



Ambler Road Environmental Impact Statement

Additional Public Outreach Teleconference Meeting

MEETING NOTES

January 18, 2018, 5:00-7:00 pm

HDR, 2525 C Street, Suite 500, 4th Floor, South Multipurpose Room, Anchorage, Alaska

Teleconference Number 844.844.0414, Passcode 973468

Presentation materials at www.blm.gov/amblerroadeis

Project Team Participants

Bureau of Land Management: Tina McMaster-Goering, Tim LaMarr

HDR: John McPherson (via phone), Leslie Robbins, Katherine Wood

Attendees via Phone

Alaska Department of Natural Resources: Marie Steele

Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority: Jeff San Juan (Project Applicant)

Buckland: Tim Gavin

Noorvik: Lonnie Tebbits

Noorvik Tribal Council: Joshua Melton

Unalakleet: Wade Ryan

White Mountain: Willa Ashenfelter, Amos Brown, Sr.

Meeting Purpose

To share information about the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process, and to gather input from the public.

Meeting Topics

1. Introduction and Welcome by Katherine Wood, HDR
2. Presentation by Tina McMaster-Goering, BLM

In November and December 2017, scoping meetings were held in 10 communities that we anticipated would be the most impacted by the proposed project. We also attended the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) working group meeting in December. The members there suggested that additional WACH communities may have information and comments to share with the BLM. In response to that

suggestion, we are holding two teleconferences. Our first teleconference was held Tuesday afternoon. Each teleconference is presenting identical information and taking comments. The purpose of today's meeting is to share information about the BLM's EIS process, and to gather input from you.

Background

The purpose of today's meeting is to share information about the BLM's EIS process, and to get input from the local communities. Without that input the EIS process will not be effective. Public input about issues and concerns is very important.

Project Background

In the 1950s, mineral exploration efforts discovered significant mineral resources of copper and base metals on the southern side of the Brooks Range. In the 1980s, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) was established. Congress passed that law recognizing the mineral potential in the Ambler Mining District and the need for transportation access. Section 201(4)(b) provides for surface transportation access through Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, but did not address access across BLM lands.

In 2009-2010, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) began evaluating multiple road and rail routes that could provide access to the Ambler Mining District. In 2013, project ownership was transferred from DOT&PF to Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA).

In 2015, AIDEA submitted an SF-299 application requesting right-of-way for the road. In 2016, AIDEA spent the first half of the year responding to requests for additional information from the application recipients (BLM, National Park Service [NPS], U.S. Coast Guard [USCG], and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [USACE]). The application was considered complete by June 30, 2016.

BLM filed a Notice of Intent on February 28, 2017, to prepare an EIS initiating a 90-day public scoping period, which the BLM extended through January 31, 2018.

In 2017, the NPS began a separate but parallel Environmental and Economic Analysis (EEA) for the portion of the road on NPS land as directed by ANILCA Section 201 (4)(b). The EEA is only for the portion of the road that crosses the NPS land.

Proposed Project

The right-of-way application submitted by AIDEA proposes a road across public and private land to the Ambler Mining District to increase job opportunities, and otherwise encourage the economic growth of the state, including the development of its natural resources.

According to AIDEA without that access the mineral assets associated with the Ambler Mining District would remain unused, and AIDEA would not be able to support economic development and increase job opportunities within a region known for high unemployment rates.

Road Elements

In a few slides you can see a map for the proposed area.

AIDEA's proposed alignment begins at the Dalton Highway (Milepost 161), and extends westward along the south side of the Brooks Range to the south bank of the Ambler River.

The type of land crossed by the road includes State lands (61 percent), Federal land managed by BLM and NPS (24 percent), and lands associated with two Alaska Native Corporations, NANA and Doyon (15 percent).

The road would be a 211-mile long, all-season, gravel two-lane road. As proposed, it is for industrial access only, and would not be open to the public. It includes bridges, material sites, maintenance stations, airstrips, and related infrastructure and utilities.

Vehicles using the road would be semi-trailer trucks hauling mineral exploration and development equipment, supplies, fuel, and hauling ore concentrate out.

Proposed Project Area

If you refer to the map in your slides you can see the jurisdictions the road crosses, and you'll notice that when it gets to the Gates of the Arctic Park and Preserve it has two routes that are proposed by the applicant. There's a northern route that cuts straight across the Park and Preserve and there's a southern route. This southern route impacts less of the park lands. Otherwise the route would be the same into the park and out of the park.

Agency Roles

BLM is the lead federal agency for preparing the EIS, and is coordinating with all the other agencies. BLM has authority to grant a right-of-way across BLM-managed lands. BLM must also comply with ANILCA Section 810 and the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106. This is a good time to submit comments about issues relating to subsistence and cultural resources.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is a Cooperating Agency, and would be responsible for the wetlands permits that would be required. The USACE would evaluate the project application under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, and use the EIS as the basis for its permit decisions.

The Northwest Arctic Borough (NAB) is a Cooperating Agency. NAB will provide traditional knowledge and input on subsistence, cultural resources, and coordination with Tribal members and affected communities. The NAB would also enforce local permitting requirements, and advise the BLM on NAB's responsibilities under State law and Northwest Arctic Borough regulations.

The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) is a Cooperating Agency, and would be responsible for bridge permits over navigable waters, and would also use the EIS as a basis for its decisions.

We are also in the process of developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Allakaket Tribal Council to make it a Cooperating Agency.

The State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is a Cooperating Agency, and would be responsible for state permits. DNR would make land management decisions for right-of-way access across state-managed lands.

NPS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are all Participating Agencies.

What is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

This is a site-specific EIS for the proposed Ambler Road. An EIS is a document required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) which requires federal agencies to assess the environmental consequences of their decisions. An EIS is required for actions by federal agencies that significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Without your input, we cannot do a good EIS. An EIS includes the following:

- Project Purpose and Need
- Issues raised during scoping (internal/external)
- Project alternatives
- Description of potentially affected environment
- Environmental consequences of all the alternatives
- Proposed mitigation

What is the EIS process?

We published the Notice of Intent to produce an EIS in February 2017, and are currently in the Scoping Process requesting public participation, which ends in January. Then a Draft EIS will be developed with draft alternatives by March 2019 followed by a 45-day public review. The final EIS is anticipated in December 2019 with a Record of Decision in January 2020.

Draft Purpose and Need

Project need is based on the requirement for the BLM to respond to a right-of-way application from AIDEA for surface transportation access to the currently inaccessible, economically valuable mineral deposits in the Ambler Mining District.

The project purpose of the BLM action is to provide AIDEA with:

- Technically and economically practical and feasible surface transportation access across BLM-managed lands for mining exploration and development in the Ambler Mining District.
- Authorization to construct, operate, and maintain associated facilities for that access.

BLM Decisions to be made

The BLM must decide whether a right-of-way shall be granted, and if so, what are the terms and conditions that will be included in the right-of-way.

What is Scoping?

Scoping is the process used to get input on the issues, impacts, and potential alternatives that will be addressed in the EIS. The intent of scoping is to:

- Inform agencies and the public about AIDEA's application and the proposed project.
- Identify resources, impacts, and issues of concern to be addressed in the EIS.
- Obtain input to help refine the purpose and need and the alternatives to study.
- Identify potential mitigation measures that may be needed to avoid, minimize, or mitigate for project impacts.
- Obtain information to help evaluate the project under the applicable laws.

EIS Document

The EIS document will cover these kinds of issues, which we came up with internally and felt should be considered:

- Air quality
- Special status species
- Subsistence use and access
- Climate change effects
- Fish and aquatic species
- Critical minerals
- Invasive species
- Water
- Travel management
- Mining
- Wetlands and riparian
- Demand for gravel resources
- Recreational activities
- Wilderness characteristics
- Public access
- Social and economic impacts
- Cultural resources
- Wildlife and biological resources
- Impacts to rural and traditional lifestyles
- Geology and soils
- Reasonably foreseeable future activities

ANILCA Section 810

Under Section 810 of ANILCA, the BLM must determine whether the project, "...may significantly restrict subsistence uses." This analysis will be included in the EIS.

If alternatives may significantly restrict subsistence uses (either abundance, access, or availability) then this will be identified in the analysis, and ANILCA Section 810 hearings will be held at the same time as public meetings upon release of the Draft EIS. We'd come out to communities and hold public meetings and also Section 810 hearings.

National Historic Preservation Act Section 106

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties and places of religious and cultural significance.

Tribal entities, the State Historic Preservation Officer (Judy Bittner), and other interested parties are consulted to identify significant places and ways to reduce or mitigate potential effects.

Section 106 Process

The 106 process is concurrent with the EIS. We determine the effects of the undertaking and respond to the right-of-way application.

- Identify historical properties and their significance to be evaluated
- Identify historical properties that could be effected.
- Discuss potential adverse effects, and consult with consulting parties to resolve to the best degree any adverse effects.
- Develop an MOU or pragmatic agreement as to how we will deal with any potential impacts to cultural or historical resources.

NPS EEA Process

If you have any comments, the [National] Park Service is taking comments until the end of January at www.parkplanning.nps.gov/Ambler.

AIDEA's proposal includes two alternative routes across NPS lands (North and South).

Under ANILCA, NPS is legally required to permit access across NPS lands, and ANILCA requires that they prepare an EEA to evaluate which route is preferable based on environmental, social, and economic effects, and develop permit terms and conditions.

EEA Public Input

NPS seeks comments on route selection and permit terms and conditions.

Schedule

Scoping concludes January 31, 2018. A Draft EIS will be developed by March 29, 2019, followed by a 45-day public review. A Final EIS based on public and agency review of the draft will be produced by December 30, 2019, and the Record of Decision is targeted to be completed by January 30, 2020.

What's Next?

BLM is in the scoping phase collecting comments tonight on the phone. Additional comments can be submitted by fax, letter, and email on the BLM's website. We will consider input received to potentially refine the Purpose and Need, determine issues and impacts to be studied, determine alternatives to be studied, and potentially identify mitigation measures to apply to the project.

Writing substantive comments assists BLM to make good decisions.

When you provide comments:

- Be as specific as possible about what you are concerned about.
- Refer to a section or page number of a particular referenced document.
- Present new information.
- Share issues relevant to the environmental analysis.
- Suggest alternatives to the proposed project and the reason(s) why they should be considered.
- "I don't like this," or "I do like this" is not useful. Explain why you do or don't like the project, but please be specific.

You are welcome to comment on the proposed project.

We want to hear from everybody. You can submit comments in the following ways:

- Submit a comment form in the box
- Submit comments via the website: www.blm.gov/AmblerRoadEIS
- Fax to: (907) 271-5479
- Email to: blm_ak_akso_amblerroad_comments@blm.gov
- Mail to: 222 West 7th Avenue, Stop #13, Anchorage, Alaska 99513

3. Comments

Below are a compilation of verbal comments received at this meeting.

Comment and Question from Joshua Melton, Noorvik

(Lonnie Tebbits, Environmental Coordinator also on the line)

We are concerned for the Delta. We are the last village along the Kobuk River. How are you going to monitor the rivers, lakes, and tributaries that are in our Delta? It's a large area with a lot of wildlife, fish, and waterfowl. Mining can leech into the river with contaminants. This contamination has already started because of global warming. We want to find out if during the mining it will be open and transparent for environmental safety.

I'm concerned about the river, because every village along the Kobuk River is below the mining district so this will affect every village along the Kobuk River, and it will affect all the diverse wildlife, fish, game, and environment in this area. We are concerned with losing our subsistence abilities. We rely on the wildlife in the Delta for subsistence. We are also concerned on the effect on the caribou, and where they are and how the road will impact the migration.

Comment from Lonnie Tebbits, Noorvik,

We would also like to add we will be putting in a written statement to comment online. It's going to be a big issue for the community based on the effects we project. This is going to be a gamble, because we know jobs will be temporary, and what is on the line is our subsistence way of life, our traditions, and our culture. All of that will be affected if this road commences.

Question from Willa Ashenfelter, White Mountain

According to the slides, the road will only go to Buckland?

Response from Katherine Wood, HDR

The road as it is currently proposed would stop at the south bank of the Ambler River, a little bit to the west of Ambler so I don't think the road goes to Buckland.

Response from Tim LaMarr, BLM

It doesn't directly access any communities as it is currently proposed.

Question from Tim Gavin, Mayor, Buckland

Has a study been done for the caribou migration route? Will that affect them in any way?

Response from Tim LaMarr, BLM

The impact will have to be analyzed in the EIS, and this is part of the EIS process.

Question from Tim Gavin

Since a portion of this road is going to be on NANA land from the Dalton Highway, what is security going to do for keeping non-natives off our land?

Response from Tim LaMarr

Security on the road will have to be spelled out through the process. It would be good to hear comments about concerns that you have related to that. At this point, AIDEA is the proponent so this is something they would need to work out how security would be established and maintained.

Question from Tim Gavin

Has NANA put any input in regarding the security yet?

Response from Tim LaMarr

We have consulted with NANA on one occasion, and we will visit with them again in the near future. They attended our public meeting in Anchorage. NANA's official position was one of neutrality on the project.

Response from Katherine Wood, HDR

NANA also attended a lot of the scoping meetings in the villages. They reiterated they were there in a listening role, and were interested in seeing what communities were saying.

Question from Tim Gavin

Say the road comes in, who will foot the bill for security?

Response from Tim LaMarr

That would have to be ironed out by the proponent in this case. The BLM would not be footing the bill for security in this instance that would be incumbent on the proponent to iron all that out.

Response from Katherine Wood

In their current proposal, AIDEA is planning that the road would be secured, and it wouldn't be open for public access. Details of who would hold the security contract and what the specifics that would entail haven't been determined yet.

Question from Amos Brown, White Mountain

One of the main concerns is that the initially proposed mining resources copper and base metals are just a way to get a foot in the door for potentially hazardous materials like uranium and others. If that is the case, is there any way regulations can be put in place beforehand to prevent this from happening?

Response from Tim LaMarr, BLM

At this point, there are no specific plans for development of any particular type of mining. I know there has been a fair amount of exploration work done in portions of the mineral belt, but as far as any kind of preemptive regulation that would not be part of this process. This process is focused on the analysis of the road proposal itself. That being said, as part of the analysis there will need to be an assessment and characterization of a reasonably foreseeable development scenario for mineral development from the mineral belt, because the mining itself is considered under NEPA to be a connected action to the road. The road is only being proposed because of the minerals. There will need to be some characterization of foreseeable development, and the potential impacts of that will have to be addressed in the EIS. But this that analysis will not be highly site specific because there are currently no site-specific plans for development under consideration at this time.

Comment from Amos Brown

This is a main concern because these toxins don't go away for a very long time.

Comment and Question from Wade Ryan, Unalakleet

Our big concern in Unalakleet is the impact on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. We have a lot of subsistence users that hunt the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, and I've heard a lot of the research that will go into it. We are afraid it will change the migratory path. After the mine is done, what happens to the road? Does it become public access? If that happens, the whole State of Alaska could hunt on the Brooks Range. It would open up hunting, fishing, and trapping to a lot of non-local residents using the resources.

Response from Tim LaMarr, BLM

The proposal is for a 50-year right-of-way authorization, and included in that at the end of the 50-year period, the route would be decommissioned after the conclusion of mineral explorations. We've been receiving public comments suggesting it be opened to the public, but we've also had people express concerns similar to yours.

Comment from Wade Ryan

It would be a big disservice to the communities in the area if it became a public access road and created additional problems.

Katherine asked if there were any final comments. There were none.

4. Closing Remarks by Katherine Wood (HDR)

If you don't feel comfortable providing comments on the phone you can still submit comments in writing through January 31, 2018. Thank you for your time, and we appreciate your thoughts.