



REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF:

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
U.S. ARMY ENGINEER DISTRICT, ALASKA  
P.O. BOX 6898  
ELMENDORF AFB, ALASKA 99506-0898  
APR 28 2008

Regulatory Branch  
South Section

Ms. Edrie Vinson, Environmental Project Manager  
Federal Highway Administration  
Alaska Division  
709 West Ninth Street Room 851  
Post Office Box 21648  
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1648

Dear Ms. Vinson:

This letter provides our comments as a cooperating agency on the Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement (PDEIS) prepared for the Knik Arm Crossing, (KAC), Anchorage, Alaska, Federal Highway Administration project No. ACSTP-0001 (277).

The proposed KAC will require a permit from us pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water. In order for a permit to be issued we must determine that the proposed project is not contrary to the public interest and that it complies with the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines (Guidelines) to the Clean Water Act (40 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 230). Under the Guidelines a permit can only be issued for the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative, so long as that alternative does not have other significant adverse environmental consequences. At this point, the PDEIS contains insufficient information for us to determine Guidelines compliance and is inadequate with respect to our permit action.

The document cites a number of on-going baseline studies. The PDEIS indicates these studies are independent of the NEPA process. We believe the data resulting from these studies are integral to a full disclosure and understanding of the potential environmental consequences of the project, and are needed for our Guidelines compliance evaluation.

The PDEIS also indicates that the "Study Group" reached several decisions regarding the content and direction of the PDEIS. However, no where in the document does it indicate which agencies comprised the study group. We raise this issue solely to note that we were not part of this study group.

Below are some specific comments we believe need to be addressed prior to going forward in the NEPA process:

Purpose and Need: The population growth charts shown in your document clearly indicate that the overall population of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough will increase approximately the same amount whether or not the bridge is constructed. The change in population growth shown in the data indicates that if the bridge is built the growth in other areas of the Borough will not be as large as without the bridge. This data also indicates that if the bridge is not constructed there will be little or no need for greater traffic flow into the Port MacKenzie area, as little growth will take place in this area. The PDEIS supports the addition of a ferry system as it will accommodate non-bridge related growth in the Port MacKenzie area far into the foreseeable future. As currently presented the document supports the no-build alternative, as it appears to meet the purpose and need and would be the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative.

Hydrology/Sedimentation Issues: Our Coastal and Hydraulics Laboratory at the Engineering and Research Development Center (ERDC) in Vicksburg, Mississippi has reviewed the hydrodynamic/sediment model application and analyses that were done by HDR/URS and will be issuing a report on them near the end of the month. ERDC personnel will be traveling to Anchorage to present their report to all stakeholders, including the Federal Highway Administration. This information is integral to the EIS and our permit decision, particularly as it relates to the potential effect of the KAC on sedimentation rates at the Port of Anchorage, a Federal project maintained by the Corps. We must evaluate the KAC for compatibility with the purposes of the Federal project at the Port of Anchorage. We cannot issue a permit which will adversely affect the federal project at the Port of Anchorage.

Alternatives: We believe the PDEIS contains insufficient information on alternatives with respect to both NEPA and the Guidelines. As noted earlier we can only issue a permit for the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative. The Guidelines define practicable as available and capable of being done after taking into consideration cost, logistics and existing technology in light of the overall project purpose. We do not believe slight variations in location and design of similar structures encompasses a reasonable range of alternatives. It is unclear in the document why a rail only connection would not serve the purpose and need. Similarly, how will a ferry system fail to meet the transportation needs of the public? Page 4-97 Environmental Consequences, states that "Coal and other resources could be shipped from Port MacKenzie to the Port of Anchorage via a toll bridge." Why would the ports exchange large amounts of goods by truck when it would be done more economically in mass by sea going vessels, or trains? Hundreds of truck loads could be transported for much less cost (Rail Corridor Study page 1-11). It is our opinion that this document does not meet the NEPA requirements or policy for the evaluation of alternatives. Please refer to the Council on Environmental Quality's Memorandum titled "Forty Most Asked Questions Concerning CEQ's National Environmental Policy Act Regulations (46 Federal Register 18026, March 23, 1981, as amended), in particular the answer to Question No. 2. The criteria established to eliminate

alternatives has been so narrowly defined that the only reasonable alternative would be a toll bridge without genuine consideration of other alternatives which appear to be both reasonable and practicable.

Logical Termini: (Page 2-5): The Guidelines require the consideration of secondary and cumulative impacts as does NEPA. The PDEIS does not address the reconstruction/improvements that would be needed to Burma Road to accommodate the movement of freight to the interior of Alaska as discussed in the document. Improvements to transportation systems on the Port MacKenzie side of the project will likely require the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S., and will be subject to our permit requirements under Section 404. These secondary and cumulative impacts to aquatic resources must be addressed in the document.

Mitigation: The PDEIS identifies Best Management Practices associated with some activities. Corps' mitigation policy for activities involving Section 404 sets forth a sequence that impacts to aquatic resources must first be avoided, then minimized, and finally compensated to the extent practicable for unavoidable impacts. The PDEIS needs additional information on mitigation to inform the public of the full impacts of each alternative. This is an integral part of our evaluation process and review for compliance with the Guidelines. Failure to develop these measures early in the review process and failure to address all the direct and indirect impacts of the project will likely result in delay.

Thank you for considering our comments. We look forward to working with you to improve the document so that it is adequate with respect to our permit action and NEPA requirements. Please contact me at 907-753-2712, toll free in Alaska at 1-800-478-2712, or via fax at 907-753-5567 if you have any questions or would like to discuss our comments.

Sincerely

**SIGNED**

Irvin T. Joy  
Project Manager  
South Section

Enclosure

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