

September 29, 2005

Edrie Vinson  
Environmental Project Manager  
FHWA  
P.O. Box 21648  
Juneau, AK 99802-1648  
VIA FAX

Dear Ms. Vinson:

I am writing to express grave concerns about a decision I've been told your agency has tentatively made regarding the proposed Knik Arm Bridge and access routes to and from the bridge. The concerns are both legal and policy ones.

This project can be done in a way that damages no existing neighborhoods by building an access route across Elmendorf Air Force Base. It can be done poorly, in a manner that damages Government Hill and increases traffic in Fairview and downtown. These are three of Anchorage's oldest neighborhoods. Government Hill is Anchorage's oldest neighborhood. These neighborhoods should not be damaged - unnecessarily - in order to create one new neighborhood on the other side of Knik Arm. I'd hate to see hundreds of millions of dollars, and perhaps over \$1 billion, spent on a poorly planned project.

My understanding is that your agency may soon issue a decision to stop any further meaningful consideration of the preferred Elmendorf access at the scoping stage of the NEPA process, even though you have permission from the Base Commander to utilize an Elmendorf corridor. Earlier statements by project proponents who wanted to build through Government Hill that a military crossing would endanger national security have proven unfounded. Removing the Elmendorf access from consideration will leave a proposed access route through Anchorage's oldest neighborhood - Government Hill - and increase traffic in Fairview and Downtown. From a city planning standpoint, that would be a poor decision.

I also do not believe the EIS process allows a government agency to dismiss meaningful route options before an EIS study is performed. The EIS study is supposed to consider the options, not dismiss them before they are considered. By dropping the Elmendorf access route from consideration, you are likely making a decision that will invite delay and litigation over this project when that can be avoided.

The Knik Arm crossing will be an expensive project. After the cost of access routes is added, the costs will near or top \$1 billion. To spend that kind of money in a manner that damages three neighborhoods, and adds additional traffic to two neighborhoods where traffic is already heavy would, in my mind, be very shortsighted.

I urge you to allow the EIS process to move forward in a manner that allows consideration of all possible access routes that do not damage three of Anchorage's oldest neighborhoods. I'd hope you could call so we can discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Rep. Les Gara

cc: Senator Lisa Murkowski  
Senator Ted Stevens  
Congressman Don Young  
Senator Johnny Ellis  
Mayor Mark Begich  
Assemblyman Allan Tesche  
Government Hill Community Council