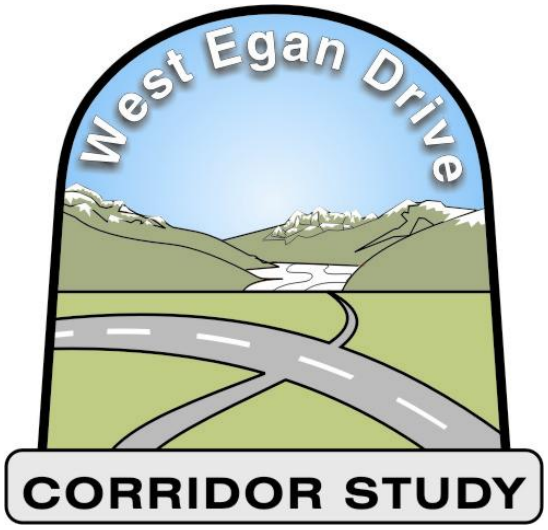
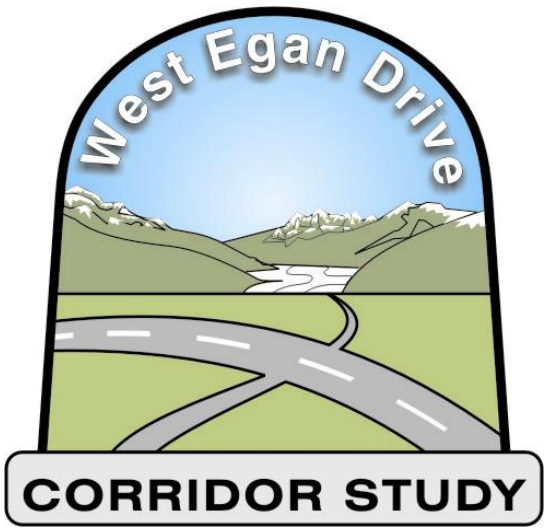
Section 2

Report



Section 2 - Chapter 1

Summary of Study Area, Public Involvement Plan, and Draft Project Goals



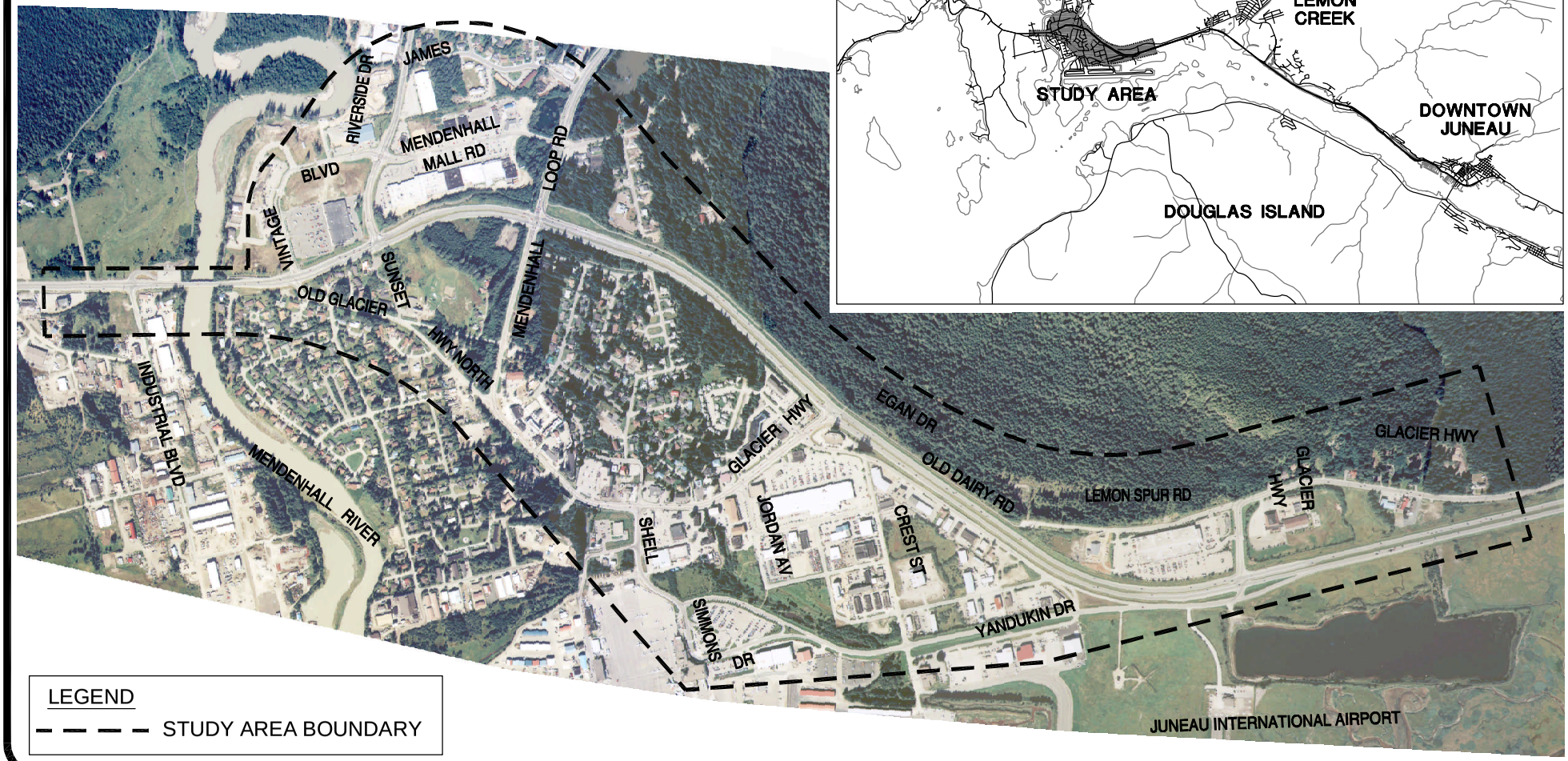
1 Introduction

Egan Drive is the major transportation corridor from downtown Juneau through Lemon Creek and Twin Lakes to the Mendenhall Valley and Auke Bay. This road is the only continuous connection between downtown Juneau and the Mendenhall Valley. Throughout the day it is used for commuting, recreational access, shopping, commercial activity, and government trips. Egan Drive is part of the National Highway System due to its critical regional function in linking the entire City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) with the region's major external gateways: Juneau International Airport and the Auke Bay Ferry Terminal.

Egan Drive was originally designed and constructed as an expressway in the mid 1970's to accommodate this key regional function, bypassing the increasingly congested and unsafe Glacier Highway. However, the design did not fully account for future intersection or interchange locations, nor could it completely anticipate the land development in the corridor. As the community has grown, the increased need for access and circulation within the lower Mendenhall Valley has required the addition of traffic signals on Egan Drive at Mendenhall Loop Road (1977), Glacier Highway (McNugget, 1983), and Riverside Drive (1990), creating a gradual deterioration of the free-flowing nature of Egan Drive. In addition, the increased traffic demand along Egan Drive and access control along the facility has created a barrier for non-motorized travel, forcing pedestrians and bicyclists in many cases to either travel out of their way to cross Egan Drive at one of the traffic signals or to risk crossing at other locations. This conflict—the needs of regional traffic on Egan Drive versus the access and circulation needs of local trips within the lower Mendenhall Valley—is the primary focus of this study.

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) has conducted a number of traffic studies in the corridor to address specific problems as they have developed. These solutions have included adding traffic signals or grade-separated interchanges or creating new connections to allow local traffic to bypass Egan Drive. ADOT&PF has not taken any significant action on these prior recommendations to date, largely because ADOT&PF recognizes that a comprehensive look at the corridor is needed to ensure that the investments are coordinated, that they facilitate future development, and that they will be acceptable to the public.

The objective of the West Egan Drive Corridor Study is to identify and evaluate solution concepts to safely and efficiently accommodate existing and future travel demands along and across the Egan Drive corridor between Industrial Boulevard and Yandukin Drive. Among the streets and local connections that have been studied are Egan Drive, Mendenhall Loop Road, Riverside Drive, Glacier Highway, Lemon Spur Road, Industrial Boulevard, and Yandukin Drive Figure 1-1 presents the study area for this project.



West Egan Drive
CORRIDOR STUDY

Kittelson & Associates, inc. in association with CH2M Hill, Cogan Owens Cogan and Southeast Strategies

STUDY AREA MAP

West Egan Drive Corridor Study

Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

DATE: JULY 2003

FIGURE: 1-1

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This project has identified improvements to the corridor (on or off Egan Drive) that balance the competing demands of local trips within the Mendenhall Valley and through trips to or from downtown Juneau or Douglas Island. Each of these improvements is designed to provide safe and efficient access along and across Egan Drive for all modes of transportation: pedestrians, bicycles, public transit, automobiles, trucks, and commercial vehicles.

The Work

The technical study and public input followed three primary phases over a 19-month period. In the first phase, between January and April 2002, ADOT&PF and the consultants (Kittelson & Associates, CH2M Hill, Cogan Owens Cogan, and Southeast Strategies) conducted research into current and possible future environmental, transportation, social, and economic conditions in the study area and organizing the public involvement process. This data collection, analysis, and public input helped to create a detailed understanding of the characteristics of existing and future travel (motorized and non-motorized) along and across Egan Drive, and the characteristics of how Egan Drive complements or conflicts with surrounding development and natural resources. This information helped develop transportation system solutions for the corridor and analyze their effectiveness and associated impacts. In addition, the findings of this analysis have been documented in a draft Purpose and Need document to be used during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping.

During the second phase of the work, between April and November 2002, the project team and the public discussed and evaluated a wide variety of possible pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and automobile solutions that may address the problems identified in the first phase of the project. The public helped narrow down the number of alternatives to the four considered most feasible.

During the third phase, between November 2002 and July 2003, more quantitative analyses on the four alternatives revealed additional safety, environmental consequences, and construction requirements, as well as advantages and disadvantages to the transportation system. Finally, the public and project team identified the best future transportation system for the West Egan Drive Corridor and developed a feasible plan to implement improvements over time as needs and funding dictate.

Public Involvement

Due to the complexity of the WEDCOR Study and the variety of individuals and groups interested in the results, the public involvement strategy used a variety of techniques to ensure that all stakeholders were informed and involved in the process. The public involvement strategy exceeded expectations regarding the number of Juneau citizens who participated and the quality of their input. The final Proposed Action reflects these efforts.

The purpose of the public involvement strategy was to inform the public about key findings as the technical work proceeded and involve them in helping develop safe, cost-effective, environmentally sound and politically acceptable solutions to current and anticipated problems. Following is a summary of the specific elements.

Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)

The CAC was a key link between the project and the public. Appointed by ADOT&PF, it consisted of 17 members with a wide range of perspectives. To form the CAC, ADOT&PF made a list of interests that could potentially be affected by the project, then invited representatives of each of those interests to serve on the CAC. A list of CAC members and their affiliations is included in Section 4.

The CAC met six times between April 2002 and May 2003. Among the first agenda items was to assist the project team in developing the Project Goals and Draft Purpose and Need, which guided the remainder of the study. CAC members also advised the technical team on the range of alternatives, helped narrow down the list, then agreed on the one Proposed Action.

As a result of input from the CAC and the public, the project team added a fourth alternative to include in the final analysis (rather than the planned three). An additional CAC meeting was scheduled to provide adequate time to consider all the alternatives.

The CAC also reviewed the proposed Phased Improvement Plan, advised the team on the format of the public events and other public outreach strategies, and helped host the public events. Summaries of all CAC meetings are included in Section 3.

All CAC meetings were open to the public and advertised in the project newsletters.

Public Events

Three public events were held during strategic points in the study when public input would influence the next stage of work. They were held in vacant rooms in the Mendenhall Mall between 4:30 and 8:30 pm and designed to provide information to the public as well as solicit their input.

The events were held in an open house format so that people could come and go during the allotted time, view displays and maps of the alternatives, and talk with consultants and staff. Participants provided feedback by writing on displays and completing comment forms. At two half-hour intervals, consultants and staff made formal presentations.

At the first public event, participants were asked to identify current and future needs in the corridor's transportation system. They also reviewed and commented on the Project Goals and Draft Purpose and Need. At the second public event, participants commented on the four alternatives selected for further review. At the third public event, participants reviewed the Proposed Action and Phased Improvement Plan. Comments received at the third public event will be considered in the environmental phase.

The public events were advertised in the project newsletters, through flyers that were distributed throughout the CBJ, and in radio interviews conducted with ADOT&PF staff. Summaries of the public events are included in Section 3.

Newsletters and Web Site

Over the course of the project, four newsletters were produced and mailed to every postal customer in the CBJ. They also were available at libraries, City Hall and at each public event.

Written in a readable, non-jargon style, the newsletters described the project schedule, Draft Purpose and Need, Project Goals, the four alternatives being studied, the Proposed Action, and the Phased Implementation Plan. Maps and other graphical displays were especially designed to help make the information easy for the public to understand. The newsletters also announced public events and CAC meetings, the CAC members and ADOT&PF contacts, and the project's Web site address.

The first newsletter included a mail-back questionnaire asking residents their opinions about problems and issues in the corridor. More than 250 completed questionnaires were returned to the project team, providing key information about the most important transportation issues the public hopes to see addressed. A summary of responses and copies of all four newsletters are included in Section 3.

A WEDCOR project Web site contained technical memoranda, maps of the alternatives, a meeting schedule and meeting summaries, and a space for the public to send comments to ADOT&PF.

Presentations to the CBJ

During the course of the study, members of the project team from ADOT&PF staff, Kittelson & Associates, Inc. and Cogan Owens Cogan made two presentations to the Public Works and Facilities Committee of the CBJ. The purpose of the first was to update the Committee on the status of the project and describe the four alternatives being considered. The purpose of the second presentation was to summarize the Proposed Action and Phased Implementation Plan. The public involvement process also was discussed at each presentation. Summaries of these presentations are included in Section 3.

Meeting with Business Representatives of the Nugget Mall Area

At the request of some businesses in an area targeted for major change, the project team met with business representatives in the Nugget Mall area. Consultants and staff discussed the specific issues of concern and assured attendees that their comments will be considered in the environmental phase. A summary of the meeting is included in Section 3.

General Response

Though concerns from people and businesses who may be specifically affected had been received, in general, participants in the outreach effort have been satisfied with the results of the WEDCOR Study thus far.

Project Goals

To help direct the public discussion and the technical study of possible solutions, the project team suggested a set of draft project goals. They were reviewed and updated by the CAC and the

public, and subsequently a set of final Project Goals was adopted. The Project Goals were a major tool in helping make project decisions.

The Project Goals are:

Develop a safe and efficient transportation system for automobiles, bicycles, commercial vehicles, pedestrians and transit on or across Egan Drive within the study area.

- Balance connectivity and efficiency for all users.
- Integrate the transportation system with existing and future development in the area.
- Avoid creating new barriers to travel.
- Provide reasonable access for existing and projected development, both locally and within the surrounding transportation system.
- Improve safe and efficient access for emergency vehicles.
- Minimize and mitigate for impacts to natural resources.
- Minimize and mitigate social, economic and aesthetic impacts.
- Meet engineering standards, while being sensitive to the needs of all users.
- Develop and prioritize cost-effective solutions that can be carried out by ADOT&PF and the City and Borough of Juneau.
- Reduce impacts to and from maintenance activities.