



## GOVERNMENT HILL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

P.O. Box 100018 • Anchorage, Alaska 99510-0018

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**February 19, 2008**

**Subject: Government Hill's remarks regarding FEIS comment responses.**

Government Hill respectfully submits the following remarks in response to selected published comments and responses in Appendix K of the FEIS.

**A/C Couplet Bridge: Comment 291-31 - A/C Couplet Bridge does not have seismic capacity to provide access to KAC for evacuation.**

The response to comment 291-31 included the following:

*Travel demand analysis has been conducted and it has been determined that the A-C Couplet has adequate capacity to handle traffic volumes from the Knik Arm Crossing project until approximately 2023 at which time the Ingra-Gambell connection could be constructed to tie in with the Highway-to-Highway project proposed by AMATS. It is estimated that approximately two-thirds of the travel demand will shift to the Ingra Gambell Couplet once constructed.*

This response directly contradicts DOT/PF's assessment of the A/C Couplet Bridge which is listed as "functionally obsolete", and it is also on DOT/PF's 2007 Bridge Inventory list as one of only 3 bridges in the state with the comment of "Fracture Critical", meaning that it requires special inspections to ensure that it does not collapse. Contrary to the Purpose and Needs Statement, the A-C Couplet Bridge is not a reliable "redundant route".

**Funding and Construction: Comment 295-49 – No construction should be done until all bridge-related funding is secured.**

Government Hill and other organizations asserted:

*... that the bridge and its access roads should not be constructed until all bridge-related funding has been secured. If this is not done, there will be needless, adverse environmental and social impacts and community costs associated with a bridge that might never be completed.*

The FEIS response included the following:

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*Determining financial feasibility entails determining the costs to construct, operate and maintain the project on the costs side and determining the forecast traffic and toll revenue on the revenue side of the equation. These elements are then used to determine the cash flow generated in order to determine its sufficiency to support project financing. KABATA has hired numerous highly respected independent experts to determine these various elements and to assist it in determining the financial feasibility of the Knik Arm Crossing. The following provides a brief history of the financial feasibility work that has been performed...*

The response is a justification of the [highly suspect] financial feasibility analysis. The response fails to address the underlying issue of adverse social, environmental, and community costs that will be incurred if bridge construction is started but not completed.

In a letter dated March 24, 2007 to David Miller of FHWA from Mary Jane Michael, Executive Director of the Municipality of Anchorage's Office of Economic and Community Development, Ms. Michael stated that the MOA's Long Range Transportation Plan was amended to include language prohibiting construction on the Anchorage landside until the complete funding package is secured and the access connections and project design have been submitted for review to the Municipality of Anchorage.

The excerpt is below:

Finally, the Anchorage Assembly and Mayor Begich, which together hold three of the five member positions on the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Study group (AMATS), recently supported a key amendment to Assembly Ordinance 2007-46 (S), to include the Knik Arm Crossing in MOA's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), which added the following language:

D. No construction work will begin on Anchorage landside bridge approaches until the complete funding package is secured for the bridge and the access connections and the project design had been submitted for review through the established municipal design review process.

Based on this recent pronouncement by MOA decision makers, we expect that these mitigation issues must be fully resolved before construction may proceed. We look forward to working with you to address these major concerns.

Obviously, construction of Anchorage landside approaches are prohibited until the complete funding package is in place.

### **Anchorage Access Solution**

The Anchorage Access Solution (ASS) is a proposal resulting from the initial Context Sensitive Design meetings held in December 2005. As pointed out in our comments throughout Appendix K in the FEIS, KABATA and FHWA grossly misrepresented our proposed solution. The Phase 2 crossing at Elm Street was just one of *many* possible Phase 2 routes including some that *closely* resemble the Phase 2 Degan Street Variant. We have strenuously objected to the misrepresentation of the AAS as demonstrated by our comments throughout Appendix K.

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Phase 1 of the AAS was demonstrated to be both less expensive than the Degan and Erickson Alternatives and has far fewer impacts to historic properties protected by Section 106 and parks protected by Section 4(f). If a Degan-like variant was selected for Phase 2, the variant would have fewer impacts on Section 106 and 4(f) resources. A minor compromise would be required: the curves from Government Hill to the viaduct would be at tight radius that prohibits a 50 mph design speed. However, those speeds would be similar to the Phase I 35 mph loop road and A/C Couplet Bridge speeds.

Several AAS design elements are superior to the Degan-Erickson alternatives. Intersections occur on flat ground north of Government Hill Elementary School as opposed to the middle of icy and steep “Curling Club Curve”. Also, currently Loop road is a four lane road. The Erickson Variant converts Loop road to a two lane road with on and off ramps which will force both Government Hill and Elmendorf traffic on to a single ramp.

#### **TeamBuildingInitiative: 291-4**

From Section 1.4 of the Knik Arm Crossing Report on pages 1-3:

*Because the proposed Knik Arm Crossing project was deemed nationally significant, FHWA selected it for participation in the NEPA TeamBuilding Initiative. The goal of this FHWA initiative is to improve the quality and timeliness of transportation development projects while ensuring stewardship of the human and natural environment. In addition, the TeamBuilding Initiative aims to assess potentially controversial impacts early in the NEPA process; use conflict-resolution techniques; build public trust through an effective public involvement process; identify opportunities to integrate innovative technology and data tools; and improve documentation of impacts from the proposed project and records.*

Our comments and the official response in regards to the TeamBuilding Initiative:

#### **Comment: 291-4**

*Government Hill firmly believes that if the stakeholders had been allowed to follow the TeamBuilding Initiative, reviewing reasonable alternatives in good faith, the resulting DEIS may have been a strong document that could have received broad support. Instead, the DEIS is fatally flawed.*

#### **Response:**

*The Knik Arm Crossing Draft EIS was conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and 36 CFR 800, Protection of Historic Properties. The consultation process is ongoing through the Final EIS. The Interdisciplinary Team was established specifically for environmental resource and regulatory agencies, and local governmental officials. A concurrent public involvement process was established that included outreach to the general public, group meetings, community council*

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*meetings, public scoping meetings, public workshops, and newsletters. In addition, 14 separate meetings were held with the GHCC or its representatives during the Draft EIS process.*

*As a result of the scoping process, reasonable alternatives were identified and brought forward for study in the Draft EIS, including the Anchorage Access Solution. The Anchorage Access Solution was refined in consultation with the GHCC Steering Committee. The resulting alternative, the Elm Street Alternative, was determined by FHWA to not be reasonable. The results of the Elm Street Alternative analysis are contained in Section 2.5.4.3.*

The above response does not address the total failure to adhere to the guidelines established by the TeamBuilding Initiative. There are several TeamBuilding Initiative comments in Appendix K of the FEIS. Not a single response addresses the issue. Every response consists of the stock language used above.



*Would be sustainable; projected travel demand would provide estimated debt service and cover operation and maintenance costs".*

We agree with the Municipality of Anchorage when they said in their Comments to the DEIS:

*Our analysis projects a daily volume of 160-480 gravel-haul trucks based on the DEIS information, in addition to other tractor-trailer trucks from the Bridge through our Downtown District. This is detrimental to the Municipality. Moreover, projected traffic volumes on the proposed Phase I connector alternatives via the A/C Couplet are unworkable. Our analysis indicates the A/C Couplet Viaduct over Ship Creek will be over capacity and dysfunctional well before projected in the DEIS.*

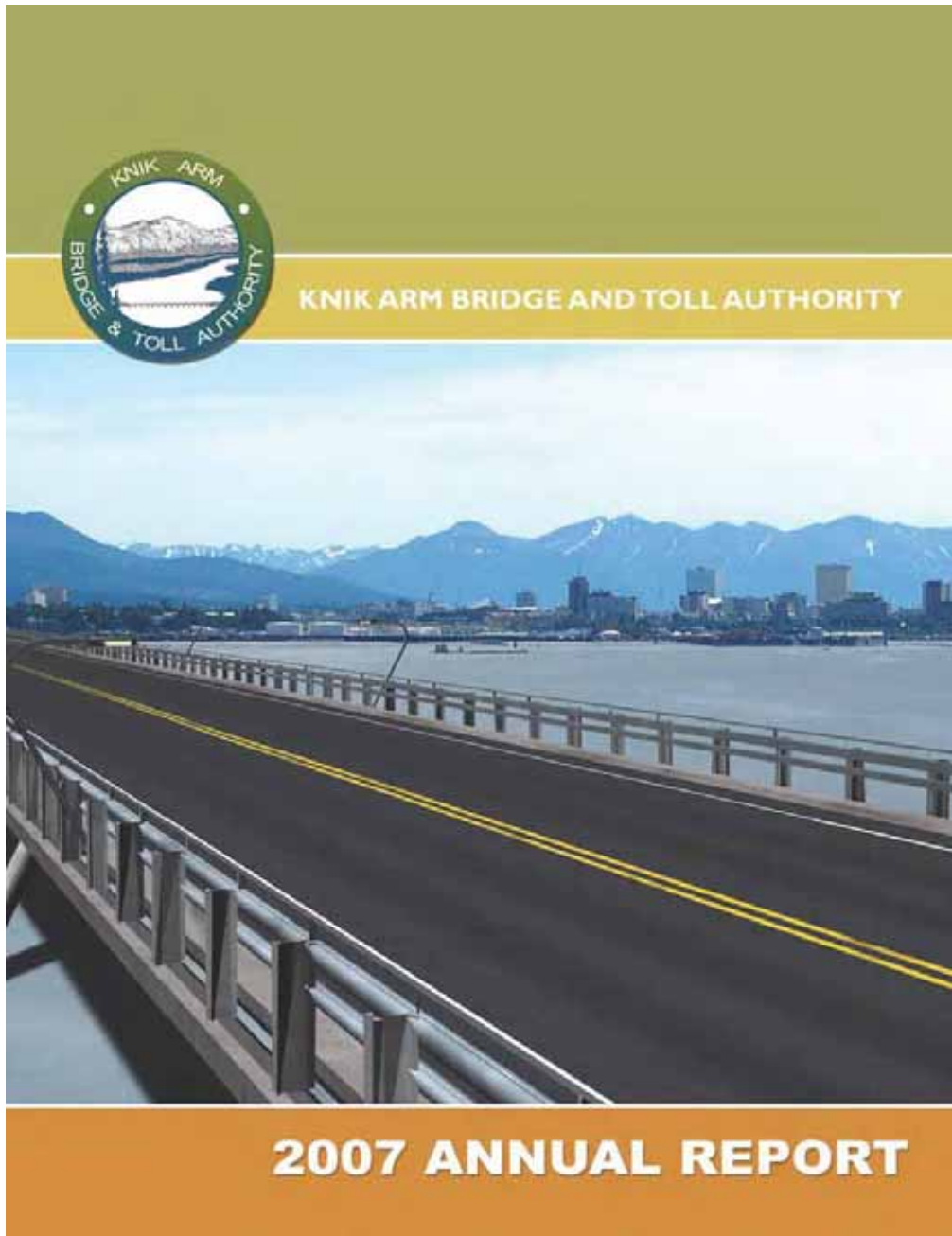
Because of these unacceptable effects on the connecting transportation networks, KABATA's preferred alternate does not meet Criterion P&N-4:

*Would be efficient; defined as a measure of traffic operating conditions that occur when such factors as travel demand, effects on connecting transportation networks, facility length, travel time, and operating speed are collectively considered.*

The Government Hill Community Council supports the comments on the FEIS by Trustees for Alaska, the Alaska Public Interest Group, the Alaska Transportation Priorities Project and others that comment on the critical shortcomings of the Purpose and Needs.

**Bridge Design Fails Basic Functionality and Safety Requirements:**

KABATA's 2007 Annual Report prominently displays the picture below:



The bridge is depicted as two lanes lacking any sort of pullout. The Knik River bridge on the Glen Highway also was originally a two lane bridge. It experienced major problems with ice fog due to the open water and cold temperatures. It was also the site of many accidents until the second bridge was built, special lights installed, and turned into a fully divided 4 lane highway, which has lessened the number of crashes. If the Knik Arm Crossing is built as a two lane bridge, one can only imagine the results of a multi-car crash in the middle of the bridge due to ice fog and zero visibility on a 1.5 mile long bridge over open water in freezing conditions. It will take hours, if not days, to clear out the wreckage. That is not an "effective" road.

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**Fiber Optic Cables on Government Hill:**

KABATA's states on page 4-86 of the FEIS that there are no known major communication lines in the Anchorage portion of the KAC project. That is false. During the CSS discussions in December 2005, with Government Hill Community Council, GHCC informed KABATA that a critical high capacity fiber optic cable carrying at least half of the instate and out of state communications for ALL of Alaska will be crossed by either the Degan or Erickson Tunnels.

**Hazardous Materials:**

The discussion in 4.5.4.3 of hazardous materials sites in the Government Hill neighborhood are missing several known haz-mat sites. This includes the following: that OT92 extends to Site 99, and would be impacted by the Erickson Tunnel. Site 99, the former Defense Fuels site had the buried tanks removed, but the foundations for those tanks remain, which will cause much high costs when digging the trench for the Erickson Tunnel. Sunset Park is the former location of Government Hill, and as a school built in the 1950's was full of asbestos and lead-based paint, as well as having buried underground fuel tanks. We regularly find pieces of the school coming up through the grass in Sunset Park and are confident that excavations for the Erickson Tunnel will be impacted by those hazardous materials.

**Cumulative Impacts:**

GHCC agrees with comments 274-6, 274-7, 274-8, 274-18 and 274-9 among others that the EIS is deficient with regards to direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of the KAC. The FEIS needs to include a more thorough discussion of alternatives that would avoid or minimize impacts to Section 106, 4(f), fish, wildlife, wetland trust resources, marine mammals, and other cultural and recreational resources. In particular, no specifics are given on actual mortality due to direct, indirect and cumulative impacts. Also, the summary of impacts shown in the FEIS summary minimizes the impacts.

**Beluga Whales:**

The Government Hill Community Council supports the comments on the FEIS by Defenders of Wildlife, the Marine Mammal Commission, NOAA, Trustees for Alaska, and others that identify various shortcomings in the discussion of impacts to Cook Inlet beluga whales. Among the problems identified in these comments, the discussion of impacts to the beluga whale understates the challenges the whale faces and minimizes or ignores information indicating that the bridge may drive the whale population to extinction. E.g., NOAA, Comments on the Knik Arm Crossing Draft EIS 2 (Nov. 17, 2006). The EIS, as a result, violates NEPA by depriving decision makers and the public of a reasonably thorough discussion of the impacts of the bridge. E.g., Ctr. for Biological Diversity, 508 F.3d at 526-27."

**In Support of other Comments Regarding Lack of Alternative Evaluation:**

Government Hill Community Council agrees with the EPA in Comments 313-3, 313-4, 313-13, 313-14, the Matanuska Susitna Borough, the Municipality of Anchorage, the Corps of Engineers in comments 293-2, 293-4 and the Alaska SHPO that the FEIS has not explored and evaluated additional or true alternatives that would avoid or minimize environmental impacts.