

Thesis 3:

The Seward Highway is a multi-purpose corridor serving resident and visitor, and commerce and the environment.



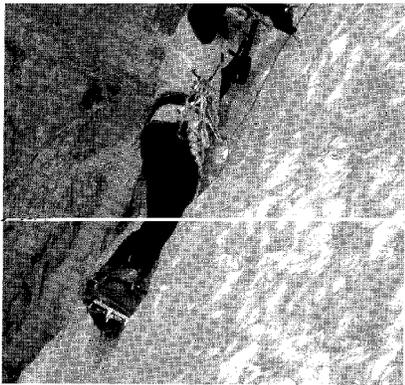
Four Theses

Unlike many of the scenic routes in the Lower 48 which provide an alternative to the frantic high-speed travel of the interstate, scenic routes in Alaska are usually the principal routes serving the people of the state. This provides a challenge for scenic highway management not experienced elsewhere in the nation. How to accommodate visitors looking for the majestic scenery featured in travel posters (and perhaps more importantly how to accommodate the economic stimulus such visitors bring) while at the same time providing the needed safe year-round access to communities and commerce will require careful planning, broad visions, and creative thought. Recreational use and highway safety are both important. Scenic vistas and commercial shipments both contribute to the State's economy.

Carrying Capacity for the Seward Highway

If recreational use is acknowledged as the driving force behind many of the changes and challenges facing the Seward Highway, capacity must be acknowledged as the great equalizer—the balancing component.

Recognizing recreational use as the driving force influencing the Seward Highway is not to suggest that it cannot be managed. Residents, resource managers, tourism organizations (especially the major cruise lines) and local communities can work together to plan a balanced and sustainable future. A well-organized byway strategy will address the capacity of the corridor head-on to alleviate the feeling of helplessness and ensure that the qualities enjoyed by residents, resource managers, and visitors today, can be maintained, even improved, for



An ice climber, a familiar sight along the Turnagain Arm during the winter months.

able future, provide the primary means of access to visitor destinations. Despite the state's great size, the percentage of lands accessible to the average traveler and reasonably close to population centers is limited. Future growth and demand are going to place intense pressures on the state's highly scenic road network to accommodate new development and traveler services.

If, for example, an analysis indicates future increased numbers, types and impacts from visitation in the years ahead, resource managers and local communities must determine what, if any impacts, these numbers will have on existing facilities. Such a capacity analysis provides the framework for understanding the limitations and abilities of a given resource. Together, these analysis help with making decisions such as: *Should we encourage more recreational use, and if so, what kinds? Should we expand our visitor facilities, and if so, which ones?*

Photo: © David Rhoads

The Seward Highway's Corridor Capacity

Why is capacity an important issue for the Seward Highway? Some might look at the Seward Highway and the adjoining public lands and see a modern roadway

which could be seen as having the capacity to transport and absorb many more visitors into the future. This appearance is deceiving for a variety of reasons.

First, while the Chugach State Park and Chugach National Forest contain millions of acres of land, most of this land is categorized as being very difficult to access. Under the USFS's recreation management system, 99% of the trail mileage in the Seward Ranger District is classified as *difficult* and as such would not be accessible to the average visitor. In other words, the mountainous, wild terrain of the Kenai Peninsula is best suited to the recreationist prepared to enjoy a backcountry experience. It is less well suited to the average family or cruiseliner visitor driving the Seward Highway for the first time. It is this latter category of traveler that will grow at the highest rate in the coming decades. Therefore, increasing numbers of persons will be vying for the use of the most limited acreage of these public lands.

Capacity and the Roadway

The majority of the Seward Highway has recently or will soon receive roadway modifications that will enable the road to handle higher volumes of traffic and/or move



Generally speaking, the Seward Highway (segments 2 to 5) has sufficient width, alignment and speed allowances to handle at least 15,000 to 20,000 cars per day traveling in both directions.

- Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) in 1995 did not exceed 5,000 at any location in Segments 2-5.
- Seasonal traffic counts are as high as 12,000 during summer peak weekends.

There are bottlenecks along the road where the combination of topography, seasons, the number of users and the types of users all conspire to create congestion under today's circumstances. It is quite likely that in the future, congestion at these bottlenecks will grow more severe.

Congestion occurs most heavily along the portion of the road from Potter Creek to Girdwood. At Windy Corner, the combination of a curving road, Dall sheep, little parking and no pedestrian space creates traffic slowdowns and a dangerous environment for all concerned—except perhaps the sheep who calmly observe the commotion from a safe vantage. At other points in this stretch of road, wildlife viewers, bicyclists, trucks delivering goods to or from Seward, and resident auto traffic all attempt to move through the corridor at once. Again, while the majority of the road does not have serious congestion problems from this variety of users, the emergence of problems suggests that use levels are approaching the point where problems will be more severe and occur in more locations.



Seward Highway near Portage.

Photo: © Dan Marriott

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Thesis 4:

The successful management of the Seward Highway is dependent on the cooperation of existing institutions, resource managers

The success of the Seward Highway lies, ultimately, in the hands of the resource managers, government officials, and committed citizens who desire the preservation of the special qualities of the Seward Highway, recognize the influences that will shape the highway corridor in the coming century, and feel the responsibility to manage

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

...improve the quality of life for Alaskans by cost effectively providing, operating and maintaining safe, environmentally sound and reliable transportation systems and public facilities. Special emphasis will be given to

Plans such as this cannot ever be substituted for the good stewardship of committed local leadership. This plan was created in consultation with the Seward Highway leadership (federal, state, local, and community) and structured according to their resources, abilities

Responsibilities:
 Roads and Highways
 2,100 miles of the National Highway System
 3,500 miles of state and community roads
 600 bridges



critical actions required in the following section can be successfully implemented.

Mission Statements

Every managing organization the consultant team contacted during the course of this study expressed, without hesitation, an appreciation for the great scenic beauty of the Seward Highway corridor. While this is a good thing, it should not be interpreted to mean that all managing organizations view the Seward Highway in the same way administratively. The following mission statements from managing organizations along the route suggest very different missions. They are included here in order that different individuals and offices may familiarize themselves with the "bottom line" objectives each organization will bring to any discussions regarding the management of the Seward Highway.

United States Forest Service

The phrase, "Caring for the Land and Serving People," captures the Forest Service mission. As set forth in law, the mission is to achieve quality land management under the sustainable multiple-use management concept to meet the diverse needs of people.

Specifically, the mission includes:

1. Advocating a conservation ethic in promoting the health, productivity, diversity, and beauty of forests and associated lands.
2. Listening to people and responding to their diverse needs in making decisions.
3. Protecting and managing the National Forests and Grasslands so they best demonstrate the sustainable multiple-use management concept.
4. Providing technical and financial assistance to State and private forest landowners, encouraging them to practice good stewardship and quality land management in meeting their specific objectives.



Bald eagle.

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Photo © David Rhoads

5. Providing technical and financial assistance to cities and communities to improve their natural environment by planting trees and caring for their forests.

6. Providing international technical assistance and scientific exchanges to sustain and enhance global resources and to encourage quality land management.

7. Helping states and communities to wisely use the forests to promote rural economic development and a quality rural environment.

From: 1020.21-Statutory Mission, Zero Code 1020 - Forest Service Mission, FSM1000 -Organization and Management, 4/30/93

Chugach State Park

Chugach State Park is managed to provide:

- a public water supply
- outdoor recreational opportunities
- protection of scenic resources
- wildlife viewing opportunities, and
- the protection of the wilderness.

Department of Natural Resources— Division of Land

The Division of Land is the steward of state land, upholding Alaska's constitutional mandate to "...encourage the settlement of its land and the development of its resources by making them available for maximum use consistent with the public interest." The division makes state land available for both public and private purposes.

Municipality of Anchorage

The Municipality's goal is to make Anchorage a better place to live and raise families. In achieving this goal to make Anchorage a more livable city, the Municipal governments mission is to:

- make Anchorage a more beautiful, attractive city for both people who live here and those who will visit;
- provide a safe environment for the city's residents and visitors;
- facilitate orderly, attractive growth in the community;
- make the streets throughout the city safer and cleaner;
- provide, as efficiently as possible, those cultural and recreational amenities such as museums, libraries, bike trails, parks and recreation opportunities that make the city livable and enjoyable;
- provide basic social and public health services to those in need;
- through the comprehensive planning process, provide guidance for the city's development over the next twenty years, based upon the community's vision of the future.

Kenai Peninsula Borough

No Mission Statement currently exists.

Alaska Visitor Association

AVA's mission is to benefit all components of the industry (travel and tourism) through unification of its goals, coordination of private sector efforts that encourage and promote travel to and within Alaska; involvement in governmental policies that affect travel and tourism; and introduction of education, communication and programs that benefit industry business.

Alaska Natural History Association

The Mission of the Alaska Natural History Association is to enhance conservation and understanding of the natural, cultural and historical resources of Alaska's public lands through education, public information and research.