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Mr. David Miller
Alaska Division Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
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Dear Mr. Miller:

I am deeply disturbed by recent reports on comments made by FHWA employees relative to the scoping process for the Knik Arm Crossing (Don Young's Way).

I was recently informed by George Wuerch, Chairman of the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority, that FHWA has "determined that the only corridor across Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson lands to be carried forward for detailed study in the draft EIS is the "below-the-bluff" alignment."

This would literally leave no alternative but to construct an approach cutting directly through Anchorage's most historic residential area, and funneling insupportably large amounts of traffic into an already congested downtown area.

In my view, announcing such a choice at this stage would be a serious mistake. It would render the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process moot and potentially create serious legal difficulties both for your agency and for the project itself.

As you know, the scoping process under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is conducted to develop an outline for the contents of a subsequent draft EIS. The draft EIS reviews in detail the various alternatives for a given project. The development of a preferred alternative occurs only at the draft EIS stage. After additional public comment, a final EIS is drafted which identifies one alternative for action, and effectively becomes a decision document for the involved agency.

There are certainly circumstances where one or another proposal may be eliminated from consideration. However, I do not believe this situation meets that test in any way. It would appear that the judgment that your staff has reportedly relayed both to Chairman Wuerch and to members of the public is arbitrary and capricious.

For example, the only argument I have been able to discover against the so-called "Yellow Route", which would carry traffic across the base, avoiding the downtown area,

is the very preliminary "rough order of magnitude" cost figure suggested in an August 31, 2005 letter from General Chandler of the Alaskan Command. The difference between the cost of that route and the "red" or "below-the-bluff" route is approximately \$120 million. While that is certainly significant, no work has been done to date to explore whether it could be reduced by a slightly different routing that avoided sensitive areas of the base. In addition, a significant part of that figure appears to be for moving certain on-base facilities. It is possible that such work could be undertaken outside the bounds of the Knik Crossing project itself, thus obviating the need for additional transportation funds.

There appears to be no other substantive objection. Indeed, General Chandler specifically states: "Based on our rough analysis, we believe that all issues can be resolved..."

Given the exceptional benefits of such a route, I suggest that it is both premature and inappropriate to eliminate it at this time. In fact, it is my opinion that it would be a serious dereliction for the scoping process to result in the elimination of any of the alternatives. Such a serious decision should only be undertaken after additional information is gathered and analyzed in the draft EIS, as required by NEPA.

I urge you to review and correct any misinterpretations of FHWA views on this matter at the earliest possible opportunity, and thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Lisa A. Murkowski
United States Senator