APPENDIX 1

DOT&PF PEL Questionnaire

INTERIM PEL QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is intended to act as a summary of the early planning processes and ease the transition from planning to a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. It is consistent with the 23 CFR 450 (Planning regulations) and other FHWA policy on the Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) process. Often there is no overlap in personnel between the early planning and NEPA phases of a project, so information and justification for decisions made in the corridor and subarea planning may be lost. Different planning processes take projects through analysis at different levels of detail. NEPA project teams may not be aware of relevant planning information and may re-do work that has already been done. Proper use of this questionnaire can help fill these gaps and ensure that planning information can be useful in the NEPA analysis.

The term Planning and Environmental Linkages study (PEL study) is used in this questionnaire as a generic term to mean any type of planning study conducted at the corridor or subarea level which is more focused than studies at the regional or system planning levels. A PEL study is similar in many respects to a Reconnaissance Engineering Study (Preconstruction Manual Section 430.4). The main difference being that a Reconnaissance Engineering Study focuses on developing technical feasible alternative solutions to a problem or deficiency in order to compare engineering alternatives, but with limited public engagement. Whereas, public and agency involvement is central to the NEPA process. A PEL study should have a detailed plan for documenting public and agency involvement so that outputs from the reconnaissance stage are useful to the NEPA analysis. At the inception of the PEL Study, the study team should decide how the work may later be incorporated into subsequent NEPA efforts. A key consideration is whether the PEL study will meet standards established by NEPA regulations and guidance. One example is the use of terminology consistent with NEPA vocabulary (e.g., purpose and need, alternatives, affected environment, environmental consequences).

Instructions: These questions should be used as a guide throughout the planning process, not just answered near completion of the process. When a PEL study is started, this questionnaire will be distributed to the project team. Some of the basic questions to consider are: "What did you do?," "What didn't you do?," and "Why?". When the team submits a PEL study to Statewide Environmental Office (SEO), the completed questionnaire will be included with the submittal. SEO will use this questionnaire to assist it in terming if the study meets the requirements of 23 CFR Section 450.212. The questionnaire should be included in the planning document as an executive summary, chapter, or appendix.

1. Background

a. <u>Who is the sponsor of the PEL study? (DOT&PF, Municipality, Local Agency, Other)</u>

State of Alaska, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

b. <u>What is the name of the PEL study document and other identifying information (e.g., corridor studied, STIP numbers, sub-account, or sub-area of transportation plan)?</u>

- **Project Numbers-State/Federal:** Z546290000 / TBD
- **Project Site:** Anchorage, Alaska

- **Project Title:** Seward Highway: Midtown Traffic Congestion Relief (MTCR) Preconstruction Services
- **Contract Description:** The Contractor shall provide professional services to develop the most effective solution to resolve traffic congestion on the Seward Highway through Midtown (20th Avenue to Tudor Road). Services include: performing a Planning Environmental Linkage (PEL) study, recommending a construction phasing plan and preparing bid-ready contract documents for the first phase of construction. The work includes, but is not limited to: Data Collection, Environmental Documentation, Agency Coordination, Traffic and Civil Engineering, and Public Involvement.

c. *Who was included on the study team (Name and position of DOT&PF representatives, consultants, etc.)?*

- Sean Holland, P.E., State of Alaska, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities – Project Manager
- Galen Jones, P.E., State of Alaska, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities – Project Engineer (part of study)
- Jonathan Tymick, P.E., State of Alaska, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities – Project Engineer (part of study)
- Steve Noble, P.E., PTOE, DOWL – Project Manager
- Renee Whitesell, PTP, DOWL – Transportation Planner
- Sam Tyler, P.E., DOWL – Project Engineer
- Bradly Coy, P.E., PTOE, DOWL – Traffic Engineer
- Rachel Steer, DOWL – Public Involvement
- Katie Conway, DOWL – Public Involvement
- Emily Creely, DOWL – Environmental
- James Potts, P.E., Jacobs – Transportation Engineering Support
- Wende Wilber, AICP, PTP, Kittelson & Associates – Traffic Engineering Support
- Andrew Ooms, P.E., Kittelson & Associates – Traffic Engineering Support

d. *Provide a description of the existing transportation facility within the corridor (if any), including project limits, modes, functional classification, number of lanes, shoulder width, access control and type of surrounding environment (urban vs. rural, residential vs. commercial, etc.)*

- **Corridor:** Seward Highway between Tudor interchange and approximately 20th Avenue through Midtown Anchorage.
- **Project Limits:** Develop the most effective solution to resolve congestion on the Seward Highway through Midtown Anchorage (20th Avenue to Tudor Road).
- **Modes:** Motorized vehicles, freight vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles.
- **Functional Classification:** The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities classifies Seward Highway as an Interstate Roadway and the majority of the crossing roadways (Tudor Road, 36th Avenue, Benson Boulevard and Northern Lights Boulevard) as Other Principal Arterial Roads. The Municipality of Anchorage classifies the Seward Highway as a Freeway and most of the crossing roadways are Major Arterial Roads.

- **Number of Lanes:** The Seward Highway includes three lanes in each direction between Tudor Road and Fireweed Lane (with an additional northbound auxiliary lane between the northbound Tudor on-ramp and the 36th Avenue right-turn lane), four lanes in each direction between 15th Avenue and Fireweed Lane (with the 2,000-foot section north of Chester Creek operating as one-way streets as the corridor separates to continue as the Ingra Street and Gambell Street couplet). There are various right- and left-turn lanes (including some dual left-turn lanes) along the length of the corridor.
- **Shoulder Width:** 0' to 8', dependent on roadway width, marking, and available right-of-way (ROW).
- **Access Control:** Driveway access is limited along much of the Seward Highway, except for a few segments, particularly along the west side of the highway. On the east side of the highway, the only segment with numerous closely-spaced driveways is between Northern Lights Boulevard and Benson Boulevard. On the west, numerous driveways are clustered north of Northern Lights Boulevard, south of Benson Boulevard, and near 15th Avenue.
- **Surrounding Environment**: Urban mixed commercial and residential.

e. *Provide a brief chronology of the planning activities (PEL study) including the year(s) the studies were completed.*

- **Project Management Plan (PMP):** July 2017
- **Project Kick-Off Meeting:** July 2017
- **Scope of Services:** September 2017
- **Public and Agency Involvement Plan:** November 2017
- **Agency Meeting:** January 2018
- **Public Open House #1:** January 2018
- **Concept Development Workshop:** April/May 2018
- **Business and Citizens Advisory Groups Meeting #1:** June 2018
- **Agency/Business/Citizen's Advisory Groups Meeting #2:** July/August 2018
- **Final Existing Conditions Review and Data Collection Report:** August 2018
- **Phase 1 Concept Evaluation:** January 2019
- **Agency/Business/Citizen's Advisory Groups Meeting #3:** February 2019
- **Public Open House #2:** February 2019
- **Agency/Business/Citizen's Advisory Groups Meeting #4:** May 2019
- **Draft Traffic Report:** August 2019
- **Detailed (Phase 2) Concept Evaluation/Draft Preferred Concept:** August 2019
- **Agency/Business/Citizen's Advisory Groups Meeting #5:** September 2019
- **Draft PEL Study Report:** November 2019
- **Public Open House #3:** November 2019
- **30 Day Public Comment Period:** November 2019 to January 2020
- **Final PEL Study Report:** April 2020

f. Are there recent, current, or near future planning studies or projects in the vicinity? What is the relationship of this project to those studies/projects?

Recent Projects:

- **Benson Boulevard – Lois Street to La Touche Street Pavement Preservation (Z567260000):** Pavement preservation of Benson Boulevard between Lois Street and LaTouche Street.
- **Ingra Street and Gambell Street Resurfacing, 5th Avenue to 36th Avenue (Z565570000):** Resurfacing roadway of Ingra Street and Gambell Street between 5th and 36th Avenues.
- **Minnesota Drive Tudor Road to E. 36th Avenue Pavement Preservation (Z585070000):** Pavement preservation of Minnesota Drive between Tudor Road and E. 36th Avenue.
- **A Street Resurfacing: Northern Lights Boulevard to 5th Avenue (Z534810000):** Resurfacing roadway of A Street between Northern Lights Boulevard and 5th Avenue.
- **Tudor Road Overcrossing Emergency Repair (CDRER00525):** Emergency repair of Tudor Road overcrossing following a strike to the bridge deck by an empty dump truck.
- **AMATS: Bicycle Plan Implementation – C Street: 10th Avenue to 40th Avenue:** Implementation of bicycle project as identified in the Bicycle Plan along C Street, between 10th Avenue and 40th Avenue.
- **Anchorage Earthquake Repair Seward Highway (CDRER00500):** Undertake repairs to the Seward Highway pavement surface following the November 30, 2018 earthquake.
- **Seward Highway Reconstruction Dowling Road to Tudor Road (Z508160000):** Reconstruction of the Seward Highway between the Dowling Road interchange and the Tudor Road interchange.

Current Projects:

- **32nd and 33rd Avenue Rehabilitation – Arctic Boulevard to Old Seward Highway (MTP #100):** Rehabilitate 32nd and 33rd Avenue from Arctic Boulevard to Old Seward Highway to collector standards. Project would include nonmotorized improvements and consider adjacent land use.
- **Midtown Corridor Improvements Denali Street Area (MTP #117):** Upgrade Denali Street from Benson Boulevard to Tudor Road and 36th Avenue from A Street to the Old Seward Highway. Project would include nonmotorized improvements and consider adjacent land use.
- **Chester Creek Single Track Trails:** MOA Parks and Recreation project
- **36th Avenue Resurfacing – New Seward Highway to Lake Otis Parkway:** MOA Project
- **Tudor Road/MacInnes Street Signalization:** MOA Project
- **A Street: Northern Lights to 40th Avenue Pavement Preservation (RFP No. 25192032):** DOT&PF Project, Conceptual design in progress
- **Anchorage Areawide Trails Rehabilitation – C Street Pathway:** AMATS Project, Conceptual design in progress
- **HSIP: C Street to Tudor Road:** DOT&PF Project, conceptual design in progress.

Future Projects:

The Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation System (AMATS) identifies the following projects in its draft Metropolitan Plan (MTP) 2040 project list:

MTP#	Project Name	Project Description	Source Document	Relationship to MCR
108	Fireweed Lane Rehabilitation – Spenard Road to Seward Highway	This project would rehabilitate Fireweed Lane from Spenard Road to the Seward Highway and include a road diet. Changing Fireweed from 4 lanes to 3 lanes (2 with a center turn lane). This project would also include non-motorized improvements.	2019-2022 TIP	This project is located within the study area and adjoins the Seward Highway corridor.
115	Midtown Congestion Relief Project – 36th Ave Interchange	Reconstruct the Seward Hwy as a freeway from 20th Ave to Tudor Road which may include interchanges at 36th Ave, Northern Lights Blvd, Benson Blvd, Fireweed Lane, and the addition of frontage roads. Project would include non-motorized improvements and consider adjacent land use.	2035 MTP	This project will implement the PEL study.
116	Midtown Congestion Relief Project – NLB/Benson	Reconstruct the Seward Hwy as a freeway from 20th Ave to Tudor Road which may include interchanges at 36th Ave, Northern Lights Blvd, Benson Blvd, Fireweed Lane, and the addition of frontage roads. Project would include non-motorized improvements and consider adjacent land use.	2035 MTP	This project will implement the PEL study.
130	Seward Highway/Tudor Road Interchange Reconstruction	Reconstruct the Tudor Road Interchange and make necessary safety and capacity improvements. Project would include non-motorized improvements and consider adjacent land use.	2019 DOT&PF	This project will implement the PEL study.
131	Short Term MTP Implementation	Could include the following projects: … Midtown Subarea Transportation Plan, … Transit Supportive Development Corridor Strategic Implementation Plans (Spenard Road, 15th/DeBarr Road, Northern Lights Blvd).	2035 MTP and New Projects	This project provides for the implementation of small projects and plans, including projects within the study area.
200	36th Avenue Access Management – Spenard Road to Denali Street	Access management treatments. This project would consider adjacent land use.	2035 MTP	This project considers access management changes within the study area.
212	Midtown Congestion Relief Project – Chester Creek	Reconstruct the Seward Hwy as a freeway from 20th Ave to Tudor Road which may include interchanges at 36th Ave, Northern Lights Blvd, Benson Blvd, Freweed Lane, and the addition of frontage roads. Project would include non-motorized improvements and consider adjacent land use.	2035 MTP	This project will implement the PEL study.

MTP#	Project Name	Project Description	Source Document	Relationship to MCR
309	Lake Otis Pkwy Reconstruction – Debarr Road to Northern Lights Blvd	Reconstruct and increase capacity of Lake Otis Parkway from Debarr Road to Northern Lights Blvd. Replace bridge over Chester Creek and reconstruct Lake Otis Pkwy/Northern Lights Blvd intersection. Project would include non-motorized improvements and consider adjacent land use.	2035 MTP	This project considers improvements to a transportation corridor parallel to the Seward Highway within the study area.
312	Northern Lights Blvd – Lake Otis Pkwy to Bragaw Street	Extend third eastbound lane from Lake Otis Pkwy to Bragaw Street. May include intersection improvements at both Lake Otis Pkwy and UAA Drive. Project would include non-motorized improvements, replacement of existing pedestrian overcrossing if required, and consider adjacent land use.	2035 MTP	This project considers improvements to a transportation corridor within the study area.
313	Northern Lights/Benson Blvd Access Management – Seward Highway to Minnesota Drive	Add access management and turn restrictions; modify local connections to make adjacent property access to other roads; east-west or north-south access in lieu of direct access from Northern Lights Blvd and Benson Blvd where practical.	AMATS Northern Lights/ Benson Blvd Pedestrian Safety Study	This project considers access management changes within the study area along major arterial roads.
321	Tudor Road Access Management – Seward Highway to Arctic Blvd	Add access management and turn restrictions; modify local connections to make adjacent property access to other roads; east-west or north-south access in lieu of direct access from Tudor Road wherever practical.	2035 MTP	This project considers access management changes within the study area along a major arterial road.
322	Tudor Road Access Management – Seward Highway to Patterson Street	Add access management and turn restrictions; modify local connections to make adjacent property access to other roads; east-west or north-south access in lieu of direct access from Tudor Road wherever practical.	2035 MTP	This project considers access management changes within the study area along a major arterial road.
402	A St Sidewalk/Pathway – 13th Ave to Fireweed Lane	Construct a sidewalk/ pathway on the west side of A St from 13th Ave to Fireweed Lane. Project would consider adjacent land use.	2035 MTP	This project proposes non-motorized facility improvements along a parallel north-south corridor within the study area.
403	A St West Sidewalk – Benson Blvd to 36th Ave	Construct a missing sidewalk on the western side of A St from Benson Blvd to 36th Ave. Project would consider adjacent land use.	2035 MTP	This project proposes non-motorized facility improvements along a parallel north-south corridor within the study area.
404	A St West Sidewalk – Fireweed Lane to Benson Blvd	Construct a missing sidewalk on the western side of A St from Fireweed Lane to Benson Blvd. Project would consider adjacent land use.	2035 MTP	This project proposes non-motorized facility improvements along a parallel north-south corridor within the study area.

MTP#	Project Name	Project Description	Source Document	Relationship to MCR
405	A St Sidewalk/Pathway Study – 13th Ave to Fireweed Lane	Study the feasibility of constructing a sidewalk/ pathway on the west side of A Street from 13th Ave to Fireweed Lane. Project would consider adjacent land use.	New/ 2035 MTP	This project proposes non-motorized facility improvements along a parallel north-south corridor within the study area.
408	Campbell Trail Lighting Construction – Victor Road to Seward Highway	Construct lighting along Campbell Creek Trail from Victor Road to Seward Highway. Project would consider adjacent land use.	2035 MTP	This project proposes non-motorized facility improvements within the study area.
508	Northern Lights Blvd Lane Reduction – Minnesota Drive to Seward Highway	Convert an existing travel lane on Northern Lights Blvd between the Seward Highway and Minnesota Drive to expand the existing sidewalks. Project would consider adjacent land use.	New	This project proposes reconfiguring a major arterial roadway within the study area to provide improved non-motorized facilities.
700	Transit Intersection Signal Priority Improvements	Install bus signal priority at key intersections along frequent routes.	New	This project improves transit facility improvements, which may include facilities within the study area.
706	Transit Centers/ Support Facilities	This project supports an ongoing effort to provide major transit facilities in key areas of the city and major destinations. The Anchorage Comprehensive Plan and 2040 Land Use Plan (LUP) identified neighborhood, town, regional commercial, and city centers that function as focal points for community activities with a mix of retail, residential, and public services and facilities. Anchorage Talks Transit coordinated with the LUP and implemented a frequent bus network along transit supportive development corridors. These corridors should provide pedestrian connections to surrounding neighborhoods and transit. Existing and future facility improvements along these corridors and in areas like *Midtown*, Downtown, U-Med, Dimond Center and Muldoon, are vital to the implementation of these community planning documents.	AMATS TIP	This project supports transit facility improvement, including within the study area. This is specifically referenced in the discussion of existing and future facility improvements along transit supportive development corridors and in areas like Midtown.

2. Methodology Used:

a. <u>What was the scope of the PEL study and the reason for completing it?</u>

The Midtown Congestion Relief (MCR) project corridor is defined as the Seward Highway from the Tudor Road interchange to approximately the 20th Avenue intersection through Midtown Anchorage. DOT&PF is seeking to extend the controlled access portion of the Seward Highway through some of the busiest intersections in the state, including 36th Avenue, Benson Boulevard, Northern Lights Boulevard and Fireweed Lane.

The population of Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough has grown steadily over the last several years, with an average growth rate of between 1.3 percent and 2.3 percent respectively each year between 1997 and 2013[1]. This has created corresponding increases in levels of traffic on surface transportation facilities, particularly the Glenn Highway and Seward Highway. The Municipality of Anchorage's (MOA) Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan envisions continued population growth in the Anchorage Bowl, with a healthy yet moderate forecast annual average population growth rate of 0.8 percent, and an employment growth rate of 0.9 percent envisioned between 2015 and 2040[2]. This forecast would yield as many as 47,000 additional people and 21,000 additional households in the Anchorage Bowl. This forecast is an increase of approximately 15-20 percent more traffic on Anchorage's arterial street network, which is already strained with congestion along several network segments and intersections during peak periods.

To better accommodate the existing traffic and forecasted growth, the MOA 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan update (2035 MTP) envisions road improvements to connect the Glenn and Seward Highways[3]. The MOA is currently developing a year 2040 MTP update, which in its draft list of projects again provides for connecting the Glenn and Seward Highways as a needed capacity improvement for surface transportation in the Anchorage Bowl. The Glenn to Seward connection will result in traffic moving from other congested roads in the Anchorage network, and will double the volume of traffic on the Seward Highway in the next 20 to 30 years. Failure to complete this connection would require much more expensive and disruptive impacts/improvements to the alternative corridors.

Congestion at the intersection of Seward Highway and 36th Avenue creates approximately 250 driver hours of delay every weekday afternoon, particularly at the signalized intersections of 36th Avenue, Benson Boulevard, Northern Lights Boulevard and Fireweed

[1] https://www.muni.org/Departments/OCPD/Planning/AMATS/Documents/CMP/2016/Status_of_System_22216.pdf, Accessed 8/23/19.

[2] http://www.muni.org/Departments/OCPD/Planning/Publications/Documents/Anchorage%202040%20Land%20Use%20Plan/Anchorage%202040%20LUP-Section1.pdf, Accessed 8/23/19.

[3] https://www.muni.org/Departments/OCPD/Planning/AMATS/2035%20MTP/2035_MTP.pdf, Accessed 8/23/19.

Lane. Between 2016 and 2018, the study area had three of the top eight highest volume intersections in the Anchorage Bowl[4].

Safety is a key consideration along this corridor. Between 2016 and 2018, the study area had three of the top ten most accident-prone intersections, and three of the top ten highest severity crash intersections[5]. In addition to roadway characteristics, the facilities for non-motorized transportation (walking and bicycling) are inadequate in the study area. Facilities are undersized, in relatively poor condition, and not compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requirements. In particular, the north/south pedestrian corridors are not continuous, all pedestrian crossings are at-grade with traffic and require the use of signalized crossings, and traffic crossings are 7-9 lanes wide.

The Planning and Environmental Linkages study considers solutions to improve traffic operations, motorized and non-motorized facilities, with a goal of eliminating at-grade turning conflicts and greatly improving safety on this corridor.

The project contributes to the State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' Mission to *"Keep Alaska moving through service and infrastructure"* by reducing injuries and property damage and by improving the mobility of people and goods.

The MCR Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study established a shared corridor vision and goals, garnered public and agency concurrence on the scope of individual projects, and identified environmental concerns in anticipation of environmental documentation efforts. The outcome of the PEL study will be a planning document that identifies a logical build-out plan with several distinct projects that each have a defined purpose and need, logical termini, and independent utility. This effort is state funded, but follows the federal process in anticipation of federal funding for project implementation.

b. Did you use NEPA-like language? Why or why not?

The PEL study did use NEPA-like language, but avoided the use of the terms "purpose" and "need", and "alternatives" at the concept development level to avoid confusion in the future as the planning product is incorporated into the NEPA process. The terms "purpose" and "need" is used only when specific projects are defined to enable funding, design and permitting for the implementation of the preferred corridor build-out to be implemented.

c. What were the actual terms used and how did you define them? (Provide examples or list)

Specific terms used, and the reasons for their use are:

[4] Municipality of Anchorage Annual Traffic Report, 2016, 2017, and 2018.

[5] Ibid.

- **Study:** This term includes all planning-level activities conducted in support of the PEL process before the environmental document and the design process is initiated for the first project forwarded from the PEL.

- **Vision:** The study vision articulates a shared aspiration for corridor function and operations. It reflects agency, stakeholder, DOT&PF and Municipality values and input.

- **Goals:** Study goals describe how the corridor vision will be achieved. Goals reference problems the study intends to address and include safety, mobility and connectivity, access, and environmental impacts.

- **Project (action/no action):** This term references design and construction efforts nominated, programmed or funding through the DOT&PF project development process. One or multiple projects may be forwarded as a result of recommendations from the PEL study.

- **Improvement Concepts:** Proposed projects sharing common operational characteristics, locations, or other features will be grouped together and discussed collectively as improvement concepts in the PEL study report.

- **Screening Criteria:** A two-phase process that guided concept refinement. Phase 1 screening provided a high-level analysis of the initial concepts to determine their ability to meet the corridor vision and goals. It primarily involved qualitative analyses intended to identify fatal flaws early in the concept development process, so those concepts could be eliminated. Phase 2 screening used qualitative (or measurable) screening criteria, intended to identify the concept(s) that best achieve the study's vision of improving safety and mobility for all users of the Seward Highway while enhancing east-west multi-modal safety, connectivity, and access for Midtown Anchorage.

- **Potentially Affected Resources:** Potentially affected resources considered include land use, users, socioeconomics, special land use designations, historic and cultural resources, contaminated sites, waterbodies and water quality, floodplains, wetlands, special status species, fish and wildlife, invasive species, noise and air quality.

d. <u>How do you see these terms being used in NEPA documents?</u>

It is envisioned that subsequent NEPA documents for any project will cite the PEL study vision and goals statement and the project-specific purpose and need statement articulated in the PEL study. It is also envisioned that the concept analysis in the PEL study will be used to provide context and background for alternatives analysis in accordance with FHWA Final Rule 81 FR 34049. Additionally, information presented in the Environmental Resources section will be used to document affected environment and the environmental consequences section of subsequent NEPA documents.

e. *What were the key steps and coordination points in the PEL decision-making process? Who were the decision-makers and who else participated in those key steps? For example, for the corridor vision, the decision was made by DOT&PF, a municipality or other local agency, with buy-in from FHWA, the USACE, and USFWS and other resource/regulatory agencies.*

Final Rule 81 FR 34049 eliminated the need for duplicative approval of agencies and replaced it with demonstrating that the planning product was conducted pursuant to Federal law. This PEL process was conducted pursuant to Federal law.

f. *How should the PEL information be presented in NEPA?*

The PEL study will be cited as an appendix for environmental documents, particularly in sections outlining purpose and need, alternatives analysis, and affected environment.

3. Agency Coordination:

a. *Provide a synopsis of coordination with federal, tribal, state and local environmental regulatory and resource agencies. Describe their level of participation and how you coordinated with them.*

An agency coordination meeting was held in January 2018 to understand specific resource issues. Representatives from DOT&PF, Federal Highways Administration, Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) Metropolitan Planning Organization, United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation were invited to participate, and representatives attended from all the organizations except USACE and EPA.

Representatives were invited to continue participation in the project as part of an Agency Advisory Group that has met regularly throughout the PEL study process, and has contributed to and provided feedback on the concept development and screening process. It is expected that the agencies will provide feedback on the draft preferred concept(s) as part of the 30-day comment period on the draft PEL study report. Further information on engagements with agencies is provided in Section 3 and Appendix 3 of the PEL Study Report.

b. *What transportation agencies (e.g. municipal agencies or ARRC) did you coordinate with or were involved during the PEL study?*

Representatives from the MOA and AMATS were active participants in the initial agency coordination meeting and subsequent meetings of the Agency Advisory Committee. Further information on engagements with agencies is provided in Section 3 and Appendix 3 of the PEL Study Report.

c. What steps will need to be taken with each agency during NEPA scoping?

For NEPA project documentation, agencies with jurisdiction over resources will be identified based on the Environmental Resources section of the PEL Study Report. Scoping information, including a brief description of the project, draft purpose and need statement, project limits and identification of resources will be sent to each agency representative. Each agency will have 30 days to provide feedback and, based on the scope of the project, an agency meeting may be held.

4. Public Coordination:

a. Provide a synopsis of your coordination efforts with the public and stakeholders.

Refer to Section 3.0 of the PEL Study Report.

5. Purpose and Need for the PEL Study:

a. What was the scope of the PEL Study and the reason for completing it?

The scope of the PEL Study was to consider transportation improvements to the MCR project corridor, defined as the Seward Highway from the Tudor Road interchange to approximately the 20th Avenue intersection through Midtown Anchorage. DOT&PF sought to extend the controlled access portion of the Seward Highway through some of the busiest intersections in the state, including 36th Avenue, Benson Boulevard, Northern Lights Boulevard, and Fireweed Lane.

The reason for completing the PEL Study was acknowledgement that traffic along this corridor is expected to roughly double in the next twenty to thirty years because of forecast population increases, corresponding increases in the level of traffic on the surface transportation network, and roading improvements to connect the Glenn and Seward Highways. Without dramatic improvements, congestion will significantly increase in the Midtown Region, and failure to complete this connection would require much more expensive and disruptive impacts/improvements to the alternative corridors. At the commencement of the study, DOT&PF estimated the congestion at 36th Avenue currently creates approximately 250 driver hours of delay every weekday afternoon, particularly at the signalized intersections of 36th Avenue, Benson Boulevard, Northern Lights Boulevard and Fireweed Lane. Between 2016 and 2018, the study area had three of the top eight highest volume intersections in the Anchorage Bowl[6].

Safety is a key consideration along this corridor. Between 2016 and 2018, the study area had three of the top ten most accident-prone intersections, and three of the top ten highest severity crash intersections[7]. In addition to roadway characteristics, the facilities for non-motorized transportation (walking and bicycling) are inadequate in the study area. Facilities

[6] Municipality of Anchorage Annual Traffic Report, 2016, 2017, and 2018.

[7] Ibid.

are undersized, in relatively poor condition, and not compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requirements. In particular, the north/south pedestrian corridors are not continuous, all pedestrian crossings are at-grade with traffic and require the use of signalized crossings, and traffic crossings are 7-9 lanes wide.

DOT&PF sought a PEL study to consider surface transportation solutions to improve traffic operations, motorized and non-motorized facilities, with a goal of eliminating at-grade turning conflicts and greatly improving safety on the corridor.

b. Provide the purpose and need statement, or the corridor vision and transportation goals and objectives to realize that vision.

The corridor vision is *"Improve safety and mobility for all users on the Seward Highway while enhancing east-west multimodal, safety, connectivity, and access for Midtown Anchorage."*

The transportation goals are:

- Safety
  - Improve safety for all users by reducing the frequency and severity of crashes, particularly at intersections.
- Mobility and Connectivity
  - Reduce traffic congestion of the Seward Highway and cross streets.
  - Improve connections for motorized and nonmotorized users along and across the Seward Highway corridor.
- Access
  - Maintain access to adjacent land uses and improve access across the corridor for all travel modes.
- Environmental
  - Minimize impacts to residents, businesses, other stakeholders and the natural environment.

c. What steps will need to be taken during the NEPA process to make this a project-level purpose and need statement?

Draft purpose and need statements have been developed for relevant projects recommended from the PEL study. These mirror the corridor vision and goals outlined in the PEL study, but have been tailored to the selected project to ensure project alternatives are evaluated based on their ability to meet the project purpose and need. The draft project need statement has been developed to clearly outline the deficiencies the project will address. The draft project purpose statement clearly states how the project will address deficiencies and mirrors the goals outlined in the PEL study.

6. Range of Alternatives:

Planning teams need to be cautious during the alternative screen process; alternative screening should focus on purpose and need/corridor vision, fatal flaw analysis, and possibly mode selection. This may help minimize problems during discussions with resource agencies. Alternatives that have fatal flaws or do not meet the purpose and need/corridor vision will not be considered reasonable alternatives, even if they reduce impacts to a particular resource. Detail the range of alternatives considered, screening criteria, and screening process, including:

a. What types of alternatives were looked at? (Provide a one or two sentence summary and reference document.)

A total of ten alternative improvement concepts, including one intermediate concept that could provide a staged approach to the larger concepts were considered as part of the PEL study. Initially, nine concepts were considered, divided into one-way frontage road concepts and two-way frontage road concepts, and a first phase of concept screening was applied to dismiss concepts that had fatal flaws or did not meet the vision and goals of the PEL study. Following several stakeholder and public meetings, four concepts (including the intermediate concept) were forwarded to a second phase of concept screening and a further alternative improvement concept was developed in response to stakeholder and public feedback. One of the concepts forwarded was deemed to be fatally flawed as part of the ongoing concept development and refinement process, and the intermediate concept was incorporated into the three remaining concepts. These three concepts were the subject of the second phase of screening and the recommended preferred concept comprises two of the concepts (Multi-Interchange Concept, Variant 1 – Median U-Turn and Variant 2 – Loop Ramp). The improvement concepts are discussed in detail in Section 7 of the PEL Study Report, and the Concept Development and Evaluation process is described in detail in Section 8 of the PEL Study Report.

b. How did you select the screening criteria and screening process?

A two-phase screening process was used, and this was selected to enable concepts that were clearly contrary to the PEL Study's vision and goals to be dismissed early, prior to the application of more detailed, quantitative screening criteria.

The purpose of Phase 1 screening was to identify those concepts with the potential to meet the vision and goals of the study. The screening analysis performed during Phase 1 was a high level, pass/fail type analysis intended to eliminate concepts that obviously do not meet the vision and goals of the study. Each of the initial concepts was considered using a range of questions tied to the vision and goals, and a qualitative assessment was made about how well the concept performed in relation to each question.

Phase 2 screening focused on identified deficiencies and needs and included several implementation criteria based on the ability for the concept to be implemented using a project or multiple projects with independent purpose and need and logical termini, the maintenance burden associated with each concept, and the planning-level cost estimate. The criteria were tied to the study vision and goals, and each concept was scored in relation to how well it performed against each of the evaluation criteria.

Further information on concept screening and results is included in Section 6 and Appendices 7 and 8 of the PEL Study Report.

c. *For alternative(s) that were screened out, briefly summarize the reasons for eliminating the alternative(s). (During the initial screenings, this generally will focus on fatal flaws.)*

- **Concept A:** Concept A was a one-way frontage road concept. The concept did not pass the Phase 1 screening because of significant forecast traffic volumes on the frontage roads relocated from 36th Avenue. Additionally, the two-way section of Benson and Northern Lights Boulevards would significantly increase traffic on Fireweed Lane and Tudor Road, increasing volumes and safety risks. It would also create access challenges along arterial roadways, particularly along Northern Lights Boulevard, which would generate adverse effects on adjoining land uses. In addition, nonmotorized transportation using the local street network would be less comfortable because of elevated traffic volumes, and street crossings would potentially be more challenging. On this basis, the concept was deemed to not meet the vision and goals of the PEL study and dismissed from further consideration.
- **Concept C1:** Concept C1 passed through the Phase 1 screening. However, during the concept refinement process it was determined that challenges associated with the creation of three closely-spaced intersections along 36th Avenue were unable to be easily resolved in this concept, resulting in insurmountable congestion challenges. The concept was therefore deemed to be “fatally flawed” and did not advance to Phase 2 screening.
- **Concept D:** Concept D “borrowed” the diverging diamond interchange format to cross the limbs of the Seward Highway through Midtown, with the diverge/merge points located immediately to the north of the Tudor Road intersection and the Fireweed Lane intersection. Early challenges were identified with this concept associated with congestion generated from right-turn movements, which meant the concept was deemed “fatally flawed” prior to Phase 1 screening.
- **Concept E:** Concept E converted Old Seward Highway into a two-lane frontage road for local access and dedicated the Seward Highway corridor to a high mobility freeway corridor. The concept duplicated significant traffic volumes currently experienced on the Seward Highway onto the Old Seward Highway corridor, particularly between Benson Boulevard and 36th Avenue, which would result in high levels of traffic congestion and bottlenecks. Lower traffic volumes were also forecast on the freeway section than on the frontage roads, which is contrary to best practices for safety. The concept also generated new challenges for nonmotorized traffic along and across Old Seward Highway without necessarily resolving existing nonmotorized connection challenges adjacent to the Seward Highway, particularly between Benson Boulevard and 36th Avenue. On this basis, the concept was deemed to not meet the vision and goals of the PEL Study and dismissed from further consideration.
- **Concept F:** Concept F created a short two-way frontage road “business loop” parallel to a Seward Highway freeway for local access. The two-way frontage road was forecast to experience similar volumes to the existing Seward Highway, and bottlenecks are likely at the 36th Avenue intersection. Lower traffic volumes were also forecast on the freeway section than on the frontage roads, which is contrary to best practices for safety. The concept would require a single build, which would be prohibitively expensive owing to

the need to create a depressed or elevated freeway. On this basis, the concept was deemed to not meet the vision and goals of the PEL Study and dismissed from further consideration.

- **Concept G:** Concept G created a longer two-way frontage road parallel to a Seward Highway freeway for local access. The two-way frontage road was forecast to experience similar volumes to the existing Seward Highway, and bottlenecks are likely at the 36th Avenue intersection. Lower traffic volumes were also forecast on the freeway section than on the frontage roads, which is contrary to best practices for safety. On this basis, the concept was deemed to not meet the vision and goals of the PEL Study and dismissed from further consideration.

d. Which alternatives should be brought forward into NEPA and why?

The Multi-Interchange Concept is recommended as the corridor alternative that performs most strongly in delivering the corridor vision and goals. There are two variants that can be applied to successfully achieve the concept – Variant 1 (Median U-Turn), and Variant 2 – (Loop Ramp). These variants represent different ways of delivering transportation improvements at the intersection of 36th Avenue and Seward Highway.

e. Did the public, stakeholders, and agencies have an opportunity to comment during this process?

The public, stakeholders and agencies had several opportunities to comment on the concept evaluation process through an interactive project website, public open house meetings, the agency, business, and citizens advisory group meetings, community council meetings and other engagements. Further information on public involvement in the PEL study process and comments received are detailed in Section 3 and Appendix 3 of the PEL Study Report.

f. Were there unresolved issues with the public, stakeholders, and/or agencies?

Representatives from the Municipality of Anchorage raised concerns about creating a large median space between the divided highways as part of the transportation improvements proposed in two projects, known as:

- Seward Highway/36th Avenue Intersection Improvements
- Seward Highway/ Benson Boulevard, Northern Lights Boulevard, and Fireweed Lane Intersection Improvements.

Their concerns related to the prospect of the median space being left vacant for several years, and the impact this may have on adjoining land uses in Midtown. Concerns were also raised about whether there would be an ability to exclude undesirable land uses from the median space, such as homeless camps. The representatives also raised concerns about accommodating pedestrian crossings against left-hand turns from the frontage road network.

- A project titled “Complete Streets, Aesthetic Improvements and Community Placemaking” is proposed to help address the concerns. This project seeks to enable enhancements to occur for the above projects through working with the community to identify improvements to support facilities that enable safe access for all users, including

pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. It will include initiatives for stakeholders and the community to collectively identify and implement initiatives that strengthen the connection between people and the public realm. This will support the Anchorage Bowl 2040 Land Use Plan's goal to create a city center in Midtown that is a thriving mixed-use environment that enables business growth. This approach will also enable the identification of initiatives to improve the aesthetic appearance of other projects identified for implementation, to ensure a clear design aesthetic is identified early in the implementation of corridor improvements and retained throughout the implementation of projects

7. Planning Assumptions and Analytical Methods:

a. What is the forecast year used in the PEL study?

Year 2048. An intermediate forecast year of 2028 was also used to evaluate the intermediate build concepts, known as Projects 2 and 3. These projects provide short- to medium-term transportation improvements and accommodate 2028 forecast traffic volumes.

b. What method was used for forecasting traffic volumes?

The AMATS Travel Demand Model developed for the 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and updated for the Anchorage Bowl 2040 Land Use Plan was used as a basis for traffic analysis. The model was supplemented with traffic counts, other traffic data and Bluetooth origin-destination data to increase the level of granularity of traffic conditions within the MCR project corridor and study area.

c. Are the planning assumptions and the corridor vision/purpose and need statement consistent with each other and with the long-range transportation plan? Are the assumptions still valid?

The corridor vision and goals are consistent with the Federal transportation planning factors, the State of Alaska Long-Range Transportation Plan and the AMATS Long-Range Transportation Plan. The highest priority projects, Projects 2 and 3 have been identified jointly for implementation in the short term in the draft 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

d. What were the future year policy and/or data assumptions used in the transportation planning process related to land use, economic development, transportation costs, and network expansion?

The corridor study assumed a forecast year of 2048. This was to ensure consistency with the AMATS Travel Demand Model, the Long-Range Transportation Plan and to fulfil the purpose of the PEL Study in accommodating forecast traffic increases in the next 20 to 30 years. The Travel Demand Model has been updated to be consistent with the Anchorage Bowl 2040 Land Use Plan, which provides for a forecast population growth rate of 0.8 percent, and an employment growth rate of 0.9 percent, between 2015 and 2040.

8. Environmental Resources

a. In the PEL study, at what level of detail was the resource reviewed and what was the method of review?

An Existing Conditions and Data Collection Report was prepared that provided a baseline review to confirm the presence or absence of environmental resources typically assessed under FHWA guidelines. Resources considered were socioeconomic effects and environmental justice, special land use designations including Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) properties, historical and cultural resources, waterbodies, water quality and floodplains, wetlands and vegetation, federally listed threatened and endangered species, fish and wildlife, invasive species, land use and transportation infrastructure, contaminated sites, noise, air quality, visual effects, and utilities. The concept evaluation process evaluated the potential effects from concepts based on existing conditions. It identified permitting needs and required consultations associated with each concept. The results were summarized in Section 5.4 of the PEL Study Report.

b. Is this resource present in the area and what is the existing environmental condition for this resource?

Refer to the Environmental Resources and Preliminary Effects Analysis chapter, Section 8 of the Study Report and the Existing Conditions Review and Data Collection Report attached as Appendix 2 to the Study Report.

c. What are the issues that need to be considered during NEPA, including potential resource impacts and potential mitigation requirements (if known)?

No permits or authorizations are required as part of the PEL process. The following permits and authorizations are anticipated to be required for projects identified in the preferred concept(s):

- CSS Process for Transportation Projects and Approvals (MOA)
- Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit (DEC)
- Clean Air Act 404 permit/401 water quality certification (USACE)
- Flood Hazard Permit (MOA)
- NHPA Section 106 Consultation (SHPO)
- Department of Transportation Section 4(f) Determination (MOA/DOT&PF)
- Land and Water Conservation Fund Act Section 6(f) Determination (ADNR/DOT&PF).

d. How will the planning data provided need to be supplemented during NEPA?

Environmental information will require update to address any regulatory changes during the environmental documentation process. It will also need to consider whether environmental conditions have changed on the ground. Once project limits have been defined, a more detailed analysis of effects will occur.

9. List environmental resources you are aware of that were not reviewed in the PEL study and why. Indicate whether or not they will need to be reviewed in NEPA and explain why.

The PEL Study considered all environmental resources that are typically assessed under FHWA Guidelines. It is not envisioned that additional environmental resources will need to be reviewed in NEPA.

10. Were cumulative impacts considered in the PEL study? If yes, provide the information or reference where the analysis can be found.

A high-level review of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future impacts was completed as part of the PEL Study. A summary of the cumulative impacts review is provided in Sections 8.2 and 7.3 of the PEL Study Report.

11. Describe any mitigation strategies discussed at the planning level that should be analyzed during NEPA.

No specific mitigation strategies were discussed as part of the PEL Study Report.

12. What needs to be done during NEPA to make information from the PEL study available to the agencies and the public? Are there PEL study products that can be used or provided to agencies or the public during the NEPA scoping process?

In accordance with Final Rule 81 FR 34049 the PEL study can use and rely on planning analyses, studies, decisions, or other information for the project development and environmental review of transportation projects. The information from the PEL Study can either be incorporated by reference into the environmental review, or cited as an Appendix to the NEPA analysis, which will ensure information is available to the agencies and public.

13. Are there any other issues a future project team should be aware of?

a. Examples: Controversy, utility problems, access or ROW issues, encroachments into ROW, problematic land owners and/or groups, contact information for stakeholders, special or unique resources in the area, etc.

- Representatives from the Municipality of Anchorage raised concerns about creating a large median space between the divided highways as part of the transportation improvements proposed in two, as detailed in the response to question 6(f) of this questionnaire. A project is proposed to address these concerns.
- ROW acquisition, both full and partial, will be required to achieve the preferred improvement concept.
- Contact information for stakeholders and interested members of the public can be made available to a future project team.