

Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority

West Susitna Access Road Project Communications Plan

DECEMBER 2020



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West Susitna Access Road Project



ACRONYMS

AIDEA	Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority
DOT&PF	Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Mat-Su	Matanuska-Susitna
MSB	Matanuska-Susitna Borough



West Susitna Access Road Project

BACKGROUND AND STUDY AREA

In 2014, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) Roads to Resources Program Initiative completed an extensive natural resources inventory and access corridor study referred to as the West Susitna Reconnaissance Study for Access to Resource Development Opportunities (West Susitna Access Study). The purpose of the study was to identify multiple resource development opportunities that can be accessed by one transportation corridor, thereby attracting multiple private sector, non-governmental, and governmental investments across resources.

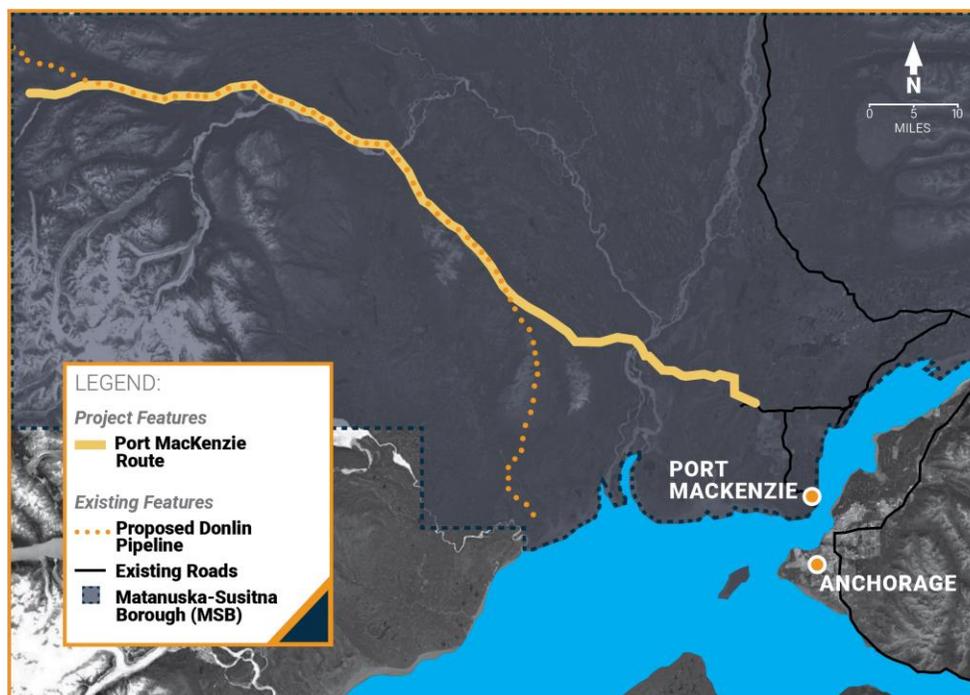
The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), in coordination with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) and industry partners, is in the pre-development feasibility stage of planning for a multi-use public access road leading to resource development opportunities that will diversify the state and borough economies and lead to job creation. The potential extension will advance a road from the vicinity of the west end of Ayrshire Road approximately 100 miles west into the upper Skwentna River Valley. Advancing the work initiated by DOT&PF would also allow the MSB to access borough-owned resources in the Fish Creek Natural Resource Management Units, enhance MSB's fire suppression capabilities, provide access to mineral resource development, increase opportunities for effective utilization of Port MacKenzie, and support future economic growth for the state.

A multi-use public transportation access road will diversify the state and borough economies and provide jobs through the development of natural resources, tourism, and recreation.

Route identification, high-level data gathering, and helicopter reconnaissance were conducted during Phase 1 of the feasibility analysis. The effort is now in Phase 2, which consists of performing preliminary engineering and wetland mapping and developing cost estimates for the proposed access road.

Phase 2 has three distinct goals:

1. Advance the preliminary engineering to a point that estimates of probable capital costs can be reasonably determined for the purposes of economic decision making.
2. Capitalize on the summer field season to conduct and field verify wetlands and natural resources.
3. Develop positive stakeholder engagement through public outreach and communications.



Why is this Project Needed? Project Opportunities and Benefits

This roadway is anticipated to provide access to many resources as well as to increase utilization of Port MacKenzie for import and export opportunities. The Port MacKenzie Route is approximately 100 miles long, starting near the west end of Ayrshire Road and heading northwest to the vicinity of the confluence of the Talachulitna River and the Skwentna River, then crossing the Skwentna River and continuing generally along the proposed Donlin Gold gas pipeline route on the north side of the Skwentna River. Near the Happy River crossing, the route would diverge away from the Donlin Gold gas pipeline route and continue west to a point of tie-in with existing mineral exploration roads. Approximately 57 miles of this segment would follow the proposed Donlin Gold gas pipeline route. Port MacKenzie would be the import and export point for bulk resource materials. If this roadway is built, additional resource projects will become accessible.

Potential area resources that would use this route include:

- Port MacKenzie import/export
- Alaska minerals development
- Timber
- Oil/Gas
- Energy
- Recreation

 <p>MINERAL RESOURCES</p> <p>Copper, gold, silver, platinum, and diamond potential; more than 3,000 active mining claims within the basin</p>	 <p>OIL AND GAS</p> <p>Active oil and gas exploration in the northern Cook Inlet continues; nine oil and gas producing units and fields in the study area</p>	 <p>FORESTRY/ TIMBER HARVEST</p> <p>More than 700,000 acres available for harvest; enhance fire suppression</p>
 <p>AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES</p> <p>More than 65,000 acres of agricultural land identified for potential agricultural uses</p>	 <p>ALTERNATIVE ENERGY</p> <p>Alternative energy resource opportunities including geothermal and hydroelectric projects, and woody biomass resources</p>	 <p>RECREATIONAL RESOURCES</p> <p>Recreation resource opportunities including snowmachining, fishing, hunting, boating, recreational mining, and use of cabins</p>

The project benefits include:

- Connecting MSB residents with the rest of the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Valley
- Providing surface access to recreation, economic, and resource development opportunities
- Providing a cost-effective solution for additional transportation infrastructure in the Mat-Su Valley
- Increasing utilization of Port MacKenzie
- Increasing the opportunity for job creation and economic growth for the state
- Enhancing MSB's fire-suppression activities

COMMUNICATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this Communications Plan is to identify communications and outreach opportunities for the project team to engage with project stakeholders and the general public through proactive, easily accessible, and educational communications that will accomplish the following:

- Provide project-specific, timely, and effective information.
- Build understanding, awareness, and support for the project.
- Provide opportunities for effective, valuable public engagement and input throughout the research process.

Plan Development Process

In 2019, AIDEA and MSB signed a Memorandum of Understanding that provided a partnership framework for a phased feasibility analysis of the West Susitna Access Road.

Today, AIDEA and MSB, along with other private partners, are the initial joint partners in Phase 2 of the West Susitna Access project. Other private entities may participate in future development efforts.

As private sector projects continue to develop, the need for access to those areas will increase. The feasibility analysis must be presented to the MSB Assembly and AIDEA Board for approval in an open meeting format where the public will be able to submit comments. If the feasibility analysis during Phase 2 is approved by the MSB Assembly and then by the AIDEA Board, it would be advanced to the planning and environmental baseline work stage.

Stakeholders and the public are encouraged to be involved and provide their input during comment periods and at board meetings.



Plan Objectives

The objectives of this plan help us measure the effectiveness of our communications and assess whether we have achieved our goals.

The communication objectives include:

- Support an open and transparent public engagement process.
- Engage key local and regional stakeholders as well as the general public.
- Educate the public and stakeholders on the development process and identify opportunities for involvement.
- Utilize multilingual traditional and online digital engagement to broaden reach and connect with project stakeholders.
- Foster and maintain lasting relationships with key stakeholders and the general public while promptly addressing concerns as they arise.

West Susitna Access Road Project



COMMUNICATION TEAM

NAME	AGENCY	TITLE
COMMUNICATION LEADERSHIP		
Jesse Peterson	AIDEA	Project Manager
Alan Weitzner	AIDEA	Executive Director
Brad Sworts	MSB	Pre-Design and Engineering Manager
Stefan Hinman	MSB	Public Relations Director
Michael Brown	MSB	Borough Manager
Josie Wilson	HDR	Communication Support/Project Communication Coordinator
COMMUNICATION TEAM TECHNICAL SUPPORT		
Alex Strawn	MSB	Planning and Land Use Director
Wescott Bott	HDR	Project Manager/Engineer

PROJECT STAKEHOLDERS

AUDIENCE GROUPS
Property owners (along the route and in the vicinity, recreational users, local hunters)
General public
Elected officials (local, state, federal)
Industry (agriculture, mineral mining, oil and gas producers)
Community influencers (local businesses, leaders of community organizations)
Alaska Native Organizations and Tribes
Media (traditional outlets such as radio, newspaper, TV; social bloggers)
Lodges/Tourism/Sportfishing



COMMUNICATION METHODS

The methods discussed below will be used to reach the key audiences and communicate key messages about the project.

The communication goals for this project will:

- Provide project-specific, timely, and effective information.
- Build understanding, awareness, and support for the project.
- Provide opportunities for effective, valuable public engagement and input throughout the research process.
- Educate the public on the process for project development and identify opportunities for them to provide comments.
- Highlight the variety of options for project funding and the fact that it will not necessarily come from public funds.

As part of Phase 2, several tools will be used that adhere to the current state of public health and social distancing orders for local residents. There are also additional plans that address how to drive engagement throughout this phase.

As we think about near-term engagement activities, we should consider how to effectively garner attention from project stakeholders, as the general public is inundated with the following concerns:

- Primary focus on health (e.g., social distancing, caring for families)
- Employment/financial impacts
- Access to commodities, food security, subsistence rights
- Uncertainty of future
- State economy and budget deficit
- Political scrutiny and adversity (election year)

Due to the current social distancing and contact-free requirements, we have included virtual tools designed to broaden our reach and create effective collaboration opportunities. However, additional in-person and other methods should be considered and integrated into this strategy in order that, once social distance regulations are lifted, we will be able to provide a more personal touch to project communication with stakeholders.

Communication Methods and Information

Informative Materials and Collateral

A project fact sheet, FAQs, a PowerPoint presentation, virtual display boards, meeting materials, project maps/renderings, flyers/signage, and comment forms will be needed to effectively communicate project information and build transparency.

Project-Specific Website

The project requires an interactive website with identifiable URL for easy recognition and simple navigation that allows for comment submissions and database sign-ups via online forms. This project-specific website is linked to the AIDEA project site at www.westsusitnaaccess.org/Programs/ProjectDevelopment/WestSusitnaAccess.aspx

Digital Engagement

Digital engagement such as an online project sign-up form to join the project email list and electronic notifications (i.e., e-blasts) is encouraged as both an educational and informational tactic. Regular e-blasts can be sent on a routine basis (e.g., quarterly) to keep project stakeholders informed.



Public Meetings (Virtual or In Person)

This would consist of an online open house linked to the project website that provides the same information as in-person meetings. Information in the online open house may include a short welcome video, voiceover for further clarity, online comment card/survey, and other unique visuals to explain project elements.

In tandem with the online open house, a virtual meeting could be held through video conferencing technology (i.e., Zoom or Webex) to present pertinent project content and receive public comment is recommended if we are unable to conduct an in-person meeting due to state or federal health restrictions.

If an in-person public meeting becomes feasible, it would be hosted within the project vicinity at a convenient location near project stakeholders and conducted during a time when the highest volume of participation could occur. Additionally, it would be an open-house style meeting where attendees could engage with project team members for an individual or 1 to 1 experience.

Video Production

Short, recorded videos are a helpful way to explain valuable project information in a simple and concise way. This tactic is suggested as an additional option for project communication.

Media Relations Plan

Consider using advertisements, editorial board outreach, bylined stories, and news releases disseminated to local and regional media (e.g., *Frontiersman* Newspaper, *The People's Paper/Make a Scene*, Channels 2 and 11, and Alaska Public Media radio news).

Advertising Plan

To publicize the public meeting (either virtual or in-person) and invite project stakeholders to engage with the project, the recommended tactics for advertising include the following:

- Newspaper ad in the *Frontiersman*
- Postcards mailed to residents in the project area
- A series of emails or e-blasts to initial stakeholder list
- Flyers posted in local places
- Radio PSA
- Social media posts and event invitations
- Partnering with local groups and MSB to promote meeting
- Online Public Notice on State of Alaska Website
- Community calendars

Stakeholder and Public Engagement

The table below identifies possible methods for both near- and long-term stakeholder and public engagement activities. Recommendations for the near term are considered to occur through December 2020.



STAKEHOLDER AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

TOOL OR TACTIC	PURPOSE	NEAR-TERM (COVID-19 CRISIS)	LONG-TERM
Virtual Public Meetings	Provide project information to general public with an opportunity for input; proactively bring project to stakeholders	<p>Promotion/Distribution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Telephone, mailers, e-blasts, posters, mobile ads, news releases, social media posts, ads ▪ On-site posters at key areas (e.g., grocery stores, U.S. Post Offices, churches, transit [if operating], childcare centers) <p>Engagement Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Online public meeting ▪ Comments submittal: electronic via website or email, and hard copy via mail ▪ Telephone interviews ▪ Telephone town halls ▪ Electronic notices/surveys ▪ Webinars (e.g., WebEx, Skype, GoTo Meetings) 	<p>Promotion/Distribution: (same as near term with exception of on-site signage)</p> <p>Engagement Activity: (in addition to near term)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In-person Public Open House (information stations, staffing) ▪ Stakeholders sign up to receive future project information
Elected Officials Briefings (MSB Mayor and Assembly)	Provide project information for their awareness	<p>Promotion/Distribution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Telephone, e-mail <p>Engagement Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Telephone, e-mail, Conference calls ▪ Virtual Meetings (e.g., WebEx, Skype, GoTo Meetings) 	<p>Promotion/Distribution: (same as near term)</p> <p>Engagement Activity: (in addition to near term)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In-person briefings/meetings

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TOOL OR TACTIC	PURPOSE	NEAR-TERM (COVID-19 CRISIS)	LONG-TERM
Meeting Road Show	Provide project information to general public with an opportunity for input; proactively bring project to stakeholders	Promotion/Distribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Telephone, e-mail Engagement Activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Telephone, e-mail, conference calls ▪ Virtual Meetings (e.g., WebEx, Skype, GoTo Meetings) 	Promotion/Distribution: (same as near term) Engagement Activity: (in addition to near term) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In-person briefings/meetings
E-blast Updates	Routine communication to project stakeholders	Promotion/Distribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ E-mail Engagement Activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ E-mail 	Promotion/Distribution: (same as near term) Engagement Activity: (in addition to near term)

Comment Tracking

All public and stakeholder comments will be collected throughout Phase 2 and included as part of the project record.



COMMUNICATION NEXT STEPS

1. Develop public materials on the project, such as a fact sheet and FAQs.
2. Create and publish a project website.
 - a. Add an online sign-up feature to receive project updates via email.
 - b. Add public materials and information for the public to access.
3. Create an email contact list that will be used to send project updates and other information (e.g., virtual open house invitations) via email.
 - a. Include a link on the project website (see above) to request inclusion on the email sign-up list.
 - b. Prepare and send quarterly project update emails (e-blasts) to the project contact list.
4. Create and deliver a postcard or door hanger to local residents to inform them about the project, the project website, and other ways in which they can learn about the project. Postcard content should include how to sign up for the project contact list, offer the opportunity to speak with a project team member, announce a public meeting, or advertise the next opportunity to learn about the project in a formal setting.
5. Monitor and assess the communication strategy for effectiveness. Add communication tactics as appropriate.
6. Host a public meeting or formal opportunity for stakeholders to learn about the project and ask questions.
7. Continue to re-engage the public.

SUMMARY

Pulling together as much information as possible regarding stakeholder concerns helps increase understanding of public sentiments about the project, as well as potential public concerns.

The communication strategy includes an accessible approach with messages about the project's benefits and mitigation of environmental impacts. The project is in an early stage, and the public is invited to participate and be part of the process.

A combined technological and in-person approach is recommended once restrictions on contact and social distancing are eased. This approach will depend on the extent of changes in restrictions and should be reassessed as restrictions continue to be revised.

The next steps for the communication team include developing project materials, publishing a website, and offering outreach opportunities for stakeholders.



APPENDIX A

Sample Stakeholder List

West Susitna Access Road Project



STAKEHOLDER NAME	ORGANIZATION/BUSINESS	POSITION/TITLE	NOTES
Vern Halter	MSB	Borough Mayor	
Tim Hale	MSB Assembly	District 1	
Stephanie Nowers	MSB Assembly	District 2	
George McKee	MSB Assembly	District 3	
Ted Leonard	MSB Assembly	District 4	
Dan Mayfield	MSB Assembly	District 5	
Jessie Sumner	MSB Assembly	District 6	
Tam Boeve	MSB Assembly	District 7	
Mike Wood	MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission	Chair, Member 2	Sport Fish
Amber Allen	MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission	Member 5	At large
Bob Chlupach	MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission	Member 6	At large
Andy Couch	MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission	Member 7	At large
Howard Delo	MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission	Vice Chair, Member 4	At large
Larry Engel	MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission	Member 3	Hunting
Dan Mayfield	MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission	Assembly Rep 1	
Tamara Boeve	MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission	Assembly Rep 8	
Bruce Knowles	MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission		Non-voting
	Susitna River Coalition		24,000+members
	Ahtna, Inc.		Alaska Native Regional corporation
	Trout Unlimited		
	Rainy Pass Lodge		
	Peony Flower Farm		
	Private property owners		*resident addresses to add
	Iditarod Trail Commission		
	Iditarod Race Organizations		
	CIRI		Alaska Native Regional corporation
	Native Village of Tyonek		Federally Recognized Tribe
	Tyonek Native Corporation		Native Village Corporation
	Alexander Creek Native Corporation		
	Knik Tribe		Federally Recognized Tribe
	Knikatnu Incorporated		Village Corp for Knik
	Dena'ina People		First Alaskans in the area



APPENDIX B

Project Fact Sheet and Frequently Asked Questions

West Susitna Access Road Project

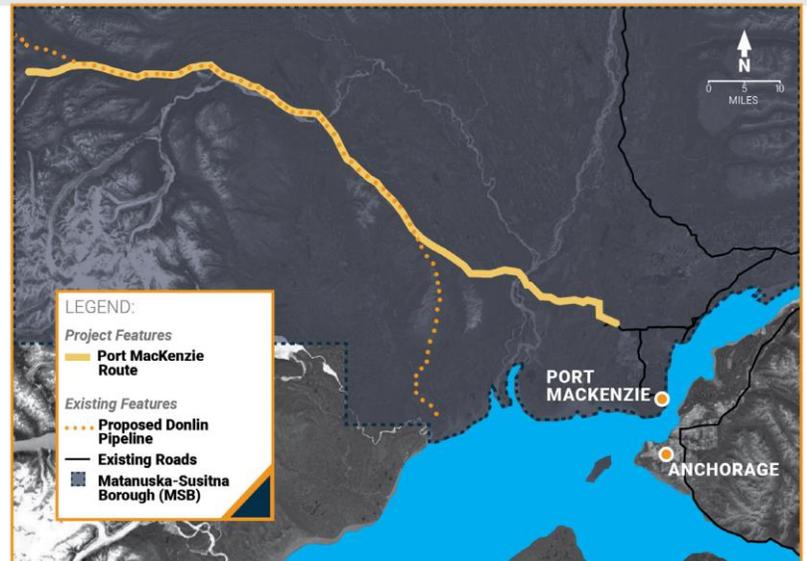
November 2020

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), in coordination with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) and industry partners, is in the pre-development feasibility stage of planning for a multi-use public access road leading to resource development opportunities, that will diversify the state and borough economy and lead to job creation.

The proposed project would:

- Connect MSB residents with the rest of the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Valley
- Provide surface access to recreation, economic, and resource development opportunities
- Provide a cost-effective solution for additional transportation infrastructure in the Mat-Su Valley
- Increase opportunities for effective utilization of Port MacKenzie
- Increase the opportunity for job creation and economic growth for the state
- Enhance MSB's fire suppression activities

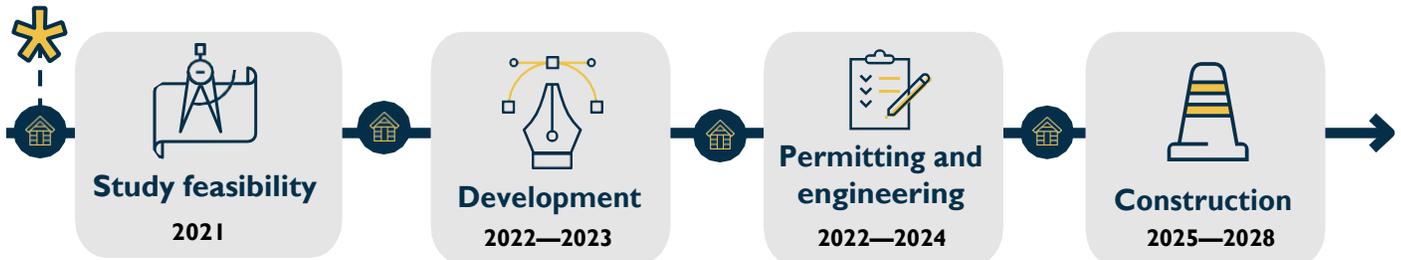


Location:

The proposed Port MacKenzie Route is approximately 100 miles long, starting near the west end of Ayrshire Road and traveling northwest to near the confluence of the Talachulitna and Skwentna Rivers. After crossing the Skwentna River, it would continue generally along the proposed Donlin Gold gas pipeline route on the north side of the Skwentna River. Near the Happy River crossing, the route would diverge away from the Donlin Gold gas pipeline route and continue west to a point of tie-in with existing mineral exploration roads.

Schedule

We are here



Indicates open house 

We Want to Hear from You!

The public is invited and encouraged to learn about the project and provide input. In the near future, the project team will hold a virtual public meeting to provide information on the potential access road and answer questions.



EMAIL: projectinfo@westsusitnaaccess.org



WEBSITE: www.aidea.org/Programs/ProjectDevelopment/WestSusitnaAccess.aspx



Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who is leading this effort?
2. What is the purpose of the project?
3. What is the intended use for this proposed road?
4. How many routes have been studied?
5. How many miles would the proposed road cover?
6. Would the road be private and used only for specific access?
7. What would be the cost of the project?
8. What are the benefits and potential impacts of the project?
9. How will the sensitive cultural historic sites be preserved?
10. This area is rich with fish and wildlife habitat. How will this habitat be protected?
11. What is the timeline for the study, planning, design, and potential construction of the road?
12. What is the next step?
13. How can I provide feedback to the project team?
14. How do I contact the project team?

1. Who is leading this effort?

As part of a public-private-partnership, the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), the state development finance corporation, is leading the West Susitna Access Road project in cooperation with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB).

2. What is the purpose of the project?

Advancing the work initiated by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) would allow Alaskans access to develop and recreate in the natural resources of the western Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Valley, provide jobs, enhance the MSB's fire suppression capabilities, increase import and export opportunities at Port Mackenzie, and support overall future economic growth for the state.

3. What is the intended use for this proposed road?

The intent of the road would be for multi-use transportation/access from the Port MacKenzie/Big Lake area to the upper Skwentna River Valley. As currently planned, it would be open to the public and allow for public, commercial, and industrial access.

4. How many routes have been studied?

Two routes were considered in 2019 during the reconnaissance-level review in Phase 1:

- » A northern route would start at the MSB's Port MacKenzie and extend west.
- » A southern route was also considered in Phase 1 that would start at the Ladd Landing area on Cook Inlet, but environmental challenges and

limitations to public usability caused this route to be ruled out.

5. How many miles would the proposed road cover?

The roadway alignment being studied would be approximately 100 miles long.

6. Would the road be private and used only for specific access?

No, as currently planned, the road would be public and would allow public access, just like any other State- or MSB-owned public road.

7. What would be the cost of the project?

Phase 2 of the project will determine an initial cost estimate for the route.

8. What are the benefits and potential impacts of the project?

- » Provides economic and resource development opportunities
- » Diversifies the state and borough economy
- » Increases the opportunity for job creation and economic growth
- » Connects Alaskans with the west side of the Mat-Su Valley
- » Provides surface access for recreation such as minerals, timber, and tourism

- » Provides a cost-effective solution for additional transportation infrastructure in the MSB Valley
- » Provides long-term financial benefit to taxpayers
- » Enhances access to MSB's fire suppression

9. How will the sensitive cultural historic sites be preserved?

If cultural resources are located within or near the project area, they will be evaluated for significance to determine if those resources are historic properties. As part of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act process, project design options will be considered that avoid or minimize effects to historic properties. While it is not always possible to meet the needs of a project and simultaneously preserve historic properties, measures for avoidance or minimization will be considered. If the project is found to have an adverse effect on a historic property, it will then be necessary to resolve adverse effects through mitigation.

10. This area is rich with fish and wildlife habitat. How will this habitat be protected?

The project will be reviewed by appropriate state and federal permitting agencies, the MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission, and other advocacy groups to ensure protection of fish and wildlife habitat in accordance with current environmental laws and regulations.

11. What is the timeline for the study, planning, design, and potential construction of the road?

We are currently in Phase 2, which builds on early work done in 2019 during Phase 1 of the project and involves gathering more information on a preferred route along with data on wetlands and an initial cost estimate. This work is expected to take 4 to 6 months.

At the earliest, construction would be anticipated for 2025, assuming that the project is financially viable and able to be permitted.

12. What is the next step?

After the Phase 2 preliminary engineering and cost estimating, AIDEA, MSB, and investing partners will determine if the project is economically feasible. If it moves forward, Phase 3 could include environmental baseline data gathering, engineering refinement, Port MacKenzie feasibility analysis, and alternative route identification. To proceed to phase 3, the project team will need to develop a scope of work, negotiate a proposal, first earn MSB Assembly approval and then earn AIDEA Board approval before proceeding to the next phase.

13. How can I provide feedback to the project team?

The project team intends to provide several opportunities for engagement with the public and local stakeholders. Stakeholders can submit comments by email at projectinfo@westsusitnaaccess.org and provide feedback during the virtual public meeting to be held on December 3, 2020. Join the project team live from 4 to 6 p.m. at bit.ly/WSARP2020.

Meeting number (access code): 146 816 6093
Password: WSARS2020

To join by phone call: 1-408-418-9388
Meeting number (access code): 146 816 6093

14. How do I contact the project team?

You can email the project team at projectinfo@westsusitnaaccess.org or visit the project website at www.westsusitnaaccess.org/Programs/ProjectDevelopment/WestSusitnaAccess.aspx.