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The Four Theses: An Introduction to the Seward Highway

4.1 The Four Basic Theses for the Seward Highway Corridor Partnership Plan

The four basic theses (or four givens, if you will) for the Seward Highway Corridor Partnership Plan acknowledge the condition of the Seward Highway today and its likely future direction assuming current forces and realities continue unchanged. These four theses provide a reference point from which to evaluate the Seward Highway and a framework from which to plot its future. The four theses are:

1. The Seward Highway is composed of five distinct segments
2. Tourism in Alaska will continue to increase, as will Alaska's resident population
3. The Seward Highway is a multi-purpose corridor serving both residents and visitors for numerous recreational and commercial purposes.
4. The successful management of the Seward Highway is dependent on the cooperation of existing institutions, resource managers and committed individuals.

1. The Seward Highway is composed of five distinct segments

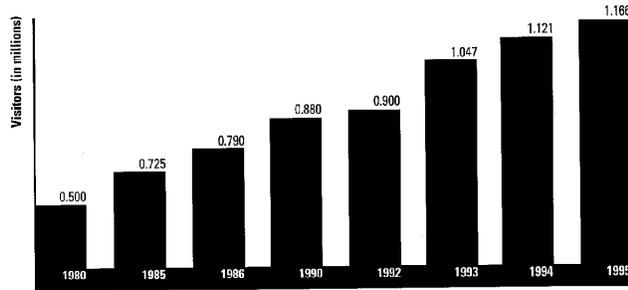
Today, the Seward Highway is composed of essentially five geographical areas. These segments, defined by landscape and use, not by ownership and political jurisdiction, provide an alternative strategy to viewing the route and its needs. The identified segments are:

- The Anchorage Gateway
- Turnagain Arm
- The Mountain Pass and Summit
- Communities and Lakes
- The Seward Gateway

2. Tourism in Alaska Will Continue to Increase, as will Alaska's resident population

Visitation to Alaska and to the Seward Highway will continue to rise based on all available tourism tracking and census data. Alaska's spectacular scenery, unique history, and mystique as America's last frontier all contribute to the strong appeal of the state as a place to live and visit. Tourists or "visitors" are generally considered to be anyone who is traveling more than 100 miles away from home. The impact of tourism is particularly high during the summer months. According to a study completed by the Alaska Visitors Association, 7 out of 10 visitors came to Alaska during the peak four-month period from June to September.

The Seward Highway is heavily used by local residents as well as visitors from other parts of Alaska and from outside the state. Many out-of-state visitors to the Seward Highway have only a minimal impact on the



Visitation to Alaska more than doubled between 1980 and 1995.

route. Visitors from the cruise ships travel in motor-coaches with only a few stops along the way for breaks and photo opportunities. Other visitors, as well as many local residents, take advantage of some of the recreational opportunities offered along the Seward Highway and are more intense users. They venture away from the roadside, up into the mountains, on the lakes and down the rivers. They spend more time and have a greater impact on the highway area per person than those visitors who simply pass through in a matter of several hours.

Anchorage will continue to grow in population, and in turn, its residents will travel the highway for recreation in increasing numbers. Already, almost a quarter (24%) of Chugach National Forest visitors are residents from the Anchorage metro area. Between 1980 and 1990 the population of Alaska increased by 46.3% (from 401,851 to 550,043), a rate second only to Nevada's for the same period.⁴ The Seward Highway has been described by some as "Anchorage's backyard playground", an apt description for the strong draw that the area has for residents.

Private and public tourism organizations are promoting Alaska heavily. Cruise ship tours are a booming form of tourism in Alaska and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. Between 1989 and 1995 cruise ship visitor volumes increased a whopping 86%, translating to an average annual growth rate of almost 11%.⁴ As the baby boomers retire, this state—which is more difficult for many people to reach, and therefore more appealing to some than other states—will see rising levels of visitation just as all national parks and U.S. Forest lands have seen in recent years. Regarding tourism, the Seward Highway Corridor Partnership Plan should be viewed as an opportunity, a mid-point pause, to evaluate the pluses and minuses regarding the impact of additional visitation. Tourism must be acknowledged and managed in ways that balance its economic force with the needs and rights of the natural environment and the Kenai Peninsula and corridor communities.

3. The Seward Highway is a multi-purpose corridor serving both residents and visitors for numerous recreational and commercial purposes.

The Seward Highway is both a tourism route and a primary highway that must serve the needs of residents and businesses. It is the only roadway connecting the Kenai Peninsula to the rest of Alaska. The corridor carries utility lines; trucks use this route to access the seaports, and industrial and commercial uses in the communities of Seward and Homer. The cruise industry uses the route as a vital transportation link from the docks in Seward to the Anchorage airport. Residents and other visitors drive the route to see the dramatic views and watchable wildlife as well as to take part in the many recreational opportunities afforded by the route. Coordinated planning for the diverse needs of these users is important to maintain the highest quality of tourism, recreation, commerce, safety, and economic opportunity along the entire route.

⁴Source: U.S. Census Bureau

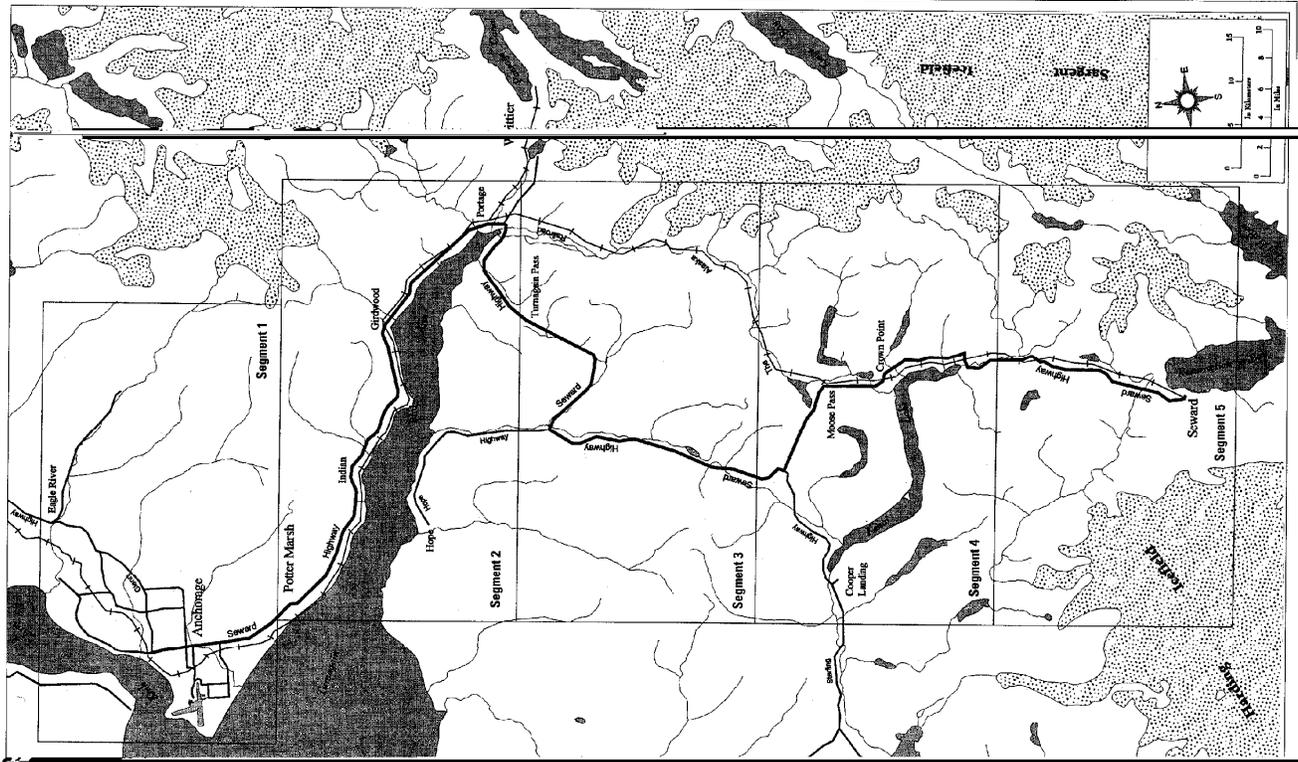
⁴Source: *A Comprehensive Overview of Alaska's Visitor Industry: Impacts and Outcomes of the State's Travel and Tourism Trade*, p. 6, May 1996.

4. The successful management of the Seward Highway is dependent on the cooperation of

The major management agencies within this corridor—ADOT&PF, USFS, DNR-Parks, DNR-Division of Land—have faced reductions in their funding in recent

owned by a variety of government agencies (local, state, and federal) and private property owners. The roadway and right-of-way is under the jurisdiction of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. The two single largest land owners adjacent to the route are the United States Forest Service and Alaska DNR-Parks. Intrinsic qualities know no jurisdictional barriers and therefore must be understood and recognized in a cooperative effort to ensure their well-being and continued contribution to the economic health of the Kenai Peninsula and scenic quality of Alaska. This plan seeks to recognize the professional and technical contributions of each of the key players along the corridor (including, but not limited to ADOT&PF for highway safety, USFS for forest health and recreation, DNR-Division of Land for land transfers, DNR-Parks for recreation, and local governments for daily management) and encourage a broader dialogue with the recognition that actions by individual offices and organizations frequently impact others along the route.

economies associated with cooperation and cost sharing are difficult to attain given each agency's budgeting and rules procedures that can provide administrative barriers to agencies wishing to work together. While agencies have successfully overcome aspects of these procedural barriers with past projects, a successful CPP for the Seward Highway must recognize the realities and nuances needed for successful partnering.



Map showing the five distinct segments of the Seward Highway

Arctic Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Thesis 1:

The Seward Highway is composed of five distinct segments

The Seward Highway is a richly varied and highly diverse roadway. Its character changes over the course of its length. Roadside topography, the proximity of water, the types of views, the levels and types of development and the width and character of the road are some of the ways in which the Seward expresses different moods and qualities over 127 miles between Anchorage and Seward.

Acknowledging and working with this varying character can help to define management strategies that are appropriate for different communities and different parts of the byway.

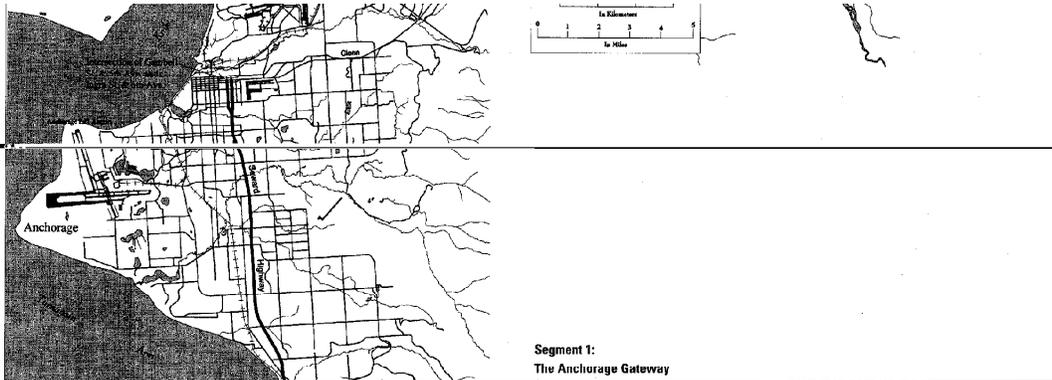
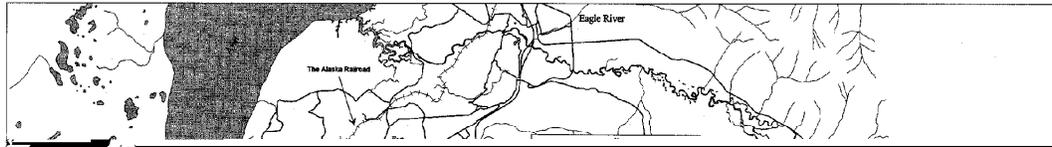
To help with this process of creating and targeting strategies, the Seward Highway has been divided into five segments. These segments do not represent hard and fast divisions of the highway, nor do they suggest revi-

is to encourage communities and government agencies to think about the Seward Highway as a whole. As one resource worthy of a unified strategy, the Plan is also designed to direct local, state and federal attention to the distinct character along different segments, and therefore the need for sensitivity and flexibility in corridor management policies.

Please note that for the clarity of definition and description, the five segments are described in a north-to-south order. Traveler views and experiences can vary dramatically by direction, and the Seward Highway is equally spectacular regardless of direction traveled. The trip from south to north along the Seward Highway, for example, possess spectacular views of Turnagain Arm from segment 3 and provides views of the Anchorage

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example—that the average traveler is already conscious of. The segments are merely planning concepts to help one think in a more focused way about different parts of the highway. While one objective of this Partnership Plan



Segment 1:
The Anchorage Gateway

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This is the gateway and introduction to the Seward Highway for visitors coming from Anchorage. The Seward Highway runs north-south through the center of the Anchorage metropolitan area. The urban setting varies from the modern, commercial high-rise buildings of Downtown and Midtown to forested residential uplands in south Anchorage before the highway descends to tidewater along Potter Marsh.

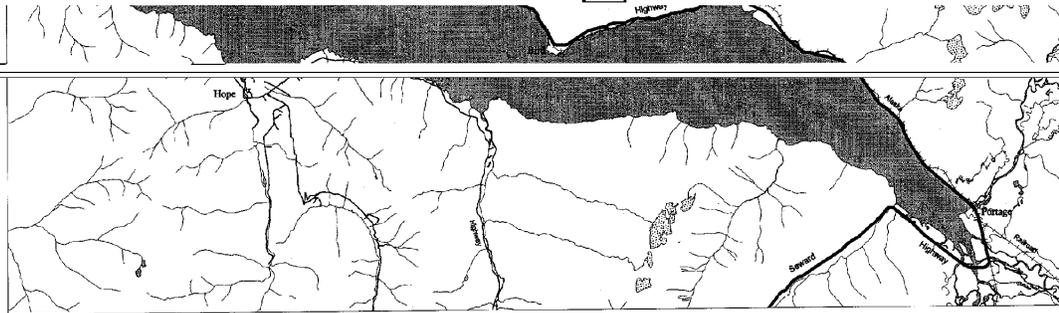
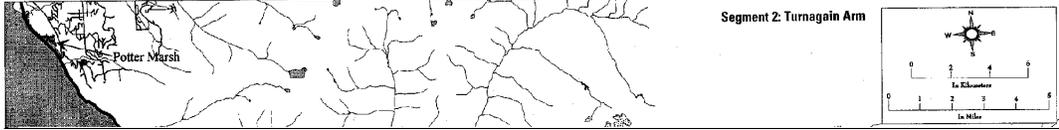
Just east of the Seward Highway in this segment the Chugach Range is dominated by such jagged peaks as

Wolverine, O'Mally, Ptarmigan, and North and South Suicide. Farther away to the northeast can be seen the Talkeetna Mountains. Looming against the northern horizon 180 miles away are the two ice-covered monoliths, Mt McKinley and Mt. Foraker, the first and fourth highest peaks in North America. Segment 1 is the only segment of the Seward Highway from which they are visible.

The full range of visitor services—food, fuel, lodging, service and banking are immediately available off the

Seward Highway in the Anchorage Gateway segment. In addition, the Anchorage terminus of the corridor is close in proximity to the Alaska Railroad terminal and directly links many of the historic and cultural resources of Alaska's biggest city with the remainder of the Seward Highway corridor. It also provides a direct link to the Anchorage International Airport, one of the principal gateways to Alaska. This is an essential element for the accommodation of international visitors required of an All-American Road.

Map: courtesy Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities



Map: courtesy Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

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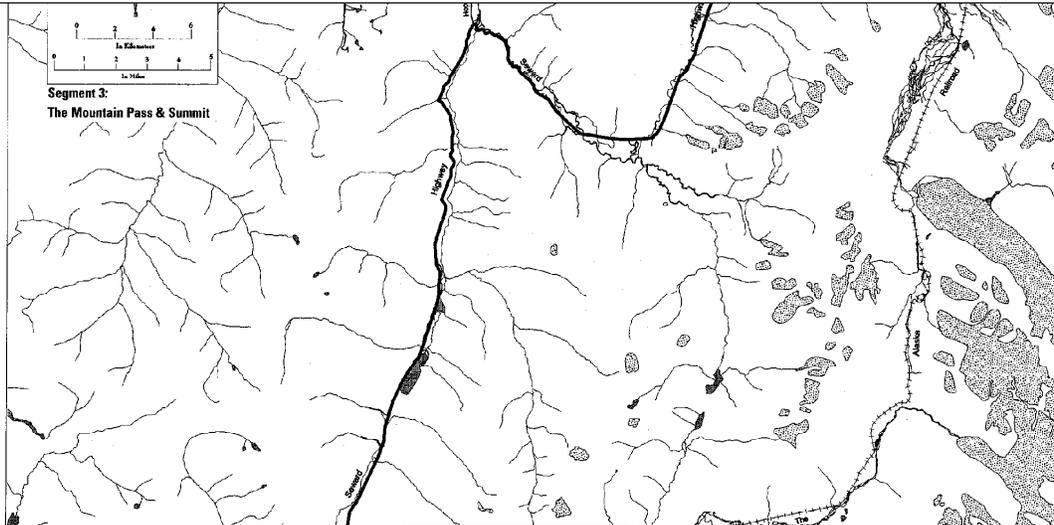
Segment 2: Turnagain Arm

It is at the Turnagain Arm segment where the natural beauty of the route becomes more than a distant view. The road narrows dramatically and the traveler finds him or herself suddenly embraced by the natural landscape with water to west and rock faces to the east. The distant profiles of the Kenai Peninsula's mountains become more intimate and mysterious as they slip in and out of view as the traveler winds along Turnagain Arm. The

waters of the Arm are home to Beluga whales and an impressive bore tide, both of which can be viewed from numerous pullouts located directly above the water. The northern side of the highway is largely composed of the steep mountain slopes of Chugach State Park where Dall sheep routinely entertain both local residents and visitors.

The segment is approximately 41 miles long and extends from Potter Marsh to the beginning of the Kenai Peninsula. This area lies primarily within the Chugach State Park, but also includes the communities of Indian,

Bird, Girdwood and Portage, as well as other public lands, including Anchorage Heritage Land Bank, DNR-Division of Land, Chugach National Forest, and other federal lands such as the Portage Glacier Visitors Center and U.S. Fish and Wildlife properties. The Alaska Railroad also parallels the highway through much of this segment.



Segment 3: The Mountain Pass and Summit

Segment 3 of the Seward Highway is approximately 42 miles long and consists primarily of undeveloped areas in the Chugach National Forest. This area, more than any other along the Seward, presents a feeling of vast, untouched wilderness. While there are areas that are sparsely settled (e.g., Summit Lake and nearby housing), the majority of the segment is open and undeveloped. Not always undeveloped, however, as careful viewing by history buffs near Canyon Creek will reveal alder-filled corridors adjacent to the highway—the remains of an

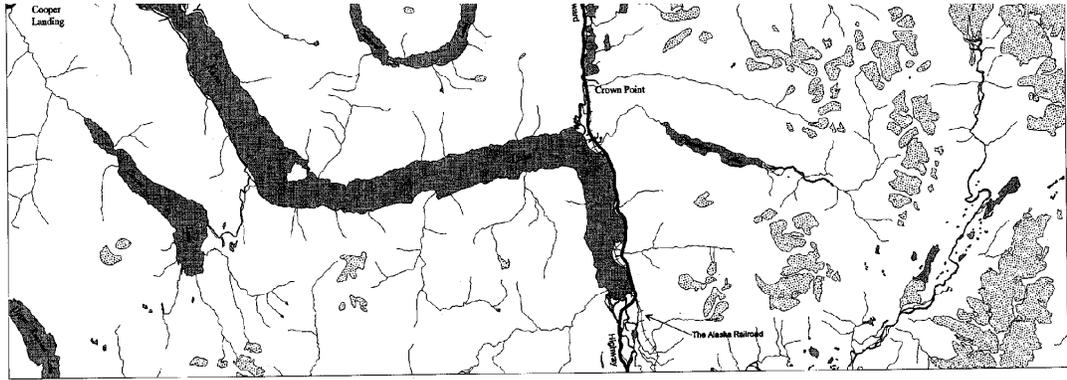
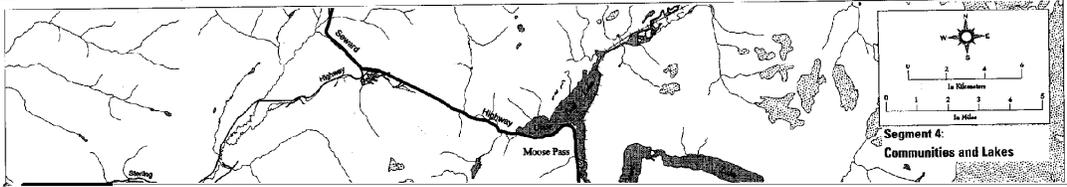
elaborate system of ditches constructed during the Gold Rush era. The longest, highest views of the Scenic Highway are found in this segment. The views of the Chugach Mountain Range as one drives north from Turnagain Pass are some of the most spectacular in North America.

The landscape of Segment 3 is dramatically different and clearly defined compared with Segment 2. As one crosses the southern most part of Turnagain Arm, the

valleys rather than an entire range. The feeling of climbing continues through Turnagain Pass, along Sixmile Creek, the Hope Highway Junction, along Canyon Creek and on to Summit Lake. Summit Lake holds a restaurant and a number of year-round and seasonal homes stretching along the lake. From there until the Sterling Highway Junction, the road remains at a relatively steady high elevation as it winds through valleys and basins. The distinctive qualities of this segment are its openness and the degree to which it travels through a truly majestic mountain landscape.

The mountain experience begins at this point. Whereas Segments 1 and 2 offer distant views of mountains across the Arm, Segment 3 puts the viewer on the mountain and headed into a dramatic landscape of jagged peaks. One of the unusual aspects of the Seward Highway is that it encompasses the full range of ecosystems from sea level to alpine over the course of 20 miles. From the beginning of Segment 3 at sea level the road climbs to nearly 1,000 feet surrounded by mountains that reach over one mile in height.

One's attention goes to individual mountains and



Segment 4: Communities and Lakes

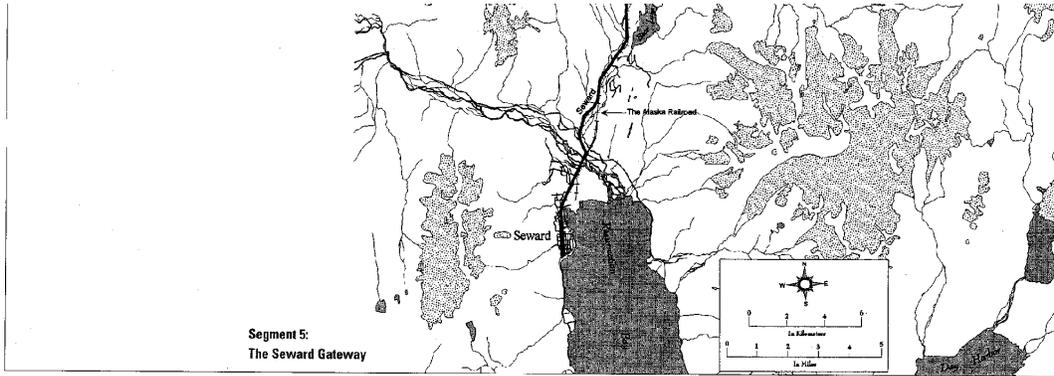
This 32-mile segment begins at the Sterling Highway Junction and extends southward to Mile 12 on the hill above Seward. The area is characterized by its relatively flat topography as the road runs along Trail Lake, Kenai Lake and Snow River. The Alaska Railroad rejoins the corridor at this point and continues to run relatively close to and parallel to the Seward Highway into the City

of Seward. The community of Moose Pass and the surrounding chain of lakes flowing north to south are the main defining features of Segment 4. The community of Moose Pass lies directly on the Seward Highway and the community of Cooper Landing is closely connected to the Seward Highway corridor (approximately 12 miles away) via the Sterling Highway and Kenai Lake. Year-round and recreational housing are evident along much of the Segment. The transition from unsettled to settled landscape is completed when one drives from Segment 4 into Segment 5 and the City of Seward.

Kenai Lake is a dramatic fjord-like body of water with a unique aqua-marine hue. The Seward Highway hugs the lake edge at a slightly raised elevation for six miles. Kenai Lake stretches for almost 25 miles from Moose Pass to the community of Cooper Landing. The Seward Highway, Sterling Highway and Kenai Lake create a circular corridor connecting Cooper Landing to Moose Pass and the scenic highway.

Map: courtesy Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

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Segment 5:
The Seward Gateway

Segment 5: The Seward Gateway

Segment 5 is 12 miles long and is anchored at the southern end by the City of Seward. Approximately 10 of the 12 miles run through Chugach Native Corporation Lands, state lands and lightly developed private lands. This portion descends gently from the Snow River junction through a transition of vegetation approaching sea level. The final two miles are at the edges of and within the City of Seward. This area is fully settled and consists

of a mixture of industrial, residential and commercial landscapes. Resurrection Bay extends out into the distance as one drives into Seward. The beginning of the Seward Highway, milepost zero, is adjacent to the new SeaLife Center.

Seward possess a number of late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial and residential structures. Of particular note is the Seward railroad depot constructed in 1917. It was here President Harding arrived in 1923 on his way to drive the spike marking the completion of the Alaska Railroad in Nenana. When asked

what he wanted to see and do in Seward he replied, "I want to be a normal person". The good citizens of Seward respected the President's wishes, and he wandered the town undisturbed.

The distinctions among and between the segments are significant. The concept of segments is used in this Partnership Plan to highlight the ways in which each area should be considered from a variety of perspectives: scenic quality, land use patterns, recreational experiences and community character.

Thesis 2:**Tourism in Alaska Will Continue to Increase, as will Alaska's Resident Population**

Photo: © Herb McLean

An RV traveling along the Seward Highway.

Tourism Along the Seward Highway

Recreational users, whether they are local residents getting out of Anchorage for the weekend, or visitors flocking to the route from more distant locations, are significantly changing the nature of the Seward Highway. While there are other forces influencing the Seward Highway (sprawl, commercial traffic, industrial development), recreational users are the driving force behind the Seward Highway and have the greatest potential for increase over time. This may be through direct influences such as an increase in motorcoaches and RV's impacting the free-flow of traffic, to indirect forces such as the tourism industry or scenic advocates challenging the impacts new industrial development or intensive timber management will have on the beauty of the corridor. The purpose of the tourism component of this plan is to better understand the forces "out there" and determine the most appropriate fit between recreational uses and the other uses of the Seward Highway.

Virtually every significant change experienced or proposed for the Seward Highway can be directly or indirectly traced to the route's appeal as a recreational destination.

- The increase in new tax revenues from tourism and recreational users
- The increase in demand for new recreation and tourism facilities.
- The increase in recreational use compromising the wildland experience.
- The increase in traffic necessitating highway construction projects.
- The increase in tax revenues financing new highway construction projects.
- Highway construction projects decreasing the aesthetic experience for the motorist by widening and straightening the road.

Arriving in Alaska

Alaska is a touring destination. Visitors coming to Alaska are seeking opportunities to get out and experience America's largest state. Because Alaska is physically removed from the Lower 48, the majority of out-of-state visitors arriving in Alaska come by plane or cruise ship rather than in their personal auto. This means that many independent travelers will rent a car during their stay, making car rental companies an important point of contact for visitor information. Major airports are also an extremely important point of contact for independent travelers, as many of them will pass through a major airport when they come to Alaska.

Out-of-state visitors arriving in Alaska learn about places to visit in different ways. Those who are visiting friends or family may rely on recommendations from trusted locals about the best places to see. Other independent travelers may rely on travel information they secured in advance of their visit as well as visitor information that is available at their hotel, or at a local visitor information center. The Seward Highway can provide a variety of experiences for these visitors, from a spur-of-the-moment scenic drive to a well-planned back country experience. Some independent visitors may arrive and then seek out tour packages to help them experience Alaska. These visitors may learn about the Alaska Railroad, which parallels the Seward Highway, or one of several motorcoach tours to destinations along the Seward Highway. Package travelers are less likely to seek

out independent experiences, unless they have opted to extend their stay in Alaska on their own. For these visitors, the tour operator providing the package may shape one or more options for touring the Seward Highway; the visitor has the option of choosing among these offerings. For conventioners and their spouses who may be attending a conference in Anchorage or along the Seward Highway, meeting planners depend upon the hotel or meeting location as well as local convention and visitor bureaus to provide tour options that will fit into the meeting schedule.

As noted, the recreational and scenic appeal of the Seward Highway directly or indirectly influences virtually all the change, or opposition to change, currently being experienced along the corridor. This scenic appeal, the compelling attraction and natural beauty of the route, is most easily discussed, quantified, and measured through tourism statistics and methodologies. If we can understand why people are coming, where they are coming from, and what they are doing, we will be able to unlock the "magic" behind the scenic attraction and best develop a strategy that acknowledges issues as diverse as economic development and scenic preservation.



Seward Harbor.

The following sections provide an introduction to the tourism attractions, existing and proposed, that are influencing change along the Seward Highway corridor.

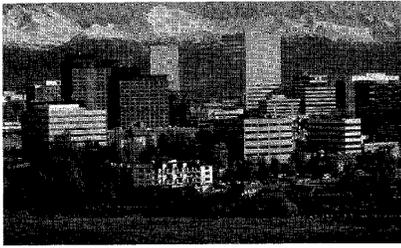
The Scenic Appeal of the Seward Highway

Diverse and unique attractions and accessibility have contributed to the popularity of the Seward Highway as a tourism destination, with the scenic beauty and recreational opportunities topping the list of reasons to visit. The natural beauty of the route ranges from dramatic views across the water along Turnagain Arm to soaring, snow-capped mountains above pristine mountain lakes. An abundance of wildlife and ecosystems are readily seen along the route.

World-class recreational opportunities abound throughout the year. Summer sports include fresh and salt-water fishing, hunting, hiking, rock climbing, biking, sea kayaking, whitewater kayaking, camping, river rafting, canoeing, backpacking, walking, parasailing and windsurfing. Winter activities include cross-country and downhill skiing, snowmachining, snowshoeing, dog mushing, ice climbing, ice skating and ice sailing.

Other unique attributes of the Seward Highway include:

- **The second highest tides in the world are at Turnagain Arm.** Interpretive panels describing the tides, with a tidal range of 38 feet, help visitors understand the significance of Turnagain Arm's tidal flow. (The highest tide variation is in the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia.)
- **Bore tides.** Impressive, but rare, this natural phenomenon occurs during times of extreme low tides when the front of an incoming tide is a moving wall of water from 3 to 5 feet high moving up Turnagain Arm at speeds of 35 miles per hour.
- **Earthquake subsidence.** A strange landscape created by the Earthquake of 1964 lies on both sides of the Seward Highway near Portage. This land area sank 5 to 8 feet, placing it below sea level and flooding the area with salt water. The salt water killed all the vegetation. Today a ghost landscape of dead spruce and a few tilted structures give witness to the destruction of over thirty years ago.
- **The historic Iditarod Trail started in Seward.** The Iditarod Trail originally followed parts of the existing highway corridor. The original starting point for this world-renowned trail from Seward to Nome is marked with an interpretive sign in Seward at mile zero. Parts of the original route have been dedicated as recreational trails. Local recreation groups such as the Seward Chapter of the Iditarod Trail Blazers are working on a long term vision to reconstruct the Iditarod Trail from Seward to Anchorage.
- **Alyeska Ski Resort offers world class Olympic-quality skiing.** Alyeska has hosted national level United States Ski Association and collegiate downhill ski racing events; it has been the home for the "Extreme Skiing" Trials.



Anchorage.

The Seward Highway is home for some of Alaska's most popular attractions. Studies completed by the Alaska Division of Tourism identified **Portage Glacier** as Alaska's second most visited attraction (the Inside Passage was the most visited) during the summer of 1993. **The Anchorage Museum of History and Art** just off the route was cited at the eighth most visited attraction in Alaska for the Summer of 1993, capturing 26% of all visitors to Alaska (216,300 visitors for Summer 1993) (Source: Alaska Visitor Statistics Program: Alaska Visitor Patterns, Opinions and Planning; Summer 1993, p.19).

Anchorage, located at the northern terminus of the route and the principal point of entry to the route, has been cited as Alaska's most visited community, attracting 543,600 visitors (65%) of all visitors to Alaska during the summer of 1993. (Source: Alaska Visitor Statistics Program: Alaska Visitor Patterns, Opinions and Planning; Summer 1993, p.18). Anchorage offers a full range of visitor services including lodging, restaurants and other amenities to meet every budget. Anchorage serves as a hub for many destinations in the interior of

Alaska because of Anchorage's easy accessibility by air, cruise ship (via Seward) and highway from other points. Lower airfares into Anchorage as compared to other Alaska airports contribute to Anchorage as a popular point of entry for many visitors.

Compared to other scenic highway destinations in Alaska, the Seward Highway is quite accessible for visitors. As noted, the northern terminus of the route is in Anchorage, a stopping point for many Alaska visitors. The Seward Highway is relatively short (127 miles), and offers a range of options for visitors with varied interests. The route has been described as a "microcosm of Alaska", offering a taste of many different aspects of America's largest state in a concentrated area. The highway is paved, well-maintained, and is in the final years of a substantial, multi-year \$82 million road improvement program.⁵

New Attractions for the Seward Highway

In addition to road and infrastructure improvements taking place along the route, several major new attractions are being developed that will increase the number of visitors traveling the route. Coming attractions include the **Alaska SeaLife Center** (a \$50.4 million project), the **Alaska Native Heritage Center** (a \$13 million project) and several other proposed native cultural centers. The Alaska SeaLife Center, in Seward, anticipates an annual visitation that will place it among the top ten most visited Alaska attractions when the Center opens in

May 1998. According to SeaLife Center staff, the Center currently anticipates 260,800 people per year in paid attendance, representing 40% (2 out of 5) visitors currently coming to Seward. The Center hopes to capture 60% (3 out of 5) visitors coming to Seward after the first three years of operation, bring annual visitation to 390,000. As the only driving access to Seward, the Seward Highway will experience increased traffic as this new attraction establishes a position as a major visitor draw.

The Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage on the Glenn Highway will provide another major attraction in one of the two anchor communities for the Seward Highway. A projection of 112,000 visitors a year is anticipated for this living culture museum, which broke ground during the summer of 1997 and plans opening in the winter of 1998-1999. The Alaska Native Heritage Center will have exhibits on the five major culture groups in Alaska. Five representative villages will be clustered around a man-made lake, with native employees demonstrating traditional activities and explaining how this relates to subsistence living.

Two separate native heritage projects have been proposed at other points on and just off the Seward Highway. The **Chugach Native Center** will be located in the historic railroad depot in Seward, adjacent to the new SeaLife Center. A **Kenaitze Heritage Center** has been proposed for a location just off the Seward on the Kenai Peninsula.

Directly on the Seward Highway the Alaska Department of Fish and Game is planning a new interpretative center and resource facility for birds at Potter Marsh, ADOT&PF and DNR-Parks are coordinating on

⁵This does not include Segment 1, The Anchorage Gateway, where an additional 20 - 30 million was spent.

a sheep viewing facility at Windy Corner, and a separated bike trail from Bird to Girdwood will be located along a soon to be abandoned section of the Seward Highway. New Gold Rush interpretation is planned at Canyon Creek near the Hope Highway Junction. It was here, directly beneath the newly completed highway bridge (mile 55.8), that a rich gold deposit was discovered in 1895. That discovery set off the Turnagain Arm Gold Rush of 1896, which predated by a year the rush to the Klondike.

Visitor Travel Types for the Seward Highway

Seward Highway attracts five basic visitor markets: 1) area residents, 2) independent travelers or independents, 3) inde-package, 4) package, and 5) the convention and meeting market. While each of these markets share common interests in the byway, each market segment has different needs and different concerns about the route. These markets can be further broken down into domestic and international travelers.

1. Area Residents

Area residents use the Seward Highway as their "backyard playground", taking advantage of the many recreational opportunities in a breathtakingly beautiful setting. Many of these visitors are day users. This group tends to be more knowledgeable about the recreational resources and the potential hazards along the route and has easier access to recreational equipment. These factors allow this group to take fuller advantage of the recre-

ational opportunities in the area and be the most intense users of the area in general. For example, residents might take advantage of wilderness camping opportunities, or keep boats in Seward for weekend excursions.

- Issues raised for this group include:
- the need for additional day-use areas in the National Forest (such as picnic facilities)
 - the need for additional trailheads along Turnagain Arm to access recreational opportunities
 - future use of state lands: Six Mile Creek boat launch areas, Manitoba Mountain, backcountry skiing, Trail Lakes area.

2. Independent Travelers or Independents

Independent travelers drive the route to see the sights and pursue individual interests. These travelers make their travel arrangements independently and are not part of an organized group. These travelers are more dependent upon information from guidebooks, signage along the route and information available at sites along the way.

- Issues raised for this group include:
- the need for more left turn lanes to allow independent travelers to stop at attractions on the opposite side of the road without impeding traffic or causing a traffic hazard
 - a means of educating independent travelers about potential hazards inherent in a wildland area (already addressed in interpretive signage and brochures in information centers).
 - the ability to locate public restroom and RV dump sites along the route.

3. Inde-Package Travelers

Some independent travelers may purchase package options such as sightseeing tours while in Alaska, making them "Inde-Package" travelers. These visitors may elect to ride the Alaska Railroad or take advantage of one of the tours offered by tour operators such as Grayline as a part of their visit to Alaska. The needs of this group, independent travelers traveling the Seward Highway as part of a package tour, are roughly the same as the needs of package travelers.

- An issue raised for this group is:
- an ability to connect Inde-Package travelers with appropriate package tour experiences that will meet their needs and interests.

4. Package Travelers

A number of visitors travel to Alaska as a part of a package tour, such as a cruise. Both Princess Tours and Holland America offer cruises that begin or end in Seward, and involve one-way air transportation from Anchorage. For these travelers, the Seward Highway is both a scenic overland portion of the travel experience and an important transportation link. Princess Tours carries an estimated 125,000 passengers a year over the Seward Highway, and Grayline an additional estimated 115,000 passengers for a total of 240,000 passengers from these two tour operators alone. For the majority of the visitors traveling by motorcoach or railcar, they are accompanied by a guide who provides information about the route. In some cases, the guide is trained by the tour operator, in others, the guide is an interpreter who has accompanied the group from their point of departure.

Issues raised for this group include:

- having enough pullouts in scenic locations, and being sure that pullouts allow a long enough area to allow the motorcoach to gain speed before rejoining traffic
- having a full-service rest stop with restrooms that can accommodate busloads of visitors at one time
- additional facilities for winter tourism to expand the shoulder season and increase the appeal of winter tourism. For example, the proposed Native Centers as well as the Alaska SeaLife Center will provide additional year-round attractions that are not dependent upon either daylight or good weather.

5. Convention and Meeting Market

The convention and meeting market attracts yet another audience to sites along the Seward Highway. Major meeting facilities can be found in Girdwood at the Alyeska Resort, at the Princess Lodge just off the Seward Highway on the Sterling Highway, as well as at every major hotel in Anchorage. Once open in 1998, the Alaska SeaLife Center will have meeting facilities to accommodate small conventions of up to 300 people. The SeaLife Center has identified two additional markets to target: those visiting friends and relatives in Alaska and school groups. Additionally, in Seward, the Seward Multi-Agency visitor facility will be able to accommodate an additional 300 people in planned conference facilities. The issues raised for this group are similar to those raised for package and inde-package travelers. There are also plans for a joint U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and City of Seward facility which would include conference space.

6. Corridor Changes Influencing Tourism and Tourism Patterns

There are some concerns which affect all five target markets for the Seward Highway, including:

- the rapidly increasing melting of Portage Glacier. The glacier has been eroding at a rate of 350 feet a year up until 1995, when it eroded 800 feet. The glacier is no longer visible from the visitors center, but can be experienced on a boat tour. While the icefield of which Portage Glacier is a part is not predicted to melt, and the recession of Portage will slow significantly when out of the lake, it will nonetheless require new interpretation and means of visitor access and viewing.
- the potential impact on visitation with the opening of the Whittier rail line to automobile traffic. The Whittier Tunnel is planned to open in 2000-2001. The number of visitors using the tunnel is projected to be 1.1 million by 2002 and 1.4 million by 2015. The EIS notes that the opening of the tunnel to automobile traffic will increase traffic on the Kenai Peninsula.
- for independent, inde-package and package travelers overcoming the image of Alaska as a summer-only destination.

Telling the Story of the Seward Highway

The visitor experience along the Seward Highway will vary based on several factors. Different visitor types will tend to rely on different interpretive techniques. In addition, personal interests will direct visitors to seek out information about topics of interest and affect the amount of time and attention spent focusing on the available interpretive options.

For "Independent" visitors traveling the Seward Highway on their own, on-site interpretation is extremely important. This includes signage, brochures, exhibits, audio visual presentations as well as interactions with interpretive specialists at sites along the route. Independent travelers will also rely on materials that they have picked up or purchased prior to driving the highway such as seasonal visitor information and tour guidebooks.

Inde-package and package visitors will rely heavily on the interpretive information that is provided as part of their package, and this may or may not include on-site interpretive information. Package tours tend to be more of a "cocoon" experience, where all the visitors needs are met within a clearly defined structure. Trained motorcoach drivers and step-on guides are an integral part of the interpretive experience for package travelers. The drivers and guides can be trained by the company offering the tour, or in some cases (particularly those from a foreign country with a language that is not commonly spoken), the guide may accompany the tour group from their original destination.

For the convention and meeting market, guided tours of the Seward Highway or selected destinations on the Seward Highway could be provided by one of the larger tour companies or smaller tour operators working in conjunction with a hotel or convention and visitors

bureau. Area residents and to some extent, other independent travelers, may be able to take advantage of guided group tours or wilderness experiences along the Seward Highway.

The Chugach National Forest and the Seward Highway Scenic Byway Interagency Planning Team completed a comprehensive Seward Highway Scenic Byway Interpretive Plan in 1993. Interpretive themes identified in the plan cover the scenic/natural and cultural qualities of the route. In this plan, the recreational qualities of the route are viewed as an integral part of the cultural history of the route as represented by the most recent influx of people coming to the route in a long history of uses. These themes include:

Scenic/Natural

- **Earth-Shaping Forces: The Drama of the Landscape**
Numerous opportunities exist to interpret the earthquakes, glaciers, avalanches, bore tides and weather that have shaped the land forms and created spectacular and scenic views along the route
- **Natural Resources: The Tapestry of Life**
Wildlife and fish abound along the route. Beluga whales, Dall sheep, mountain goats, moose, bald eagles, Pacific and common loons, arctic terns, sea

Pacific salmon are just a few of the species found along the route.

Cultural

- **Cultural Resources: A Pageant of Peoples**
Beginning with the Native Americans and moving on to European and Russian explorers, miners, military personnel, settlers and recreationists, the Seward Highway has a rich and varied cultural history.

As a result of this study, the U.S. Forest Service has installed a number of new interpretive signs in pullouts along the route to supplement existing roadside signs. Staffed visitor centers offer exhibits and opportunities for personal interaction at the Chugach National Forest District Office in Girdwood, the Marine Science Center in Seward, the Kenai Fjords National Park Visitor Center, the Trail Lakes Fish Hatchery near Moose Pass and others.

Chugach State Park does not have a comprehensive interpretive plan. Interpretive projects in the state park have been funded by ISTE and TRAAK dollars on a project-by-project basis. Several projects have used the theme "Converging Trails and Colliding Forces" for sites along the Seward Highway.



An interpretive facility at Chugach State Park.

Historic

The first signs interpreting the Gold Rush in the central region of Alaska are planned for Canyon Creek. Gold Rush history, adjacent sites such as the abandoned Gold Rush town of Sunrise, and the history of the Alaska Railroad, are currently interpreted through publications such as *Memories of Old Sunrise: Gold Mining on Alaska's Turnagain Arm*, *Autobiography of Albert Weldon Morgan* (Buzzell, Rolfe, editor, Cook Inlet Historical Society, Anchorage, 1994), *Rails Across the Tundra: A Historical Album of the Alaska Railroad* (Cohen, Stan, Pictorial Histories Publishing, Montana, 1984.), and *History of Mining on the Kenai Peninsula* (Barry, Mary, Alaska Northwest Publishing Company, 1973, second edition 1997).

Publications such as the *Milepost* and travel guidebooks such as *Scenic Driving Alaska* by Falcon Press offer descriptive information about the route as well. Tour operators such as Princess, Grayline and the Alaska Railroad all offer guide training programs for motor-coach drivers and railcar guides, providing information about diverse topics such as the history of gold mining, wildlife, glaciers, avalanches, and homesteads, as well as activities along the route.

Accommodating International and Special Needs Visitors

The Seward Highway is already an established destination for international tourism, capturing a share of the estimated 17% of Alaska's visitors coming from outside the United States (Source: A Comprehensive Overview of Alaska's Visitor Industry; May 1996). According to U.S. Forest Service staff at Begich-Boggs Visitor Center, these figures appear to be consistent with international visitation at Portage Glacier, although formal studies have not been conducted. Winter brings a large percentage of Japanese visitors to Portage Glacier. Along the Seward Highway, international symbols are already being used in many places to indicate trails, picture-taking opportunities and other visitor amenities. Many sites provide literature or interpretation in other languages. For example, the film at Portage Glacier offers an audio in English, German, Japanese and French in addition to offering provisions for the blind and the hearing impaired. Several trails along the corridor currently offer wheelchair-accessible routes. Tour operators and other visitor facilities actively recruit guides and employees with foreign language abilities, and foreign tour companies from Taiwan, Korea, and other countries with an established relationship with the Seward Highway bring interpreters who are familiar with the route and its attractions.

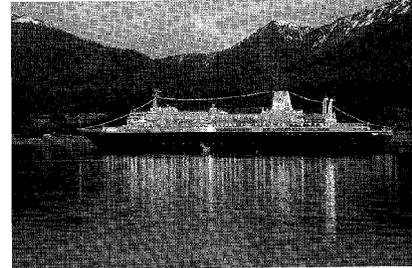
Accommodations

How many more visitors can the Seward Highway accommodate? The answer to this question varies greatly, depending upon whom is being asked. The lion's share of the lodging opportunities are located in Anchorage, which offers 6,000 rooms at present and has three additional hotels under construction. Upscale resort accommodations are available at the Alyeska Resort in Girdwood (307 rooms), and the Princess Lodge in Cooper Landing (70 rooms). Seward's current bed capacity is 500 (a total which includes bed & breakfasts), and cruise ships at port in Seward provide additional ship-board lodging opportunities for cruise visitors.

In addition to hotel rooms, Girdwood offers additional vacation rental opportunities. The Alyeska Resort has 500 condominium units, many of which are privately owned, although more than half of the owners lease units back as rental properties. Girdwood has about 1,800 cabins and homes, two-thirds of which are weekend or vacation houses. The Chugach National Forest has 42 "public recreation cabins," 19 of which can be accessed by trail or air from the Seward Highway.

Camping facilities

There are numerous camping facilities throughout the Seward Highway corridor. The U.S. Forest Service has 13 campgrounds with a total of 720 sites, and the Chugach State Park has 3 campgrounds with a total of 134 sites—the Bird Creek Campground in Chugach State Park, however, could benefit from needed improvements. The City of Seward manages two campgrounds in Forest Acres and Waterfront Parks. These facilities provide over 600 RV spaces and 300 tent sites. There are several private campgrounds in Cooper Landing, Moose Pass and near Seward, as well as many wilderness camping experiences available, by permit, on the public lands.



One of the many cruise ships visiting Alaska.

The Cruise Industry

The cruise industry has experienced strong growth in the past decade, with annual growth rates of about 11%. Alaska's cruise industry is so strong that it drives the tourism economy of the state. If the cruise industry continues to grow at the current rate for another five years, the current 240,000 visitor/year estimate by Princess and Grayline for the Seward Highway alone would grow to over 400,000 by 2001. The strong increase in cruise volumes is attributed to increased capacity ships, new companies entering the cruise market, and the availability of discounted cruise rates. Overall, the total number of visitors coming to Alaska is growing at an average annual growth rate of 8%, showing a steady increase from year to year. (Source: A Comprehensive Overview of Alaska's Visitor Industry)

Clearly the cruise industry will have a major impact on traffic along the Seward Highway through the use of

motorcoaches carrying patrons between Seward and Anchorage. Already the cruise lines stagger departures from Seward and Anchorage and have policies of not stopping at smaller pullouts if another motorcoach is already there. The cruise lines do have the alternative of using the Alaska Railroad to transport visitors which could help to balance or alleviate traffic pressures.

Marketing Opportunities

- Alaska is a touring destination. Because Alaska is a remote destination far from major population concentrations, it is a bigger trip for most visitors and they want to spend more time and see more places. In order to experience Alaska's vast territories, visitors must travel out from Alaska's urban centers.
- The Seward Highway offers a microcosm of the best Alaska has to offer—including spectacular and varied landscapes and watchable wildlife.
- Seward Highway contains some of Alaska's most popular established attractions (such as Portage Glacier), as well as some of the newest up-and-coming attractions (such as the Alaska SeaLife Center).
- The Seward Highway is easily accessible and offers a full range of visitor services at the northern terminus of the route in Anchorage.
- The Seward Highway already has a captive audience: it is a vital transportation link for cruise visitors coming from Seward and visitors driving to the Kenai Peninsula. "You gotta drive it to get there"—in other words, the market is already there. There is an opportunity to target where direct economic opportunities and development offer the greatest benefits.

- Individual tour companies (such as Princess, Grayline and the Alaska Railroad) all have an interest in promoting visitation along the route. In addition, there are convention and visitors bureaus in Anchorage and Seward and the Kenai Peninsula has a tourism marketing council. In addition, individual sites such as the Alyeska Resort also have a stake in promoting travel to the region.

Marketing Issues

Many of the individual attractions along the Seward Highway have a limited capacity, and any marketing efforts for the Highway must recognize and respect these limits. At present, the Seward Highway is reaching capacity in certain areas during the popular summer months. During this time, marketing efforts should direct visitors to the existing business nodes and sites that can handle more visitation and encourage a "through" driving experience in those areas that cannot. If any concerted marketing effort is undertaken for the Seward Highway, it should focus on increasing visitation in the shoulder season and during the winter months when visitation is currently low and there is room for growth.

The existing business nodes of Indian, Bird, Girdwood, Summit Lake, and Moose Pass should be promoted as places to stop, get a bite to eat, do a little shopping and possibly spend the night. As the Hope Highway Junction and Turnagain Pass are developed in the coming years, they may become additional business nodes.

Other business nodes along the corridor should be developed only if the market warrants such development, such development does not compromise existing nodes, and that such new nodes are infrastructurally and environmentally sustainable.

As development is geared toward solitude-seeking experiences in the Chugach National Forest, it may be desirable to "demarket" this portion of the Seward Highway to reduce visitor expectations. In other words, do not actively promote this area to the general visitor, but, instead maintain the area for backcountry experiences with facilities suitable for experienced outdoor travelers. Marketing materials can portray this section as a wildland with few services or amenities for the visitor. Visitors will be encouraged to stop, fill their tanks, have lunch, use the restrooms and take care of any other needs in the small communities outside of the national forest. For most visitors, the section of the Seward Highway through the national forest will be a driving experience with a few photo stops or interpretive walks at pullouts. For the more adventurous and well-prepared visitor, the national forest will offer backcountry experiences where the traveler can truly get away from it all.

The Kenai Princess Lodge and the Alyeska Resort are two relatively recent additions to the Seward Highway and environs that increase the appeal of the Highway as an overnight destination for the upscale tourism market. For both facilities, the drive to reach the hotel is an integral part of the overall experience. The marketing for these two sites, coupled with the marketing that the cruise companies undertake, is currently the major way that the upscale tourism market learns about the Seward Highway.

Regional marketing organizations such as the Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Seward Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Kenai Peninsula Tourism Marketing Council all offer promotional materials and programs that could logically include the Seward Highway. At present, these organizations do not provide any collaborative marketing efforts that might promote a multi-day stay along the Seward Highway in different regions.

The Seward Highway and the attractions along the Seward Highway are currently not marketed as a single destination. The marketing efforts of many individual sites and regional tourism organizations mention the Seward Highway, although the highway is always the by-line rather than the headline. According to tourism organizations in the area, the Seward Highway does not have the name recognition of other sites along the route. Visitors at present do not call and ask for information about the Seward Highway.

■ Responding to Current Trends in Visitation

Studies indicate that the average age of travelers to Alaska is decreasing and that these younger travelers are seeking "soft adventure" travel opportunities. "Soft Adventure" travelers seek out opportunities to interact with nature in Alaska by taking part in activities such as hiking, fishing or hunting as a part of a tour that provides extras such as gourmet meals, comfortable accommodations, and guides that are knowledgeable, safety-conscious and personable. The

time constraints that are resulting in shorter, more frequent trips that are reducing the overall amount of time Americans are spending on vacation may have a silver lining for the Seward Highway. The Seward Highway's easily accessible, relatively quick and condensed Alaska experience can provide this area with a market edge over other more remote Alaskan destinations. (Source: A Comprehensive Overview of Alaska's Visitor Industry, p.2)

- **Positioning the Seward Highway** Although the Seward Highway is without question a strong draw for many different tourism markets, the highway itself rarely receives top billing. Collateral materials and marketing efforts point to Portage Glacier or the Chugach National Forest, noting in descriptive copy that the visitor will drive the scenic Seward Highway to reach the destination. This offers an important issue to be addressed: does the scenic highway program and designation open up opportunities to reposition the Seward Highway as a fresh angle on an established tourism product? Or does the current hierarchy and name recognition of the attractions work so well that we might say "if it ain't broke, don't fix it"? It is likely that as the Seward Highway gains more national and international recognition as a tourism destination, travel marketers will incorporate the Seward Highway into their promotional materials and marketing studies.
- **Ecotourism** A growing awareness and concern about the environment has led to an increasing interest in "ecotourism", a niche market with a motto of "take only photographs, leave only foot prints". Environmentally aware consumers consciously choose environmentally responsible travel outfitters and suppliers, and engage in outdoor activities that do not negatively impact the environment.

- **International Tourism** While the Seward Highway currently attracts and accommodates international visitors, several issues relating to foreign travel need to be more clearly investigated, including the availability of direct international flights into Anchorage and a need to learn the customs of different cultures in order to respond to needs more effectively.
- **Anchorage Airport** The proximity of the Anchorage airport to the route creates opportunities for additional linkages which are currently not in place. Signage clearly directing the visitor from the airport to the byway is needed.
- **Leader for Marketing Efforts** While there are a number of tourism organizations with an interest in marketing the Seward Highway as a tourism destination, there is no one organization that jumps out as a clear leader in coordinating marketing efforts for the byway as a whole.
- **Seward Harbor** Many visitors first introduction to Alaska, and the Seward Highway is arriving at Resurrection Bay via cruise ship. This positions the City of Seward as not only an important gateway to the Seward Highway corridor, but also an important gateway to Alaska.