

September 21, 2016 FNSB Platting Board Meeting
Public Comment Summary

On September 21, 2016 the Richardson Highway MP 353-357 Access Improvements project (Project) received preliminary platting approval from the FNSB platting board. At the meeting, several interested property owners provided public testimony regarding the project design to date, and questions were also received from the platting board regarding various design elements. This document summarizes those comments and the Department’s response.

What is the Project’s design life (how long will the new design be expected to adequately handle traffic)?

20 years, with traffic projections based on a 2% annual growth rate.

What are the current and design year traffic volumes for the frontage and side streets?

Route Name	Current Average Daily Traffic (vehicles/day) (Year)	Design Year (2035) Average Daily Traffic (vehicles/day)
Richardson Highway	14,000 (2010)	23,000
North Frontage Road	No data available	1,107
South Frontage Road	No data available	1,107
Wescott Garden Lane	No data available	Not calculated
Davison Street	No data available	Not calculated
LuAnne Road	No data available	Not calculated
Bethany Street	No data available	Not calculated
Midland Street	No data available	Not calculated
El Paso Street	No data available	Not calculated
Sinclair Avenue	No data available	Not calculated
Rozak Road North (currently Old Richardson Highway)	676 (2010)	Not calculated
Rozak Road South	167 (2010)	Not calculated

What is the current funding source, year, and amount for construction?

The project is funded through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and is identified for funding in fiscal year (FY) 2018 per the approved Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). We anticipate the project will be ready for construction funding in FY 2017, and we have the ability to seek advance construct (AC) funding¹ to get the project under construction in 2017 if the right-of-way acquisition and utility relocation agreements are complete.

The project estimate for construction is \$26 million.

¹ The STIP is a 4 year document that allocates known FHWA funding amounts to projects. Using AC funds does not change the total amount of funds received from FHWA, it only makes the funds available a year earlier than planned.

How will impacts to private property due to right-of-way acquisition be mitigated?

Individual impacts to property owners whom we acquire right-of-way from are managed through the acquisition process in accordance with the Uniform Act (49 CFR Part 24) which requires that affected owners receive just compensation for any property right acquisition. The property will be appraised to determine fair market value, including considerations for impacts to portions of the lot that remain (for instance changing where the driveway is could require altering the garage doors on a house). The property owner can submit a counter-offer by providing documentation and supporting evidence. Final negotiated costs will take into consideration the land value, improvement value, and cost to cure any changes to the function or usefulness of the property as a result of the property acquisition.

Will the Department install signs for the businesses along the frontage roads to direct traffic to the new locations?

No, the businesses remain visible from the Richardson Highway therefore no significant impacts to locating businesses are anticipated. The Department does not allow business signs, or any form of outdoor advertising, on its highways in accordance with AS 19.25.105. Specific tourist oriented businesses (e.g. hotels) and roadside service businesses (e.g. gas stations) may request a permit from the Department for a sign to guide motorists to their business in accordance with 17 AAC 60.

Will the new access points on the Richardson Highway be signalized?

No, similar to the existing access points the new access locations will not be signalized. Signalization is not appropriate for a 60 mph freeway such as the Richardson Highway in this location. At this time there are no signalized intersections on the Richardson Highway four-lane section until its termination at the Steese Expressway/Airport Way intersection. This intersection is proposed for construction of an interchange in the future as well.

The new intersections will provide full acceleration and deceleration lanes to ensure traffic can safely merge with the Richardson Highway traffic, maintaining free flow on the Richardson.

Why is El Paso Street being realigned?

Nationwide studies² have indicated as the driving population ages, intersection skew angles have become increasingly important with regards to intersection safety. Even low volume intersections should be realigned to intersect as close to perpendicular as feasible as older drivers are not able to crane their necks far enough to see oncoming traffic when the intersection is skewed. The State currently has a Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) project in design to specifically address this issue at ramp intersections throughout town.

Realigning El Paso Street now, while we have an active project, allows us to get ahead of this ever-growing safety concern, and build the improvement in a cost effective manner.

² NCHRP Report 500 / Volume 5: A Guide for Addressing Unsignalized Intersection Collisions

Why wasn't the North Frontage Road terminated at the Badger Road ramp rather than bringing it through Exclusive's pit?

Extending the North Frontage Road to intersect with the Badger Road ramp to the west was rejected for several reasons:

- The Badger Ramp is a one-way facility; therefore the Exclusive pit location would still be required for southbound (towards North Pole) travelers.
- Merging traffic intended for northbound Richardson Highway with Badger Road exit traffic creates operational concerns, ultimately degrading the traffic flow on the existing ramp system.

How were the final intersection locations determined?

The final intersection locations were determined based on traffic modeling and existing design standards for distance between access points on a freeway (Richardson Highway) to maintain level of service (traffic flow) and improve safety (reduced conflict points). The Project's Design Study Report provides a full discussion on the preferred alternative. The Design Study Report is available on the Project website.

If safety is such a high priority, why was the speed limit on the Richardson Highway increased to 60 mph?

Speed limits advise drivers of the reasonable and safe operating speed under favorable conditions. In addition, a properly set speed limit provides a reasonable basis for law enforcement as the speed has been demonstrated to be prudent by a majority of road users. Our traffic engineering staff has gathered data over several years demonstrating 90% or more drivers were already exceeding 55 mph in the area. Department policy and national practice both recommend that speed limits be set at the speed at which 85 percent of the traffic is driving, which is around 62 mph in this area. Other considerations in setting the posted speed limit included crash history, roadside development and enforcement presence. Based on the data gathered we determined 60 mph to be the appropriate speed limit between North Pole and Fairbanks. Follow up studies will be conducted to determine if and how much impact the speed limit change has on driver speed and crash rates in the area.

Who will maintain the new frontage road system?

As a part of this project, the Department will assume maintenance responsibility for the new frontage roads. This includes pavement patching and snow removal as needed.

Will moose fence be installed with this project?

Not specifically, but 8-ft tall access control fence, similar to what is currently on the Richardson Highway, will be installed with this project.