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DRAFT
Public Involvement Plan
Kenai Spur Highway
Sports Lake Road to Swires
Road
Rehabilitation Project

Prepared for:
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Prepared by:
HDR

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1. Project Background and Description

This project area covers the section of the Kenai Spur Highway between Sports Lake Road and Swires Road. The project corridor lies between the communities of Kenai and Soldotna, traveling around the eastern bank of the Kenai River. Serving as a critical link between the two communities, 11,500 vehicles travel the project corridor per day. In addition, pedestrians, bicyclists, and ATVs use the nearby 10-foot shared use pathway located 20 feet west of the highway.

Few improvements have been made to this portion of the highway since its initial construction. It is an undivided two-lane roadway. Lying between two five-lane segments, the project alignment requires capacity improvements to provide a suitable level-of-service for the next 20 years. In addition, the project alignment experiences higher crash rates than the statewide average, and it has the second highest rate of moose collisions in Alaska. Safety improvements are warranted. Therefore, this project is a priority for both the Kenai Peninsula Borough and the State of Alaska.

In 2011, The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) received a \$20 million appropriation from the legislature for the project. From 2012 to early 2014, DOT&PF conducted reconnaissance engineering to develop and evaluate alternatives. The Cities of Kenai and Soldotna have expressed their preference for a five-lane highway, as it would best meet their needs long-term. However, current available funding is not sufficient to construct the desired improvements in their entirety. The preliminary cost estimate for complete project delivery is \$40,000,000.

Outreach activities conducted by the DOT&PF began in 2013. DOT&PF has held two public open houses since the beginning of the project, one in the fall of 2013 and one in the winter of 2014, in support of developing a Reconnaissance Engineering Report. This outreach documented the public's desire for a five-lane section, and also revealed that the existing \$20 million in funding would not be enough to design and construct that concept—estimated to cost \$40 million. With this phase of the project, DOT&PF will take the five-lane concept to a 75% design level. During that time, the DOT&PF will consider additional enhancements to improve safety and bring the alignment up to current design standards, including moose mitigation measures, lighting, and drainage improvements. The project's State Environmental Checklist is scheduled to be completed during 2015.

Identified Public Involvement Objectives:

- *Retain the attention and participation of the public over the project's extended timeline*
- *Clarify this stage of project development and the funding gap*
- *Work with property owners regarding impacts to access during construction*
- *Manage expectations about changes to the viewshed due to removing trees in the State's right-of-way and adding streetlights*

Based on the final design and additional public feedback, DOT&PF will develop a phasing plan that makes best use of the \$20 million in appropriated funding and outlines future phases and their costs plans for the future.

For Phase 1, DOT&PF will complete a final design and move forward with construction to use the \$20 million in existing funding. If required, right-of-way will be secured; construction could take up to two construction seasons.

2. Project Area

The Kenai Spur Highway is a 39-mile highway that connects the communities of Soldotna, Kenai, and Nikiski in the Kenai Peninsula Borough of Southcentral Alaska. Constructed in 1956, the Highway branches off from the Sterling Highway in Soldotna and then travels northwest around the Kenai River to the City of Kenai. From there, it heads north, following the coastline of the Cook Inlet to Nikiski. The highway then heads northeast, where it terminates at the Captain Cook State Recreation Center. In addition to being the primary connection between the three communities, the highway also provides access to residences and businesses along its length.

The project area, Kenai Spur Highway from Sports Lake Road to Swires Road, is a 5.7-mile segment located between the communities of Soldotna and Kenai. The start of segment is located approximately 2.3 miles from Soldotna and its termination is approximately 3 miles from Kenai.

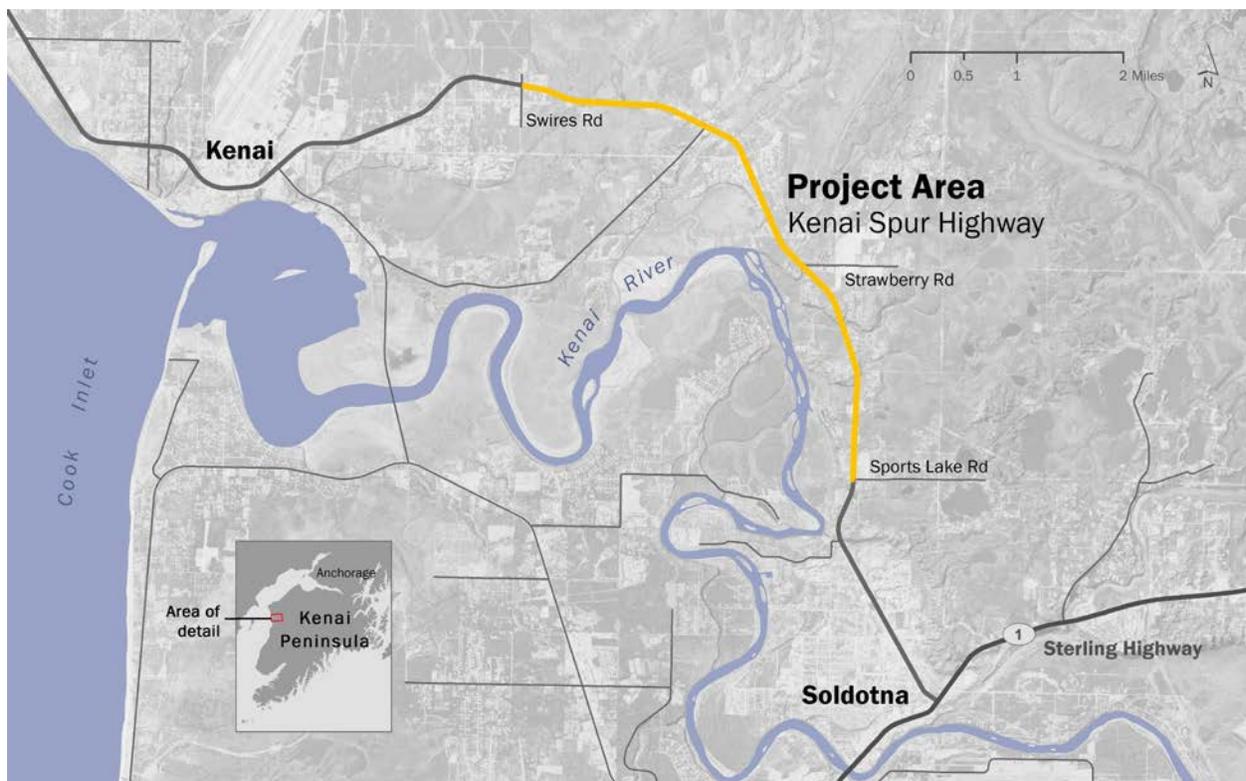


Figure 1: Kenai Spur Highway Sports Lake Road to Swires Road

3. Public Involvement Overview

The Kenai Spur Highway, Sports Lake Road to Swires Road Rehabilitation Project will improve a section of roadway that currently experiences a high crash rate. While many stakeholders who use this portion of the Highway recognize the need for improvements, DOT&PF must manage expectations during the design process, as well as prepare the public for the possibility of not acquiring the necessary funding. The project's purpose and need, design constraints, budget realities, and construction impacts all must be clearly defined. This project will impact the roadway users, as well as businesses and residences that are accessed by the project alignment. Educating the public about the project centers around clear communication about the design process, what the project will (or will not) accomplish, and what to anticipate during the project's ultimate construction.

The design for rehabilitation of the Kenai Spur Highway from Sportsman Road to Swires Road is in its initial phase. At this point in the design and construction process, public involvement will focus on educating the traveling public, affected businesses, agencies, and local stakeholders on the existing roadway about issues identified during the development of the 75% design phase that need resolution, including lack of funding for the community's preferred design. Public involvement efforts will seek to provide meaningful ways for stakeholders to give input on final design considerations and priorities for phased construction. Once a final design is selected, public involvement efforts will prepare stakeholders for phased construction based on available funding and, if determined necessary, right-of-way acquisition.

3.1 Potentially Affected Interests—Project Stakeholders

As the primary roadway linking Soldotna and Kenai, with an average of 11,500 vehicles daily, the Kenai Spur Highway Sports Lake Road to Swires Road rehabilitation project has numerous potential stakeholders including commuters, area residents and businesses, recreational users, federal and state agencies, local government, emergency services, utilities, Tribal governments, and non-governmental organizations. Table 1 outlines a list of potential stakeholders.

3.2 Public Involvement Objectives

Information sharing is at the heart of any public process. This public involvement plan focuses on this basic premise: DOT&PF commits to working with stakeholders to relay accurate and timely information relating to the project and to ensure stakeholders concerns relating to design and construction traffic control are heard and, when possible, addressed.

Our public process objectives are to:

- Communicate the purpose and need and goals of the project
- Inform a wide spectrum of the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, opportunities, and solutions
- Work with the public to ensure public concerns are understood
- Demonstrate sensitivity and, when possible, responsiveness to issues and ideas
- Manage expectations during the design process
- Prepare the public for the possibility of not acquiring the necessary funding

3.3 Project Decisions

DOT&PF retains sole authority to make decisions related to the project. While stakeholder feedback will be considered by the planning team, DOT&PF will ultimately finalize the project design and determine the best path forward. Decisions will include what design details can be incorporated, what approaches to safety and moose mitigation are best suited, and how the selected improvements can be logically divided into a phased approach that matches funding and construction timing.

This Public Involvement Program will seek feedback that will inform decisions related to the project's design and construction mitigation.

Table 1: Potential Stakeholders

<p>General Public Kenai Spur Highway Commuters Area residents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kenai ▪ Soldotna <p>Property Owners Recreational Users</p> <p>Business Entities Area businesses and businesses' customers Property lease holders Tour Companies/Alaska Travel Industry Association Alaska Trucking Association</p> <p><i>Businesses Within The Project Area</i> Duct or Sheet Metal Morgan Steel Ridgeway Farms and Stables Suzuki T-Shirts and Signs Matson Winery and Supply Tanglewood B&B Hi-Lo Charters Peninsula Memorial Funeral Chapel A.K.A. Insurance Alaska Pacific N.W. Fishing Adventures Eagle Rock Lodge Anthony's Transmission-General Tesoro Taylor's Image AT&T Midway Auto Sales Kenai Auto Twin City Raceway</p>	<p>Local Government Departments (City/Borough) Kenai City Manager City of Kenai Planning and Zoning Commission City of Kenai Parks and Recreation Commission City of Kenai Fire Department City of Kenai Police Department Kenai Peninsula Borough Advisory Planning Commission Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Kenai Peninsula Borough Planning Department</p> <p>Utilities City of Kenai Water and Sewer Department ENSTAR Homer Electric Association GCI Alaska Communications AT&T</p> <p>Community Organizations, NGOs and Others Kenai Chamber of Commerce Conference and Visitor Center Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District Kenai Peninsula Road Service Area Department Kenai Peninsula Borough Office of Emergency Management Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District (ARDOR) Central Emergency Services Central Peninsula Hospital Kenai Peninsula Borough Trail Commission Kenai River Sport Fish Association</p>
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Elected Officials	Kenai River Special Management Area
City of Kenai Mayor and City Council	Advisory Board
City of Soldotna Mayor and City Council	Arctic Bike Club
Kenai Peninsula Borough (KPB) Mayor and Assembly	Alaska Randonneurs
Alaska State Senate	Eagles Aerie 3525
Alaska House of Representatives	Moose Lodge
	GeocacheAlaska!
	Rotary Club of Soldotna
State/Federal Agencies and Entities	Amtgard of the Frozen Coast Alliance
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)	Midnight Sun Seventh Day Adventist Church
U.S. Bureau of Land Management	Mountain View Elementary
U.S. Postal Service	Snowshoe Gunclub
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS)	Trinity Cristian Center
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Maintenance and Operations (DOT&PF M&O)	
Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)	
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)	
Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR)	
State Historic Preservation Officer	
Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED)	
Kenai River Center (KPB, DNR, ADF&G, and the Kenai Watershed Forum)	
Tribal Stakeholders	
Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated	
Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Incorporated	
Kenaitze Indian Tribe	
Kenai Natives Association	

3.4 Minority, Low-Income, and Limited English Populations

This Public Involvement Plan outlines an approach that seeks to inform stakeholders in the project area. The Kenai Spur Highway runs within two census tracts (Census Tracts 5 and 6) in the Kenai Peninsula Borough (KPB), with Census Tract 5 encompassing Soldotna and Census Tract 6 encompassing the City of Kenai.

Table 2: Minority and Low-Income Populations, 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

	Total Population Est.	% below poverty level	Race % Non-white	Median Household Income (\$)	% Speak a Language other than English
Alaska	711,139	9.6	33	69,917	16.3
KPB	56,862	9.1	15	59,421	8.7
Census Tract 5	6,454	5.2	17	51,967	6.0
Census Tract 6	7,247	11	20	59,906	5.5

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis: <http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/cen/acsdetails.cfm>; accessed 9/15/2014

According to the 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, both Census Tracts have a lower median household income than the KPB and the State at large. However, neither is not within the 2014 poverty guidelines for Alaska.¹ The percentage of racial minorities for both Census Tracts 5 and 6 are higher than the KPB, but lower than is experienced statewide. Census Tract 5 has a smaller percentage of residents that live below the poverty level than the KPB and the State, whereas Census Tract 6 has a percentage that is significantly higher than all three. There are a higher percentage of English speakers in Census Tracts 5 and 6 than is experience in the KPB and the State.

Given the scope of the project, the project area and the potentially impacted stakeholders, there are currently no identified populations that require specific outreach required under state and federal regulations. The planning team will monitor the project as it progresses and proactively address any environmental justice issues that may arise.

3.5 Roles and Responsibilities

While the public has a vested interest in project conclusions, DOT&PF is the sole authority for decisions related to the final design of the Kenai Spur Highway Sports Lake Road to Swires Road Rehabilitation Project.

Project Management: Sean Holland, DOT&PF. Sean Holland will be the single-point-of-contact supervising contract performance. Sean is ultimately responsible to coordinate decision-making at the DOT&PF and provide project direction.

Lead Design Engineer: Edith McKee, DOT&PF. Edith McKee is the lead design engineer tasked with developing the design for improvements.

Either Sean or Edith will provide final approval for any public messages that sent, prior to distribution.

Project Management: Katherine Wood, HDR. Katherine Wood will be the single point-of-contact directly engaged in contract performance. She will be the PI task lead overseeing the development of the PIP, lead the PI strategy, and work with DOT&PF to develop key project messages.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2014. 2014 Poverty Guidelines. Accessed 9/17/2014
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/14poverty.cfm>

4. Public Involvement Schedule

Public involvement activities for this project will correspond to key milestones in the project’s development. Figure 2 provides an overview of the anticipated project schedule, and gives a general sense for when public involvement activities will occur.

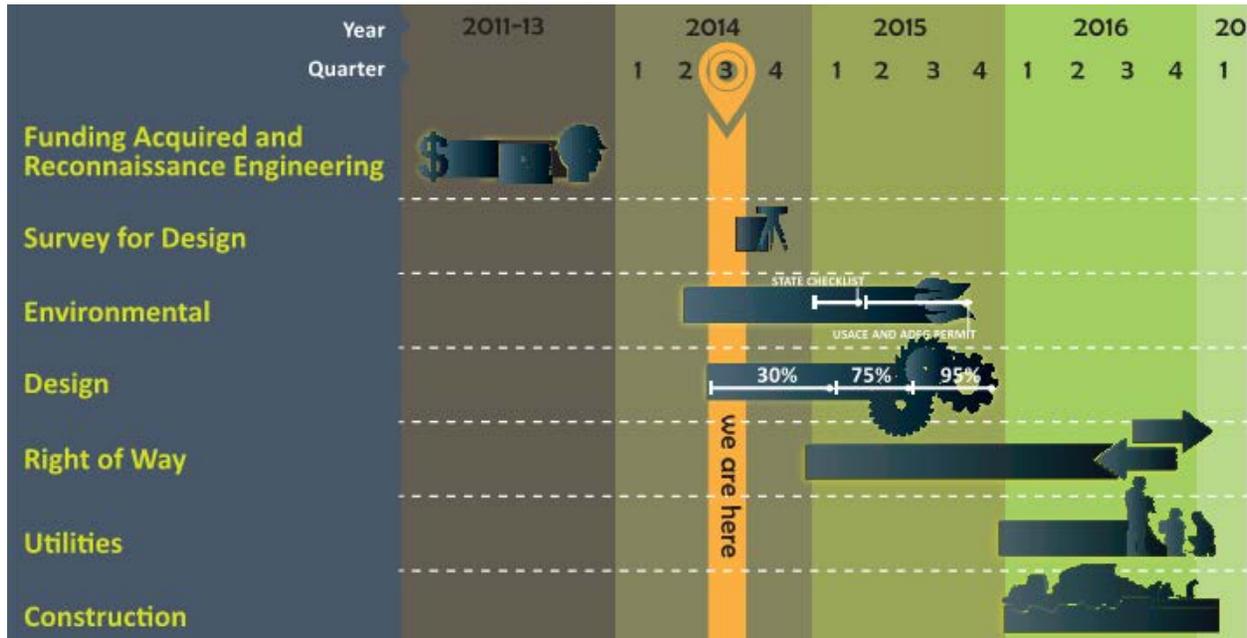


Figure 2: Anticipated Project Schedule

Moving forward, there will be two public open houses for the project: one in 2015 (Public Open House #1) and one in 2016 (Public Open House #2). Prior to Public Open House #1, DOT&PF will work towards the 75% design, identify potential right-of-way needs, and complete the State Environmental Checklist. The purpose of Public Open House #1 will be to present the work conducted by DOT&PF and allow the public an opportunity to provide feedback. Between the two open houses, DOT&PF anticipates acquiring right-of-way, moving utilities, and planning for construction. The purpose of Public Open House #2 will be to reveal the final design and receive public input regarding right-of-way acquisition and construction. Ideally, construction will begin following the second open house; this process could take a minimum of two years.

Activities include:

4.1 2014

- Fall 2014: A project **Fact Sheet** will be distributed by surveyors to those that express interest in the project. The fact sheet will be designed to educate the public about the

purpose of the project, the favored design that is being taken to a 75% design, and the anticipated project schedule.

- Fall 2014: The **Project Website**, www.KenaiSpurRehab.com, will be launched. It will present a basic description of the project, the most recent project schedule, the fact sheet, contact information, and a method of submitting electronic comments.
- Winter 2014: **E-newsletter #1** will be sent, inviting individuals to visit the website for more information or to sign up for the email contact list. We will ask community organizations to forward this e-newsletter to members to help build our email list.
- Spring 2014 – Spring 2015: Up to 4 **Small Group Meetings** will be held with affected agencies, community organizations, and interest groups. Small Group Meetings, or stakeholder interviews, allow for more in-depth discussion on how the project may affect individual stakeholders or stakeholder organizations. In addition to an HDR professional, a DOT&PF staff member will participate in the meetings. HDR will provide a summary of each Small Group Meeting.

4.2 2015 and 2016

During the development of the 75% design, e-newsletters will be sent out to remind the public that this project is ongoing. These communications can relay timely project updates, e.g. design news, right-of-way updates, etc., drive traffic to the project website, and remind the public that there will be a public open house to discuss design (tentatively scheduled for April 2015) and another that will precede construction and will ask for community input regarding construction mitigation strategies (tentatively scheduled for April 2016). *Note: the timeline for communications during this phase of the project is an estimate; actual dates will depend on project activity and updates.*

- Spring 2015: An **E-newsletter #2** will relay information about the upcoming public open house online open house.
- Spring 2015: **Post Card #1** will relay information about the upcoming public open house and instruct individuals to visit the website for more information or to sign up for the email contact list.
- Spring 2015: **Flyer #1** will be posted in high traffic locations in the project area to inform the public about the upcoming public open house and online open house.
- Spring 2015: **MetroQuest Survey** will be posted on the web, with the link provided on the project website. This will be used at the first public open house and following the open house to gauge public opinion regarding the project.. MetroQuest will be used to get feedback on design priorities, funding, and phasing. MetroQuest will also be a useful tool for helping the public visualize how the design might change depending on where funding is allocated and timing of phases.
- Spring 2015: **Public Open House #1** will be held. This meeting will be the first introduction to the project for many interested parties, so it will be designed to educate the public about the purpose and need for the project, funding constraints, project

schedule, and the environmental review process. Public feedback will be sought on design considerations. The meeting format will be a traditional open house, featuring project displays and project team members available to answer individuals' questions and concerns. There will be a presentation and a Q&A session held, facilitated by HDR. The public open house will be publicized via post card, e-mail, and paid ads (Anchorage Daily News and the Peninsula Clarion). Note: the postcard will also encourage recipients to sign up for the project email contact list via the website. Following the open house, graphic materials and the presentation files will be loaded onto the project website.

- Spring 2015: **Online Open House #1** will run concurrent to Public Open House #1 and use similar informational materials. This tool will be available for a 30 day period, providing convenient participation opportunities for individuals who are interested in the project, but who may not be able to attend the public open houses in person. Promotional materials for the public open house will also advertise the online open house.
- Spring 2015: **E-newsletter #3** will be emailed, including a project synopsis, highlights from information shared at the public open house, pertinent project updates and a current design and construction schedule.
- Winter 2015: **E-newsletter #4** will be sent providing an update on project progress and reminding participants that the project is ongoing.
- Spring 2016: An **E-newsletter #5** will relay information about the upcoming public open house online open house, and instruct individuals to visit the website for more information or to sign up for the email contact list. We will ask community organizations to forward this e-newsletter to members to help build our email list.
- Spring 2016: **Postcard #2** will relay information about the upcoming public open house and instruct individuals to visit the website for more information or to sign up for the email contact list.
- Spring 2016: **Flyer #2** will be posted by DOT&PF in high traffic locations in the project area to inform the public about the upcoming public open house and online open house.
- Spring 2016: **Public Open House #2** will be held when the design is approximately 75% complete, and when DOT&PF is beginning the process of right-of-way acquisition. The revised design and new project details will be shared with the public, along with information about any aspects of the updated design that were influenced by public comments. Public feedback will be sought on the project's 75% design and on construction schedules and traffic control planning. The meeting's format and notification details are the same as listed above for Public Open House #1.
- Spring 2016: **E-newsletter #6**, the final e-newsletter, will be sent including links to information shared at the 2016 open house, construction plans, and other timely information of interest to the public. This newsletter will include information about the project's final design, how public feedback influenced project decisions, and what to expect during project construction.

- Spring 2016: **Online Open House #2** will run concurrent to Public Open House #2 and use similar informational materials. This tool will be available for a 30 day period, providing convenient participation opportunities for individuals who are interested in the project, but who may not be able to attend the public open houses in person. Promotional materials for the public open house will also advertise the online open house.
- Following design phase completion, a **Public Involvement Report** will be released that documents public involvement through completion of the design phase. The report will include a copy of pertinent comments from the public and any responses.

4.3 Ongoing Activities Include:

- A **Project Website** to provide project information, meeting notices, contacts, public materials, and mechanisms to submit comments.
- A project-specific **Mail/Contact List** of agencies, organizations, elected officials, and others with an interest in the Kenai Spur Highway Sports Lake Road to Swires Road project will be continuously maintained. The Mail/Contact List will be developed by identifying key stakeholders (see Table 1), using the Kenai Peninsula Borough's tax parcel GIS data, and by adding contact information provided by the public at open houses, on comment forms, or via requests to be added to the mailing list. Two public open house notification postcards will be sent via post and other communications will be sent using the email contact list.
- Project written materials such as a **Fact Sheet and Frequently Asked Questions** will be updated when new information becomes available, and will be provided at public open houses and posted on the project website.
- **Comments and Responses** will be tracked throughout the project. Comments will be tracked using a database; responses will be drafted by HDR, reviewed by DOT&PF, and then sent directly to the commenter. DOT&PF staff should forward any public comments and their responses to HDR for tracking, to make a complete record. Incoming comments and questions from the public may be used to update the Frequently Asked Questions document. Comments and their responses will not be made public.

5. Public Involvement Tools and Terms

The following tools will be used to target specific levels of involvement in the Kenai Spur Highway Sportsman Road to Swires Road Rehabilitation Project. This does not represent a commitment to use all of these tools; rather, this is a strategic list that the project team may pull from as needed as the project progresses.

- **Agency Coordination** - the project team will coordinate with participating state, federal and local agencies, incorporating viewpoints from all affected agencies in the public involvement and design processes.
- **Flyers** - for distribution in libraries and other public places (grocery stores and post offices). Flyers will announce the public open houses and online open houses and the project website.
- **List Maintenance** - (Mailing, E-mail) - a project mailing list will be developed including agencies, organizations, elected officials and others with an interest in the Kenai Spur Highway Sports Lake Road to Swires Road Rehabilitation Project. Where possible, communications will be delivered electronically (e-newsletters, meeting announcements). HDR will send two postcards to project stakeholders, one announcing each public open house (2 total), and inviting stakeholders to sign up for future e-mail correspondence via the project website.
- **Media Coordination and Monitoring** - provides for the ongoing sharing of information with the media. Monitoring the press, including news articles, letters to the editor, and other sources, will gather information and interpret the public's concerns.
- **MetroQuest** – an interactive survey tool that provides online community engagement for planning projects. It collects informed input from the public and stakeholders, and enables the public to learn about the project.
- **Paid Advertising** – newspaper ads and online advertising on popular websites provide information about the project's status, public open houses, and direct people to the Web site for more information.
- **Online Open House** – this web-based tool creates an online open house, accessible 24 hours a day to any stakeholder with internet access. The online open house allows users to access documents, and maps—the same as used in the public open house—and, if desired, short (2-3 minute) videos of project team members explaining



Figure 3: Sample Online Open House Format
[Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport Master Plan](#)

each open house station. Comments from online participants will be added to the comment database.

- **Print Materials** – materials will include meeting handouts such as fact sheets and FAQs.
- **Public Open House** – the project team will host two public open house meetings during the final design and right-of-way acquisition process with the goal of informing stakeholders of the project schedule, relaying how the project may potentially affect them, and gathering their feedback on construction traffic mitigation. The meeting will be advertised in advance to provide sufficient public notice.
- **Public Service Announcements (PSAs)** – these brief project announcements will be distributed to radio (and potentially TV) stations to notify the public about meetings and project milestones.
- **Small Group Meetings** – informal meetings with individual stakeholders and groups of stakeholders
- **Website** – www.KenaiSpurRehab.com has been established and will provide up to date information to interested parties. The site will be linked to the DOT&PF Central Region [Project's Page](#). The site will feature a GIS map with an embedded comment function, allowing site visitors to pinpoint their comment to a specific location along the project corridor. The site will also include a “join our list” option to automatically sign up for e-newsletters.

6. Project Contacts

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