

STATE OF ALASKA

SARAH PALIN, GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

NORTHERN REGION, PRECONSTRUCTION

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January 4, 2008

RE: Fairbanks Noble Street Upgrade
Project No. 61725/STP-0005(413)
Agency Scoping Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is seeking comments on a proposal to construct improvements on Noble Street from 1st Avenue to Gaffney Road in downtown Fairbanks (Figure 1). The level of the environmental document expected is a Categorical Exclusion (CE) under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) guidance.

Project Background

The Fairbanks downtown area is experiencing revitalization. The City of Fairbanks, wishing to enhance and continue this revitalization, requested DOT&PF's assistance in developing a transportation plan. As a result, in August 2001 the *Fairbanks Downtown Transportation Study* was completed and approved by DOT&PF and the City of Fairbanks. This study presents a plan to improve traffic and pedestrian circulation, parking, and the general appearance of the downtown streets. Specific recommendations for Noble Street were to convert from one-way to two-way traffic (already completed) and to make bicycle, pedestrian, and streetscape improvements. The Noble Street Reconstruction project has evolved from these recommendations.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to provide functional and aesthetic improvements to Noble Street and update its storm drain components. Construction of the project would also improve accessibility and vehicle/pedestrian safety on Noble Street. The facility has the following deficiencies:

- 1) Deteriorated pavement
- 2) Aging storm drain components
- 3) Lack of sidewalks in some areas, and existing sidewalks that do not meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards
- 4) Poor aesthetic condition of the streetscape

Proposed Project Description

- 1) Reconstruct pavement section, curbs, and gutters
- 2) Reduce posted speed limit
- 3) Replace wood stave storm drain components
- 4) Provide ADA-compliant sidewalks
- 5) Add curb extensions to selected intersections
- 6) Replace wire-hung traffic signals with mast arms
- 7) Add streetscape improvements
- 8) Update street lighting if necessary

Due to its deteriorated state, Noble Street is to be reconstructed from 1st Avenue to Gaffney Road (Figure 2). The lane configurations would continue to be a typical three-lane urban roadway with sidewalks on both sides (Figure 3), and the speed limit would be reduced to 25 mph along the entire corridor. Reconstruction would also include the replacement of the aging storm drain components within Noble Street and for approximately half a block up the side streets.

Sidewalks meeting ADA standards with curb ramps at intersections would be incorporated in the new construction. The project may also extend the sidewalks to building faces, where appropriate and agreed to by the landowner. Curb extensions on side streets would be considered at intersections. Curb extensions are consistent with recent and planned downtown core area street improvements. They promote a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment due to decreased street crossing widths and provide more area for pedestrian refuge and streetscape opportunities.

Excavation from 1 to 4 feet deep is expected for road improvements, while storm drain components may require excavation down to 10 feet and potential storm drain tie-ins at 2nd and 3rd Avenues may require as much as 14 feet of excavation. The existing wire-hung traffic signals along the corridor would be replaced with mast arms. The project may move some power poles to the back side of sidewalks. Other utilities such as water and sewer may need to be adjusted or relocated depending on their location with respect to the final design.

Aesthetic improvements at strategic areas along the corridor would include streetscape additions such as colored or textured concrete, benches, low decorative fences, stylized light poles, and landscaping. In addition, the project may replace the chain link fence at Myrtle Park, a 4(f) property, with a decorative fence and arched pedestrian gateway.

Preliminary Research Results

Preliminary research results on environmental resources in the project area are described in Appendix A. A project website has been set up at www.pdcprojects.info to provide project information and allow you to comment.

In addition to identifying any concerns and/or issues your agency might have with the proposed project, the links on the project website request agency-specific information. The website will take you to a list of questions specific to your agency's purview and allow you to provide comments via email.

Your comments will assist us in evaluating possible impacts related to the project. To ensure that all factors are considered in the Categorical Exclusion, your comments are requested by February 4, 2008. If you have questions regarding the project, you may contact Valerie Baxter, Environmental Impact Analyst, by telephone at 907-451-5289 or send email to valerie.baxter@alaska.gov.

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Thank you for your assistance with this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Campbell", written in a cursive style.

Bruce Campbell
Northern Region Environmental Coordinator

Attachments: Figure 1 – Location and Vicinity Map
Figure 2 – Project Area
Figure 3 – Typical Section
Appendix A