



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

No. 11-2551

Governor Directs DOT&PF to Move Juneau Access Project Forward

September 14, 2011, Anchorage, Alaska – Governor Sean Parnell has directed the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) to move the Juneau Access Improvements project toward construction by immediately preparing a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

“The Juneau Access project is a critical infrastructure project for Juneau and Southeast Alaska. It’s time to move it ahead,” Governor Parnell said. “The project will increase transportation capacity and reduce travel time and cost in the region, particularly for travel between the Lynn Canal communities of Juneau, Haines, Skagway, and Alaskans travelling on the road system.”

The state’s preferred alternative consisted of a combination of new road and shuttle ferry connection to provide access to Juneau through upper Lynn Canal via Skagway and Haines and out of Juneau. The multi-year administrative process followed by the FHWA was challenged and a Federal District Court Judge ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in 2009. The court also issued an injunction stopping all work on the project. The State of Alaska and FHWA appealed and the Ninth Circuit ruled this year in favor of the plaintiffs. This narrowed the available legal options to asking the U.S. Supreme Court to voluntarily select the case from among thousands across the country as one of the few cases it would hear on appeal. The chances of selection for any case based on a writ to the Supreme Court is less than one percent and can take one to two years to complete. The Federal District Court injunction against the project would likely remain in place until and unless the Supreme Court reversed the lower courts’ decision.

As an alternative, the FHWA and the State Department of Transportation can restart the environmental review process and cure the defect found by the District Court. “The department will immediately start the process for completing a supplemental EIS that includes the court ordered alternative,” said DOT&PF Commissioner Marc Luiken. “It is clear the highest and best use of resources to move the project ahead at this time is to complete a supplemental EIS.” DOT&PF will fully examine improving service in Lynn Canal with the extended use of decommissioned vessels combined with shifting ferry service from elsewhere in Southeast, though the extensive study of a ‘no build’ alternative has never been required for a transportation project before. Supplementing the EIS will provide DOT&PF an opportunity to review, update, and share information with the public about all of the project alternatives.

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