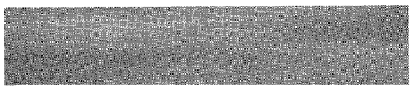
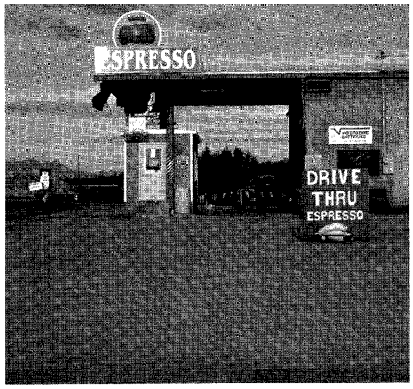
Keystone Strategy 3:

Haphazard development poses the greatest threat to the highway's ability to attract visitors and quality development.





Drive-thru espresso on the Parks Highway north of Wasilla, Alaska.

Photo: © Don Marriott

The Seward Highway passes through a variety of different jurisdictions. Development in each jurisdiction will differ. The types of development in a state park or national forest will differ from that occurring on private lands. The ways in which development is monitored or regulated in Anchorage may differ from the Kenai Peninsula Borough and the City of Seward. The surrounding landscape and existing land uses in each area of the highway will affect how new development impacts the Seward Highway. And, underlying all of this is the fact that as visitation grows along the Seward Highway, there will be more need and more pressure for additional development.

anticipate and/or manage this development. This is necessary to avoid turning the Seward Highway into a congested strip of commercial development, as has occurred in many areas of the lower 48 near National Parks and popular National Forests. Such congestion can already be seen in Alaska at the entrance to Denali National Park. It is also necessary to ensure that those who make public and private investments in new and improved businesses can be confident that the resources that are drawing people to the Seward Highway today will be present and appealing for the long term. If they are not, visitation will drop off and businesses will suffer.

Managing this potential problem will require paying attention to a variety of factors and concepts.

Conveyances Must be Managed Carefully

As the federal, state and regional agencies continue to move along a path of conveying land from public ownership to local government to private hands, care must be taken to ensure that these conveyances do not jeopardize the Seward Highway's character. This process is underway along the Seward Highway today as the DNR-Division of Land works with the Kenai Peninsula Borough to identify areas along the Seward Highway that should be conveyed. Important issues must be kept in mind during this process.

First, there is a limited economy along the Seward Highway today. The travel season is short, and therefore

during a 120 day period to be financially healthy for the full year. While projections suggest that there will be more tourists coming to the Seward Highway, most businesspeople agree that the summer season is already quite full. Unmanaged growth in the summer months will ultimately damage the Seward Highway's appeal as word gets out describing a crowded experience with little opportunity to commune with the natural landscape or view wildlife. And while regional tourism agencies are trying to expand the visitor season, it will take much effort and time before the number of shoulder season visitors will sufficiently expand the Seward Highway's economic pie to a point where there will be ample potential profits to justify new business start-ups. Therefore, does it make sense to introduce too much new commercial property to the Seward Highway if the economic pie will just be split into smaller pieces? It should also be noted that there still exists land along the Seward

Highway that could be used for businesses, but the market has not yet justified the creation of those businesses. Conveying land will not create that market justification either.

Second, agencies involved in conveyances must consider the potential visual impact of new businesses along the Seward Highway. This must be thought about ahead of time as Kenai Peninsula Borough has limited land use regulations to guide the development of new businesses. While additional development should be welcomed if it will provide more and stable jobs and create opportunities for healthy businesses, the Seward Highway's character will change dramatically if that development makes the highway seem more like "everywhere else, USA."

Finally, the choice of what land to convey can have dramatic impacts on the protection of scenic character. The maintenance of buffers along the highway could, for instance, provide land owners with great flexibility as to how they use their property while at the same time ensuring that the roadside will be maintained in a largely natural state.

Haphazard development must be avoided because:

- once you have destroyed a resource it is often gone forever.
- it will fundamentally change the pattern of land use and development along the Seward Highway for the first time in its history.
- the conveyance process provides a significant opportunity to transfer land with responsible stewardship built in.
- it will alter the economic and land use patterns well into the future.

Critical Actions

Each action identifies potential partners to implement the action. A lead partner or partners has/have been identified by an asterisk.

Haphazard development poses the greatest threat to the scenic character of the Seward Highway. The Highway today is largely undeveloped in nature. The development that does occur, in particular commercial development, is generally concentrated in clusters or nodes. This existing land pattern, one developed organically based on market demand, infrastructure, and public lands, serves as a good model for future sustainable development along the Seward Highway corridor. This basic land use pattern should be encouraged. The Seward Highway's character will be retained if it can continue to provide a feeling of wild openness and solitude, if it offers an experience of escape, and if future development either recedes into the landscape and/or buildings and sites are regionally distinctive in architecture, materials and setting. The following recommendations are designed to achieve these goals.

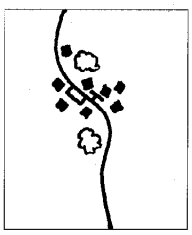
K.3-A Conveyance Planning

Recommended: Make conveyance decisions within the land use framework recommended by this Corridor Partnership Plan. Shape land uses within conveyances to conform with either Corridor Development or Nodal Development policies. Hold back public lands in 150' deep buffers adjacent to the conveyance areas so that there is sufficient buffer land to protect the roadside character of the Seward Highway and to control signing along the highway. The upcoming conveyances from DNR-Division of Land to the Kenai Peninsula Borough and on to private ownership are a major event that must be carefully planned. These conveyances will establish a new land use pattern along the Seward Highway. The lands opened up for development will participate in a process of changing the character of the Seward Highway. The land use guidelines presented in the recommendations that follow should shape how and where land is conveyed.

Potential Partners: DNR-Division of Land*, USFS, Kenai Peninsula Borough*, Moose Pass, Cooper Landing

K.3-B Nodal Development Areas

Nodal Development Areas are concentrated centers or districts of business and commerce. Nodal Development areas provide services in close proximity to one another (ideally walking distance) where parking and access to the highway are shared or linked to one another. Businesses benefit from one another due to concentration; highway safety benefits from a defined district with special safety features such as left turn lanes, lighting, etc; and the corridor benefits from orderly concentrated development rather than dispersed development relying on single-site highway improvements and requiring extended infrastructure and municipal services. Within the Seward Highway corridor, such areas would ideally include fuel, repair and food services.



Keystone Strategies

Additionally, larger nodes may include lodging, recreational and outdoor supply businesses, and tourist services. Nodal Development areas serving a local resident population may include banking, hardware, business and medical services.

Recommended: Define Nodal Development Areas along the Seward Highway. This concept focuses on areas suitable for concentrated development that are either already developed or which are targeted for future development through conveyances. These areas should deliberately express a feeling of human activity or settlement and, most particularly, embody patterns, designs, and materials typical of Alaska and not of "Corporate America". Such development should have a minimal buffer from the road (e.g., 50'.) It should clearly be a destination or be an area that invites activity. Existing nodes include commercial districts and interchanges within Indian, Bird, Girdwood, Portage, Summit Lake, Crown Point, and Moose Pass. Potential nodes include the Portage Area, Turnagain Pass Forest Service facility and the Hope Highway Junction.

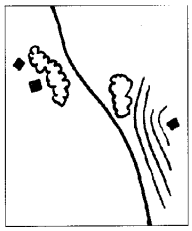
Several guidelines should shape development in the nodes.

- Building and parking design and land uses in these areas should not only attract passers-by but also look Alaskan and respect the natural scenery of the Seward Highway corridor.
- Nodal Development areas will be highly visible from the roadway. Their design must reflect local design values and traditions to be most appealing and attractive to the visitor.
- Public lands targeted for development in these nodes should have strong design processes to ensure that all buildings enhance the landscape.
- Private lands that will be developed should have clearly defined land use classifications so that development is uniform and consistent with that particular node.
- Public funds should be targeted for these areas to provide plantings, pathways, lighting, signage and safety features in the public right of way that will make the node a pleasing and cohesive area.
- To the degree possible, conveyances should include development regulations that will help shape how development proceeds on the site.
- In areas with few or no development regulations, local or regional scenic highway committees should be formed to develop locally appropriate voluntary development goals. These voluntary, advisory recommendations should provide a range of ideas on how developers can profitably build in ways that will enhance the overall character of the Seward Highway.
- Signage within Nodal Development Areas will be located within the public roadside buffer and thus it will be required to be of a consistent size and design so that businesses have adequate publicity and visibility, but the overall impact is one of an ordered district.

Potential Partners: DNR- Division of Land*, Kenai Peninsula Borough, USFS, ADF&G, Local Developers, City of Seward, Municipality of Anchorage

K.3-C Corridor Development Areas

Corridor Development Areas represent areas along the Seward Highway that are acceptable for low density dispersed development. The purpose of Corridor Development Areas is to allow development to occur outside of Nodal Development Areas, but in ways that will not decrease the scenic qualities of the corridor. Ideally the traveler passing through a Corridor Development Area will be unaware of any structures or development, except for the occasional driveway or mailbox. All development should be completely screened from the Seward Highway. Unlike Nodal Development Areas, the design of structures within Corridor Development Areas should be left to the discretion of the owner (as all development is to be screened from the roadway and be environmentally sound, it will have no impact on the traveler's experience along the highway). For the Seward Highway Corridor such areas are most ideally suited for residential or recreational units, small camps or lodges, club or organizational facilities (fraternal organizations, girl scouts, recreational groups), and non-visually intrusive infrastructural facilities (fish hatcheries, municipal facilities, utility operations).



© Keystone Strategies

Recommended: Define Corridor Development Areas along the Seward Highway.

These corridors are the linear areas parallel to the roadway within which low density, dispersed development is likely to occur. Within these areas conveyance policy, local land use regulations, public land development strategies and private property owner management actions should seek to protect the immediate road edge and hide development from the road. Generally speaking, there should be few signs of human activity in these corridors; buffering such activity from view of the road should be a primary objective.

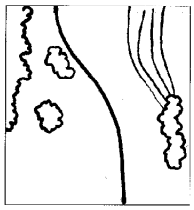
Several guidelines should shape development in the corridor development areas.

- In corridors where conveyances will occur, a 150' buffer strip of land should be held in public ownership immediately adjacent to the road. This will maintain the natural vegetative road character that exists today in perpetuity. Development may occur behind the buffer. While regionally distinctive building and site designs should be encouraged, the buffer will provide adequate protection to allow property owners great flexibility in what they do with their land and how they design their structures.
- Conveyances should be limited to lands that lie below line-of-sight elevations that would be within view of the Seward Highway. In other words, direct develop ment to lands that can be largely hidden from view by the roadside buffer and which will not protrude above the vegetative buffer.
- Encourage low-density land uses that do not rely on road visibility: residential, vacation homes, recreational or club facilities.
- Discourage frontage roads.
- Signage in Corridor Development Areas should be minimal and serve primarily identification and access purposes. As an intentionally noncommercial area, signage should be limited.
- Since a goal for Corridor Development Areas is to maintain a buffer between the highway and development, curb cuts and property access should be limited. Necessary access with adjacent property owners should be encouraged through shared access, development clusters, providing access via a single driveway to the Seward Highway, and collector or access roads behind the buffer.

Potential Partners: DNR - Division of Land*, Kenai Peninsula Borough, USFS, Local Developers

K.3-D Corridor Preservation Areas

Corridor Preservation Areas are recommended to acknowledge some of the large, undeveloped and relatively untouched areas that still exist along the corridor. Such areas should remain free of virtually all development. These are areas that provide easy visual and physical access to the type of natural features and resources of Alaska that are increasingly blocked or obscured by roadside development throughout the state. Owing to the Seward Highway's easy access to the majority of the state's population and further recognizing the road as a point of access and arrival for many of the travelers supporting the state's tourism economy, the maintenance of a few natural and unencumbered areas adjacent to the highway is important for the spiritual well-being of Alaskans, future generations, and the economy of the Kenai Peninsula.



Recommended: Define Corridor Preservation Areas along the Seward Highway. These should be corridors of a sufficient length to offer a feeling of openness and escape. These preserved areas will enhance the aesthetic qualities of the Seward Highway and preserve a few unspoiled land areas. These areas should remain under public ownership and protection. Spectacular views, critical wildlife areas, and areas sensitive to or inappropriate for development should be some of the criteria used to define these areas. Business and residential development will not be appropriate in these areas. Utility and other

Keystone Strategies

public infrastructure projects should be carefully designed to avoid or minimize visual intrusions. Even

For the Seward Highway there are essentially two types of gateways to be addressed and considered: ceremonial

- **Ceremonial Gateway** signs should be placed at points entering the Seward Highway from Anchorage, Potter Marsh, Girdwood, Portage, the

untouched Alaskan landscape for all to enjoy.
Potential Partners: DNR-Division of Land*, USFS, ADF&G, Kenai Peninsula Borough, Moose Pass, Cooper Landing, Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association

K.3-E Gateways

Gateways address the arrival to a place by shaping the visitor's initial impressions. Gateways are especially important in a state like Alaska where the great majority of visitors are coming a significant distance. Their "expectation" of Alaska is likely that of jagged snow-capped peaks, igloos, and abundant wildlife—a National Geographic wilderness experience. Gateways, the areas which transition visitors from the business of arrival (baggage claim, lodging, and transportation) to that of "holiday" (the travel poster image) are essential and often overlooked components of building a quality experience.

Imagine a traveler's first visit to the Seward Highway. They have been plied with images of Turnagain Arm at sunset, rustic log accommodations, and moose foraging at roadside. Now imagine, if to get to that rustic lodge, they pass through a commercial district with gas stations and convenience shops that they expect to find in suburban California. What happened to Alaska?

Gateways provide an opportunity to introduce the Seward Highway to the visitor through clearly defined signage, orientation and welcome.

Anchorage
Potter Marsh
Girdwood
Portage
Hope Highway Junction
Sterling Highway Junction
Seward

Destination Gateways, *direction provided to resources from the Seward Highway:*
Girdwood node
Portage node
Hope Highway Junction
Sterling Highway Junction

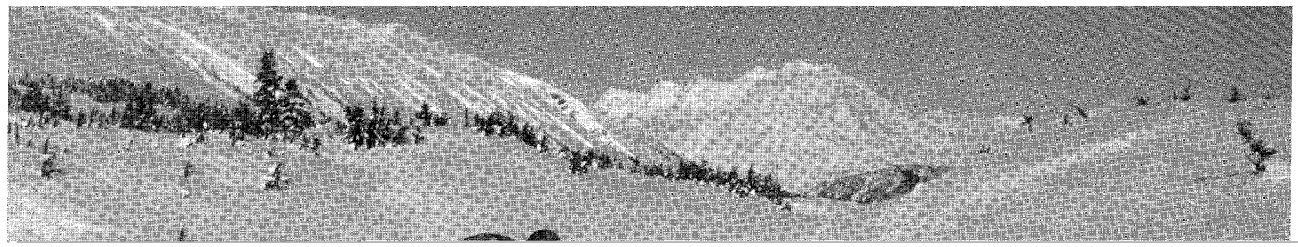
Recommended: Gateway strategies should be developed for the entrances to the Seward Highway and to all entrances to the nodes. Each type should be acknowledged and incorporated into planning efforts.

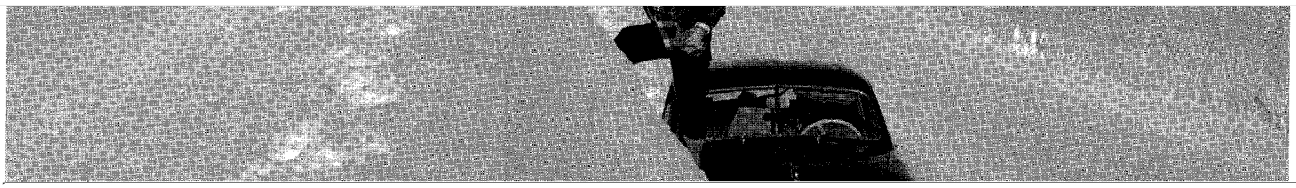
Designated Route. Affixed to this sign should be plaques or logos identifying all relevant byway designations and affiliations such as: National Scenic Byway, All-American Road, US Forest Service Byway sign, and the Alaska State Scenic Highway logo.

- **Destination Gateway** signs should be erected providing direction to key destination points off the highway. These signs are intended to direct the traveler to important key destinations, districts, or areas of interest associated with the natural, historic, cultural and recreation features of the byway. These sites include: Girdwood node, leading to Alyeska resort, Portage node, leading to Portage Glacier, Whittier and Prince William Sound, Hope Highway Junction, leading to Hope and the site of Sunrise, and Sterling Highway Junction, leading to Cooper Landing, Soldotna/Kenai, Homer and fishing.

Potential Partners: Partnership Team*, Local Government and Communities, USFS, DNR-Parks, ADF&G, Alyeska, Girdwood, Kenai Peninsula Borough, City of Seward, Municipality of Anchorage

© Keystone Strategies





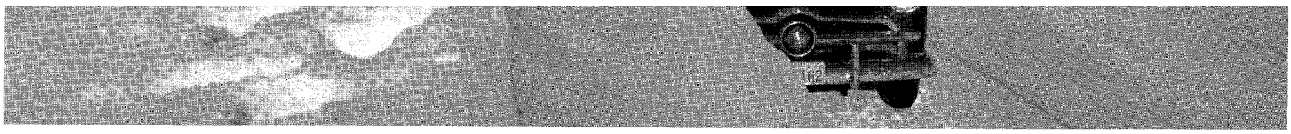


Photo: © Helen Rhode

Turnagain Pass in the 1950's.