
PALMER WASILLA HIGHWAY EASTERN TERMINUS

Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

September 24, 2009

Red Beet Café and Bakery

4:30 to 6:30 p.m.

Next meeting date has been changed to Wednesday, October 21 from 4:30 to 7:30ish to allow more time for Alternatives.

Introductions

MAT-SU TRANSPORTATION FAIR

Reminder: The Transportation Fair is at Raven Hall (Fairgrounds) on October 8th from 4 to 8 p.m. showcasing all of the projects happening in the Borough. This will be in lieu of the regular meeting. It is important to get feedback from the public. CAC members that haven't signed up to help at the project table are still encouraged to attend.

The proposed Comment Sheet was distributed for review. The following changes were requested.

- Reword Questions 1 and 2: Do you think there is a growing problem...
If yes, what times of the day is it a problem?
- Transportation Fair Graphics. The corridor graphic with AADT was viewed as a good graphic to use at the Fair. It was requested that the intersection photographs be removed because they misrepresented the traffic situation. The map view should be expanded to encompass Arctic and Springer Loop. The spelling of "terminus" should be corrected. The community values as defined by the CAC should also be shown at the table.

SEPTEMBER 10, 2009 MEETING MINUTES

Move the "Parking Lot" item concerning the pedestrian crossing of the Glenn Highway to "Hopes for the Project" as this pedestrian problem should be addressed.

Historic and Existing Traffic Counts

(Randy Kinney of Kinney Engineering)

Randy reviewed how AADT calculates the existing traffic. See attachment. There was still some debate as to the validity of these numbers.

- Do the numbers differentiate between cars and trucks? For example is a trailer goes over the counter does it count as one vehicle or two? *The answer to this question is that the numbers typically take this into account. Some of the counters automatically do this and others have to be adjusted.*
- Do others use these numbers? *This same process is used nation-wide.*

After much discussion, the CAC agreed that AADT is the best information available for existing traffic counts and the AADT will serve as the baseline.

A presentation of other agencies projected population growth rates for future planning purposes was presented. See attachments. ADOT designs for at least 20 years into the future. The design year for the Palmer Wasilla Highway project is 2034. These rates are from different sources and the growth rates vary but new growth is projected.

- Short-term versus long-term trends.
 - The AADT trend over the last 3 years shows traffic going down on the Palmer Wasilla Highway. This indicates that there is not a problem with traffic.
 - The long-term trend shows fluctuations but an overall increase in traffic over the years. The long-term trend indicates there will continue to be growth.
- Palmer and Wasilla will someday be one continuous developed area.
- Evergreen is backing up throughout the day.
- With the new Trunk Road, what will happen with traffic? These changes have to be considered.
 - One prediction is that traffic on the Palmer Wasilla Highway will decrease with the improved Trunk Road and there will no longer be a problem.
 - Another prediction is traffic will increase on the Palmer Wasilla Highway because Trunk Road connects to it.
- Need a 20 to 30 year plan. Traffic will increase but maybe all the improvements are not needed right now. Should make sure all the necessary right-of-way is acquired for future needs (such as the couplet) but the improvements could be done in phases.
- Downtown may not grow much. It is already fairly dense.
- It could grow “up.”
- Growth will likely occur to the south (proposed Hemmer Rd/Blunck St. north-south connector), west (Palmer High School area, proposed Bogard Rd. extension), and to the east (Lazy mountain, Butte).
- The growth trends are clear and they are not changing.
- Why do people move to the Valley?
 - Price of land/housing is less expensive
 - New employers
 - No commute
- There is a trend to go around the core city areas.
- Wasilla often gets unfairly characterized as a “failure”. The reality is the city chose a different path. It is a turbo-charged business corridor. But it has serious traffic problems, much of which is the result of Wasilla’s decision (due in large part to the business community) at an earlier time to have the Parks Highway placed through the

center of town. In general, Palmer and Wasilla have different attitudes towards urban planning, but both have certain benefits to offer – depending on what one values.

- Palmer has a high number of destination businesses such as dentists and lawyers. It will continue to experience steady growth.
- Palmer can choose to keep its individuality. It does not have to grow.

It is still repeatedly being said that “there is no problem.” The CAC identified several areas that “have room for improvement” but there is continued dialogue stating that there is no problem now and there won’t be in the future. On the other hand, solutions are being offered to resolve the “no problem.” There is a sense that Evergreen should not be included in the project.

- Several people expressed that they would be upset if Evergreen was not included in the project. The do nothing alternative is not a desired outcome for this project.
- Consensus was reached that Evergreen can be improved as well as the Palmer Wasilla Highway. There is a solution.
- A CAC representative indicated she would be doing a disservice to her neighbors and the community if she did not speak up. The focus of the discussion has been on the Evergreen side but the western terminus is important too. The west side of Palmer is getting the short end of the planning process. It is a business area but there are residents living right next to the road. This area needs careful planning as well.

Consensus: There is a problem and there is a solution to the problem.

Screening Criteria

Jim Amundsen, ADOT Project Manager presented the ADOT Evaluation criteria:

DOT&PF Screening Criteria		
Criterion	Measure	Data
Does it meet the project Purpose and Need?	Yes or No	Improves mobility (Modeled LOS meets Precon. Manual Standards for PWH & Glenn) Improves vehicular safety (Design standards met)
Is the alternative compatible with the existing and future transportation system?	Yes or No	Compatible with State Plans Compatible with Borough Plans Compatible with City Plans Or can it be accommodated with a minor update to existing plans
Is it a reasonable expenditure of public funds?	Yes or No	Order of magnitude costs based on general cost to cure for similar past projects
Is it within available budget	Yes or No or Maybe	Preliminary estimate compared to allocated funds

An overview of how what kind of data is needed and how the criteria would be measured was provided for feedback. The criteria will not be weighted. Some of the detailed criteria may require values to be assigned. This is to measure the impacts or effectiveness. For example, a level of service (LOS) will be assigned so that alternatives can be compared. The criteria still requires further refinement and some items will be more subjective than others. Professional engineering standards will have to be applied in some cases, and in others the CAC will have to apply judgment, such as evaluating Palmer Values.

Screening Criteria		
Criterion	Measure	Data
Mobility	Glenn/PWH Intersection Level of Service (LOS) for Glenn Highway movements.	Capacity Future volumes (20 years after construction)
	LOS of local streets – Minimizes impacts to local streets	Percent of corridor that is lower than LOS D
Traffic Distribution	More balanced volumes on local streets	Traffic volumes on local streets
	Maintains business access	
	Improves business access	
	Improvements in arterial travel times	Origin/destination information
Discourages speeding	Timed signals? Single through lanes to prevent weaving? On-street parking?	Existing Speeds, Posted Speeds, Speed Studies from similar roadways, Roadway Widths, Signal Spacing, Number of Lanes
Maintains Palmer Values	Amount of ROW required	
	Amount of sensitive environmental impacts	Difficulty to build or permit
	Parking Impacts	Number of spaces
	Aesthetic/Visual	
	Opportunities for Streetscape	
Vehicular Safety	Reduction in the number of crashes	Safety statistics, ADT by roadway classification, previous studies of accident reduction factors.
	Conflict reduction, Access control, Sight Distances, Speed, Width of rural Travel Way, Lighting levels, rural recovery area	AK Preconstruction Manual
Pedestrian and Bicycle Accommodation & Safety	Reduce conflicts, Improve visibility, Limit motor vehicle speed, Facility connectivity, Length of road crossings, Pathway or on-street route for bicycles in CBD (sidewalks too narrow).	Existing facilities, Number of vehicle conflict points, Sight distances
Cost	Construction Cost	Engineering estimates
	Maintenance Costs	Existing Maintenance Costs, Estimates of Future Cost

Decision-Making Process

Evaluation criteria will be applied and the top three alternatives will be selected. From the top 3, the CAC will select their Preferred Alternative. DOT Project Manager (Jim Amundsen) will concur as long as the DOT criteria are met.

The 3 alternatives will then be presented to the public (Open House) and the local governments (City and Borough) for their endorsement. The CAC preferred alternative will be identified.

The CAC will reconvene and review comments on the Alternatives. A final preferred alternative will be selected and move forward into design.

Once endorsement is received, the DOT will initiate the design process, prepare a state funded project environmental checklist, secure the necessary permits, buy any additional ROW required, and build the preferred alternative.

HOW CAN THE FUNDING BE APPLIED?

There is currently \$20 million in the budget for design and right-of-way acquisition. The money has to be spent to solve the congestion at the Glenn Highway/Palmer Wasilla intersection. The solution has to show a direct reduction in congestion.

If the preferred alternative doesn't materially address the mobility criteria within the project corridor, then the entire project needs legislative reauthorization, which is risky. The project may or may not continue after that request.

The alternative should fall within approximately \$38 million price tag. The legislature has made a commitment (by funding the design and right-of-way acquisition) to provide the remaining budget to construct the project at a future date; however, there are no guarantees that additional funding will be available.

If the alternative does not fall within that budget, it will not meet the ADOT criteria. Even if ADOT supported the over-budget alternative, the legislature would have to be convinced to provide additional funding.

There has to be a "rational" connection between the solution and the problem.

- Will a series of satellite projects be allowed? *Again, they would have to be directly linked to the Glenn/Palmer Wasilla Highway project. It has to be a good project overall. Other identified projects can be kept on the table for future funding and go into the City and Borough planning efforts.*
- According to a newspaper article, the Palmer City Manager, Bill Allen stated that the city of Palmer and Wal-Mart would contribute another \$14 million to the project to address traffic problems. Where is that money? *For a funding agreement between agencies, a signed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)*

would be required. There is no agreement at this time and ADOT does not have the referenced \$14 million.

- There was discussion that Wal-Mart is no longer very interested in the site. They own the parcel but at this time don't have plans to build.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE NEXT MEETING AGENDA

- Alternative Development – Multiple large maps will be placed on tables for CAC members to begin developing alternatives.
- It was requested that ADOT, Kinney, and Dave Lundin draft some alternatives based on the information from the CAC to help start the process.

HOMEWORK

- Start drafting up alternatives
- Review screening criteria

ACTION ITEMS

- Extend meeting graphics north to Arctic and further south to Inner Springer Loop
- Include all street names
- ADOT to provide alternatives for the next meeting
- Encourage the Borough Planner to attend next meeting
- Post Mat-Su Borough Long-Range Transportation Plan and the City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan on the web site

TENTATIVE FUTURE MEETING DATES

- November 12th
- December 10th
- January 7th

PARKING LOT (SUMMARY OF ALL MEETINGS)

The parking lot is for items that are likely outside the scope of discussion. They will be addressed as time permits.

- Future of Glenn Highway through Palmer. What are ADOT's plans?
- Walkway from Palmer to Fairgrounds
- Frontage Road with limited access along west side of Palmer Wasilla Highway (will discuss during alternatives)