National Park Service
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Park Roads & Parkways Program
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The Alaska Federal Lands Long-Range Transportation Plan

The Alaska Federal Lands Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), now at the draft stage and accepting comments, is the result of a partnership between the National Park Service (NPS), the US Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, and the Federal Highway Administration, Western Federal Lands Highway Division.

This regional, multi-agency approach to long range transportation planning is the first of its kind, and will serve as a demonstration project for region-level transportation planning. It will also bring Alaska Federal Land Management Agencies (FLMAs) into compliance with Federal legislation requiring all Federal land management agencies to conduct long range transportation planning, and put into place a defensible structure for sound transportation planning and decision-making.

The overall thrust of the Alaska Federal Lands LRTP is to assist federal land management agencies in Alaska to consolidate efforts for long-term coordination in transportation planning and decision-making processes.

This document does not identify specific projects for implementation, or suggest changes in the way Federal lands resources are managed. Rather, it will serve as a tool to collectively engage the various agencies on how they can work together to set statewide transportation priorities and leverage funds to meet transportation needs for Alaska's Federal lands.

"This is an umbrella plan...it represents all of our agencies collective vision where Federal public lands should be going," said Paul Schrooten, NPS Transportation Program Manager for the Alaska Region and one of the moving forces behind the LRTP. "But the umbrella LRTP also has "drop-down" plans for each agency involved."

Drop-down Agency Plans

The "drop-down" plans that Schrooten refers to are agency-specific long-range plans that elaborate on the topics outlined in the overall Alaska LRTP. The drop-down plans include agency-specific details, including baseline conditions, transportation deficiencies and needs, project selection processes, funding opportunities, performance measures, and recommended future actions for each agency.

The "drop-down" plans are agency-specific long-range plans that elaborate on the topics outlined in the overall Alaska LRTP.

"Using the drop-down plans was a key decision," said Schrooten, "because it let us end up with a long-range transportation plan that could represent all of the agencies involved." (See the related interview with Paul Schrooten in this update of the NPS Transportation web site front page.)

More than anywhere else in the United States, residents and visitors to Alaska to depend on a mix of highway, rail, marine, trail, water, and air connections to meet their transportation needs. As with nearly all travel in Alaska, visiting the state's federal lands requires access to multi-modal transportation opportunities. There was never any doubt that a long-range plan that really served the Alaska region's needs would have to be robust.

Although often overlooked, Alaska's multimodal transportation system provides critical links to connect local residents and visitors with their Federal lands and, in many cases, provides critical links for inter-village travel and subsistence use.

In developing the LRTP, representatives of Alaska's federal land management agencies established a mission, goals, and objectives to serve as benchmarks for evaluating improve-

ments to the transportation system. Together with an understanding of existing transportation infrastructure deficiencies in the state of Alaska, this plan will enable agencies, individually and collectively, to make better decisions regarding the most critical needs.

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"Roxanne Bash of Western Federal Lands Highway Division planted the seed for the multi-agency transportation plan in August 2008 in Juneau," said Schrooten. "There was a meeting with no agenda. The question was, 'Would you be interested in participating, with no guarantees that it would go anywhere?'

Schrooten said a core group of people was floating the idea because they thought it had merit. "We didn't want to go out to the public four different times with four different transportation plans, one for each agency," he said. "We kept talking and exploring, and the more we worked together, the more sense it made. Each agency decided that it was the right thing to do."

This LRTP, unlike those developed for FLMA regions in the lower 48 states, focuses on planning issues related to the interconnectivity of the various travel modes, and providing unique and seamless experiences for visitors, local residents, agency staff, and other non-recreational users, such as contractors and concessionaires.

Working With Alaska DOT

This LRTP is being developed to help federal land managers and the Alaska DOT make better funding decisions for transportation facilities that provide access to and within public lands in Alaska.

"There is a distinct advantage to working with just one state DOT, and just the agencies within one state," said Schrooten. I really applaud the representatives from Alaska DOT; they really stuck with us."

Schrooten noted that there is a lot of Federal land in Alaska, and that there are generally two opinions: you are either very proactive for Federal public lands that are managed in Alaska, or you believe the preponderance of Federally managed land in Alaska restricts private development and resource extraction to a great degree.

"It's not an easy task to expect DOT reps to sit down and have any sensitivity to what we are doing," Schrooten said. "They were as receptive as they could be and my hat is off to them."

Climate Change

Schrooten said that there was one particular issue that struck a chord with all agencies, and that was climate change. Initially, some agency representatives didn't recognize climate change as a legitimate topic for a long-range transportation plan.

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"We worked around that subject a couple of times," Schrooten said. "To this day there are still a few people having trouble coming to grips with the topic of climate change. We had some people from the state of Alaska make presentations on how climate change was starting to impact the state and the environment, sensitive shorelines, the relocations of entire villages, adaptation and mitigation."

Completion of the Plan Is A Key Goal

At a time when resource protection and infrastructure funding is scarce, this LRTP can provide leaders with a toolkit to use in working with local communities, native tribes, and other Federal Land Management Agencies, many of whom could potentially contribute funding or in-kind services to advance priority projects.

"To my mind, getting the plan completed was a key goal," said Schrooten. "I don't care if it's an A-plus quality plan, but it's important that we finish the plan."

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Schrooten added that he's heard a lot about the Golden Gate National Park and the Northeast Region trying to grapple with long-range transportation plans, and while he understands why those planning efforts have not concluded, he wanted to know what do you in Alaska and how do you complete it?

"Sometimes we get through an entire planning process, and we feel like, gosh, we're no further ahead than when we started," said Schrooten. "We are always going to have differences. Whether or not a project is important to all agencies, we need to focus on the common ground. This is the cooperation that is coming out of the LRTP."

"The LRTP is something that I have a great deal of enthusiasm for, because I felt it was important for the NPS to have a completed plan," Schrooten said. "It's become more apparent with the new legislation that we demonstrate that we have this strategy, that it's based on real constraints and emphasizes partnerships."

"Planning is good," Schrooten said, "but you have to accept some compromises as you go through the process, and accept some deadlines if you want to accomplish anything."

Going Forward

And even when the initial LRTP is completed, it won't really be done, according to Schrooten. "We'll be launching into Version 2 within months of when we get this long-range transportation plan signed," he said.

"As we move ahead to implement the LRTP, we now have a team-building history, beyond having just met once, or shared a particular project. We have a two- to three-year experience; we know we can work together, we know what the other agencies are about. This provides clear expectations from partnering agencies as to what we can and can't do."

“In addition,” Paul said, “there are other stakeholders that we didn’t know about who now want to work on the next version. There are all sorts of things that will get us to Version 2. We want to create a process, not just a product; we don’t want to stop developing a plan.”

The Alaska Federal Lands LRTP is currently available online and accepting comments. You’ll find the draft Alaska LRTP here: http://www.akfedlandslrtp.org/lrtp.html