

2.0 Project Background & Status

The CBJ and the State of Alaska began investigating construction of a North Douglas Crossing of Gastineau Channel more than 20 years ago. CBJ land use and transportation plans consistently highlight the importance of the North Douglas crossing to meeting Juneau's current and future transportation needs and to facilitate the community's growth. The city's *Areawide Transportation Plan* (2001) lists the crossing as "one of the top near-term priorities to improve connections between Juneau's population centers." The 1995 CBJ *Comprehensive Plan* indicates the need to "identify the crossing corridor" to move the project forward. The February 2007 draft update to the *Comprehensive Plan* continues to call for construction of the crossing to address congestion on the Juneau Douglas Bridge during peak traffic times and to allow for new development (including needed affordable housing) on Douglas Island, both near the existing bridge and in West Douglas.¹

Community opinion surveys show that the Juneau public consistently supports construction of the North Douglas Crossing. In 1984, 69% of those surveyed favored the crossing.² Polling in 2003 reported that 63% supported or strongly supported the crossing.³ Polling in February 2007 shows that 76% of Juneau residents now support or strongly support construction of the crossing (see Section 7.0).

This section briefly summarizes the findings and recommendations of the CBJ-sponsored 1984 *Second Gastineau Channel Crossing Feasibility Study* and the 2005 *Juneau Second Channel Crossing, Project Development Summary Report* prepared for the ADOT&PF. More detailed project background, maps, and evaluation of alternative crossing locations considered in these earlier studies can be found in these documents. It also discusses the October 2005 CBJ Resolution that set the framework for the city's further work on this project, and briefly describes likely next steps for progress on the project.

2.1 CBJ Feasibility Study (1984)

The 1984 *Second Gastineau Channel Crossing Feasibility Study* (HGR, 1984) evaluated 14 alternative locations for the crossing. The alternatives spanned a nine-mile study area from Salmon Creek (farthest east) to Mendenhall Peninsula-Spuhn Island (farthest west), as well as a No Build alternative.

The 1984 study included public and stakeholder consultation; and evaluation of population growth, land use, environmental conditions, traffic projections, existing and planned transportation facilities, engineering feasibility, funding, regulatory requirements, and policy constraints. The study ranked the alternatives relative to five factors: land use, environmental issues, transportation, engineering and public policy.

¹ 2007 Draft CBJ Comprehensive Plan, February 20, 2007 Draft for Citizen Review and Comment.

² *Second Gastineau Channel Crossing Feasibility Study*, 2004.

³ *Juneau Second Channel Crossing Household Survey Results*, McDowell Group, December 2003.

It recommended the development of a crossing from eight-mile Egan Drive (near the airport) to intersect with the Fish Creek (Eaglecrest) Road on Douglas Island.

2.2 ADOT&PF Preliminary Scoping and Environmental Analysis (2005)

In 2003-2005, the State of Alaska ADOT&PF initiated a scoping process and environmental and engineering studies and analysis for a North Douglas Crossing EIS. In May 2005, ADOT&PF concluded the project without completing the EIS and published the *Juneau Second Channel Crossing Project Development Summary Report* (HDR Alaska, Inc., 2005). The *Summary Report* presented results of preliminary scoping consultations with the public and agencies, a summary of engineering and environmental baseline studies, estimated project costs, and preliminary findings and recommendations regarding the project. The *Summary Report* is not a complete scoping report or Draft EIS, but will be used by ADOT&PF to contribute to further EIS activities.

The *Summary Report* considered the same 14 alternative crossing locations studied in 1984, and a No Build alternative. The report considered updated and comprehensive evaluations of physical and biological baseline conditions, transportation planning, existing and future land uses, environmental constraints and regulations, engineering criteria/constraints/feasibility, navigational considerations, land use development plans, approximate ranges of construction costs, consistency with purpose and need objectives, and agency and public comments received during the preliminary scoping phase.

The 2005 *Summary Report* reached the following preliminary conclusions, which have informed the CBJ's recent work on the crossing project:

- A crossing in the vicinity of the Vanderbilt Hill Road Area to Yandukin Drive area provides the greatest potential for meeting the comprehensive project's objectives (listed in Section 1.0).
- The least costly crossing potentials (with embankment) are in the Vanderbilt Hill Road area to Sunny Drive area.
- For an "all-structure" crossing (bridge) of the Gastineau Channel, a Salmon Creek area crossing represents the least costly option.
- The Salmon Creek area and Mendenhall Peninsula area provide the only opportunities to avoid a crossing within the MWSGR.
- Of alternative crossing routes within the Refuge, crossings in the Vanderbilt Hill Road area to Yandukin Drive area best avoid the highest value environmental areas within the Refuge (which are located west of the airport).

The *Summary Report* recommended against further consideration of crossing routes west of the Juneau International Airport (JIA), for the following reasons:

"Primary features west of the JIA include the Mendenhall River, western end of the MWSGR, Mendenhall Peninsula, Fritz Cove, and North Douglas Island in the vicinity of Fish Creek. The reasons for eliminating

further consideration of this area are based on a comprehensive set of factors, including environmental “hot spot” areas [at Fritz Cove, the mouth of the Mendenhall River and Fish Creek] and potential impacts to protected [fish and wildlife] species; comments from regulatory agencies; results of preliminary travel demand analysis; geometric constraints with crossing the Mendenhall River in the vicinity of Industrial Boulevard and potential conflicts with JIA Part 77 airspace;⁴ potential conflicts with future expansion plans at JIA; potential Section 4(f) resources on the Mendenhall Peninsula and North Douglas Island;⁵ and crossing types/costs.”

The *Summary Report* also found that a crossing at Salmon Creek would not meet one of the primary need objectives of the project for locating the crossing to “efficiently serve the CBJ planned ‘New Growth Areas’ on North and West Douglas Island.” Traffic modeling and transportation planning completed in 2004 concluded that a crossing at Salmon Creek would foster future land use development and concentrate traffic along North Douglas Highway between the existing bridge and the new crossing, and would not effectively meet the transportation demands of new development at West Douglas.

2.3 CBJ Resolution – Focus on Three Alternative Routes (2005)

Based on the technical work and preliminary conclusions of the *Project Development Summary Report* (listed above), the CBJ Assembly unanimously adopted Resolution 2330(b) in October 2005, focusing the city’s consideration on three general crossing locations that would best meet project objectives: Vanderbilt Hill Road area; Sunny Point area; and Yandukin Drive area.

In addition, the CBJ Resolution supported a “bench road on North Douglas as a necessary transportation improvement in the future to reduce traffic on North Douglas Highway and enhance access to West Douglas.” However, the Resolution specifically did not link progress on a future Bench Road with progress on the North Douglas Crossing project.

2.4 Next Steps

The CBJ’s identification of a community preferred alternative for the North Douglas Crossing will give focus and impetus to future work on the project. However, many steps remain to make the project a reality. Many state and federal agencies and the public will have a role in the final determination of the crossing’s location and design.

In simplest terms, next steps include:

⁴ The height of objects in the vicinity of the airport is controlled by Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR) Part 77 (Objects Affecting Navigable Airspace).

⁵ Refers to Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966 (see Sections 4.3 and 6.3.4.)

- Obtaining state and federal support and funding for project planning, permitting, design and construction;
- Environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a State of Alaska best interest finding, and/or other decision document;
- Permitting;
- Obtaining the corridor right of way;
- Detailed design; and
- Construction.

Juneau's community preferred alternative would likely be identified as the Proposed Action or preferred alternative in a NEPA document or state decision document. Identifying the alternative would not eliminate other alternatives from consideration during environmental analysis, but may serve to focus the analysis on a smaller number of alternatives.

The public will have further opportunities to have input on the project during future environmental analysis and permitting. Agencies with a significant role in the project would likely include the Federal Highway Administration (if federal highway funding is used), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in consultation with state and federal environmental agencies (for Section 404 permit to place fill in wetlands and other waters of the United States), U.S. Coast Guard (for bridge over a navigable waterway), Alaska Department of Fish and Game (for route through the MWSGR and crossing of anadromous fish streams), Alaska Department of Natural Resources (for route across state tide and submerged lands), and the Federal Aviation Administration (review for potential impacts to Airport operations).