



## Fairbanks North Star Borough Comprehensive Roads Plan

### Steering Committee (SC) Meeting #2 – NOTES

September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021; 3:30 – 5:30 pm

#### Participants

- Steering Committee Members:

#### Transportation

- Jackson Fox, FAST Planning
- Randi Bailey, DOT&PF

#### Local Government

- Randy Pitney, FNSB Platting Board
- Bill Butler, City of North Pole
- Robert Pristash, Fairbanks City Engineer
- Jerry Colp, City of Fairbanks

#### Road Service Area

- Sig Strandberg, Mountain View RSA

#### Surveyor

- Steve Lowry, 3 Tier Alaska

#### Fire/EMS

- Chief Scott Learned, Steese Fire Department

#### State

- Bruce Sackinger, Department of Natural Resources

#### Military

- Alexa Greene, Eielson Air Force Base

- FNSB Technical Staff:

- Brittany Smart, Mayor's Office (Co-Project Manager)
- Kellen Spillman, Community Planning Department (Co-Project Manager)
- Melissa Kellner, Community Planning Department
- Billy Cardentey, FNSB Platting Officer
- Daniel Welch, FNSB Platting Officer
- Bryant Wright, FNSB Parks and Recreation

- Floyd Sheesley, FNSB Public Works
- Project Consultants:
  - PDC Engineers: Patrick Cotter (Contractor Project Manager), Natalie Lyon
  - Agnew::Beck Consulting: Shelly Wade (Public Involvement Lead), Aubrey Wieber

## Summary of Discussion by Topic and Slide Number

### ***Project Overview and Purpose – Slides 1-13***

- The project team reviewed the project purpose and progress made since the committee last convened in April 2021.
- The project team reviewed the importance of the 1991 Roads Plan and how it will inform the updated plan. The team also discussed tools the team will use to develop the updated plan that were not available during the process to develop the 1991 Plan.
- The project is in the summer/fall 2021 phase of the planning process, gathering public input on what the plan should include to help inform the draft plan. In the winter, the project team will begin drafting the plan, and then finalize the plan in the spring 2022.
- The purpose of the 9/30/21 Steering Committee is to discuss preliminary ideas for the vision and goals for the plan. In January 2022, the Steering Committee will review the functional classifications, strategies, and maps components of the plan. In March, the Steering Committee will have a final meeting to go over the draft plan before it goes out for public review.
- Since April, there has been extensive public engagement, including a survey, a comment map, a virtual Open House, and public outreach at community events, such as Golden Days Street Fair, the Midnight Sun Festival, and the Tanana State Fair.
- In March/April 2022, we will hold public meetings to go over the draft plan.

### ***Existing FNSB Transportation-Focused Goals – Slides 14-22***

- We are not starting this process from scratch. Part of the background work on this draft plan is review of other Borough guiding documents to identify existing transportation goals.
- Among these various plans are common themes that will guide goals for the updated Roads Plan.
- The goals, vision, and strategies of the 1991 plan have stood the test of time.
  - One key element of the 1991 plan is protecting private property rights, which will remain in the updated plan.
  - A starting point for the Steering Committee is to review the 1991 plan policies to weigh in on how much they should be reflected in the updated plan.
    - Access/Rights of Way: Ensuring access to while preserving rights of way for trails and existing roads.

- Traffic Circulation: Designing roads to discourage through traffic on roads providing direct access to residential lots
  - Aesthetics: The policy on preserving vegetation in the right of way has been fully implemented.
  - Environment: Evaluate proposed road locations to ensure there is no construction on environmentally sensitive areas.
  - Community Impact: Discourage roadway alignment that divides neighborhoods.
  - Safety: Pedestrian safety was a huge emphasis of the 1991 Plan.
  - All these aspects of the 1991 Plan are a starting point for the plan update.
- 2006 Comprehensive Plan:
    - This plan focuses on multi-modal transportation that anticipates future growth.
  - 2019 Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan:
    - This plan focused on safety, access, nonmotorized transportation, maintaining the regional freight system, maintaining roads for current use and future growth, developing an interconnected trail network, and ensuring the trail system is environmentally friendly.
  - FMATS Metropolitan Plan Goals:
    - Integrating transportation with other systems for smart growth.
    - Managing a connected, multi-modal transportation system.
  - 2016 FNSB Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy:
    - Support expansion of military bases.
    - Increase investment in infrastructure.
  - The plans identified above have many shared transportation goals, including maintaining current infrastructure and building for growth, improving connections, creating efficiencies, a multi-modal system and improving safety. These plans provide a depth of information, goals and strategies to inform the updated Roads Plan.

### **Community Input to Date – Slides 23-36**

- To date, we have had more than 140 people take the survey.
  - Of those, 58% live in an RSA, 33% are 65 and older and 73% are 45 and older. This is not very representative of the borough, as participation skews older than the general population.
- Overall, 54% of participants say the roads are safe and well-connected. However, people say the overall borough roads are safer and better-connected than their local/neighborhood roads.

- Participants report they are very satisfied with the number of lanes, traffic flow, width of lanes and ways to access local businesses.
- Participants are less satisfied with multiple ways to access homes, neighborhoods, and the width of shoulders.
- By far, the top desired characteristic in a road is road maintenance (i.e., well-maintained).
  - Other top characteristics are width of shoulders, quality of road materials and traffic flow.
- The survey also asks participants to share feedback on what is a good road and what is a poor road. Thus far, most examples people have given are state versus local roads. State roads is not the focus of this project, but a good reminder of education needed on this topic.
- As of September 30, 164 comments have been submitted on the comment map.
  - Currently, there is not significant overlap in the comments, however there were emerging high-level themes, such as increased bicycle and pedestrian pathways, more road maintenance and use of higher-quality road materials.
  - While some comments are on topics outside of the scope of our updated Roads Plan, there are parallel planning efforts happening (e.g., Trails Plan). The project team will continue to track the outcomes of these plans to ensure alignment among FNSB plans.
- Some survey and comment map participants propose many connector roads, but also oppose proposed connections from the 1991 Plan.

### ***Emerging Vision and Goals – Slides 37-42***

- Viewing past and current related plans, the project team has developed a preliminary vision and goals for the Roads Plan Update but need more feedback from the Steering Committee.
- As a comparison, the project team is reviewing the Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan and FNSB Comprehensive Plan visions, which specifically state protections for personal freedoms and private property rights.

### ***Discussion:***

- **Jackson Fox** – The baseline question about this roads plan seems to be – what is your version of a safe and well-connected roads system? Overwhelmingly, people are concerned about maintenance. We have a lot of orphan roads that are outside of RSAs. I think tackling that issue head on should be part of the vision and goals of this plan. If you have poor maintenance or no maintenance, you don't have safe or efficient access to your home. You don't have easy access for heating fuel or emergency responders. We should be addressing their number one concern.
- **Steve Lowry** – I think Jackson had a really good point. The more roads we do build should be countered against the cost of maintenance. It's great to have a road network that goes everywhere, but the other side of that coin is maintenance and environmental impact. When we talk about building a bunch of roads, that's great, but it comes with consequences. We are in an area where roads will fall apart. This happened with the Steese Highway. It comes down to the number of roads

and the mileage. It doesn't matter how well you make them, they will fall apart, and that costs a lot of money.

- **Kellen Spillman** – Coordination between trails and road corridors.
- **Randy Pitney** – The roads need to be built to standards to begin with. When we have built them minimally, they fell apart quickly.
- **Bill Butler** – I keep hearing about how the Interior and all of Alaska must deal with climate change in regard to road maintenance.
- **Scott Learned** – You can build all the roads in the world, but if they aren't maintained, we (Fire/EMS) can get into them. This happened last year during the Easter storm. That was a freak storm, but access is our biggest issue. A lot of these places don't have hydrants, so we need to truck in large amounts of water. Having large turnarounds to get in and out is a key to emergency access.
- **Randi Bailey** – It does come down to maintenance.
- **Sig Strandberg** – The existing roads were built cheaply. They are still being used but they blow out frequently. It's more than just coming in and doing maintenance. We need to reconstruct some of these roads, so how do you fund reconstruction to a maintainable standard. These are in multiple service areas, and service areas resist adding some of these new roads to their area, because it's a drain on money to maintain them. The larger picture needs to include a funding mechanism to ensure these roads, which are important to neighborhoods and residents, are maintained. A mill rate will not generate enough money to address these problems.
- **Daniel Welch** – A huge goal is to have a prioritization scheme to rank areas or projects based on need. Having data helps people like me focus on the areas of biggest need. If we have just one giant road project, we could end up focusing on a project or area that actually isn't of high need. If we don't have prioritization, we just end up hoping the roads plan was correct in saying an area is important.
- **Bryant Wright** – We are running into similar issues as Daniel mentioned in our trails plan. We need more detail and precision in the projects we are proposing. Thankfully, we have a parallel land suitability analysis project. We are anticipating where there could be more development interest in the near future and trying to put more emphasis on those areas. For trails, we are looking more at Borough property where we have more flexibility. If there were more precise ideas or times spent in the developable areas (North Pole, Salcha), that would be helpful. When it came to connections, we asked what we are connecting to and from. Why are those connections important? Connecting residential areas to each other, to schools, parks, commerce, open spaces – those are places to want to connect to and from. Also, it's important to show efficiency. Redundancy is important in densely populated areas for emergency response. We often focus on the concepts and think about maintenance later, but the public doesn't care about the concept. They want the roads to work well. We don't always have the chance to discuss this, so addressing maintenance in goals forces us to address that. We should also look at identifying non-traditional transportation routes.
- **Kellen Spillman** – Since the 1991 Plan, we have had a lot of military expansion. We need to take into account the military mission when we consider roads in direct proximity to the bases. The 1991 Plan included a road by Ft. Wainwright, but it is now the only area by the base that hasn't been developed, and a road there would likely spur development.

- **Steve Lowry** – Most people are not familiar with this comprehensive roads plan. I think it's a hard sell for a lot of people. If you are talking about major collectors and through-roads, the Borough should look at partnering with developers. Placing the burden of a major collector on a developer is a big deal. It costs a lot of money and a big chunk of land that could otherwise be developed. The local roads within the subdivisions is one thing, they understand that. The bigger issue is roads that are going to go through existing neighborhoods or eventually be connected. Holding developers' feet to the fire to dedicate these ignores their private property rights.
- As shared by **Gary Newman (10/10/21)** via email after reviewing the 9/30/21 SC meeting recording:
  1. **Upgrade and ensure maintenance of existing roads including 4. below.** I heard this loud and clear from others.
  2. Encourage collaboration on major/minor collectors with FNSB RSAs and State of Alaska DOT (example Roland Road, which would require eminent domain to widen in some areas).
  3. Any required dedication through new subdivisions beyond must consider types of land use, zoning, topography, soils and feasibility.
  4. A serious analysis of likely anticipated impacts from climate change. (see 3. above).
  5. Partnership in local/regional zoning efforts to minimize future conflicts and establish acceptable uses for landowners (e.g., mining development adjacent to residential areas like Ester, Amanita) where road extensions would create conflicts.
  6. Would like to know more about RSA Plan in progress.
  7. FNSB needs to have road powers. Expectations of 1. above are unrealistic without this. (My 10 year future desire).
  8. Integration with trails plan and recreational/natural areas.
  9. Encourage DOT to not go overboard with multiple creative intersection designs that require more maintenance without more funding and confusing for a community with a lot of transient users (e.g., military).
  10. Clean up unnecessary past dedications by making easement vacations easier, especially where prior dedications were required from the previous road plan but are no longer appropriate.
  11. Ensure appropriate easements for utilities.
  12. Change the name of 'orphan' roads. It sounds pejorative. And just because a road is not in a service area does not mean it is substandard. Title 17 should allow for methodologies of accepting those roads for limited development.
  13. Flexibility of mapped future corridors with alternatives that generally meet the standards of functionality.
  14. The 1991 Comp Road Plan map on the website showing Esro to Tungsten and Amanita Roads extensions is a great example of roads that are not needed and are undevelopable due to poor

ground, going through GCI's major earth station for Fairbanks and conflicting land uses (residential and mining).

*FNSB In the News Activity:* 10 years out, what is the ideal outcome of this roads plan? The plan has been successfully implemented – what do the headlines in the Daily News-Miner, or some other source, read?

- **Bryant Wright** – “Wait times are shorter than they ever have been and mechanics are overstocked on ball joints.”
- **Sig Strandberg** – Some of these roads that have been in existence for a long time have been improved. Road construction has adequate drainage, which has enhanced the value of adjoining properties. All of this is expensive, so I would like to see that we had the sense to develop a fair mill rate and a package of mechanisms, like local improvement districts that can access funds, so improvements are paid by property owners who will see the benefit. I would like to see these roads improved to proper standards to address safety. When you improve roads, that means they are maintained for all types of vehicles, including emergency responders and fuel and water trucks. There are a lot of roads throughout the Borough that will be improved.
- **Alexa Greene** – We were able to maintain the roads we have and improve them for the future.
- **Bill Butler** – “Hell has frozen over: Fairbanks North Star Borough residents have taxed themselves to pay for the road maintenance they need.”
- **Scott Learned** – I like the idea of people actually taxing themselves to pay for road maintenance. I have been here for 30 years – we want everything, but we don't want to pay for it. “We have finally obtained funding to pay for our roads in a safe and efficient manner.”
- **Billy Cardentey** – “More paved roads.”
- **Steve Lowry** – “Department of Transportation, Borough and local developers have success in developing local roads.” I would like to see a partnership between those groups.
- **Bryant Wright** – “Fairbanks is one of the best cities for winter commuting.” (For motorized and nonmotorized commuters)

*Potential plan examples:*

- We are looking at roads plans examples, including the Official Streets and Highway Plans from Wasilla and the Municipality of Anchorage.
  - [2005 City of Wasilla Official Streets and Highways Plan](#)
  - [2014 Municipality of Anchorage Official Streets and Highways Plan](#)

**Engagement – Slides 43-48**

- We are continuing to solicit public input through the survey and comment map, which will remain active until October 15. We also have a project website where the public can access project documents, updates and submit comments.

- We submitted a “Community Perspective” to the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner which we are expecting to publish soon.
- We boosted a social media post, which has really helped with participation on the survey and comment map.
- **Bruce Sackinger** – Where are the orange lines coming from on the comment map? Why does the Borough think these make sense?
  - **Shelly Wade** - Those are proposed connections from the 1991 Plan. People have already weighed in on the comment map saying they don’t think some of these corridors make sense. We do not discuss why those were selected for the 1991 Plan very much.
  - **Kellen Spillman** – We have all the backup from that plan. It was all done on hard copy, but it has been scanned in. We have more than 1,000 pages of background that went into this. The background that went into that plan was similar to what we are doing now. The proposed connections considered topography, developable land in the area and trying to avoid things like wetlands. It also considered minimal disruption to private property. There originally were about double the number of connections, and about half of them are now developed roads. In the 1991 Plan, we released panels for public comment. That resulted in some sections being deleted and others being added. For each of these, there is extensive documentation, including public comments. Ultimately, we will be going through a very similar process.

**Next Steps – Slides 48-51**

- We will continue gathering input, which will inform our draft of the plan.
- Our next meeting will be to review functional classifications, strategies, and maps in January.
- After the public engagement period ends, we will produce a summary of those results so the public can see what people said.
- We need Steering Committee members to help push participation in the survey and comment map.