

Alaska LNG project shares Information about possible highway relocation

By Larry Persily
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(This update, provided by the Kenai Peninsula Borough mayor's office, is part of an ongoing effort to help keep the public informed about the Alaska LNG project.)

The Alaska LNG project this month started a public-involvement process to help determine the best route for relocating a couple of miles of the Kenai Spur Highway, moving the road away from the proposed site for the natural gas liquefaction plant and marine terminal in Nikiski.

The LNG project's site plans are subject to change, but the most recent public presentation of the plant's potential footprint shows the Kenai Spur Highway cutting through the waterfront site between Mile 19.5 to 21 of the highway which moves traffic between Kenai and Nikiski to the north. The proposed 800- to 900-acre plant site is just south and east of the Nikiski industrial area that includes a Tesoro refinery, ConocoPhillips LNG plant and the Agrium fertilizer plant that closed in 2007.

Permanently relocating the highway in that limited stretch would reduce safety and security conflicts during construction and operation of the multibillion-dollar plant, and allow unrestricted movement of construction materials, equipment and plant modules from a beachfront offloading facility to the uplands construction site on the other side of the road.

Alaska LNG's current schedule for the highway project — again, subject to change — shows public involvement and further analysis of route options through 2016, with roadway design, right-of-way acquisition and permitting in 2017. If the project sponsors decide to proceed with the highway, Alaska LNG would go to bid in late 2017 for construction the next year, building the highway so that it could be ready if the sponsors decide to move ahead with LNG plant construction starting in 2019.

Alaska LNG would be responsible for construction but would turn the new highway over to the state upon completion, at which point the state would vacate the old stretch of roadway for use by the LNG project. The existing highway would dead-end at two security gates to the LNG plant site — one for traffic heading from the south, and one for traffic coming from the north.

Alaska LNG and its highway consultant HDR, a global engineering and design firm with offices in Anchorage, held the first community meeting on the possible highway relocation Oct. 19 in Nikiski, drawing about 300 people who got their first look at a map of more than a dozen options for rerouting traffic around the LNG plant site.

"Currently, the team is evaluating preliminary options for the new route," Alaska LNG said in a four-page hand-out distributed at the meeting. "This map shows the first draft

of options. Reasons the options may be eliminated from further study include, but are not limited to”:

- Unacceptable community or environmental impacts.
- Unacceptable roadway conditions.
- Length of new highway.
- Excessive complications for access to the new highway.

The multiple route options would divert from the Kenai Spur Highway as far south as Mile 18, then reconnect with the highway somewhere between Miles 22 and 26. “Project goals are to maintain traffic, limit impacts to the community and the environment, and meet borough and state transportation requirements for the Kenai Spur Highway,” according to the Alaska LNG hand-out.

The map shows an approximately 600-foot-wide corridor for each of the options, though any final right of way would be much narrower. To meet state Transportation Department standards, the new road would be designed to safely accommodate traffic at 55 mph, with shoulders, turn lanes and lighting as appropriate.

The potential routes all run behind the LNG plant site, with some staying west of Cabin Lake and others going around the east side of the lake. Most head north between Bernice Lake and Island Lake to reconnect with the existing highway, while a couple of the possibilities turn back to the highway before Bernice Lake. Some options would use portions of existing rights of way and portions of new roadway, while others would use mostly new rights of way.

The Alaska LNG project does not have eminent domain authority, and any land purchases by the developer for the highway relocation would be voluntary — a private, negotiated deal between the property owner and project developer.

Kenai Peninsula Borough and state Transportation Department officials will work with the Alaska LNG project team and its consultants to ensure the highway project meets local needs, safety standards and permitting requirements, and to ensure continual access to the public during road construction.

A follow-up community meeting is expected by spring 2016, when the project will provide residents with an update on the highway project.

During the 2016 review process, the Alaska LNG project team will look at several factors influencing the route decision:

- Environmental features, such as wetlands, contaminated sites and eagle nests.
- Impacts to the community, including recreational and residential areas.
- Land ownership along the right of way.
- Traffic flow, roadway design, sight distance, curves and corridor width.
- Utilities, including relocating existing lines.

- Soil conditions and bluff erosion problems near where the Kenai Spur Highway intersects with South Miller Loop Road.