

# YK Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

## Transportation Work Session Meeting Notes

1:30 pm – 3:30 pm, Tuesday, February 6, 2024 [Link to meeting recording](#)

### Attendees (alphabetized by organization)

Attendee Name	Organization
Mary Ayunerak	Alakanuk Tribal Council
Marilyn Stanislaus	Alakanuk Tribal Council
Anna Bosin	Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Romorenzo Marasigan	Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Ben White *	Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Audrey Alstrom *	Alaska Energy Authority
Shaun Codman	Alaska Logistics
Henry Combs	Association of Village Council Presidents
Eric Evon	Association of Village Council Presidents
John Tobeluk *	Association of Village Council Presidents
Alba Brice *	Calista Corporation
Brenda Pacarro *	Calista Corporation
Pauline Boratko *	City of Bethel
Lee Foley *	City of Bethel
Tracy Pleasant	City of Quinhagak
Stacey Fritz	Cold Climate Housing Research Center
Nikki Navio *	Denali Commission
Colleen Laroux	Donlin Gold
LaQuita Chmielowski	DOWL Engineering
Kendal Ramage *	DOWL Engineering
Kate Silber *	DOWL Engineering
Miles Brookes	Federal Highway Administration, Office of Tribal Transportation
Pauline Fisher	Kwethluk Inc
Kristina Jackson	Kwethluk Inc.
Kim Sweet	Lower Kuskokwim School District
Vanessa Stevens	National Renewable Energy Laboratory
Amy O'Brien	Orutsararmiut Native Council
Bob Marquez *	Rural Alaska Community Action Program
Ragnar Alstrom *	Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association
Lenore Fox *	

\*Starred attendees participated in the work session virtually while unmarked attendees participated in person.

Each breakout session featured a specific focus area summary document to guide the discussion. This summary document was used as a baseline and will be updated for the future CEDS document based on Work Session attendee feedback. To view the draft focus area summaries referenced in the breakout sessions, visit the YK CEDS page [here](#).

## Data Indicators Discussion Highlights

- Data metric suggestion: Track number of overdue travelers and whether there were marked trails on their route (for Strategy B).

## Objectives, Strategies, and Actions Discussion

### ***What strategies or actions are missing?***

\*Starred items are noted as a proposed priority.

- **Strategy A: Maintain funding for ongoing Kuskokwim River Ice Road construction and maintenance.**
  - Advocate for and secure ongoing and consistent funding for ice road. \*
  - Develop crowd sourcing app for sharing trail and weather conditions. \*
  - Address how to measure ice thickness on the ice road.\* Monitoring ice thickness and freeze/thaw cycles is a requirement of state funding under the Safe Ice Roads for Alaska Program but there's a need to find a way for communities to do that safely and efficiently especially with effects of climate change. Taking measurements is risky. New technologies like ground penetrating radar and drones could be useful but they are expensive.
- **Strategy B: Invest in a safe, connected, consistently marked winter trails network.**
  - Use drones for mapping, tracking dangers on trails, conditions. Increase training opportunities for drone operations in communities. \*
  - In addition to trail markings, communities need the channels of the Yukon River marked for subsistence use and to keep people safe and knowing where they're going.
- **Strategy C: Establish a Western Alaska Emergency Response Center in Bethel.**
  - Should also work with St. Mary's or another community on the Yukon River to develop emergency operations center for Lower Yukon communities.\*
- **Additional strategies and actions:**
  - Need to ensure all communities have safe and accessible landings; when barge access is insufficient it results in delays and higher costs (must fly in supplies).\*
  - Build redundancy of travel options especially during freeze up and break up, when rivers are not accessible via boat or snowmachine. Air travel is the most expensive but during shoulder season it is currently the only option.\*
  - Increase the frequency of barges.
  - AVCP Transportation has a growing maintenance team; they can help with and do maintenance on boardwalks and maintenance; have a handrail project in Eek.
  - Bethel Port Relocation

- Current port is only about 8 acres in size, limited room to grow. Also in the flood zone (only 2 feet above sea level). The ground is so soft, couldn't install the required lights. "We are one storm away from catastrophe."
- 40% of cargo that comes to the Bethel port goes out to villages.
- Bethel Native Corporation (BNC) has other land that would be more suitable and is looking at feasibility of relocation.
- Additional space would also allow for more storage.
- Increase the frequency of inter-village air travel.
- Increase education on trails, wayfinding, and survival skills, including traditional methods.
- Keep Pilcher Mountain gravel pit on the list. This project is still in the works. Competitively priced and adequate rock/gravel sources are not common in the region. The Pilcher Quarry has great potential, but we need to develop a better barge load out and a road that does not run through town from the pit to make it usable for regional projects.
- 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.
  - Perhaps instead of requesting using federal agency equipment (there may be concerns with insurance/liability issues), request that federal agencies give priority to local Tribal/city governments once they're ready to surplus the equipment.

### **How can we collaborate to make progress?**

- UAF Tribal Transportation Assistance program has resources for ice road funding, book, and guidelines. <https://aidc.uaf.edu/ttap>
- Local Technical Assistance Program trainings: <https://dot.alaska.gov/ltap>
- Discretionary grants on the federal level: The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) looking for partners and ideas that can work with local communities and Tribes on getting federal funding for infrastructure needs in the State.
- DC has an open funding opportunity that includes transportation funding for waterfront and surface transportation development -we historically haven't funded ice roads and trail marking but it could be a good opportunity for other needs. Applications are due April 12. <https://grants.gov/search-results-detail/351860>
- AVCP is partnering with U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) regarding technology to capture data and monitor infrastructure, using a DOT SMART grant.
- DOT&PF has a winter trail program – worked with Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in the past. Funding for FFY24 and beyond is in the draft STIP waiting for Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approval. This would allow the program to continue through FFY27. Website has guidebook and process and requirements. <https://dot.alaska.gov/nreg/wintertrails/>

### **Additional Discussion**

- When advocating and strategizing about the ice road, be inclusive of upper river villages in the CEDS; not all communities benefit from the road.
- Outside of winter transportation, Bethel is wanting to pursue a feasibility and navigation study working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for the river to determine changes in the

river over time and potential dredging and/or erosion mitigation needs around the deep water port - important for access to the whole region. Could be relevant to other village landings as well, to monitor changes and track maintenance needed to maintain river access.

- In the long term, Emmonak would like to conduct a feasibility study to determine if Emmonak airport could accommodate jet air cargo planes.