

Meeting Notes

Yukon Kuskokwim Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

2022 1st Quarter Transportation Working Group Meeting | March 31, 2022 | 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Attendees

Name	Affiliation	Email
Eric Evon (facilitator)	AVCP Transportation	EEvon1@avcp.org
Bessie Lea Weston	Mekoryuk	Bessie_weston@lksd.org
Billy Connor	Arctic Infrastructure Development Center	bgconnor@alaska.edu
Clarence Daniel	AVCP Community Development	clarence@avcp.org
Colleen Laroux	Donlin Gold	claroux@donlingold.com
Florence Kargi	Coastal Villages Region Fund	florence_n@coastalvillages.org
Iliodor Philemonof	Yukon Kuskokwim Regional Tribal Government	iphilemonof@ykrtg.org
Miranda Strong	Calista Corporation	mstrong@calistacorp.com
Patty Murphy	Yukon Kuskokwim Regional Tribal Government	pmurphy@ykrtg.org
Philana Miles	DOT&PF	philana.miles@alaska.gov
Tonia Jimmie	Yukon Kuskokwim Regional Tribal Government	tjimmie@ykrtg.org
Shelly Wade	Agnew::Beck Consulting	shelly@agnewbeck.com

Meeting Objectives

- Discuss and confirm a set of indicators that can be tracked by CEDS partner(s) to measure whether the region is moving toward our desired outcomes within this focus area.
- Confirm key information for priority actions.
- Share updates from YK CEDS partners (as time allows).

YK CEDS Action Planning Discussion

Lead/Partners: Is there at least one organization committed to leading the action/project? This organization will seek funding, manage the implementation and report on the status of the project over the life of the project.

1. If a committed leader does not exist for this project, can one be recruited?
2. If a committed leader cannot be recruited, is this action/project really a priority at this time?

Actions: Are the lead organization(s) for each action clear on what the action is and how it will be implemented?

3. Does the action have a realistic scope of work? Is it doable within the next 1-5 years?
4. Should this Working Group coordinate with partners in other Working Groups?

Transportation

STRATEGY 10: Prioritize and implement regional transportation projects (e.g., Kuskokwim River ice road, winter trails, etc.).

PRIORITY ACTIONS	LEAD/PARTNERS
<p>10-A. Secure funding for ongoing Kuskokwim Ice Road construction and maintenance. The Federal Highway Administration and UAF are producing an Alaska Ice Road Manual (2021-2022). AVCP plans to host a symposium related to the BIA Tribal Transportation Program in 2022.</p>	<p>Lead: Native Village of Napaimute Partners: Tribes who use the road, DOT&PF Northern Region, Calista (advocacy), Donlin Gold, AVCP, FHWA, BIA, Alaska Federal Delegation, TKC (assisting member villages with ice road activities), Donlin (assisted with some funding needs from Napaimute to Sleetmute)</p>

10-A Discussion:

- DOT&PF funded the Ice Road in last round of funding. One year of funding is not sufficient; need sustained/long-term funding is the ultimate goal. We need to continue to work towards a fixed and sustained amount of funding.
 - Miranda mentioned later in the meeting that the DOT&PF funding is in perpetuity. See [here](#) for related DOT&PF press release.
- Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act includes ice road funding.

PRIORITY ACTIONS	LEAD/PARTNERS
<p>10-B. Construct trails as identified in winter trails plan. AVCP recently hired a Transportation Planner.</p>	<p>Lead: AVCP Transportation Partners: Tribes, USFWS, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, BIA TTP; Village Search and Rescue Groups</p>

10-B Discussion:

- Region-wide winter trails plan from Platinum to Nunam Iqua is underway. Ashley Johnson, planner, is currently working on easements and rights-of-way so they can get signage poles in the ground. AVCP is talking to partners and corporations. This is a huge project, approximately one million poles will be needed. Each “tripod station” will have a large sign/marker that provides coordinates for wayfinding; it will allow for safer modes of travel in the area. Hope to have completed in next five years. Feeling safer to travel between villages might increase tourism, business in communities, and partnerships between villages.
- [DOT&PF Community Winter Trails Program](#) funds: AVCP has not looked into this grant yet but will once trails are established as maintenance funds will be needed. There will need to be an agreement between the Corporation and Tribes on how to maintain trails.
- Bill is working in Bristol Bay on a similar trail project and has offered help to Eric, facilitate open dialogue. They have been talking about moving away from the concept of “trails” and towards “transportation corridors”. This could open up funding opportunities: by converting a “trail” project to a “transportation corridor.”
- Need to think about how to modernize projects in the area.
- Unclear if winter trails/transportation corridors are included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Ice roads are.
 - From Bill’s memory, Trails and Transportation Corridors are well defined in the CFRs.
- Infrastructure is a tool to get what you want.
- Instead of thinking of these projects as individual corridors, perhaps start thinking of it as a “transportation system,” tying them into aviation and marine systems.
- Chat comment from Colleen: Having specific trails/corridors will help improve the environment by not having trails/corridors all over the tundra, which speeds up thawing of permafrost.
 - 4-wheelers currently go all over the place; Rose XXXX would like to see trails marked so travel is on specific trails/corridors. This will help preserve the landscape/environment. (Rose has been working for environmental departments for ~20 years now.) Designated routes can help keep the landscape pristine.

- 4-wheelers can leave tracks on the ground for years. Snowmachines too.

PRIORITY ACTIONS	LEAD/PARTNERS
<p>10-C. Adopt winter trail design standards and universal color coding for trail marking. Educate regional residents on the color system. Visible and consistent color codes of signs and flags are a major safety improvement.</p>	<p>Lead: AVCP Partners: BIA (for design, info distribution to non-AVCP Tribes); DOT&PF; UAF; USFWS (engineers can help design), FHWA Title 23; TKC assisting member villages with trail staking</p>

10-C Discussion:

- Trail marking and designated routes will help Search and Rescue and overall health and safety.

PRIORITY ACTIONS	LEAD/PARTNERS
<p>10-D. Develop a gravel pit at Pilcher Mountain with a road and port for exporting the gravel. Calista was awarded a BIA grant to conduct preliminary site work.</p>	<p>Lead: Calista Partners: ADOT&PF, City of Marshall</p>

10-D Discussion:

- Iliodor: This summer they are starting a geotechnical investigation of Pilcher Mountain. Road access to the barge float-out will save money – instead of coming from Nome, they’ll have their own access.
- This project would add a third entity to compete with Nome and Platinum. This equates to lower costs of gravel, more projects to be completed, and more jobs in the community. Savings of hundreds of thousands up to millions of dollars.
- Miranda: Met with President Guy and Commissioner Anderson last month.
 - Anderson is excited about the quality of the riprap; wants it online with the St. Mary airport rebuild.
 - The economic impacts of this is compelling.
 - What is the best way to get it fully funded? Doesn’t fit nicely in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.
 - Looking forward to [April 11](#) and [12](#) federal grant symposium at the Dena’ina Civic and Convention.
 - Maybe in the Climate Resiliency (erosion) portion of funds.
 - Looking at \$12-15 million cost for full completion.
- Possible funding agency: Economic Development Administration

- This project: uses local resources, is value added, is job and revenue generating for the region. It's a unique product to the YK. EDA AK regional representative is Shirley Kelly, Alaska Economic Development Representative, U.S. DOC / Economic Development Administration, Alaska Field Office, 907-271-2272, skelly2@eda.gov.
- Billy: Don't forget about the private sector, how is it going to be sold?
- Miranda: Is this project a good candidate for the Military's Innovative Readiness Training program (IRT)?
 - Azara Mohammadi with the Alaska National Guard (Tribal liaison) would be a good person to answer this. Her information below: Azara Mohammadi, Tribal Liaison, [Alaska National Guard](#), [Department of Military and Veterans Affairs](#), 907-545-2177, azara.mohammadi@alaska.gov.

PRIORITY ACTIONS	LEAD/PARTNERS
<p>10-E. Develop a Lower Yukon River Regional Port in Emmonak. Emmonak serves as a transportation hub for 13 nearby communities. Emmonak's current port is inadequate to fully meet the needs of residents, workers, and vessel operators, with riverbank erosion and challenging offloading conditions. This project has already secured key funding, including \$23.1 million awarded by the U.S. Department of Transportation through a Better Utilizing Infrastructure Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant, a \$3 million appropriation from the State of Alaska, and a \$1 million pledge from the Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association. Construction began in 2020 and new dock should be ready for barge services for the 2022 shipping season. The City is seeking funding for additional phases to fund a ramp and port operations center.</p>	<p>Lead: City of Emmonak Partners: DOT&PF, Calista Corporation, Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association, Emmonak Tribal Council, Chuloonawick Native Village, the State of Alaska, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, AVCP, Kwik'Pak Fisheries, AVEC, and YKHC</p>

10-E Discussion:

- This is meaningful infrastructure that would be a tribute to the late Elder Martin Moore, Sr. for all the work he did for the port, bringing it as far as it is.
- Update on funding for ramp and port operations center: Miranda – Phase 3 is currently unfunded. Materials and equipment are on site, but unfortunately because this phase is unfunded this equipment will be demobilized. Costs for the project are going up: used to be a \$8.2 million request, now is estimated at \$9.5 million to bring to completion. Current language in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (particularly Surface Transportation Block Grant [STBG] dollars) have specific provisions to realize the Emmonak port (thanks to Martin Moore, Sr., AVCP and others). If no assurance of Phase 3 funding, there is concern this project

will get harder and harder to complete. Trying to get something in place by April 15, 2022. This project has been in the [Statewide Transportation Improvement Program \(STIP\)](#) since 2019. State could put it through as capital budget matter; could be funded by STBG dollars.

- Worth reaching out to Senator Murkowski staff now. Her staff will receive these notes, highlighting how important it is to complete this critical infrastructure project, a project that is ~90% complete. Still readily achievable to fund this project to completion, particularly because of the STBG.
- Reach out to Miles Baker, governor’s infrastructure staff, and Murkowski’s infrastructure staff members to see if they could meet; announce this at the symposium.
- Important to keep this as a priority project, one that has region-wide support.

PRIORITY ACTIONS	LEAD/PARTNERS
<p>10-F. Establish a Western Alaska Emergency Response Center in Bethel. The center will be used as a training center and headquarters for coordination of emergency responses to industrial, natural, and environmental disasters. This includes use for public health needs such as coordinating pandemic response. AVCP donated an 8,4000 square foot building for the space but renovation is needed (estimated at \$4 million).</p>	<p>Lead: AVCP Partners: Bethel Search and Rescue, Alaska State Troopers, Alaska National Guard</p>

10-F Discussion:

- Eric has been talking with Bethel Search and Rescue talked about this in great detail. Pandemic has made it clear that this is an absolute need for a response center, especially important when no beds in the hospital are available.
- Who is going to partner, where is the funding going to come from? This is when project stalled.
- Want to develop plans for an office setting for Bethel Search and Rescue (currently using a house).
- Discussion thus far as been a building that would have office space on one side, large area for pandemic response, training, etc. on the other.
- Project is estimated at *over* \$4 million.
- Project has been at the conversation level only, mostly with Bethel Search and Rescue; not with State or National Guard.
- An earlier conversation Shelly had with Search and Rescue discussed a connection to FEMA (and maybe IHS) for grant and training opportunities.

- Miranda update on AK National Guard resource deployment: they are going to continue to deploy a Black Hawk helicopter to Bethel. They are also planning a Guard member and emergency management specialist to coordinate with regional entities. This complements the River Watch program partnership with National Weather Service. Looking at aerial survey lenses, daily communication with regional entities to ensure they can be responsive for Search and Rescue efforts. Let Calista know if there are specific asks when reaching to federal and state entities.

Measures of Success Guiding Questions

1. What are the most effective measures of success for **each strategy**? What measures will tell an accurate story of what is going on with this specific sector and our region's economy?
2. Which agency/organization(s) report these data?
 - a. If no one – Would we have to collect the data ourselves? If so, who would do that and how? Can they commit to doing that data collection and reporting on a consistent basis?

Priority Measures of Success

Priority Measures of Success	Data Source(s)	Where this is at Today	Where we want to be in 5 Years
Regional Transportation Projects Completed: [#] regional transportation projects have been completed	CEDS Transportation Work Group Track the progress of projects included in YK CEDS [e.g., since 2017]..[*]	[#] regional transportation projects have been completed	[#] regional transportation projects have been completed

[*] Note: USDOT grant applications require forecasts/projections of the traffic, economic and carbon emissions impacts of proposed projects. If these grant applications are completed for these regional projects, additional traffic, economic and carbon emissions indicators could be tracked as indicators as projects are completed.

Measures of Success Discussion:

Re: 10-B:

- Get unapproved routes approved, securing easements
- Address Native allotments
- Work with Elders and others who are against the project; work with those who are concerned about the length of trail and amount of materials it would leave on the landscape.
- Identify how trails and roads projects are improving the economy and quality of life. Criteria for moving forward should address:
 - Will the project allow access to subsistence areas, services, communities?
 - How is it effecting the health of the community?

Previously Identified Measures of Success (for reference)

Indicator of Success/Positive Change	Next Steps
Tasks A-N. Jobs or internships created or retained.	Where to find the data: TBD at future Working Group meeting. Who will collect it: TBD at future Working Group meeting.
Tasks A-I. Reduction in annual winter travel fatalities.	Where to find the data: TBD at future Working Group meeting.

Indicator of Success/Positive Change	Next Steps
	Who will collect it: TBD at future Working Group meeting.
Tasks A-I. Reduction in annual search and rescue missions.	Where to find the data: TBD at future Working Group meeting. Who will collect it: TBD at future Working Group meeting.
Tasks C-I. Private funding invested in ice road and winter trail projects (e.g., foundation grants awarded, investments in a winter trail marking or trail condition monitoring project). <i>Creating a meaningful target for this indicator requires baseline information that is not readily available. An input-output model may have to be done to estimate current transportation-related investment and set a target.</i>	Where to find the data: TBD at future Working Group meeting. Who will collect it: TBD at future Working Group meeting.

Other Discussion

- Do we have the right projects and routes identified in transportation that could help facilitate economic development projects?
- Need to start thinking about next stages of funds.
- Other corridors needed in the area:
 - Connecting Hooper Bay, Scammon Bay and Chevak to Bethel would help reduce shipping costs. Shipping goods through small aircraft is expensive, not sustainable.
 - Connecting Goodnews Bay and Platinum to Dillingham.
 - Connecting Aniak, Upper and Lower Kalskag to Bethel.
- Mark Leary is absent from meeting because he’s extracting a truck out of the river. Would be great to get his information.
- Shelly emailed the group a mini slide deck with mini description of the IRT from Azara with the National Guard, including her contact information.

Next Steps & Wrap Up

- Discussion on who will be at April 11 and 12 federal grant symposium at the Dena’ina Civic and Convention Center.
- Eric requested meeting more frequently, perhaps monthly; Miranda agreed.
 - Yukon Regional Tribal Government meets monthly – an invite has been extended for the group to join those meetings.
 - Shelly proposed a debrief meeting after the grant symposium, before the second quarter meeting.
- Eric re: AVCP Transportation Program: They generally do 1-2 projects a year but currently have 3-4.

- Shelly to connect Miranda and Ilidor to Shirley to start thinking about Pilcher Mountain project with her.