

Project Title: Recreation & Safety Corridor: Old Seward Hwy - RC to Potter Valley

TPS Number: 67896

Priority: 1

Agency: Transportation & Facilities

FY2024 State Funding Request: \$300,000

Future Funding May Be Requested

Brief Project Description:

To design and construct a recreational and safety corridor along the Old Seward Highway: Rabbit Creek Rd to Potter Valley Rd, adjacent to Potter Marsh in the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge.

Funding Plan:

Total Project Cost:	\$5,000,000
Funding Already Secured:	(\$0)
FY2024 State Funding Request:	(\$300,000)
Project Deficit:	\$4,700,000

Explanation of Other Funds:

\$ 300,000 FY 2024: CAPSIS request for initial project scoping, right-of-way surveys, and design

\$4,700,000 FY 2025: Future request for permitting, right-of-way acquisition, construction

Detailed Project Description and Justification:

Project Purpose/description:

Promote safety and recreation by creating an unpaved bike/pedestrian pathway along Old Seward Hwy heading south from Rabbit Creek Rd to the New Seward Hwy at Potter Valley Rd; include signage to designate lower speeds and road sharing with non-motorized users. The project would consist of two Phases: Phase 1 would encompass initial survey, design, environmental and engineering work to plan and identify the route parameters and any needed right-of-way acquisition; this is the scope for this FY 2024 funding request. Phase 2 would encompass right-of-way acquisition, wetlands mitigation, and project construction.

Background/justification:

Old Seward Highway between Rabbit Creek Road and Potter Valley Road is in poor condition but is regularly used by pedestrians, cyclists, joggers, roller skiers (high school and university teams regularly train here before snowfall) in increasing numbers, along with bird watchers and photographers accessing the adjacent Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge and State Critical Habitat Area just to the west. The area has also seen increased use with opening of the Bird Treatment and Learning Center on Old Seward Highway.

Lacking shoulders and with hills resulting in limited sight lines, this road is a tremendous safety hazard as traffic historically flows at high speeds. Because the Old Seward Highway between Rabbit Creek Road and Potter Valley Road lacks a shoulder on either side, cyclists, along with roller skiers, and joggers/dog walkers - typically ride or walk in the traffic lane which is very unsafe. This is even worse with the limited sight lines where there are several large hills along this road. It is not unusual for a motorist to crest the top of a hill, only to find a cyclist or roller skier in the lane ahead, or a dog pulling on its leash into the roadway. It is a wonder there have not been many serious accidents here, and the risk is increasing with additional houses and thus motorists in the area. Additionally, parking and other improvements to be constructed in 2023-24 at the south end of Potter Marsh will likely result in increased motorist and non-motorized uses, exacerbating this situation.

This project has been high on the RCCC Capital Improvement Project list for about 20 years, both as a standalone bike/pedestrian pathway and in conjunction with an upgrade (estimated at \$27 million) for the Old Seward Highway roadway. With regards to an unpaved path which is the purpose of this proposal, the Old Seward Highway in this area is identified as Project #233, a High Priority, in the Bicycle Network of the Municipality's approved 2021 Non-Motorized Plan. The Hillside District Plan includes Policy 9D to: 'Upgrade Old Seward

Highway to a multi-modal facility while retaining its rural and recreational character.' Our previous recommendations have emphasized the need for a Context Sensitive Design to include purposes of traffic calming (e.g., reduce speed limit to 30 mph), protection of wildlife and habitat in the adjacent State Coastal Wildlife Refuge, and for safe non-motorized travel and recreation, consistent with existing growing uses of the refuge, recreation, parking, and viewing along this road. The poor condition of the roadway, in conjunction with our recommendations did result in addition of lower speed limit signs in the fall of 2021. When the road is repaved, the speed limit is likely to be increased and the improved roadway is likely to lead to increased speeds and decreased safety for all.

The point of this project is to build a rural, unpaved pathway. In order to meet federal, state and local standards, this could involve reclassification of the road, or transfer of its management from the State to the Municipality. It is unfortunate this may only allow construction to ADA standards for some limited sections (e.g., at the south end and north end near the Bird Treatment and Learning Center. Steep hills along the route mean a fully ADA accessible route is prohibitive.

Note, other options that could be considered during Phase 1 scoping include improving safety and recreation by closing Old Seward Hwy to vehicles, south of Tideview Drive, except in an emergency, or to make one lane for vehicle traffic one way, and the other for non-motorized users. Additionally, the OSH in this area is in such poor condition, it is scheduled for a pavement preservation project under the authority of the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities. Survey, design and engineering work was scheduled for completion in 2022 with construction planned for 2023-24. Construction has now been postponed. Some of the completed survey work should be applicable for use in this proposed project, potentially reducing Phase 1 costs.

Project Timeline:

\$ 300,000 FY 2024: CAPSIS request for initial project scoping, right-of-way surveys, and design
\$4,700,000 FY 2025: Future request for permitting, right-of-way acquisition, construction

Entity Responsible for the Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of this Project:

Municipality of Anchorage

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This project has been through a public review process at the local level and it is a community priority.