

# Cordova Airport Projects

**Runway Rehabilitation Project** (State DOT&PF Project No.: NFAPT00654)

**Airport Fence Installation Project** (State DOT&PF Project No.: NFAPT00664)



## Public Open House No. 1 Summary

Wednesday, March 27, 2024, 5:00 – 7:30 PM

Cordova Center, 601 1st Street, Cordova, AK

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The meeting was held in person at the Cordova Center. The meeting format was an open house style, with a formal presentation. Attendees were greeted at the sign in table with a project fact sheet. Project boards lined the perimeter of the room to share project information, including project area, preliminary schedule, proposed projects, NEPA process, and information on next steps.

Project team members were available to collect comments and answer questions for the duration of the meeting.

Eighteen people signed in, including eight members of the project team.

### Project Team in Attendance

Chris Johnston, P.E., Project Manager	DOT&PF, Northern Region
Lindsay Webb, P.E., Assistant Project Manager	DOT&PF, Northern Region
Robert Mattson, Cordova Airport Manager	DOT&PF, Northern Region
Melissa Jensen, Environmental Analyst	DOT&PF, Northern Region
Emily Creely, Environmental Lead	DOWL
Euan-Angus MacLeod, P.E., C.F.M., Water Resource Engineer	DOWL
Talli Vittetoe, Project Communications Coordinator	DOWL
Sean Solie, Public Involvement Support	Uqaqti Consulting

### Agenda

Welcome, Introductions, Land Acknowledgement	Chris and Sean
Meeting Structure, Project Team	Sean
Proposed Projects:	Chris
- History and Background	
- Project Descriptions	
- Project Status	
Field Studies and Environmental Review	Emily
Preliminary Project Schedule	Chris
Next Steps	Chris and Sean

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### Presentation Summary

- **Cordova Airport Runway Rehabilitation Project**

- Merle K. (Mudhole) Smith Airport was built in World War II.
- Main portion of the embankment was built in 1941-1942.
- Runway was extended in the 1960s. The embankment and runway have remained unchanged aside from being resurfaced and repaved. The last time the runway was repaved was in 1998.
- Pavement requires significant ongoing maintenance for safe operations.
- Engineered Materials Arrestor System (EMAS) on the west end of the airport needs replacing.
  - Given the constraints on extending the runway to allow for 1,000-foot safety areas on either side of the runway, EMAS was installed in 2007-2008 on the west end to assist in safely slowing landing aircraft.

- **Culvert Installation:**

- Cross-runway culvert originally installed in the 1970s needs replaced.
- Runway repaving work will require half-width construction so that operations and construction can occur simultaneously. Although, during culvert work, half-width construction will not be possible. Culvert work is anticipated to include short closures of the runway. Closures will be planned well in advance, and will be coordinated with DOT&PF, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), airlines, and the Airport Manager.

- **Airport Lighting and Navigation Aids:**

- New lighting is needed as the current lighting is reaching the end of its useful life. New lighting will reduce the amount of maintenance needed to keep the lighting system in operation.
- Visual Approach Slope Indicators (VASI) are planned to be replaced with the newer system, the Precision Approach Path Indicator (PAPI). DOT&PF anticipates this system will be out of service during project construction.
- Both ends of the runway have a Medium Intensity Approach Lighting System with Runway Alignment Indicator Lights (MALSR), Omnidirectional Approach Lighting System (ODALS), and ILS Glide Slope Antenna. The project team will work with the FAA to determine how these can remain open during construction.

- **Cordova Airport Fence Installation Project:**

- Reduce wildlife impacts to airport operations.
  - Data shows up to 95 times a year airport staff must direct wildlife off the runway.
- Extending the fence around the airport will meet current Travel Security Administration (TSA) standards for safety fencing.
- Some sections of the fence unable to be maintained in swampy areas.
- There are several stream crossings on airport property. DOT&PF is working with the Department of Fish and Game, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Copper River Watershed Project to identify the best design and installation approach.
- Additional access points in the perimeter fence are being investigated.

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- An access point to the flight services station will be addressed by the planning division.
- **Material Sources:**
  - Staging will occur on airport property on previously developed or disturbed areas.
  - Material will come from existing, permitted material sites.
    - Sheridan Glacier: On airport property (may be expanded to obtain sufficient material for the project)
    - Flag Point: Approximately 13 miles east on land owned by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (expansion is not anticipated)
- **Field Studies:**
  - 2023
    - Wetland Delineation – Conducted around the airport and the material sites to gain understanding prior to design and construction. Will be finalized once LIDAR is available.
    - Topographic Survey – Some field work has been completed to better understand the topographical characteristics of the surrounding land. LiDAR surveys will also be conducted as part of the topographical investigation.
    - Geotechnical – Geologists worked in the field to understand subsurface conditions. This information will be used in the overall design, as well as other field studies. During the geotechnical investigation, field work was conducted to understand the presence of per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). A small occurrence of PFAS was found in one location.
    - Hydrologic – Characterized how water moves through the airport to assist proper drainage system design. Three river systems go through the airport. Water monitors are used on all three rivers, as well as ground water monitors.
    - Bald Eagle Nest Survey – One inactive nest was found. A subsequent study will be conducted prior to construction.
  - 2024
    - Cultural Resources – A cultural resources and historic properties evaluation is required as part of the National Historic Preservations Act requirements.
    - Hydrologic – Hydrologic studies will continue into 2025.
- **Environmental Review:**
  - Both projects will be evaluated by FAA under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
  - Permits (both projects)
    - Wetlands Permit (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)
    - Fish Habitat Permit (Alaska Department of Fish and Game)
  - Approvals (both projects)
    - Cultural Resources/Historic Properties (State Historic Preservation Office)
  - Environmental Considerations
    - PFAS management

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- Runway Rehabilitation: Categorical Exclusion (CatEx) – Completion anticipated Spring 2027.
- Fence Installation: Environmental Assessment (EA), due to the anticipated wetland impacts.
  - Completion anticipated Spring 2028
  - A public comment process to review and gather input from the public will occur in cooperation with federal, state, and local agencies.

**Note:** Both projects are awaiting a final go-ahead from FAA to kick-off the full permitting processes. Available state funding also plays a factor in the project’s construction start moving back to 2028 and 2029.

### Question Summary:

What is the usable runway when the culvert is under construction?

Chris: Calculations have not been completed, but it is clear that the runway length will be insufficient for jet landings. However, general aviation aircraft are expected to operate on the runway during culvert construction.

Is the goal to have the runway open to Alaska Airlines operations every day, or will there be times where the runway is closed to them?

Chris: The runway will experience closures, potentially lasting about 48 hours — for instance, over the course of two nights and the day in between. It may be necessary to temporarily close the runway when transitioning from one side to the other for paving operations.

At present, these instances are the only anticipated times requiring extended shutdowns beyond the usual overnight closures. Outside of these periods, we plan to maintain normal operations during the day to accommodate regular flight schedules.

In the event of planned disruptions, coordination with Alaska Airlines, cargo flight operators, and the Coast Guard will be essential to determine the most suitable days for closures.

It will be important that the runway is available during silver salmon fishing and lodge season, which is August and September. June and July are the most logical months for closures. The runway is busy all summer, but August and September are the busiest, as that is the peak of tourist season here.

Chris: It’s helpful to understand the peak seasons in this area. The fish haul is considered a crucial element that the project team has been focusing on.

The early season fish haul will go out on the planes but later in the season the fish will go out on the barges. Some will still go out via planes, but that is dependent on the how big the catches are, pricing, etc.

Euan: Regarding the culvert replacement, it’s preferable to schedule the work during periods with minimal rainfall.

Chris: We’re at an early stage and can adapt to these observations. Given that construction is a few years away, we have the leeway to pinpoint requirements that will be specified to the contractor.

How long is the PAPI going to be out for?

Chris: Typically, coordination with the FAA given the timeframe it takes to complete, the PAPI will likely be out for

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Has there been any talk about FAA bringing someone in to be on site during the projects?

most of the summer. This approach aligns with standard practice for most airport projects.

Chris: In projects of this nature, we establish an agreement with the FAA to cover all related work, including the effects on FAA navigational aids. The project's budget allocates funds for the FAA to dispatch personnel for inspections or installations.

Does this funding allow for FAA to locate someone here during the projects?

Chris: Certainly, if it's necessary for the projects, the stipulation would apply only for the duration of the project. Our contract with the FAA specifies the responsibilities for installing different equipment and project components.

In terms of replacing the VASIs with the PAPIs, are you planning to replace the northside VASIs, which is runway 9, and then doing the southside VASIs on runway 27 so that the whole system isn't down the whole time?

Chris: It's uncertain whether we can complete the flight checks and reactivate them promptly. The PAPIs require flight verification prior to resuming service. Generally, the FAA insists on conducting flight checks for all equipment.

How close are you going to be coordinating with the airport manager and Alaska Airlines, so that work can occur during closures?

Chris: Throughout the design phase, collaboration with the airport manager will be key to formulating a plan, which will then be reviewed by our safety officer. Additionally, we'll consult with the FAA, Alaska Airlines, and the Coast Guard to verify the feasibility of our strategy.

During the construction phase, we'll hold weekly meetings and maintain a mailing list to provide updates on the project's progress. This ensures that all interested parties are well-informed about our operations. In cases where a closure is anticipated, we typically provide a 45-day notice to keep you apprised of the upcoming activities.

How far is the taxiway lighting going to get worked on, or will it stay the same?

Chris: During the runway lighting upgrade, necessary replacements will be made. If only a few lights require changing, we'll likely handle that. However, if it involves entire separate systems, those may not be included in the replacements.

What lighting are you focusing on? Just the PAPIs?

Chris: Our attention is on the runway lighting. Resurfacing the runway typically necessitates replacing some lights, making it an opportune moment for this task. By the time construction commences, the lighting will be nearing the end of its service life.

When the fence project was done in 2017 the man gate was removed next to the flight service station, which restricted access to the bathroom from the transient apron area. Has there been any thought to putting it back in? To access the bathroom passengers, have to walk out

Chris: That's an important observation. We should revisit this topic in the open house segment. I'm keen on collecting your input to discuss with our planning team and address the concern.

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onto the highway and down the road to the flight services station.

What part of the project is federally funded?

Chris: 95% Federal, 5% state match.

When will you know when this project will be constructed?

Chris: Unfortunately, it is pretty fluid. We're committed to keeping the public informed with the latest developments and any alterations to the project's schedule. Additionally, we welcome any inquiries or feedback throughout the progression of the project.

Will the project priority be regraded each year, potentially bumping Cordova back?

Chris: The state allocates a specific budget annually. If the costs for ongoing projects exceed projections, the Cordova project might be postponed. Conversely, if another project is delayed, it could result in the Cordova project being expedited.

Will design continue if construction is pushed out? When can the department make plans with the agencies?

Chris: Certainly, we aim to achieve a 50-75% completion of the design within the next 12 to 18 months. This ensures that prior to entering the NEPA process, our construction plans are clear. The latter stages of design will primarily serve to guide the bidding and contractual processes for construction.

When will we know what the plan is for runway closures and operations?

Chris: We're aiming to finalize within the next 6 months to a year.

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### Photos:



### Action Items/Next Steps:

#### Project team:

- Post meeting materials to project website.
- Post public comments with contact details redacted.