



Yukon Kuskokwim Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

**Transportation Summary:
April 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 the winter.	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.

Transportation Objective *(adapted from 2018-2023 CEDS)*

- I. 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. Determine how to safely measure ice thickness on the Kuskokwim River Ice Road.
3. Develop an economic impact study of the Kuskokwim River Ice Road to illustrate how funding provides a wide-ranging benefit.
4. 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.

5. Develop a crowd-sourcing app for sharing trails and weather conditions. Work with The University of Alaska Fairbanks Arctic Infrastructure Development Center on possible weather station placement on trails that could feed into app data.
6. Use drones for mapping and tracking dangers on trail conditions. Increase training opportunities for drone operations in communities.
7. Secure easements to move ahead with trail projects.
8. Adopt winter trail design standards and universal color coding for trail marking. Assist communities with needed funding to implement and provide markers.
9. Continue community education about trail markings.
10. Identify funding for trail shelters to implement trail shelter design plans in the Federal Lands Access Program, Southwest Winter Trail Marking Improvements project.
11. In addition to trail markings, communities need the channels of the Yukon River marked for subsistence use and to keep people safe.

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

12. Work with St. Mary's or another community on the Yukon River to develop an emergency operations center for Lower Yukon communities.
13. Consult with the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program for possible partnership and to understand facility needs.

Other Potential Actions

14. Relocate the Bethel Port to an alternative location with more storage, more stable ground, and above the flood zone.
15. Ensure all communities have safe and accessible barge landings. Increase the frequency of barges.
16. Build redundancy of travel options, especially during freeze-up and break-up conditions.
17. Advocate with the 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. (For example, Alaska DOT&PF has asked Federal Aviation Administration repeatedly to use airport maintenance equipment off airport property, but they have declined to allow this use.)
18. Complete conceptual designs for Pilcher Mountain gravel pit, including access road and port access.
19. Revisit the feasibility of the YK Corridor Project.

Other Relevant Resources and Potential Funding Sources

Other Relevant Resources (listed by date, then alphabetically)

- Coastal Alaska communities net \$50M in federal transportation grants. Alaska’s News Source. April 2024. [View here.](#)
- Alaska Tribal Technical Assistance Program. University of Alaska Fairbanks. [View here.](#)
- AVCP Transportation Resources. Association of Village Council Presidents. [View here.](#)
- Bethel Search and Rescue. [View their website here.](#) [View their Facebook page here.](#)
- Community Winter Trails Program. Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. [View here.](#)
- Local Training and Assistance Program (LTAP). Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. [View here.](#)
- Native Village of Napaimute. [View their website here.](#) [View their Facebook page here.](#)
- Office of Tribal Transportation. Federal Highway Administration. [View here.](#)
- Safe Ice Roads for Alaska Program. Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Statewide Transportation Improvement Program. [View here.](#)
- Transportation Resources. Denali Commission. [View here.](#)
- Tribal Transportation Program Funds. Bureau of Indian Affairs. [View here.](#)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District. [View here.](#)

Potential Funding Sources

- Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program. US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. [View here.](#)
- Denali Commission Program Grants. [View here.](#)

Strengths and Opportunities

Internal and external factors that contribute to our success in this focus area (in alphabetical order)

- The Kuskokwim and Yukon River ice roads have critical transportation linkages in winter and are used for water transportation in summer.
- Increased recognition and funding for Kuskokwim River Ice Road.
- Improved regional connectivity, increasing safer rural travel.
- Opportunity for disaster declaration funding investment in improved infrastructure.
- YK regional representative on the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Advisory Committee on Transportation Equity.
- Improvements in regional standardization of winter trail markings.
- Increased support for boardwalk maintenance (Potential partner: Association of Village Council Presidents, Transportation).

Weaknesses and Threats

Internal and external factors that are barriers to our success in this focus area (in alphabetical order)

- Lack of basic regional transportation infrastructure (e.g., very few roads, limited connectivity, no land connection to the “Railbelt” communities).
- Prohibitive transportation and shipping costs limit YK residential access to health care, training, employment, and other resources and services.
- Negative impacts on transportation route reliability and safety due to climate change.
- High cost of fuel impacting subsistence activities, travel, and freight costs.
- Increased Kuskokwim River Ice Road maintenance costs.
- High cost of rural transportation operations and equipment maintenance.
- Restrictive use of DOT airport equipment for local needs.
- Negative air transit impacts from inconsistent village weather reporting.
- Insufficient village airport infrastructure is limiting flight operations, thus decreasing tourism-related travel.