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City of Whittier, Alaska Shotgun Cove Road Extension Environmental Assessment

March 2021

Prepared for:

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration
Western Federal Lands Highway Division

Prepared by:



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Shotgun Cove Road Extension Project
Whittier, Alaska
Environmental Assessment

AK WHITTIER 2016(1)

Submitted
Pursuant to Public Law 91-190
National Environmental Policy Act

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration
Western Federal Lands Highway Division

In Cooperation with
U.S. Forest Service and the City of Whittier

3/18/2021

Date Approved

Dan Donovan
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires that all projects carried out by a federal agency, or which involve federal funding, require a federal permit, or occur on federal land consider the effects of their actions on the quality of the human environment. This environmental assessment (EA) is completed to meet the requirements of NEPA.

The Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD) of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) with the City of Whittier (City), in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service), is proposing to construct an approximately 2.5-mile gravel road extension of Shotgun Cove Road. The road, located two miles northeast of Whittier, within Sections 3, 8, 9, and 17 of Township 8 North, Range 5 East, Seward Meridian, would run parallel to the shoreline beginning at the current Shotgun Cove Road terminus (mile 2.0) and continue on to Forest Service land at Trinity Point (Figure ES-1) and would feature several short spur roads to provide land access. The purpose of the project is to improve access to federal and state lands, alleviate pressure on Whittier's regional transportation system, and realize potential economic growth.

This project is supported by the FHWA Federal Lands Access Program through funding to the City to improve access to the Chugach National Forest. FHWA is the lead agency for the project, and the Forest Service is a cooperating agency.

The alternatives analyzed in this EA include the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative. Table ES-1 summarizes the project's potential environmental impacts by alternative.



Figure ES-1. Trinity Point (Foreground) Viewing Southwest Toward Whittier

Table ES-1. Summary of Impacts by Alternative for the Proposed Shotgun Cove Road Extension Project

Environmental Resource	No Action Alternative	Proposed Action Alternative
Transportation and Access	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access limited to foot, boat, or all-terrain vehicle • Small watercraft would continue to share access points with larger boats at Whittier Harbor 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing parking area at the end of Shotgun Cove Road temporarily closed • No or limited access to Emerald Cove Trail • Additional construction vehicles and equipment on local haul routes through Whittier <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vehicular access to federal lands at Trinity Point • Slight increase in summer traffic in Whittier including through the Whittier Tunnel • Minor congestion alleviation at the Whittier Harbor; increased points of access to Passage Canal for small watercraft
Land Use	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current land use of the area (parking lot, trail) not applicable during construction <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 23 acres of undisturbed land and trail converted to road right-of-way • Approximately 150 acres of public land potentially made available for public sale at a future date

Table ES-1. Summary of Impacts by Alternative for the Proposed Shotgun Cove Road Extension Project

Environmental Resource	No Action Alternative	Proposed Action Alternative
Recreation	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitation and recreation use/opportunities would remain low; existing recreation experience would not change • No impacts to Emerald Cove Trail • Retains more primitive/undeveloped recreation opportunities out to Trinity Point 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No or limited access to Emerald Cove Trail <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vehicle access to Trinity Point created • Additional recreational facilities (beach access, viewpoints, trailheads) created • Most of Emerald Cove Trail removed or segmented by the roadway • Some areas of recreational public land along the corridor above the 50-foot-wide public shoreline access easement no longer accessible • Potential for new privately-owned recreational cabins along the project corridor to the extent land is made available for sale to the public • Easier access to currently remote areas; potential for extended human impacts, crowding
Wetlands	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor impacts to wetlands from use and maintenance of Emerald Cove Trail 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.1 acre of temporary wetlands impacts during construction <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 13 acres of permanent wetlands impacts • Potential future wetlands impacts from development of privatized lands

Table ES-1. Summary of Impacts by Alternative for the Proposed Shotgun Cove Road Extension Project

Environmental Resource	No Action Alternative	Proposed Action Alternative
Fish, Wildlife, & Vegetation	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary increased noise displacement of wildlife • Temporary sedimentation in resident fish streams <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 23 acres of forested wildlife habitat converted to roadway • Increased interactions with wildlife • Increased invasive species spread • Potential future forest clearing stemming from development of privatized lands
Cultural and Historic Resources	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

Table ES-1. Summary of Impacts by Alternative for the Proposed Shotgun Cove Road Extension Project

Environmental Resource	No Action Alternative	Proposed Action Alternative
Soils and Geology	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrequent disturbance from trail users 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal impact until disturbed areas stabilized; exposed soils subject to erosion if not protected. Temporarily unstable slopes if not retained or flattened <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New areas of exposed soil and rock cuts subject to wind and water erosion • Soil erosion from increased foot traffic along new trails • Soil erosion from potential private development
Noise	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary noise increase during construction from equipment and construction activities at the project area and at vehicle routes through the community <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased noise associated with motor vehicle use in an area with no sensitive noise receptors

Table ES-1. Summary of Impacts by Alternative for the Proposed Shotgun Cove Road Extension Project

Environmental Resource	No Action Alternative	Proposed Action Alternative
Visual Quality	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary impacts to visual quality to boaters passing by on Passage Canal <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual impacts to boaters passing by on Passage Canal and at elevations above the project area from cleared trees and vegetation • Minor visual impacts as private lots developed and small cabins added
Air Quality	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased dust and emissions <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor air quality impacts from vehicles using the new roadway • Potential for future localized impacts from increased wood or oil burning stove use from privately-owned recreational cabins

Table ES-1. Summary of Impacts by Alternative for the Proposed Shotgun Cove Road Extension Project

Environmental Resource	No Action Alternative	Proposed Action Alternative
Water Resources, Water Quality, and Floodplains	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased temporary turbidity in surface waters • 0.03-acre temporary impacts during construction <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 0.93 acre of freshwater streams impacted (below ordinary high water) • Increased potential for stormwater runoff contamination by roadway pollutants • Potential for contamination of surface water and degradation of water quality from exposed soils erosion
Social, Community, and Environmental Justice	<u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased traffic volumes or delays due to construction equipment and vehicles • Provide opportunities for construction-related employment <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No disproportionately high and adverse effects on minority or low-income populations • Increased community visitation and associated economic benefits