



Question 1 (Q1): What is the project's purpose and why is it needed?

Response 1 (R1): The purpose of the proposed project is to construct safety improvements to decrease high-severity crashes and improve traffic operations to alleviate traffic congestion.

This project is needed to address the elevated rate of high-severity crashes; curves that do not meet design standards; and safety concerns from traffic slowing or stopping to view wildlife or scenery, or access Chugach State Park.

Q2: Why was the project expanded to milepost (MP) 109.5?

R2: After reviewing public comments made in response to the 2020 Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) extended the project north 2.5 miles from Windy Corner to Rainbow Point to address public concerns. Extending the project provides the opportunity for a more expansive safety improvement corridor, evaluating the feasibility of obtaining project materials from the new road alignment to reduce impacts to Chugach State Park, and consideration of a separated non-motorized pathway between Windy Corner and Rainbow trailheads.

Q3: Why is the project being designed for 65 miles-per-hour (mph) and not 55 mph?

R3: Projects south of Anchorage trend toward a 65-mph design speed. Seven of the 10 curves within the project corridor do not meet current design standards for this type of highway. Posted speeds vary between Anchorage and Girdwood from 55- to 65-mph. There are no immediate plans to change the posted speed limit in the Windy Corner or Rainbow Point areas. A 65-mph design speed would give DOT&PF the future flexibility to adjust the posted speed, if desired. The 65-mph design speed would also improve safety given the improved sight distance and increased curve radii required for this design speed, which would provide a greater driver safety margin.

Q4: Can the project be constructed within the existing right-of-way (ROW)?

R4: The project's first priority is to enhance safety for Seward Highway road users. There is insufficient room within the existing ROW to make the improvements needed to meet project objectives (i.e., straighten out curves, provide rock catchment, accommodate turning traffic). Additionally, the highway is at or near the minimum separation distance from Alaska Railroad Corporation's tracks and providing adequate space to achieve project objectives would require cuts in the rock face that would quickly reach existing ROW limits.

Q5: Can a separated, non-motorized pathway be constructed as part of the project?

R5: A non-motorized pathway between Windy Corner and Rainbow trailheads is currently under consideration for this expanded project. Alternatives developed in the new environmental document will analyze and evaluate resource impacts from increasing the project footprint to accommodate a non-motorized pathway. Factors determining if a pathway is included in the project and/or location of pathway termini may include environmental impacts, safe access to and from the highway, distance to adjacent facilities, and project funding requirements.

Q6: Would the aesthetics be suitable for a Scenic Byway?

R6: The Seward Highway is recognized for its scenic, natural, historic, and recreational values. Constructing improvements to the highway that meet the project purpose would require changes to some scenic features from some combination of excavation of the mountainside and/or fill on the waterside of the highway and railway. Avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce visual intrusions; however, some visual impacts would be unavoidable.

Q7: How much of the previous design efforts (i.e., public input, environmental document, engineering) will be reused for this expanded project?

R7: The experience gained during development of the “Windy Corner” project will be used to guide the Windy Corner to Rainbow Point project’s environmental analysis and design. DOT&PF recognizes decisions and assumptions for the Windy Corner project may not all be applicable to the expanded project and thus, may result in different design features when considered in the context of the expanded project. However, previously completed analyses and design will be considered and used where appropriate.

Q8: What happened to all the facilities at Windy Corner that were included in the project last year (2020 Draft EA)?

R8: The proposed mountainside facilities at Windy Corner were developed in part as mitigation for impacts to Chugach State Park from the proposed project. The Windy Corner to Rainbow Point project will also evaluate potential impacts to Chugach State Park and will propose mitigation to compensate for those impacts. Additionally, facilities will be considered to address safety improvements and other factors. Federal and state funding are being used to develop the project, and each funding source has requirements on expenditure of funds which may affect the inclusion of project features.

Q9: Will there still be access to the waterside at Windy Corner?

R9: The project’s first priority is to enhance safety for Seward Highway road users. The experience gained during development of the “Windy Corner” project will be used to guide the assessment for including emergency and public access to Turnagain Arm in the expanded project.

Q10: Why improve the highway if the Safety Corridor has already improved the corridor safety?

R10: Safety upgrades and traffic operation improvements proposed for this project are long-term solutions to reduce fatal and major-injury crashes. The Safety Corridor designation has provided a reduction in high-severity crashes; however, Safety Corridor designations are intended to be temporary measures until long-term safety improvements are constructed. As permanent engineered safety improvements are implemented, segments of the Seward Highway between MP 87 and MP 117 may be removed (i.e., decommissioned) from the Safety Corridor program based on recommendations in future DOT&PF Safety Corridor Audits. Additional Safety Corridor program information is available at: www.dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/hwysafety/safety_corridors.shtml.

Q11: How much will the additional 2.5 miles cost (The 2020 preferred alternative for Windy Corner was estimated at \$91 million)?

R11: At this stage of project development, cost estimates have not been developed. The cost of the new project will depend on the preferred alternative developed and presented in the new environmental document.

Q12: How long will this extension of the project delay construction of the project?

R12: DOT&PF anticipates the extended project could take up to four years to complete. The current schedule anticipates construction beginning in 2024.

Q13: Will the environmental document be an Environmental Assessment (similar to the Windy Corner Project)?

R13: The class of action determines the type of environmental documentation (e.g., environmental assessment) and level of analysis needed to determine if a project would cause significant environmental impacts. The class of action will be determined after scoping is complete.