McCarthy Road
PEL Study

Appendix F
PEL Questionnaire

Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL LINKAGES QUESTIONNAIRE

A Planning and Linkages (PEL) Questionnaire is intended to act as a summary of the planning process and ease the transition to a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis (FHWA 2025). Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) PEL Questionnaires are typically filled out and coordinated with FHWA. However, since the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is a NEPA Assignment state, DOT&PF has assumed these respective NEPA responsibilities and has created its own PEL Questionnaire form. The DOT&PF PEL Questionnaire format is the one used for this PEL study.

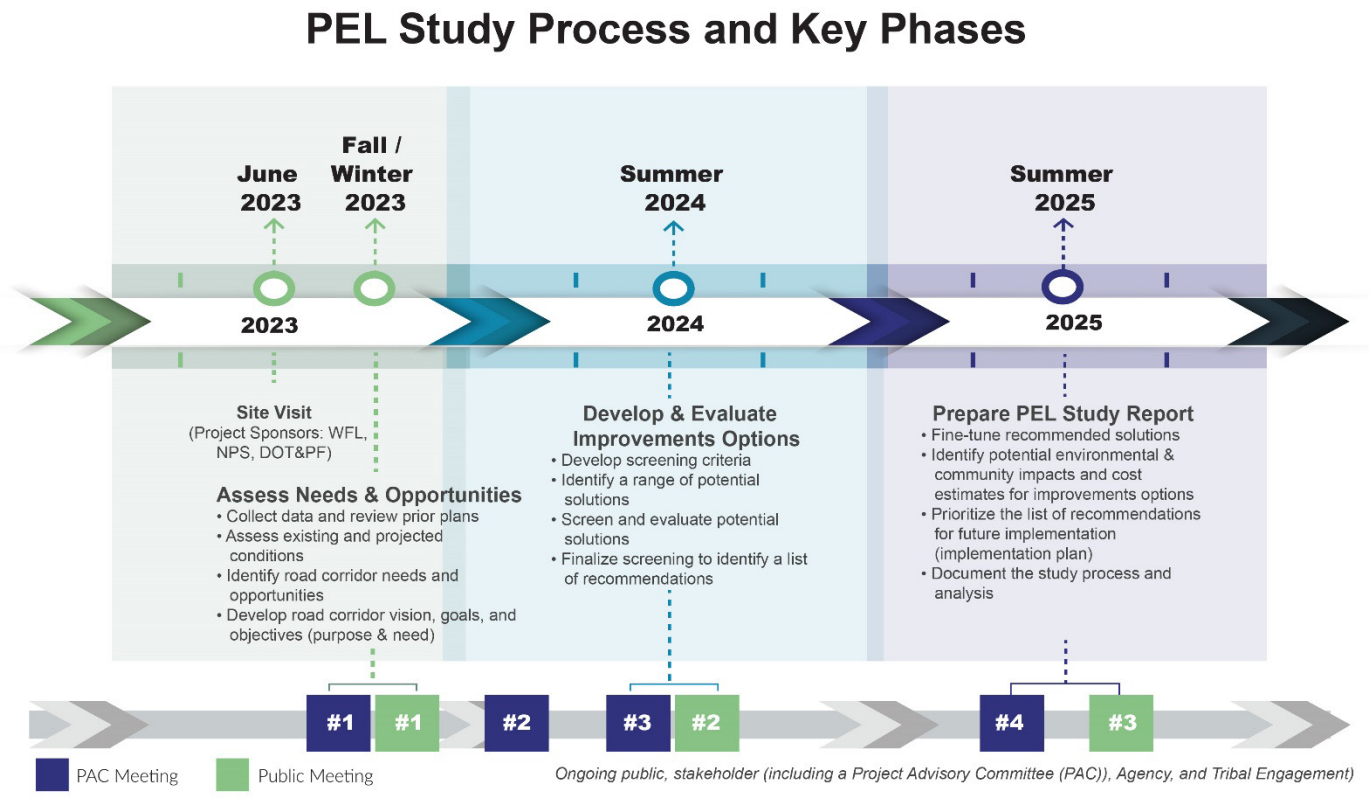
1. Background

A. What is the name of the PEL document and other identifying project information?

McCarthy Road Planning & Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study, AK FLAP DOT 198(4)
PEL Study Report

B. Provide a brief chronology of the planning activities (PEL study) including the year(s) the studies were conducted.

Refer to PEL study report Section 3 (Public Involvement and Stakeholder Outreach) for more details on outreach conducted during the PEL study process.



Pre-PEL Phase

- The DOT&PF and National Park Service (NPS) jointly applied for and successfully received a Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant during Western Federal Lands Division's (WFL's) 2021 call for projects.
- WFL hired a consultant team (Jacobs) in May 2023 and kicked off the PEL study shortly after.

PEL Phase 1: Assess Needs and Opportunities

- Core project team (CPT) 2-day site visit (June 2023)
  - The CPT is composed of staff from WFL, DOT&PF, NPS including the Alaska Regional Office [ARO] and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST), and Jacobs
  - Hosted two public meet-and-greets in McCarthy and Chitina
- Public Involvement Plan (October 2023)
- Project website (www.McCarthyRoadPEL.com) (November 2023)
- First outreach effort (November 2023 to January 2024)

  Public meeting #1 (virtual), Project Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting #1, agency and tribal outreach, newsletter #1
- *Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment Report* (March 2024)
- PAC meeting #2 (April 2024)

PEL Phase 2: Develop and Evaluate Improvement Options

- Site visit (May 2024)
- Second outreach effort (July to August 2024)

  Public meeting #2 (both virtual and in Glenallen, Chitina, and McCarthy), PAC meeting #3
- *Solutions Development & Evaluation: Screening Process Overview Memo* (July 2024)
- *Screening Evaluation & Results Memo* (February 2025)

PEL Phase 3: Prioritize and Evaluate Improvement Options/Prepare PEL Study Report

- Draft PEL study report (June 2025)
- ***FORTHCOMING:*** Third outreach effort (June to July 2025)
  Public meeting #3 (virtual), PAC meeting #4, agency and tribal outreach, newsletter #2
- ***FORTHCOMING:*** Final PEL study report (September 2025)

C. Provide a description of the existing transportation corridor, including project limits, modes, number of lanes, muster, access control and surrounding environment (urban vs. rural, residential vs. commercial, etc.)

Refer to the following for more details on the corridor and roadway characteristics:

- *PEL study report Section 1.3 (Study Corridor Context and Setting) for info on the study area, communities, road history, road users, adjacent landowners, and road characteristics such as surface, right-of-way (ROW), cross section, geometry, posted speed, bridges, traffic, and WRST visitation*
- *Needs and Opportunities Assessment Report, Section 1.3.2.2 (Road History: Rail to Road)*
- *Needs and Opportunities Assessment Report, Section 4.1.2 (Roadway Users)*

- *Needs and Opportunities Assessment Report, Section 4.3 (Roadway Characteristics)*
- *Screening Evaluation & Results Memo, Section 2 (Level 3 Screening Results) for key issues & conditions*

The McCarthy Road corridor in Alaska connects communities and provides access to private and public lands. Seasonally maintained by DOT&PF, it is one of two roads into WRST, the nation's largest park and preserve. Chitina and McCarthy are located near the study corridor's ends, with smaller resident pockets along the way. It is the sole surface route to McCarthy. The area experiences an increase in population and visitors in summer.

The study corridor spans about 63 miles, including 59 miles of the McCarthy Road from east of Chitina to the Kennicott River and 4 miles to the southern end of the Kennicott subdivision. This subdivision is part of the Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark located within WRST. The end of the study corridor and end of the DOT&PF road ROW coincide. A pedestrian bridge crosses the Kennicott River to provide public access east of the river, with a private vehicle bridge downstream accessible through a local community member through a fee.

The McCarthy Road largely follows a former railbed and is cherished for its history and scenic, visual, natural, and rural values within WRST. The road runs west-east, south of the Wrangell Mountains, paralleling the Chitina River, which flows into the Copper River near the western end of the study corridor. The road starts at 500 feet elevation in Chitina and ends at 1,500 feet near McCarthy, traversing terrain shaped by the Chitina Glacier.

The McCarthy Road serves various users, including residents, tourists, and WRST visitors. Key goals are improving safety, conditions, and reliable access. The PEL study aims to address issues through outreach like narrow road width, poor conditions, drainage problems, and natural hazards such as landslides.

The desired road width is 24 feet per DOT&PF and NPS design standards. Currently, the road has two unmarked lanes, each between 9 and 11 feet wide, totaling the road width to between 18 and 22 feet. About 45% of the corridor is no more than 18 feet wide, with minimal to no shoulders and varying side slopes and ditch depths.

The McCarthy Road is composed mostly of gravel, except between milepost (MP) 3 and MP 17 where the road consists of emulsified asphalt overlaid by crushed aggregate (also referred to as "high-float" emulsion asphalt surface treatment).

The McCarthy Road is functionally classified as rural major collector from Chitina to its end at the Kennicott River bridge; this meets the definition of a federal-aid-highway, which means this road section is eligible for *United States Code* Title 23, Section 317 funding. From the Kennicott River bridge crossing east to the Kennicott subdivision, the road is classified as a minor collector; this section does not meet the definition of a federal-aid-highway.

D. Who is the sponsor of the PEL study? (Could be Federal Highway Administration, DOT&PF, or a local agency)

WFL, DOT&PF, and NPS

E. Who is included on the study team (Name and title of agency representatives, consultants, etc.)?

The CPT met biweekly throughout the nearly 2-year PEL study process. The study team included the following:

- WFL
  - Seth English-Young, project manager (PM)
- DOT&PF
  - Paul Eckman, PM
  - Brett Nelson, Northern Region planning chief
  - Judy Chapman, Deputy statewide planning director
- NPS
  - Joshua Scott, WRST Chief of Lands and Planning
  - Jonathan Shafer, WRST representative
  - Christopher Wilcox, WRST facility manager
  - Michael Loso, WRST geologist
  - Morgan Sobek, WRST outdoor recreation planner
  - Kevin Doniere, ARO landscape architect/ planner
  - Kara Sorbel, ARO realty specialist
- Jacobs
  - Leslie Robbins, PM/PEL lead
  - Kim Wetzel, Jacobs public involvement lead
  - James McCurtain, civil design lead
  - Brian Pearson, engineer
  - Iosefa Matagi, water resources engineer
  - Gary Conner, structural engineer
  - J.P. Loomis, bridge engineer
  - Alec Jemison, geologist
  - Greg Warren, geologist
  - Sarah Jenniges, GIS
  - Sara Hoeber, graphics
  - Sarah Camacho, funding and grants specialist
  - Fatuma Yusuf, economist
  - Julie Philippon, planner
  - Jeff Berna, PEL advisor

F. Are there recent, current, or near future planning studies or projects in the vicinity? What is the relationship of this project to those studies/projects?

Yes, there are other planning studies and projects in the corridor and greater vicinity. The study team reviewed these past and current project studies, and plans. Public feedback stressed the importance of considering community input and interests identified during previous plans and studies.

Refer to Needs and Opportunities Assessment Report, Section 3 (Road Corridor History: Relevant Prior and Present Plans/Studies and Projects for the Corridor and Region) in Appendix A of the PEL study report.

Notable Prior Studies/Plans

- McCarthy Road/Chitina Valley Roundtable Project Phases I-III (1999 to 2002) (LDN 2000a, 2000b; LDN et al. 2002)
- *McCarthy Road Scenic Corridor Plan* (NPS, DNR, and DOT&PF 1997)
- *McCarthy Road Reconnaissance Study* (DOT&PF 1989)

Notable Current and Future Studies, Plans, and Projects

- The Copper Valley Telephone Cooperative has been in a multi-year planning and environmental review phase to bring fiber optic transport cable to the McCarthy Road corridor. Construction is anticipated for 2026. The two teams shared information, especially as it related to the locations of the proposed cable and road corridor improvements.
- The NPS initiated a multi-year planning study for WRST and the McCarthy Road corridor for emergency management evacuation. The study is expected to be completed by 2027. The PEL study team shared information and data with this team.
- The State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources is toward the end of a multi-year planning effort to revise the Copper River Basin Area Plan, the area land management plan that covers the McCarthy Road corridor. As of mid-2025, the timeline for completion is unknown but will occur after the PEL study has been completed.
- In 2023, the DOT&PF began a multi-year effort to update the Interior Alaska Transportation Plan, which includes the McCarthy Road corridor. A draft plan was released in April 2025. The plan will guide transportation investments over the next 20 years. It includes improvements from the PEL study, such as drainage, roadway surface, ROW discrepancy resolution, and the realignment at Kotsina Bluffs.

2. Methodology planned (or used)

A. What is/was the scope of the PEL Study and the reason for completing it?

The scope of the PEL study is identified earlier in the graphic depicting the key phases and outreach in response to Question 1B. This scope includes the following:

- Assess needs and opportunities
  - Collect data and review prior plans
  - Assess existing and projected conditions
  - Identify road corridor needs and opportunities
  - Develop a road corridor vision, goals, and objectives (purpose and need)
- Develop and evaluate improvement options
  - Develop screening criteria
  - Identify a range of potential solutions
  - Screen and evaluate potential solutions
  - Finalize screening to identify a list of recommendations

- Prepare PEL study report (provide an implementation plan for recommended solutions)
  - Fine-tune recommended solutions
  - Identify potential environmental and community impacts and cost estimates for improvement options
  - Prioritize the list of recommendations for future implementation (implementation plan)
  - Document the study process and analysis
- Conduct outreach to public, agencies, tribes, and stakeholders throughout the planning process

The PEL study purpose is largely related to the scope of the PEL study. Most transportation-related funding is through fiscally constrained programs. Due to the challenge of addressing varying needs and constraints, the DOT&PF and NPS determined a PEL study would enable a corridor-wide review of transportation improvement needs and identify priorities based on input from a variety of interests and road users.

The PEL study's purpose is to identify a list of roadway corridor transportation improvements that could be implemented in the future. The PEL study has two main desired outcomes:

- Provide a framework that identifies prioritized transportation-related projects along the McCarthy Road and a plan to advance them.
- Bring together stakeholders and users of McCarthy Road to improve communication and build relationships to identify transportation and access needs.

B. Did you use NEPA-like language? Why or why not?

The PEL included both NEPA-like language as well as planning terms. The PEL study is a planning-level document prepared in accordance with 23 USC 168 and 23 USC 139 with the intent that the analysis and findings from the study may be incorporated by reference in a subsequent NEPA phase(s). Where appropriate, NEPA-like language was used to help facilitate future incorporation into NEPA documentation.

C. What were the actual terms used and how did you define them? (Provide examples or list.)

The PEL study team elected to use the terminology "solutions," rather than what is often referred to as "alternatives" in the NEPA phase. Other examples of terms used and how they were defined include the following:

- *Study corridor*: area of analysis
- *Goals and objectives*: desirable conditions that guide the development of solution options to address the identified needs and opportunities; reflect input from stakeholders and the public
- *Goals*: broad visionary statements that describe a desired end state; these are tied to the transportation needs that the PEL process identified and is intending to address
- *Objectives*: specific, measurable statements that support achieving the goals
- *Screening criteria*: evaluation measures established to evaluate the potential solution's ability to address goals and objectives
- *Range of potential solutions*: represents the range of improvements initially considered early in Phase 2 of the PEL study; during NEPA, the range of reasonable alternatives is similarly used
- *Recommended solutions*: proposed solutions that went through the screening process; the refined list of 20 recommended solutions within the PEL study are further recommended for future implementation

- *No Action option*: option involves continuing current activities such as maintenance but without proposing new improvements; often also called the "no build" alternative in the NEPA phase, it serves as a benchmark to compare the impacts of other potential solutions
- *Logical termini*: represents rational starting and stopping points for evaluating transportation improvements
- *Independent utility*: focuses on whether a particular solution can be implemented as "standalone," which means that assuming no other projects are implemented, the project serves a distinct purpose or function

D. How do you see these terms being used in NEPA documents?

These terms were used intentionally and may be used in future NEPA documents similarly as they have been used in the PEL study. As applicable, planning-like terminology can be replaced by appropriate NEPA language.

E. What were the key steps and coordination points in the PEL decision-making process? Who were the decision-makers and who else participated in those key steps?

Refer to PEL study report Section 3 (Public Involvement and Stakeholder Outreach). Refer also to PEL study report Appendix C for outreach materials, particularly for agency correspondence.

There are five standard PEL study concurrence points, typically coordinated with FHWA; however, in Alaska the DOT&PF Statewide Environmental Office (SEO) typically handles these. With WFL as the PEL lead, the SEO chose not to be involved in coordination points but stayed informed as an invitee of the CPT meetings. Several DOT&PF staff are part of the CPT, which met biweekly over 2 years.

Key Steps and Coordination Points

PEL Study Phases	Key Coordination Points	Participants
Pre-PEL study process initiation	Determine reason for PEL study and desired outcomes	The DOT&PF and NPS defined the PEL study's purpose and goals when applying for the FLAP grant in 2021. This was confirmed with WFL during the PEL kick-off phase and shared on the project website for public awareness.
Phase 1: Assess needs and opportunities	Purpose and need	The CPT, with public and stakeholder input, prepared a corridor vision statement, draft goals (purpose and need), and objectives. The CPT sought input during the first and second outreach efforts from the public (public meetings #1 and #2), stakeholders (PAC meetings #1, #2, and #3), and agencies.
Phase 2: Develop and evaluate improvement options	Alternatives development and screening methodology	The CPT prepared a screening methodology memo (refer to PEL study report Appendix D) and sought public and stakeholder input during the second outreach phase (during public meeting #2 and PAC meeting #3).
Phase 3: Prepare PEL study and implementation plan	Alternatives screening results Draft PEL study	Initial screening results, from Level 1 and 2 screening, were included in the screening methodology memo. Level 3 screening results and the draft PEL study will be made available to the public and stakeholders during the third outreach effort and input incorporated into the final PEL.

The DOT&PF coordinated with its internal groups (ROW, maintenance and operations, planning, traffic & safety, environmental, design) throughout all PEL study phases as key decision makers. The NPS engaged its staff as well. The CPT emphasized obtaining input from the public, agencies, stakeholders, and tribal entities.

F. How must the PEL information below be presented in NEPA?

In accordance with the 23 USC 168 and 23 USC 139, the lead federal agency, or SEO on behalf of FHWA, of a future NEPA process may adopt or incorporate by referencing the planning decisions and analysis included in the PEL study.

Refer to PEL study report Section 1.2 (Why Conduct a PEL Study?) and Section 1.4.4 (Integration of Planning and Environmental Review) for more detail on integrating PEL information into NEPA.

3. Agency coordination

A. Provide a synopsis of coordination with federal, tribal, state, and local environmental, regulatory and resource agencies. Describe their level of participation and how you coordinated with them.

Agencies. WFL transmitted agency scoping letters via email on November 22, 2023, requesting early agency coordination. WFL sent letters to the following agencies:

- Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC)
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- U.S. Coast Guard
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Several agencies expressed interest in staying involved. Some offered specific and relevant data regarding baseline conditions in the study area. Agencies who provided responses included the following:

- ADEC Contaminated Sites Program. (correspondence dated 12/7/23 and 12/14/23)
- ADF&G provided specific comments regarding anadromous waterbodies, culverts with fish passage barriers, and Revised Statute (RS) 2477 ROWs. (11/28/23 and 12/15/23)
- DNR Department of Parks and Outdoor Recreation. (11/22/23)
- DNR, Office of Project Management and Permitting provided specific comments related to state lands management authority, including land, water, tidelands, and shorelands of navigable waters, and land adjacent to federal lands; RS 2477s; 17b easements; and subsistence as it relates to Section 810 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. (1/10/24)
- DNR State Historic Preservation Office provided comments related to known cultural sources within 100 feet of the existing road and their National Register of Historic Properties eligibility status. (12/22/23)
- NOAA provided specific comments related to essential fish habitat, anadromous streams, culvert design, and climate change. (12/18/23)
- USACE provided permitting comments related to Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. (11/28/23)

- EPA provided specific comments related to wetland and water resources impacts (Section 404 permitting); engagement; socioeconomics; subsistence; cultural resources; ecological connectivity and vegetation (including fish streams); invasive species; climate change and permafrost; and specific corridor issues related to the area near the Gilahina River bridge and wayside/trestle and landslide locations near MP 58 and Kotsina Bluffs. (12/21/23)

During Phase 2, the study team reached out to ADF&G (as well as the Copper River Watershed Project) in December 2024 to seek additional input on streams and impassable fish culverts in the McCarthy Road corridor, based on comments submitted, knowledge, and expertise.

Refer to PEL study report Section 3.5 (Agency Involvement) and Section 6.2 (Agency Input) for more detail. Refer also to PEL study report Appendix C for outreach materials, particularly for agency correspondence.

A second round of agency outreach will take place during the public review of the draft PEL study in early summer 2025. The results will be included in the final PEL study documentation, including this questionnaire.

Tribes. To solicit input and initiate coordination, WFL transmitted letters via email on October 19, 2023, to the following Alaska Native Tribes and Corporations: Native Village of Chitina, Chitina Native Corporation, and Ahtna, Inc. Corporation. WFL sent several follow up emails. The PEL study team met with representatives on January 23, 2024, to discuss the PEL process and how to notify Native allotment owners within the corridor.

A second round of tribal outreach will take place during the public review of the draft PEL study in early summer 2025. The results will be included in the final PEL study documentation, including this questionnaire.

B. What transportation agencies (e.g., for adjacent jurisdictions) did you coordinate with or were involved in the PEL study?

Aside from the CPT (WFL, DOT&PF, and NPS), the Copper River Valley Regional Planning Organization was a stakeholder on the PAC.

C. What steps will need to be taken with each agency during NEPA scoping?

As appropriate, agency coordination and scoping activities would occur during subsequent NEPA processes for advancing projects. The agencies involved, and the level of engagement would depend on the scope of the project, its impacts, and associated procedural requirements for NEPA. For example, the DOT&PF would post a public Notice of Intent (NOI) to begin engineering and environmental studies for a project moving forward as an Environmental Assessment. The NOI (or scoping letters) would reference the applicable planning products to use or carry forward from the PEL process. The environmental resource categories involved would determine the scope and involvement of particular agencies.

4. Public coordination

A. Provide a synopsis of your coordination efforts with the public and stakeholders.

Refer to PEL study report Section 3 (Public Involvement and Stakeholder Outreach) for more detail. Refer also to PEL study report Appendix C for outreach materials, particularly for comments from the public and stakeholders.

The WFL, DOT&PF, and NPS placed a high priority on seeking input from the public, stakeholders, tribal groups, and agencies; the analysis and results in the PEL study reflect that involvement.

- **Coordination tools**
  - Project website: www.McCarthyRoadPEL.com
  - Public notices, social media, email updates, newsletters
- **Public Meetings: The study team hosted three rounds of public meetings at key phases.**
  - Public Meeting #1:
    - Virtual online open house (OOH) ran from November 19, 2023, to January 10, 2024
    - Engagement: 325 views of the OOH; 156 comments submitted via online mapping tool; 66 people took OOH polls; 39 people submitted OOH comment forms; 21 people submitted comments via project website; 10 emails or letters directly submitted
  - Public Meeting #2 (virtual)
    - Virtual OOH ran from July 25 to August 25, 2024
    - Engagement: 295 views of the OOH; comments submitted through OOH polls (35 people took polls); emails directly submitted
  - Public Meeting #2 (in-person). Comments were submitted verbally, through hard copy comment forms, and stick notes on large maps.
    - July 30, 2024, Glenallen; 10 people signed in
    - July 30, 2024, Chitina; 22 people signed in
    - July 31, 2024, McCarthy; more than 50 people signed in
  - Public Meeting #3 (virtual)
    - Forthcoming summer 2025
    - Engagement: Forthcoming
- **PAC**
  - PAC members represented:
    - Ahtna, Inc.
    - Alaska Travel Industry Association
    - Copper River Valley Regional Planning Organization
    - Chitina Dipnetters Association
    - Chitina Resident
    - Chitina Native Corporation
    - Copper River Watershed Project/Strelna Lake Area Resident
    - Copper Valley Development Association
    - Copper River Valley Regional Planning Organization
    - DOT&PF Northern Region Maintenance & Operations
    - McCarthy Area Council and its Road & Access Committee
    - McCarthy Resident
    - Native Village of Chitina
    - NPS WRST and ARO (NPS representatives on the PAC are also study team members)
    - State of Alaska Division of Forestry & Fire Protection
    - University of Alaska Land Management
  - PAC Meetings: The team held four PAC meetings at key phases to guide the PEL study and build consensus on corridor needs and opportunities, potential solutions, and recommendations.
    - #1: Orientation, Vision, Goals, and Needs and Opportunities (November 16, 2023) (virtual)

- #2: Identify Needs and Opportunities, Vision, and Goals Continued (April 4, 2024) (virtual)
- #3: Develop and Evaluate Solutions (July 30, 2024) (virtual and in-person)
- #4: Recommended Solutions in the PEL study (forthcoming summer 2025) (virtual)

B. Provide the corridor vision, objectives, or purpose and need statement.

Refer to PEL study report Section 2 (Corridor Vision, Goals and Objectives (Purpose and Need)). Refer also to Section 5.5 (Recommended Solutions Summary Sheets) for individual purpose and need statements prepared for each of the 20 recommended solutions.

PEL Study Corridor Vision, Goals, and Needs

Important PEL Study Drivers	Description
Corridor Vision	To provide a safe road corridor and reliable access for residents and travelers on the McCarthy Road that embraces the scenic and cultural values of the surrounding environment and communities.
Primary Goals	Primary goals are related to resolving a transportation need—in particular, the fundamental needs. – Provide a safe road corridor – Maintain reliable access
Secondary Goals	Secondary goals are related to resolving another need that supports the transportation facility or access to public lands. These reflect desirable outcomes but are not considered core. – Maintain intrinsic values of corridor (scenic, visual, natural, rural) – Promote environmental stewardship – Enhance access and support land uses in the corridor, including those related to visitor experience and recreation access – Accommodate motorized and non-motorized users – Promote economic vitality
Overarching Purpose and Need	**Purpose**: To provide a safe road corridor and reliable access for residents and travelers on the McCarthy Road. **Primary Transportation Needs**: – To improve safety of the road corridor – To improve deteriorated conditions of the road corridor and allow the road to function efficiently – To improve the resiliency of the road corridor to maintain access

5. Range of alternatives considered, screening criteria, and screening process

For more detail, refer to the following:

- *PEL study report Section 4 (Solution Options Development and Evaluation)*
- *PEL study report Appendix D: Solutions Development & Evaluation: Screening Process Overview Memo*
- *PEL study report Appendix E: Screening Evaluation & results Memo*

The information collected for the Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment Report (Appendix A) helped shape the identification of potential solution options and the development of the screening process.

A. What types of alternatives were looked at? (Provide a one or two sentence summary and reference document.)

Refer to PEL study report Section 4.3.1 (Range of Potential Solutions) for details on the potential solutions considered and Section 5.2 (Recommended Solutions by Project Type) for the solutions the PEL study is recommending.

Range of Potential Solutions

The identification of needs, opportunities, corridor vision, goals, and objectives, based on input from the public and stakeholders, led to the development of the range of potential solutions for improving the road corridor. Potential solutions were categorized into two main categories: focus areas and suggested enhancements. Due to the length of the study corridor, the study team identified initial geographic focus areas to home in on key areas to recommend for improvements.

Range of Potential Solutions

Type of Solution	Description	Examples
Focus Areas	Select geographic spots along the McCarthy Road corridor that have key needs related to safety and keeping the road open and reliable (primary goals)	Improvements related to: – Drainage – Narrow road width – Bridges – Addressing hazards, such as slide areas – Potential road realignments
Suggested Enhancements[a]	– Potential opportunities to enhance visitor experience, recreation access, and the environment – These solutions support the roadway but are not must haves	Improvements related to: – Pullouts – New parking – Signage – Recreation access, including trails, lake access, and trailheads – Fish passage improvements at culverts

[a] Suggested enhancements came directly from the public and stakeholder input during the first phase of the PEL study.

Potential solutions: Focus Areas. The study team identified an initial list of 10 focus areas as locations warranting consideration for improvements based on identified needs by the public and stakeholders. The 10 focus areas identified include the following:

- Drainage and roadway cross-section improvements throughout the corridor (specific locations to be determined)
- MP 0.5 slide area
- Kotsina Bluffs (MP 1.5 to 3)
- Gilahina Bridge (MP 29)
- MP 35 slide area
- Long Lake (MP 44 to 48.5)

- MP 58 slide area
- Kennicott River bridge crossing (MP 59.3)
- Swimming hole vicinity (MP 59.5)
- Slide area south of the Kennicott subdivision

These focus areas were presented to the public and stakeholders for input during the second outreach phase, particularly during public meeting #2 (in-person and OOH) and PAC meeting #3.

Potential solutions: Other Improvement Needs. Other potential solutions and related needs or activities were brought up during outreach early in the PEL process. These did not undergo extensive analysis or comparative screening evaluation. These are important topics identified by the public and stakeholders but did not lend themselves to being included as a capital improvement project or standalone recommended solution included in the PEL study. These topics included the following:

- Extend the seasonal road maintenance to year-round
- Conduct corridor-wide vegetation brushing
- Mitigate dust
- Address speeding
- Replace signage such as mile markers

Recommended Solutions by Project Type

About half of the 20 recommended solutions included in the PEL study fall into one of the following three main types of projects:

- Drainage improvements
- Road rehabilitation
- Road reconstruction

Other project types include the following:

- Localized culvert improvements associated with an adjacent short roadway improvement
- Bridge improvements
- Pullouts
- Erosion control

B. How did you select the screening criteria and screening process?

Refer to PEL study report Section 4.1 (Screening Process Overview) and 4.2 (Screening Criteria) for more details. The screening process was performed in accordance with 23 USC 139 to eliminate alternatives from detailed analysis.

Drawing from the comments and input gathered during the Needs and Opportunities Assessment phase of the PEL study, the study team developed a screening process framework to evaluate potential solution options.

The corridor vision statement and goals shaped the screening criteria by which potential solutions were compared, particularly in the more detailed comparative screening level (Level 3 screening). These included the following criteria:

- Safety
- Reliability
- Context sensitivity
- Environmental impacts
- Support land uses, including visitor experience and recreation enhancements
- Motorized and non-motorized user accommodation
- Economic
- Public and stakeholder input and priorities
- Cost/financial feasibility and implementation

These screening criteria were used to screen and evaluate solution options during Level 3 screening to identify the best solutions to recommend. The selection and weighing of the screening criteria was heavily influenced by the input provided by the public and stakeholders early on, especially during the first two public meetings and first three PAC meetings.

C. For alternative(s) that were screened out, briefly summarize the reasons for eliminating the alternative(s). (During the initial screenings, this generally will focus on fatal flaws.)

Refer to PEL study report Section 4.3 (Solutions Identification, Screening and Evaluation) and Section 4.4 (Level 3 Screening and Evaluation Results) for details on how potential solutions were considered and screened.

The following is an overview of the three-level screening process and how solution options were eliminated.

- Level 1 Screening
  - This level entailed the following three questions, which required a "yes" to all three for a potential solution option to move into Level 2 for additional consideration.
    - Is the issue within the scope of the PEL?
    - Would the solution reasonably meet the primary or secondary goals?
    - Would the solution be reasonable or feasible? If not, would it be critical to meet the primary goals?
- Level 2 Screening
  - Would the solution substantially meet primary or secondary goals?
    - **Primary goals** are related to resolving a fundamental transportation need. Options substantially meeting these goals advanced into Level 3 for additional evaluation.
    - **Secondary goals** are related to resolving another need that supports the transportation facility or access to public lands; these reflect desirable outcomes but are not considered core. Solution options largely addressing these goals were categorized as one of the following types of enhancement opportunities: visitor experience, recreation, or environmental. These options were included in the PEL study as potential enhancements but were not included as standalone improvements that were evaluated or refined in detail.

- Level 3 Screening
  - This level involved evaluating and comparing related solutions for the identified focus areas using mostly goals-related screening criteria. The intent was to identify the best option for recommendation to move forward.
  - The potential solutions for the focus areas were the main topics presented during the second outreach phase (public meeting #2 and PAC meeting #3). The study team sought input on what solutions and focus areas should be prioritized. Based on public and stakeholder comments, the study team then conducted the Level 3 screening.
    - Three focus areas were dismissed and did not advance into Level 3 screening after the second outreach phase. The study team determined three of the focus areas would not proceed for additional analysis and screening; this included the historic or recent landslides or settlement near MP 0.5, MP 35, and south of the Kennicott subdivision. The DOT&PF and team determined these locations would continue to be monitored and addressed during routine road maintenance should future conditions require it, but no additional solution option would be explored within the PEL study.
    - Seven focus areas advanced into Level 3 screening to identify the highest scoring option to be recommended for future implementation.

D. Which alternatives must be brought forward into NEPA and why?

The PEL study provides a framework for near-term and long-term implementation of recommended solution improvements along the 63-mile study corridor. For a recommended solution using federal funding or requiring federal permit approval, an environmental review process would need to be completed. For solutions moving forward into NEPA, the PEL study does not provide the detailed analysis required to obtain approvals to begin design and construction. Several steps must be accomplished before any of the recommended solutions can be implemented. As these recommended solutions move forward in the project development process, and are programmed and funding is secured, NEPA and preliminary design activities can be initiated.

E. Did the public, stakeholders, and agencies have an opportunity to comment during this process?

Yes, these groups had the opportunity to comment during the process. Bringing together stakeholders and users of the McCarthy Road to engage and seek comment was a fundamental goal of the PEL study. Public, stakeholder, and agency comments shaped every aspect of the PEL study (such as the identification of needs and opportunities, corridor vision, goals, potential solutions, and priorities).

F. Were there unresolved issues with the public, stakeholders, and/or agencies?

Yes, unresolved issues remain. Consensus on the scale of improvements in the study corridor was not achieved; the public and stakeholders indicated consensus is not achievable. Note the following examples:

- The PEL study currently does not recommend a project to construct a public vehicle bridge over the Kennicott River; though some community members support it, there is stronger public opposition.
- For the option to reroute the McCarthy Road south of Long Lake, though supported by the community, it was not advanced in the PEL study for several reasons. (In early 2025, DOT&PF applied for grant funding to further explore the southern reroute option).
- While suggested by the public, year-round maintenance was also not included as a recommended solution; winter issues may persist, although drainage projects might help to mitigate them somewhat.

6. Planning assumptions and analytical methods

A. What is the forecast year used in the PEL study?

2040

B. What method was used for forecasting traffic volumes?

According to DOT&PF, the growth rate for calculations was 1.25%, based on historic traffic patterns. At the Chokosna River bridge near MP 27, this would result in an Annual Average Daily Traffic of 110 vehicles in 2040, up from 85 in 2016. This increase is not significant enough to warrant changes to design criteria or system capacity, so no further traffic analysis was conducted for the PEL study corridor.

C. Are the planning assumptions and the corridor vision/purpose and need statement consistent with the long-range transportation plan?

Planning assumptions and the corridor goals and objectives/purpose and need statement are aligned with relevant area plans. The study team considered public and stakeholder input to build on previous corridor vision, studies, and plans for the road corridor.

Refer also to PEL study report Section 6.3.1 (Land Ownership and Management) for more information on government land management in the area.

D. What were the future year policy and/or data assumptions used in the transportation planning process related to land use, economic development, transportation costs, and network expansion?

Not applicable.

7. Resources (wetlands, cultural, etc.) reviewed; for each resource or group of resources reviewed, provide the following:

A high-level baseline review of some of the environmental resources typically assessed during a NEPA process is included in the PEL study report Section 6 (Environmental Considerations) and Needs and Opportunities Assessment Report Section 9 (Environmental Setting).

A. In the PEL study, at what level of detail was the resource reviewed and what was the method of review?

Environmental resources were documented based on reviews of online databases, past studies completed in the study corridor, and outreach to agencies and stakeholders. Fieldwork was not conducted during the PEL study.

A broad qualitative and quantitative assessment of environmental impacts was conducted during screening to compare and evaluate solutions; refer to the Screening Evaluation & Results Memo Section 2 (*Level 3 Screening Results*). Refer also to the PEL study report Section 6 (*Environmental Considerations*) for analysis related to evaluating preliminary impacts from each recommended solution to environmental resources; this analysis

relies on the baseline environmental data. Resources were reviewed using various methods depending on data availability.

B. Is this resource present in the area and what is the existing environmental condition for this resource?

Key resources reviewed in the PEL study included land ownership and management; recreational resources; cultural and historic resources; potential Section 4(f) involvement; water resources, including floodplains, navigable waters, and waters of the U.S., including wetlands, waterbodies, and water quality; fish and wildlife; migratory birds; and invasive species. Other resources such as contaminated sites were not looked at based on lack of presence in the corridor according to online databases and agency outreach.

C. What are the issues that need to be considered during NEPA, including potential resource impacts and potential mitigation requirements (if known)?

Each recommended solution included in the PEL study has its own set of issues that will need to be considered during respective future NEPA processes. Issues during future NEPA include public and agency scoping; additional agency coordination based on the resource type in the area or being affected; data collection needs and additional analysis, including potential surveys such as for wetland delineations and cultural resources; more detailed impacts analysis based on more detailed design; determination of avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures; and identification of required permits based on design, actual project footprint, and discussions with agencies.

D. How will the data provided need to be supplemented during NEPA?

The above referenced preliminary environmental resources data collection and impacts analysis is intended to help jump start the analysis for future NEPA requirements. Data may need to be supplemented and updated during NEPA.

8. List resources that were not reviewed in the PEL study and why? Indicate whether or not they will need to be reviewed in NEPA and explain why.

Certain environmental resources were not considered in this PEL study because they were not present, impacts were not anticipated, and/or they were not anticipated to be critical factors in evaluating the solutions under consideration. Refer to the PEL study report Section 6 (*Environmental Considerations*) for a listing of resources covered.

9. Were cumulative impacts considered in the PEL study? If yes, provide the information or reference where it can be found.

Cumulative impacts are briefly discussed in Section 6 (*Environmental Considerations*) of the PEL study report.

10. Describe any mitigation strategies discussed at the planning level that must be analyzed during NEPA.

This section to be completed based on the forthcoming second agency outreach scheduled to occur in early summer 2025.

11. What needs to be done during NEPA to make information from the PEL study available to the agencies and the public? Are there PEL study products which can be used or provided to agencies or the public during the NEPA scoping process?

Refer to PEL study report Section 1.2 (Why Conduct a PEL Study?) and Section 1.4.4 (Integration of Planning and Environmental Review) for more detail on integrating PEL information into NEPA.

This PEL study was prepared with the approach that documentation is just as important as the process. This is particularly important for future NEPA processes that incorporate by reference this PEL study's planning products, analyses, and decisions. A future NEPA process can make the PEL study documentation available to agencies and the public through project websites or available upon request, for instance. To ensure that the analysis and decisions documented in the PEL study can be readily used in subsequent NEPA, federal lead agencies (or SEO on behalf of FHWA) would need to make the PEL study report and all its appendices available for public, governmental, and stakeholder review and comment and provide public notice of their intention to adopt or incorporate the PEL analysis and findings by reference. The lead agency must also consider comments received and verify there is no significant new information or circumstances that may affect the validity of the data from the PEL study. The lead agency must also review and confirm that the data from the PEL study has a rational basis founded on reliable and reasonably current data, reasonable scientifically acceptable methodologies, and is in sufficient detail to support decisions or analysis for NEPA. Lastly, the lead agency would need to verify that the PEL study is appropriate for adoption or incorporation by reference into NEPA Planning product and was approved within 5 years of adoption or incorporation.

References

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