

YK Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Transportation Working Group

10:00 am – 11:30 am, Wednesday, January 17, 2023

Link to meeting recording [here](#)

Attendees (alphabetized by organization)

Name	Organization	Email
Romorenzo Marasigan	Alaska DOT&PF	romorenzo.marasigan@alaska.gov
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Will Hartman	The Kuskokwim Corporation	will.hartman@kuskokwim.com
Billy Connor	University of Alaska Fairbanks Arctic Infrastructure Development Center	bgconnor@alaska.edu
Facilitated by Molly Mylius and Meg Friedenauer, Agnew::Beck		

Objectives

- Introduce the Purpose and Process of the YK CEDS
- Reminder of the 2020/2021 YK CEDS Energy Strategy and Actions
- Share what we've learned based on recent interviews and supplemental research, including progress since the group last came together in March 2022
- Discuss solutions to the energy needs of the YK region and topics for collaboration this winter

Discussion Notes

Welcome and Reminder of YK CEDS Purpose

What three words come to mind when you think about the future of transportation in the YK?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilient • Connection • Opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity – equitable to urban area • Connecting people, economic vitality • Health and safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need, opportunities, safety • Expensive, exciting • Unity, connecting communities
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Review and Discuss Past YK CEDS Transportation Recommendations

- Review of the 2020/2021 YK CEDS Transportation Strategy and Actions below.
- Recap of the March 2022 Transportation Working Group Meeting, including where we left off with implementation.

STRATEGY 10: Prioritize and implement regional transportation projects (e.g., Kuskokwim River ice road, winter trails).
10-A. Secure funding for ongoing Kuskokwim Ice Road construction and maintenance.
10-B. Construct trails as identified in winter trails plan.
10-C. Adopt winter trail design standards and universal color coding for trail marking. Educate regional residents on the color system.
10-D. Develop a gravel pit at Pilcher Mountain with a road and port for exporting the gravel.
10-E. Develop a Lower Yukon River Regional Port in Emmonak.
10-F. Establish a Western Alaska Emergency Response Center in Bethel.

Discussion on each of the priorities:

10-A Secure funding for ongoing Kuskokwim Ice Road construction and maintenance:

- There's been more funding recently for the ice road with federal funding, but it should remain a priority in case and if federal funding changes.
- Mark Leary and Clarence Daniel have successfully advocated nationally and at the AKLEG to get the funding for ice roads eligible for federal transportation funds. Let's keep it as a priority in the CEDS and add an item about studying the safety and economic benefits of the ice road. If we're able to show how federal funds have helped expand connections, increased resiliency and saved lives, it can help illustrate the importance of funding the ice road in future billing cycles.
 - Agreement that data collection is important to justify continued funding for the ice road. A good study would be to show an example of what happens if you don't fund a road from other areas of the state, like between Anchorage and Fairbanks.
 - It would be good if the state could do another round of traffic counting and traffic use. Anna Bosin will put the request in to the state again.
- Native Village of Napaimute made a request through Sen. Murkowski's office for ice road equipment funding. The equipment is old and in need of replacing. They use AVCP shop space for repairs.
- Anna Bosin: Not sure who makes requests to the congressional delegation, but a continued need from isolated communities is to ask Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to allow Department of Transportation (DOT) to lease equipment to cities/Tribes to use the equipment off airport property. That would allow communities to lease the equipment already in remote locations to plow city roads and perhaps the ice road in certain locations. DOT has asked FAA repeatedly, but they have declined to allow this use.

10-B. Construct trails as identified in winter trails plan. *And*

10-C. Adopt winter trail design standards and universal color coding for trail marking. Educate regional residents on the color system.

- AVCP has a winter trails project in process. Each of the AVCP Tribes maintains sections. AVCP is working on getting easements. All AVCP Tribes have adopted color coding and are working to adopt region wide. The Bethel Search and Rescue (SAR) determines the color coding. Other Tribes in the region have yet to adopt the system; sometimes they don't have the materials or funding necessary for markers. It also takes a lot of coordination to educate the public.
- The University of Alaska Fairbanks Arctic Infrastructure Development Center is exploring inexpensive weather stations in other parts of the state that work on a cell signal and can track wind, temperature, and other conditions. Would that type of weather station be helpful on the ice road?
 - Yes, helpful, although likely not the highest need.
 - AVCP is also working to create an app to crowd source trail conditions and weather information; weather stations could be a helpful addition to that information and the app. The winter trail plan that is in progress includes designating shelter locations.
 - An app to crowd source conditions would be a great resource but shelters and markers should be prioritized.
- Currently Bethel SAR and Napaimute provide some trail and weather conditions on social media and on local radio.

10-D. Develop a gravel pit at Pilcher Mountain with a road and port for exporting the gravel.

- Calista is still looking for more grants to complete the conceptual design for the project, including access road and port access.
- There is a high demand for material especially with the infrastructure airport improvements projects.
- The material needed for those projects this summer came from a nearby site and Calista's subsidiary had more than \$4 million of direct payroll to the surrounding communities with that project and resource.

10-E. Develop a Lower Yukon River Regional Port in Emmonak

- Typhoon Merbok impacts were mitigated by having this infrastructure in place. There was a lot of support for this project in the region and it helped move this project forward. The CEDS played a role in demonstrating the need for the project.
- A celebration is tentatively planned for September.

10-F. Establish a Western Alaska Emergency Response Center in Bethel.

- This topic is brought up frequently, but it hasn't been actively pursued. There is a Bethel base for SAR, and they would have to be more involved in this discussion. VSPO program should be included in this conversation about a response center because they might be a better entity to manage a response center than SAR.

What We Have Learned So Far This Year from the Community Assessment Tool and other research:

- Challenges
 - Climate change is affecting reliability and safety of transportation routes and impacting infrastructure.
 - High cost of fuel affects subsistence activities and travel.
 - High cost of fuel results in higher travel and freight costs.
 - Cost of maintaining ice road has increased with cost of fuel and materials.

- Opportunities
 - Increasing recognition of ice road as a critical regional transportation route.
 - Improved connectivity in the region can make rural travel safer.
 - Disaster declaration funding brings opportunities for improvement.
 - Regional representation on the U.S. DOT Advisory Committee on Transportation Equity.

Transportation Data Indicators – some ideas:

- AVCP recently hired a data specialist which has improved data collection. They are currently collecting information based on incidents i.e., injuries, crashes, etc.
- Establishing a normalized communication system would go a long way in helping with data collection.
- Other indicators ideas that would be helpful to collect miles of ice road maintained each winter, days of each season that the ice road is open for travel, ice thickness. These indicators could also help with tracking the resiliency and climate change impacts.

Discuss: Priority Topics and Emerging Solutions:

- What additional solutions can help us meet the transportation needs of the YK region?
 - (From above discussion on ongoing funding) Advocating with congressional delegation to figure out how to allow federal agencies to lend/share/lease equipment with state agencies, communities, and Tribes to help with maintenance in their areas. DOT&PF has asked FAA repeatedly to use airport maintenance equipment off airport property, but they have declined to allow this use.
 - Is the YK corridor still a goal? The effort seems stalled but with ongoing broadband efforts, organizations are looking at similar routes to the corridor. The corridor project would need support and investment from industry to move ahead. Calista suggests including the corridor project as discussion at the work session. It might be good to query industry on any hesitations and discuss potential for project and benefits it could provide to workforce development and resource projects.

Wrap up and Next Steps

- Slides, notes, and the meeting recording will be sent out to all participants.
- YK CEDS work session in Bethel on February 6-7, 2024.