

NORTH DOUGLAS NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
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SECOND CROSSING COMMITTEE
STATUS REPORT ON PEL STUDY – WINTER 2023-24

The Second Crossing Committee (Committee) of the North Douglas Neighborhood Association (NDNA) wants to update NDNA Officers, Directors, Members, and Residents on the Committee's work related to the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study that is currently being conducted by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT) and the engineering firm DOWL for a second crossing of Gastineau Channel linking the mainland to North Douglas Island. Information on the PEL Study can be found on a DOT website, www.jdnorthcrossing.com.

In the spring of 2022, CBJ partnered with DOT to revive interest in building a second crossing. Toward that end, DOT contracted with DOWL to conduct a PEL Study to evaluate possible crossing alternatives and solicit public input on the project. DOT/DOWL established a stakeholder advisory committee and a technical advisory committee to assist in this effort. The PEL Study has proceeded in several phases. The study team first addressed the purpose and need statement for a second crossing and developed screening criteria for evaluating crossing alternatives. Next, the study team applied these criteria in a Level I screening process, culminating in a Technical Memorandum that reduced the number of alternatives for further analysis to five: Mendenhall Peninsula, Sunny Point (East and West), Vanderbilt, Twin Lakes, and Salmon Creek. The Mendenhall Peninsula and Salmon Creek alternatives are outside the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge (MWSGR); the other three transportation corridors would bisect the MWSGR. The PEL Study team convened meetings of its stakeholder advisory and technical committees at each of these steps; held public listening sessions; and presented status reports to the CBJ Assembly.

After the Level I report, the study team began a Level II screening process intended to further evaluate the remaining alternatives in greater depth. Under their original schedule, a draft Level II report was supposed to have been issued in the summer of 2023, and a final report in the fall, but DOT announced that the PEL Study would benefit from more environmental analyses and a better understanding of the potential impacts of the alternatives under consideration, in particular impacts to the MWSGR. The study team is therefore going to conduct additional field work before undertaking further engineering and environmental analysis. At a stakeholder advisory committee meeting on September 13, 2023, DOWL and DOT indicated their intention that this work be completed this fall and winter and a draft Level II screening report be issued in the spring of 2024. The PEL study team will then hold additional stakeholder and advisory committee meetings before finalizing its report.

The NDNA Second Crossing Committee is represented on the stakeholder advisory committee and has participated actively in the PEL Study and related processes to date. The Committee's efforts have included:

- attending all of the stakeholder advisory committee meetings and workshops;
- submitting written comments at every phase of the PEL process (available on the NDNA website);
- meeting directly with the PEL study team to voice NDNA's concerns;
- attending and providing public testimony at CBJ Assembly and Public Works Committee meetings where DOT/DOWL provided updates on the status of the crossing project;
- meeting with several individual Assembly members to discuss the second crossing project and other developments on North Douglas; and
- meeting with other groups who are active in the PEL Study process, in particular the Mendenhall Wetlands Study Group, an informal association comprised mostly of former ADF&G and NMFS fisheries and wildlife biologists.

In these efforts, the Committee has endeavored to stay within the general framework of comments it articulated in the 2005-07 round of second crossing debate:

- not taking a position in favor or against any specific crossing alternatives, owing to the diversity of views on this subject among North Douglas residents whom the Committee surveyed;
- emphasizing the need for an area planning process for North Douglas encompassing not only the impacts from a second crossing but other developments planned in our neighborhood;
- addressing concerns for traffic on the North Douglas Highway, as now exists and as it may increase as a result of further development; and
- avoiding, minimizing and mitigating, to the extent possible, adverse impacts to the MWSGR and to our neighborhood.

The Committee intends to continue its active participation in the PEL Study and will update NDNA members as appropriate.