

Opportunity for Old Seward Highway safety and traffic calming east of Potter Marsh

Can ADOTPF improve safety within the current road footprint of the Old Seward Highway as part of its pending Pavement Replacement project, funded for 2025 or 2026?

One innovative proposal is to emphasize non-motorized safety south of Tideview to the South Potter Marsh Pull Out. In this southern half-mile, there are no feeder roads or driveways except for an AWWU pump station. The southern half-mile of road is flanked by public conservation lands, the Coastal Wildlife Refuge (Potter Marsh) and the nascent Potter Marsh Watershed Park.

Safety and wildlife habitat could both be improved by converting one of the road lanes to a non-motorized corridor with the other road lane remaining for one-way travel between Tideview and Potter Valley Road. Both lanes could be opened to cars in an emergency such as an accident on the main Seward Highway.

Opportunities & pros

1. TIMING

1A. pavement repair is funded for 2025 or 2026

1B. One shot at this. No other reconstruction is likely, given the focus of \$1.3 billion on Seward Highway re-design and zero response from ADOTPF to RCCC's high ranking for this project the past 25 years

1C. increasing traffic at South Potter Marsh) including drivers and walkers from outside the area who don't know the share-the-road situation)

1D. The safety risk increases after there is new, smooth pavement. More high-speed traffic, more cut-through traffic)

2. NON-MOTORIZED SAFETY

2A. Separation from vehicles: more people will walk and bike and roller ski and dog-walk.

2B. Excellent all-season terrain south of Tideview—level, thaws early, gets winter sun

2C. One-lane configuration south of Tideview reduces through traffic on the rest of the OSH, increasing non-motorized safety

2D. One-lane configuration south of Tideview sets the context for a “shared corridor” on the rest of the roadway north to Rabbit Creek—expectations for drivers to share the lane

2E. Universal access – flat for mobility impaired folks, easy to clear in winter

2F. Safety for passive users south of Tideview to stop for wildlife viewing

### 3. NEIGHBORHOOD

3A. Reduced traffic noise and volume

3B. More social interaction among neighbors

3C. Reduced driving to trailheads/more frequent exercise if there is an attractive non-motorized trail nearby

3D. Minimal inconvenience. Most trips from these neighborhoods go north.

3E. Minimal inconvenience. This segment of road was entirely closed by AWWU for about 3 months with no significant impact to travel.

3F. Deter overnight camping and trash dumping on the road shoulder in the stretch south of Tideview.

### 4. WILDLIFE HABITAT/ENVIRONMENTAL

4A. Safety improvements within current footprint: avoid wetland fill or disturbance

4B. Current footprint is fairly easy for wildlife to move across

4C. Slower speed and lower traffic volume allow wildlife to safely cross

4D. encourages close-up wildlife observation and passive enjoyment of nature

4E. Has a neck-down calming effect on rest of Old Seward Highway north to Rabbit Creek Road, which benefits non-motorized users and wildlife

### 5. EMERGENCIES

5A. Both lanes could be opened to vehicle traffic in case of an emergency evacuation or a road closure on the west side of Potter Marsh. This would require APD traffic management, which is something RCCC has been asking for in cases of emergency.

### 6. COST

6A. Will save wear and tear on the Old Seward Highway, which is on a substandard road bed and requires repaving every few years.

## CHALLENGES AND CONS

### 6. TIMING

6A. Too soon? The Seward Highway upgrades might include a lot of construction at Potter Valley Road intersection and deter recreation for several years.

### 7. NON-MOTORIZED SAFETY

7A. A false sense of safety? One part of the OSH will be safer but the rest will just have new pavement and faster driving.

7B. Will more non-motorized users sharing the lanes north of Tideview make it more dangerous?

### 8. NEIGHBORHOOD

8A. Depending on which direction of travel is allowed, local residents north of Tideview will have longer trips when going to or from the southbound Seward Highway.

8B. Potter Valley Road residents: OSH won't be available for alternative access when there are turning delays at Potter Valley Road.

8C. Some people drive for recreation and this slightly reduces their options.

8D. School bus routes? 6 bus circuits per day, 2 of which currently go out and back on the OSH and the other 4 loop onto the New Seward Highway.

8E. Garbage pick up? Truck would need to turn around at Tideview to collect on both sides of the road.

### 9. WILDLIFE/ENVIRONMENTAL

9A. Wildlife encounters might be more likely, for better and worse

### 10. EMERGENCIES

10A. Would APD really come open up the non-motorized lane in an emergency?

### 11. COST

11A. This will require some additional cost beyond pavement repair: for signage and bollards and possibly a center divide of some sort.

11B. Who will pay for maintenance? This is currently a very low plowing priority for ADOTPF.

## Current status

Old Seward Highway east of Potter Marsh (from Rabbit Creek Road south to Potter Valley Road) is notoriously decrepit and unsafe. Non-motorized users must share the travel lane with cars and trucks. ADOTPF speed data indicates common speeds of 45 to 53 mph, despite current speed posting of 35 mph.

Traffic volume was measured along three segments (ADOTPF traffic data on drakewell.com website). The level of vehicle use is lightest south of Tideview: 320 average daily trips. Between Tideview and South Park Bluff there were 520 daily trips; and there were 980 daily trips on the northerly segment between South Park Bluff and Rabbit Creek Road.

ADOTPF has not published any statistics on non-motorized use. Anecdotally, the level of non-motorized use is steady and increasing, especially near the South Potter Marsh Pull-out. Local residents observe an uptick of traffic the pull-out since the expansion and upgrade in 2024. Additional recreation attractions are in the works: a boardwalk near the pull-out, and future trails on the east side of the Old Seward Highway in Potter Marsh Watershed Park.

There are six school bus trips along the Old Seward Highway. Buses usually loop onto the New Seward Highway. One bus currently travels both directions on the Old Seward Highway. Stops change from year to year: The bus stops at any feeder road or driveway where kids live because the road is unsafe for pedestrians.

Other relevant background that pretty much everyone knows...

This section of highway has minimal or no shoulders. When ADOPF periodically re-paints the white lines, in places the paint is on crumbled asphalt or weeds. The pavement has numerous frost heaves cracks and potholes, especially southern most half-mile of road, south of Tideview. There, the highway impounds the waters of Little Survival Creek and sometimes floods during high run-off and spring thaw. In addition, hills and curves create poor sight lines.

*Pavement repair has the easily-observable effect of promoting faster speeds and more traffic.*

The public lands on both sides of the road are public conservation lands: Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge to the west and the nascent Potter Marsh Watershed Park to the east.

PROS	CONS
Timing: pavement repair is funded for 2025 or 2026	
Timing: increasing traffic at South Potter Marsh including drivers and walkers from	

outside the area who don't know the situation	
Timing:	
Safety improvements within current footprint prevents wetland fill	
Current footprint is fairly easy for wildlife to move across	
Slow speeds/low traffic volume allow wildlife to safely cross	
Allows for wildlife observation and passive enjoyment of nature	
Has a neck-down calming effect on rest of Old Seward Highway north to Rabbit Creek Road, which benefits non-motorized users and wildlife	

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