

Southeast Conference Workshop

Thursday, September 18, 2025, 1:30 – 3:00 pm AST, Harrigan Centennial Hall, Sitka, Alaska

Workshop Purpose and Goals

The Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) hosted a workshop on the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan Update during the Southeast Conference (SEC) Annual Meeting in Sitka, Alaska. The session focused on collecting meaningful local input, so the updated plan reflects the realities of transportation in Southeast Alaska. The DOT&PF and planning team welcomed participants to the workshop, setting a collaborative tone and shared sense of purpose. Interested parties from tourism, construction, mining, mariculture, local governments, Tribal entities, and transportation operations discussed their challenges and helped shape the plan's future direction. The workshop intentionally balanced technical transportation planning with the lived experiences of those who rely on these systems every day.

This presentation and discussion style meeting combined a formal presentation, roundtable discussion, and open dialogue to capture multiple perspectives. The overarching goals for the workshop included:

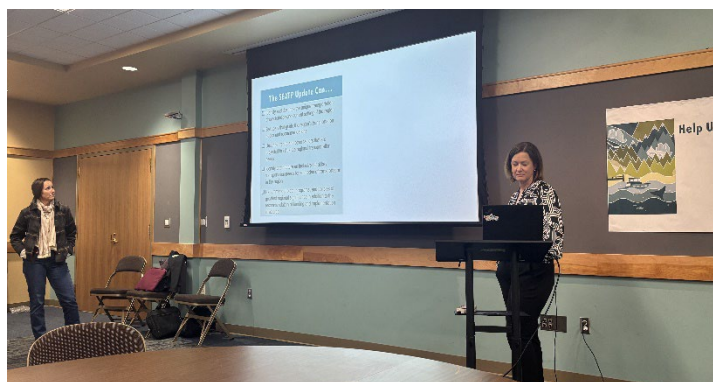
- Provide interested parties and the public with an introduction to the SEATP Update process
- Share baseline information about current transportation systems and trends
- Garner an understanding of how regional industries are impacted and depend on transportation infrastructure
- Identify challenges, opportunities, and priorities for the next 20 years
- Build relationships and establish an ongoing dialogue between DOT&PF, communities, and partners

Attendance and Representation

Attendees brought varied and sometimes conflicting perspectives, but all shared a common interest in improving transportation systems.

Approximately 35–40 participants attended, filling four discussion tables. Representation included:

- **Local and Tribal Governments:** City and Borough of Juneau, City and Borough of Sitka, various Tribal governments
- **Economic Sectors:** Tourism operators, construction industry, seafood processors, mariculture businesses, healthcare providers, and mining interests
- **Transportation Providers:** Alaska Seaplanes, Inter-Island Ferry Authority (IFA), Alaska Marine Lines
- **Regional Organizations:** Southeast Conference, Tlingit & Haida



Consultant Team and DOT&PF Staff

- DOT&PF: **Jill Melcher**, Southcoast Planning Chief – lead host and facilitator

Consultant Team: **Renee Whitesell**, Consultant Project Manager/Transportation Planner, **Katie Berry**, Economist and Discussion Lead, **Kendal Ramage**, Transportation Planner, **James Marks**, Transportation Planner

Group Discussion Highlights

This section provides an overview and summary of the discussion with attendees. The discussions revealed frustration with service inconsistencies but also a deep commitment to regional stewardship. Many participants framed transportation not only as infrastructure but essential to fostering community well-being and long-term resilience.

Participants identified critical transportation needs:

- Reliable marine transportation for freight, vehicles and passengers
- Affordable inter-community travel
- Better seaplane and airport infrastructure
- Improved safety for both active transportation and vehicles
- Stronger community-to-community connectivity

What We Heard: In Summary

Start with providing services to all, serving Alaskan's and Natives. DOT&PF has an obligation to serve Alaskan's. – *Paulette Moreno, Tlingit & Haida, Executive Council*

Alaska Natives cannot survive in Alaska due to high costs and lack of transportation. How do we get creative?

We are all connected by waterways. We need to maintain the health of our waters. Keep fish protected. Require high standards in order to do that.

We can't prevent growth (mining, tourism, etc.) and it will continue to grow. We have something they want so let's be creative and ask the industries to provide funding. If they are going to extract our resources, they should provide funding to keep Alaska healthy and viable for Alaskans. Why not at least ask them to supplement our transportation?

Build with respect to the lands, e.g., construction work near a bridge that disrupted eelgrass beds that are essential habitat for fish and critical to the local ecosystem.- *Martha Moses, Sitka Tribe*. Martha agreed with being “creative” and using the plan as an opportunity.

Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) services are unreliable. This was a frequently articulated concern:

- I can't travel to Angoon (from Sitka) and haven't been able to in over a decade-it's too expensive. Can't make connections like we used to. – *Martha Moses*.
- Reduced services affect need for health care. Missing appointments or not scheduling them is much more common. US Coast Guard had the highest number of medivacs potentially due to this reason.
- Reduced service also affects sports and attending events.
- For tourism, buses aren't able to take tourists up to Canada by way of Haines and Skagway
- Construction companies would use AMHS if it was more reliable for freight. Not having this reliability means companies need to rely on barge or plane, which is expensive.

Transportation facilities are inconsistently provided. Examples included pullouts in areas that are not needed, or inconsistent provision of pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Other comments included discussion of specific projects such as Katlian Bay, where other routes may be preferred.



Plan Overview

Jill Melcher (DOT&PF) outlined the purpose, timeline, and limitations of the SEATP update. Jill emphasized that while this plan is an important guiding tool, it is not a magic wand. Setting realistic expectations helped focus participants on identifying **actionable strategies** and **regional priorities** rather than debating issues outside DOT&PF's scope.

Jill emphasized the capabilities of the SEATP and its relationship to other DOT&PF plans, including the new Alaska Marine Highway System Long-Range Plan (AMHS LRP). The SEATP will integrate the goals and strategies outlined in the recently developed AMHS LRP without making changes to them. While additional elements may be added to support regional needs, the core objectives and strategic direction of the AMHS LRP will remain intact.

Jill provided an overview of the anticipated timeline for the SEATP with a draft being made available to the public in the summer of 2026 with a final plan adopted in the fall of 2026.

Southeast Alaska Regional Transportation Network Overview

Renee Whitesell presented baseline data on Southeast Alaska's transportation systems. While statistics provide a high-level view, participants stressed that **availability does not equal reliability**, especially when ferries or seaplane facilities are inconsistent or poorly maintained.

Economic Drivers and Industry Needs

Katie Berry provided an overview of how different industries both depend on and impact the transportation system. Personal stories underscored the human impact of transportation barriers. *Martha Moses* spoke about children needing affordable travel for sports and cultural activities, framing transportation as a social and cultural lifeline. Katie presented overview and information for eight economic sectors:

- **Seafood**
 - **Community Input:**
 - Focus on reliable freight systems for perishable goods
 - Consider scaling infrastructure for smaller, dispersed operators
- **Tourism**
 - **Community Input:**
 - Year-round, affordable inter-community travel is desired
 - Safety and walkability improvements are needed in high-volume tourist areas
- **Healthcare**
 - **Community Input:**
 - Consider continued healthcare access needs
 - Identify transportation facility upgrades in critical service hubs (i.e. seaplane bases, ferry improvements, etc.)
- **Mariculture**
 - **Community Input:**
 - Support reliable marine freight connections
 - Explore cold storage and processing infrastructure improvements
- **Military**
 - **Community Input:**
 - Coordinate with interested military parties to plan for growth impacts
 - Address AMHS reliability for personnel travel



- **Mining**
 - **Community Input:**
 - Balance economic development with environmental protection
 - Build mechanisms for local voices in decision-making
- **Forestry**
 - **Community Input:**
 - Coordination between forestry and transportation agencies is needed when identifying transportation needs particularly needs related to the expansion of the forestry industry in Southeast Alaska
- **Other**
 - **Community Input:**
 - Veterinarians and other specialties are difficult to get to small communities due to lack of consistent and reliable transportation options
 - Veterans continue to age in place, requiring more services that are unavailable in small communities

Comments and Suggestions Collected

The planning team asked participants to provide comments and suggestions for key priorities, which were transcribed and captured on a poster.





Help Us Prioritize

ACKNOWLEDGING THE BALANCE BETWEEN DEMAND FOR TRANSPORTATION (I.E. AMHS – TRANSPORTATION SCHOOL SPORTS TEAMS VS. LOCALS VS. FREIGHT VS. TOURISTS VS. SUPPORTING MILITARY PERSONNEL AND THEIR FAMILIES)

EXPANDING TIMBER HARVEST – WILL USE STATE ROADS AS WELL AS FOREST SERVICE ROADS – NEED TO WORK WITH UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE PLAN TO CAPTURE THIS

ASK FOR SUPPORT FROM INDUSTRIES TO SUPPORT TRANSPORTATION BECAUSE WHAT THE SOUTHEAST CURRENTLY HAS AND HOW WE LIVE IS WHAT IS DRAWING PEOPLE TO THE REGION

CONVERSATIONS NEEDED WITH MINING COMPANIES TO MAKE SURE INDUSTRY DOESN'T CHANGE THE SOUTHEAST LANDSCAPE AND THAT TRANSPORTATION IS MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL/MANAGES ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

MINING – CARE NEEDED TO BALANCE INDUSTRY NEEDS AND THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE WHO CALL THE SOUTHEAST HOME

INCREASING RELIABILITY OF FREIGHT MOVEMENT ON AMHS WOULD SUPPORT MARICULTURE MORE EFFECTIVELY

LEVERAGE ESSENTIAL AIR SERVICE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE TO SUPPORT SE COMMUNITIES ALSO FOCUS ON BYPASS MAIL

SUPPORT BASIC NEEDS AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL ALASKANS AND SOUTHEAST RESIDENTS

EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF REFRIGERATED FREIGHT TO TRANSPORT GROCERIES

FAIRBANKS SERVES AS AN EXAMPLE OF MILITARY INVESTMENT THAT HAS HELPED TO IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION – THIS COULD BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SOUTHEAST AS WELL

GOOD EXAMPLE OF MINES OPERATING IN SE – NEED TO MAKE SURE THESE EXAMPLES AND PROCESSES CONTINUE

ASK FOR INVESTMENT IN TRANSPORTATION TO MAKE IT MORE AFFORDABLE TO LIVE IN THE REGION AND MAINTAIN THE CULTURAL WAY OF LIFE

INCREASING DEMAND FOR MEDIVAC DUE TO LACK OF HEALTHCARE ACCESS (MISSING MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS)

ACCESS TO VETERINARY CARE IS A CHALLENGE

HIGH DEMAND AND NEED FOR MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION

AMHS IS CRITICAL AND NEEDS TO BE FIXED, LOCAL OPERATORS CAN ONLY GO SO FAR TO MAKE TRANSPORTATION AFFORDABLE

LOOK AT THIS PLAN AS A WAY TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO THRIVE IN SOUTHEAST ALASKA

LOOK FOR WAYS TO SUPPORT THE MOVEMENT OF NUTRITIOUS FOODS TO RURAL COMMUNITIES/HELP ALLEVIATE FOOD DESERTS

CONTINUE TO PRESERVE THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND BEAUTY OF SOUTHEAST ALASKA

ENHANCE SAFETY FOR VISITORS – STROBE LIGHT EFFECT AT BRIDGE IN SITKA

SUPPORT YEAR-ROUND TOURISM NOT JUST SUMMER/CRUISE VISITORS

20-YEAR PLAN, FOCUS ON SUPPORT OF ALASKA PEOPLE, CULTURE, AND WAY OF LIFE

4407 EASEMENTS – CAPTURE THESE AND SYNC WITH USFS PLANS

BE CREATIVE TO PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION AND SUPPORT PEOPLE TO LIVE THEIR LIVES

SUPPORT TOURISM FOR ALASKANS AND SOUTHEAST RESIDENTS

SEARHC RELIES ON SEAPLANE ACCESS – IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE THESE AGING FACILITIES

FISHING IS CHARGING LESS FOR CONTAINERIZED AND MORE FOR FISH BOXES – FISH BOXES ARE ALSO BEING SHIPPED MORE OFTEN

SERVE ALASKA NATIVES AND NATIVE ALASKANS THROUGH TRANSPORTATION (CONNECT CULTURAL COMMUNITIES)

SOUTHEAST ALASKA IS PLENTIFUL OF UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

AMHS IS A CRITICAL SERVICE FOR MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS

MAINTAIN WHAT THE SOUTHEAST HAS IN ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE – MANY INSTANCES OF NATURE TRYING TO TAKE OUT INFRASTRUCTURE

SOUTHEAST ALASKA HAS SOMETHING THAT PEOPLE WANT - SHOULDN'T LOSE FOCUS ON SERVING ALASKANS

CONNECT BARGE LANDINGS WITH ROADS/FOREST ROADS TO SUPPORT GROWING INDUSTRY

WATER COMMUNITY - BALANCE INDUSTRY TRANSPORTATION NEEDS WITH WHAT SUPPORTS LIFE IN SOUTHEAST ALASKA

AMHS SERVICE LOOPS ARE NOT WORKING WELL FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS