

Glennallen Trip Report

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Location: Glennallen/Copper River

Date: 3/19/09

Project: Interior Alaska Transportation Plan

Nicole McCullough and Paula Hansen, WHPacific traveled to Glennallen to discuss the draft recommendations with staff from AHTNA, Copper River Native Association, Kluti Kaah Native Village and to join Dave Sanches, DOT&PF to present the recommendations to the Copper Valley Chamber of Commerce.

AHTNA – Joe Bovee, Land and Resource Specialist. After a general discussion about the IATP and transportation recommendations, Joe provided specific comments on transportation issues in the Copper Basin. He said that it appears that roadside tourism is on the decline. He said several guides and tourism related businesses, hunts, Princess Tours have reported a 30-50% decline in reservations for this summer.

- Waysides need improvements, particularly maintenance. The wayside by Mendeltna was particularly bad.
- Cantwell area needs rest areas.
- At about MP 85 on the Parks highway, safety lanes are needed.
- The road to McCarthy should be improved.
- The Denali Highway may not need to be paved but more maintenance is needed. However, DOT&PF has improved their maintenance on the Denali Highway in the last few years.
- AHTNA is exploring a potential gas well at MP 177 on the Richardson. This site is close and has good access to the highway. They will have the results of the exploratory well in 30-60 days.
- AHTNA, DNR and the NPS have lands across the Copper River. A new one lane bridge is needed to access these lands. Minerals, oil and gas resources, geothermal, and subsistence resource potential is very good in this area and would be greatly improved by better all year access. There are a couple locations between Tazlina and Glennallen where the channel is narrow and a bridge would likely be most economical.
- In 30 days AHTNA should know about funding for a wood pellet plant. Half of the funding is available now. If the plant is built, the wood pellets will be used locally for heat and power and exported to other parts of the interior. 80% of the AHTNA owned timber is across the Copper River.

Copper River Native Association - Kathy McKonkel, Director of Tribal Community Services and Gary Hay were interviewed. Kathy and Gary discussed the need for improved transit.

- Gulkana is running a regularly scheduled bus from Gulkana to Copper Center with published fares. The bus line is called Soaring Eagle.
- CRNA worked with Chickaloon on their transit plan.
- CRNA has \$1.5 million from the Federal Transit Authority. They would like to partner with Gulkana and possibly other Tribes in the Copper Valley/Tanana Valley to run a bus service co-op.
- The Native Village of Tetlin also has funds for transit. They want to buy the 14 passenger vans that provide service twice a week between Anchorage and Whitehorse.
- There is a meeting to discuss transportation in Tok at 10 am on Tuesday, March 31. The contact person is Becky Wade.
- CRNA has vans to transport elders and those wanting to go to medical appointments. The vans are getting very old. It is a real concern driving in the winter and buses or vans are a big help.
- Gary likes the rumble strips.
- There is an erosion control problem near the baseball fields.
- There are not enough restrooms in turnouts.
- CRNA is just finishing up an economic development survey. One request is better egress from villages like Gulkana onto the highway. There is a need for shoulders there and in Gakona and Tazlina.

Kluti Kaah Native Village - Michelle Anderson, Kluti Kaah Tribal Administrator is working on her local Indian Reservation Roads inventory. We discussed general transportation needs and the IATP.

At the Glennallen Chamber of Commerce meeting Nicole began with an overview of the IATP and an explanation of the boundaries of the area. She went over the following recommendations:

Highways

- Improve access at McKinley Village and the Denali Park entrance.
- Implement the state's Highway Safety Improvement Plan.
- Improve highways in anticipation of the Alaska Natural Gas Pipeline and Enstar Gas Pipeline.
- Continue to improve the state's pavement management system program.
- Upgrade Northway, Manely, Nenana, Ernestine, Birch Lake and South Fork Maintenance Stations.

- Improve sight distances at wayside entry and exit points.

Airports

- Coordinate among state and federal agencies to balance military and civilian airspace requirements, protect backcountry airstrips, support postal hubs, and implement security requirements.
- Improve several airports along the proposed pipeline route to support pipeline construction.
- Improve Tok and Delta Junction airports, significantly improve Fort Yukon and Gulkana Airports, and relocate the Chistochina Airport
- FAA should recognize Healy Lake's airport in their system.
- Develop longer runways and/or instrument approaches for Birch Creek, Central, Circle City, Eagle, Manley Hot Springs, Minto, McCarthy, Stevens Village, Tetlin, and Venetie.

Other Transportation Modes

- Maintain funding for trail markings.
- Eliminate several at-grade crossings.
- Improve barge landings such as at Fort Yukon and support a new barge landing at Tanana.

Nicole also mentioned some of the recommendations that Joe Bovee and Gary Hay made. Finally, she briefly discussed the schedule for the IATP and opened the meeting up for discussion. One woman asked if the recommendations are covered in the website, and Nicole replied that they are in fact on the website. She also showed where the website can be found on the newsletter that was handed out. A few people requested drafts of the IATP, which were then handed out to them.

Following Nicole's discussion, Dave Sanches, DOT&PF, answered questions about the Northern Region construction and design projects. Many people asked when certain projects were going to begin construction. Dave listed off the projects that are scheduled for construction this summer, and mentioned that the projects associated with the pipeline construction (along Alaska Highway) are the highest priorities. He also talked about the projects that are supposed to go to bid in the near future. C.D. McCurry mentioned that improvement on the McCarthy Road would improve his business. The repairs for this section of road should either go to bid in the summer of 2009 or 2010. The details of these projects can be found in the handout that he distributed.

To close the meeting, Jeremy Weld discussed the benefits that advertising could have on promoting tourism in the Copper River Valley. He handed out two brochures: one highlights the reasons to travel to the Copper River Valley, and the other discusses tourism statistics in Alaska.