44 frequencies from 1.7 to 3.2 for longer spacings. For shorter spacings, the expected
45 increase is from 1.2 to 2.2 fatal/injury crashes per year"; and
46

47 **WHEREAS**, the Alaska DOT&PF Central Region Director stated in a recent
48 Assembly worksession, "We have choices; we can literally stop the project as it sits
49 and hit the reset button and go back and start all over. Often times, if there were
50 basic assumptions that were changed...We are able to go back to Federal Highways
51 and say 'some of the basic premises of this project no longer exist anymore so we

1 want to close this project out, with participation. Meaning: not having to pay back
2 federal money."
3

4 **NOW, THEREFORE, THE ANCHORAGE ASSEMBLY RESOLVES:**

5
6 **Section 1.** To request that the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public
7 Facilities and Alaska Division of the FHWA conduct a full, written, NEPA re-
8 evaluation focusing on the accuracy, applicability, and necessity of the purpose and
9 need section of the Environmental Assessment for the Seward Highway: Rabbit
10 Creek Road to 36th Avenue project as well as to ensure compliance with the many
11 new environmental, climate, and transportation planning and policy documents that
12 are currently adopted.
13

14 **Section 2.** To request that the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public
15 Facilities Conduct a study by an independent third party who is not currently under
16 contract with the Department for other roadway design or engineering services. The
17 DOT&PF should prepare a memorandum summarizing the scope and timeline of
18 the study and submit the memorandum to the Assembly as an AIM, to the AMATS
19 Technical Advisory Committee, to the AMATS Policy Committee, to the AMATS
20 BPAC, to the AMATS CAC and to the community councils whose territory is within
21 1 mile of the proposed project's footprint. The Department should accept comments
22 on the memorandum and revise the scope of the study as necessary to adequately
23 respond to any concerns by the above organizations. The study's project team and
24 the Department should present their findings to the Anchorage Assembly in a work
25 session and findings should be forwarded to the above-mentioned organizations.
26

27 **Section 3.** To request that the Alaska State Legislature and Governor call on the
28 Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to reassess the validity of
29 the Purpose and Need Statement contained in the 2006 Environmental Assessment
30 as requested in Section 1 of this Resolution, and to assess whether the project
31 merits continued inclusion in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
32 and whether it should continue to be prioritized over other transportation projects
33 throughout the AMATS area .
34

35 **Section 4.** This resolution shall be effective immediately upon passage and
36 approval by the Assembly.
37

38
39 PASSED AND APPROVED by the Anchorage Assembly this _____ day of
40 _____, 2023.
41

42
43
44
45 _____
46 Chair

47 ATTEST:
48

49
50 _____
51 Municipal Clerk