



2024-2028 Yukon Kuskokwim Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Transportation Summary: Work Session Draft – February 2024

Where We Are Today	What data indicators can we monitor to track progress? Where do we want to be in 5 years?	Where We Aim to Be in 2028
Need to identify	Miles: Miles of Kuskokwim River Ice Road maintained and/or marked each winter.	Need to identify
Need to identify	Days of Operation: Days Kuskokwim River Ice Road opened for travel annually.	Need to identify
Need to identify	Ice Condition: Ice thickness throughout season.	Need to identify
Need to identify	Incidents: Annual winter travel fatalities.	Need to identify

Other Potential Indicators (need baselines and targets): Amount of public vs private funding invested in the Kuskokwim River Ice Road and winter trail projects; access to subsistence, services, and communities.

Proposed Transportation Objective (adapted from previous CEDS)

1. Address barriers to providing safe, equitable, and affordable access to YK communities.

Transportation Strategic Direction: Potential Strategies and Actions

Proposed Strategy A: Maintain funding for ongoing Kuskokwim River Ice Road construction and maintenance.

1. Sustain Kuskokwim River Ice Road funding in perpetuity.
2. Develop an economic impact study of the Kuskokwim River Ice Road to illustrate how funding provides a wide ranging benefit.
3. Conduct regular traffic counts and traffic use studies of the Kuskokwim River Ice Road.

Proposed Strategy B: Invest in a safe, connected, consistently marked winter trails network.

4. Secure easements to move ahead with trails projects.
5. Adopt winter trail design standards and universal color coding for trail marking. Assist communities with needed funding to implement and provide markers.
6. Continue community education about trail markings.
7. Identify funding for trail shelters to implement trail shelter design plans in the “Federal Lands Access Program, Southwest Winter Trail Marking Improvements” project.
8. Develop crowd sourcing app for sharing trail and weather conditions.
9. Work with The University of Alaska Fairbanks Arctic Infrastructure Development Center on possible weather station placement on trails that could feed into app data.

Proposed Strategy C: Establish a Western Alaska Emergency Response Center in Bethel

10. Consult with Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program for possible partnership and to understand facility needs.

Other Potential Actions

11. Complete conceptual designs for Pilcher Mountain gravel pit, including access road and port access.
12. Advocate with congressional delegation to explore how to allow federal agencies to lend/share equipment with state agencies, communities, and Tribes to help with maintenance in their areas. (example: DOT has asked Federal Aviation Administration) FAA repeatedly to use airport maintenance equipment off airport property, but they have declined to allow this use.)
13. Consider revisiting YK Corridor Project; query industry about interest in pursuing the YK Corridor Project.

Guiding Questions for YK CEDS Work Session Breakouts

1. What strategies or actions are missing?
2. Which strategies and actions are the most important to achieve first and over the next five years?
3. How can we collaborate to make progress?

Other Relevant Resources and Potential Funding Sources

- AVCP transportation resources. Association of Village Council Presidents. <https://www.avcp.org/tribal-resources/transportation-2/>.
- Bethel Search and Rescue. [kusko.net/bsar/](https://www.facebook.com/bethelsar) and <https://www.facebook.com/bethelsar>.
- Tribal Transportation Program Funds. Bureau of Indian Affairs. www.bia.gov/regional-offices/great-plains/indian-reservation-roads-program.
- Denali Commission transportation resources. www.denali.gov/programs/transportation/.
- Native Village of Napaimute. napaimute.org/ and <https://www.facebook.com/nativevillageofnapaimute/?fref=ts>.
- Office of Tribal Transportation. Federal Highway Administration. highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/programs-tribal.
- Safe Ice Roads for Alaska Program. State of Alaska. dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/cip/stip/projects/SIRA.shtml.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District: <http://www.poa.usace.army.mil>.

Strengths and Opportunities

Internal and external factors that contribute to our success in this focus area

- The Kuskokwim River and Yukon River ice roads provide critical transportation linkages in winter and are used for water transportation in summer.
- Recognition and funding of Kuskokwim River Ice Road as a critical regional transportation route is increasing.
- Improved connectivity in the region makes rural travel safer.
- Disaster declaration funding brings opportunities for investing in improved infrastructure.
- The YK region has a representative on the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Advisory Committee on Transportation Equity.
- Improvements in standardization of winter trail markings around the region.

Weaknesses and Threats

Internal and external factors that are barriers to our success in this focus area

- The region lacks basic transportation infrastructure, with very few roads, limited connectivity, and no land connection to the “Railbelt” communities; as a result, transportation and shipping costs are expensive and residents have more difficult access to health care, training, employment and other resources and services. This is especially true for communities far from regional hubs such as Bethel.
- Climate change is affecting reliability and safety of transportation routes and impacting infrastructure.
- The high cost of fuel affects subsistence activities, travel, and freight costs.
- The cost of maintaining the Kuskokwim River Ice Road has increased with the cost of fuel and materials.
- The high cost of operations and maintenance of transportation equipment in rural communities is challenging.
- The DOT does not allow communities to lease or use DOT airport equipment for local needs.
- Weather reporting in villages can be inconsistent or unavailable, negatively impacting the safety and reliability of air transportation.
- Limited infrastructure at village airports makes it harder to travel, limits flight operations, and discourages tourism-related visitation.