



# CHUAC Meeting Notes

Federal Project No: NH-000S(588)  
AKSAS Project No. 58544

Subject:	CHUAC Meeting #4		
Client:	DOT&PF		
Project:	H2H Project	Project No:	80510
Meeting Date:	March 16, 2009 4-7 p.m.	In Attendance:	See Sign In Sheet
Notes by:	Erin Begier		

Following the welcome, agenda overview, and introductions, the CHUAC received an update on the Executive Oversight Committee's (EOC) March 16<sup>th</sup> meeting from Darrel Hess. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is officially a co-lead on the project<sup>1</sup>. Darrel requested that in the future, the CHUAC receive monthly project updates, similar to those received by the EOC.

## Project Update

John McPherson explained that the project was delayed slightly to develop the formal agreement with the FTA outlining each agency's roles and responsibilities, but the project is on-track to have screening criteria and alternatives developed over the next six months. In the meantime, the project team will update the Coordination Plan to reflect FTA's involvement.

A range of alternatives and modes are under consideration at this stage, and the project area encompasses downtown, midtown and most of east Anchorage. The project team intends to host an all-day public workshop in mid- to late-April to gather input on the alternatives data collected thus far. Within the broad study area corridors will be identified by the end of May for refined evaluation and consideration. Important aspects of this phase include understanding modes—what do they encompass; what factors need to be in place; how do they help meet the Purpose and Need—and what corridors make sense geographically, based on Anchorage's travel demand.

Public meetings will be held in May to discuss the reasonableness of corridors, as well as what modes may or may not make sense. The timing of this meeting is important because of summer fieldwork considerations.

<sup>1</sup> A copy of the Memorandum of Understanding between FHWA, FTA, DOT&PF, and the Municipality of Anchorage was provided to the CHUAC via e-mail on March 17, 2009

Preliminary engineering will be completed on the corridors that end up being identified (that will include preparing cost estimates, etc.). The project team will complete analysis that will allow a determination of which alternatives will meet the project's Purpose and Need. The reasonable alternatives will be studied in more detail in the draft EIS.

### **Purpose and Need:**

The Purpose and Need statement has been modified. The term "access" was added, as was the phrase "moving people and goods." The purpose statement now better reflects the intention of examining a variety of modes. Project "needs" include congestion relief, travel efficiency, neighborhood connections, safety and transit connections. The statement will remain as a draft—and edits could still be made—until the EIS has been finalized. The project team does not anticipate major changes at this point; this statement will be used to develop screening criteria and alternatives for consideration in the draft EIS. The team will look at a range of alternatives and screen them against their ability to meet the purpose and needs.

The project will address congestion in the arterial connection, but it should also help relieve congestion on surrounding alternate routes.

A suggestion was made by Susanne DiPietro to take out the words "the proposed," from the purpose statement, which implied that some kind of decision had been made on a "proposed" improvement.

### **Panel Discussion on the modes under consideration:**

Louise Smart introduced panelists who were knowledgeable about the range of potential modes under consideration in the project. David Vozzolo from HDR participated by phone. Louise asked each participant to describe their mode and asked them to describe what kinds of considerations the project should be considering. She asked them to describe "What is the mode and what does it take for it to work to make it work and to provide examples from other places."

### **Highways – Jim Childers, DOT&PF and Mike Tooley, HDR**

Mike Tooley started out. He explained that the current national highway route is the surface route of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> and Ingra and Gambell Streets. There is lots of congestion during peak hours and cut through traffic is significant. In developing highway routes there is always an awareness and concern about the possibility of splitting neighborhoods. Past studies on H2H have discussed the possibility of a depressed facility which would allow for connectivity for cross traffic. In refining such an idea, access issues on and off of the mainline are considerations. Other considerations may include ramp design, grade, climate, ramp spacing, how to allow for a free flow facility, noise, and snow removal. Putting a highway through an urban area raises possible utility relocation issues, especially if you are cutting underneath the utilities. It is especially problematic for sewers, which typically flow by gravity. We would need to consider how

construction would be done so that existing traffic flow is maintained in some way. Designers work with environmental staff to try to avoid and minimize impacts.

Mike was asked about the underground parts the CHUAC had heard about. He indicated that a cut and cover facility might include a depression 25' below ground level and be 200' wide. Depending on how the slopes on the sides are done it could be 500' or more wide. The width will be determined by the angle of backslope required. Retaining walls may be used rather than backslopes to minimize impacts, but walls raise costs. The tradeoffs are usually examined in the EIS. The highway could be confined in a tight narrow-walled cross-section subject to geotechnical considerations that might include liquefaction, heaves, and seismic concerns. The engineering team currently envisions some sort of complicated wall design, and this would increase the ability to connect the neighborhoods more easily. Cross-traffic would be handled by having certain streets cross over on bridges for connectivity. On past projects, some neighbors have been in favor of their streets not going through. They wanted to have cul-de-sacs to increase their privacy and decrease traffic. Mike indicated that it is the elevation of the side streets that will determine where a depressed facility starts and stops, because side streets will need to remain at their current elevation so business or residential access can be maintained.

Jim Childers added that neighborhood cohesion will be considered in the EIS, as will community impacts. The Purpose and Need Statement describes the problems to be solved. Alternatives are developed and screened in the draft EIS based upon the problem to be solved and the impacts created or avoided.

#### Bus Rapid Transit – Alton Staff, People Mover

A locally managed bus rapid transit (BRT) system might consist of frequent busses running at 15 minute headways all day and 10 minutes during the peak hours. PeopleMover route 45 with the most frequent headways has periods with 20 minutes intervals. The service would depend on demand and increasing the number of buses operating. BRT buses would supplement the existing People Mover system and be differentiated from local bus service with special vehicles and different logos. BRT buses might include doors on both sides (to expand station possibilities and speed up loading and unloading times), articulated buses of 60 passengers or more, double articulated buses, and/or stations that allowed for fare collection before getting on the bus (unique stations). To accommodate BRT buses, traffic signals could be prioritized (allowing buses priority over other vehicles), dedicated lanes or separated lanes created, or separate signals (queue jumper lanes) added for bus traffic to minimize delays. What would make bus rapid transit viable are town centers. Rapid transit can be as short at 4 to 5 miles in length. In Anchorage, Alton indicated that the A/C Street or Northern Lights-Benson corridor could be candidates for a BRT system. The Regional Transit Authority would likely be responsible for bus service from the Valley.

#### Transportation Demand Management/Transportation System Management – Lance Wilber, MOA Traffic Department

Transportation management tools on the system side are intended to be employed on existing routes. There are over 100 methods or techniques a city could use to address the demand on the transportation system or how the system is managed. Not all techniques are doable or acceptable in every community. Some examples of transportation system management include actions such as signal timing, access management (e.g., taking out 25% of driveways/access cuts - can increase capacity by 30% with no additional actions taken; however, businesses resist removing street access points - it can be very political). Incident Management is one example of a transportation system management technique other communities have used which includes fining drivers for not moving cars away from the road after minor accidents. Other cities have used roving tow trucks that roam through traffic during high-traffic times to move stalled or accident vehicles from the flow of traffic.

The goal of demand management is to focus on strategies that get people out of single occupant vehicles or spread the demand so it does not hit the same roads at the same time; such as vanpools and carpools, which reduce overall demand. Other options could include better bike facilities or different work schedules. Since the cost for parking at new buildings is so expensive, plans should attempt to improve public transit services to these new facilities which reduce the cost of private development and reduce the demand on driving. To work effectively, TDM and TSM generally need density and public acceptance. These strategies can be cost-effective and timely activities to pursue.

#### Commuter Rail – Bruce Carr, Alaska Railroad Corporation

Commuter rail is different than light rail. Commuter rail is a diesel-powered transit mode operated between adjacent cities on Federal Railroad Administration-approved track (light rail cannot run on FRA track). Commuter rail generally involves multi-trip tickets and one or two stations within a central business district. The existing rail corridor to the Valley along the Glenn Highway could be used to take people off the road. Within the central core city, commuter rail then connects to bus or light rail for people to continue their trip. Commuter rail trains can accommodate 600-800 people. Stations exist in the Valley, and there is a planned station at the Dimond Center. On the negative side, commuter rail is expensive. Fortunately, the Alaska Railroad Corporation already has a rail ROW in Anchorage and stations in place. ARRC's main concerns for commuter rail are operations and maintenance costs (who pays the subsidy) and making sure commuter rail would not inhibit rail freight traffic. According to Bruce, commuter rail is not an alternative for H2H, but it could be used as a tool for demand management. He feels the transportation modes are complimentary to each other. Travel time from the Glenn-Parks interchange to Downtown would take 45 minutes (longer from Palmer because of the 10 mph track). ARRC would have to work with People Mover on cross platform connections to make it successful. The Regional Transit Authority is the entity that Bruce hopes would be operating the commuter rail. He encouraged the H2H team to coordinate with the RTA.

#### Light Rail – Paul Witt and David Vozzolo, HDR

Light rail is typically characterized by transporting riders along shorter distances with more frequent stops than commuter rail. It can also operate with lower capacity and with lower speed. Light rail typically requires a dedicated right of way but can operate on city streets for short distances. It has the benefit of moving quickly, but it could also mix with traffic on streets (e.g., trolleys). It can operate on steeper grades and sharper curvatures than commuter rail. Light rail often requires overhead electric wires, power plants along tracks, or 3<sup>rd</sup> rail power sources, with power plants (or substations) along tracks. It can be integrated with a highway system. Light rail is passenger only and would not move freight. Funding would be a strong consideration—it would need a high ridership to support the system, either through fees or rider-dependent subsidies.

A light rail mode is similar to the BRT system mentioned earlier, moving from point to point, serving high density areas traveling to destination areas—sometimes using traffic signal priority. The cost is high ranging roughly between \$40 million per mile to \$100 million per mile to construct, including utilities, grades, and other infrastructure. Operating and maintenance costs would be in the multi-million dollar range per year. In evaluating proposed light rail projects for funding under the FTA New Starts program, FTA rates projects on cost effectiveness as well as land use factors including corridor density, travel generators and service, and what other plans and policies could contribute to the success of the system. Light rail would have to be coordinated with the existing transit system in a way that best serves the community.

John McPherson reminded CHUAC members that in discussing light rail and other modes within the Highway to Highway project we are not trying to define a regional transit plan, but rather to identify reasonable options that solve the problems that have been identified to carry into the EIS for consideration.

**Next Steps:**

The next CHUAC meeting will be held in May 2009.