April 24, 2014

Mr. Craig Lyon, AMATS Coordinator  
Municipality of Anchorage  
PO Box 19-6650  
Anchorage, AK 99519-6650

SUBJECT: AMATS 2015 - 2018 DRAFT TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP)

Dear Mr. Lyon,

The purpose of this letter is to provide comments on the draft TIP now out for public comment and request this item be put on the May AMATS Committee Agenda. As you are aware, the Fairview Community has been developing a Community Area Plan which includes pedestrian safety improvements to Gambell Street as part of its core efforts. Our request is to update the TIP to include the Gambell Street Redevelopment recommendations in the Anchorage 2015-2018 TIP. In addition, the AMATS Technical Committee requested additional analysis which has been completed and attached for their review.

The existing AMATS Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) includes project #576, Fairview Pedestrian Safety Study. The current Gambell Street configuration from 3rd Avenue to 15th Avenue has a crash history, very narrow sidewalks and an overhead electrical transmission line blocking the west side sidewalk area. The Fairview Business Association received a state grant to implement MTP project #576 to develop recommendations concerning pedestrian safety in the Fairview area. The initial study of pedestrian safety along Gambell Street was completed during 2013. The report noted there have been numerous pedestrian and vehicle crashes. To provide a safer pedestrian facility, the report recommendations include the widening of the sidewalks to provide adequate pedestrian/bike circulation and a designated snow storage area. The snow storage area allows normal Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) snow plowing operations and still preserves the pedestrian walking areas. To accomplish this without a major right-of-way acquisition that would impact adjacent businesses, the cross-section of Gambell Street was reduced from the existing four-lanes to three-lanes. The analysis included with the initial report showed that the 2035 projected travel volumes can be accommodated within the three-lane section.

At the request of the AMATS Technical Committee, the Gambell Street Redevelopment team has completed two additional detailed traffic analyses of Gambell Street for the 2025 and 2035 time periods. The analysis includes scenarios with a four-lane or three-lane cross section on Gambell Street and utilizes the no-build travel demand model in the 2035 MTP to provide a
The results of the detailed analysis (attachment #1) show that the conversion of Gambell Street from four-lanes to three-lanes is able to accommodate the MTP projected volumes with negligible changes in Level of Service (LOS) at intersections on Gambell Street.

While the four- and three-lane scenarios operate similarly, there are a few intersections that experience capacity related issues that should be recognized. An exclusive southbound left-turn lane may be needed at Gambell Street/6th Avenue in the future, so it is recommended that this intersection be monitored and that the sidewalks stay in their current position between 5th and 6th Avenues to provide the opportunity for an exclusive left-turn lane to be striped in the future. The analysis also noted the intersection of Gambell Street and 12th Avenue may need some minor additional work depending upon the internal neighborhood circulation patterns, which is a condition present in both the four-lane and three-lane scenario. Lastly, based on projected increases in volumes on 15th Avenue, future improvements may be necessary on 15th Avenue to improve operations at the Gambell Street/15th Avenue intersection under both the four- and three-lane scenarios in 2035. Given the uncertainty associated with future improvements and growth on 15th Avenue, it is recommended that traffic volumes on 15th Avenue be monitored in the future to assess growth and identify potential improvements. The addition of an exclusive southbound left-turn lane at the intersection of Gambell Street/15th Avenue recommended with the three-lane conversion will help improve operations. These items can be easily handled so that the three-lane cross section will result in minor vehicle operational differences.

It should be noted that beyond the minor vehicle operational considerations, the three-lane conversion addresses existing safety, ADA, and pedestrian circulation needs while providing immediate long-term certainty to allow economic development to occur in the near-term. The project as outlined in the redevelopment and implementation plan:

- Provides snow storage in 3.5 foot shoulders and the portion of sidewalks closest to the curb allowing adequate pedestrian connectivity and utilization of all three vehicular travel lanes during winter time conditions versus the three out of four currently utilized due to the lack of snow storage;
- Maintains long-term flexibility (i.e., conversion to a two-way street with on-street parking as part of the Seward Highway-Glenn Highway Connection project);
- Changes the pedestrian and vehicular environment to better match the needs of the business district, and allows additional aesthetic enhancements to occur along Gambell Street;
- Provides sufficient space for pedestrians year round, addresses ADA deficiencies, eliminates splash conflicts with outside vehicular lanes, and reduces crossing distances and exposure for pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles; and
- Reduces the need for additional right-of-way acquisition to address existing ADA deficiencies in proximity of the signalized intersections along the corridor.

The Gambell Street Redevelopment Plan has been approved by the Fairview Business Association, the Fairview Community Council, and the Anchorage Assembly and has been included in the Fairview Community Neighborhood Plan now up for consideration by the Planning and Zoning Commission on May 10, 2014. Attachment #2 is the preliminary project cost estimate to accomplish this work. Based upon discussion with the DOT&PF Statewide
Program Development Division, we are proposing that the $18 M project be funded through a combination of FHWA Safety funds and State grant funds. The funding should be shown as an initial $1.5 M to cover design and ROW in federal FY 2015 with the remainder $16.5 M shown for completion in federal FY 2016. The FHWA Safety funding portion would include the sidewalk, utility line relocation, pedestrian lighting, and roadway surface replacement for a total of $16.5 M. The state grant portion would cover the non-FHWA eligible costs (storm drain work, etc.) for $1.5 M. The current $6.5M pavement management project scheduled for Gambell Street could be accomplished by this effort with a reduced need for Right of Way acquisition at each intersection. Those funds could be incorporated into this project which reduces the net project funding needs from $18 M to $11.5 M.

Thanks you for your consideration of this request. Please don’t hesitate to contact me with any questions or comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Fuhs  
Executive Director  
Fairview Business Association

cc:

AMATS Technical Committee  
AMATS Policy Committee  
Patrick Flynn, Anchorage Assembly  
Jim Potts, CH2M-Hill  
Marc Butorac, Kittelson and Associates, Inc.  
Jeff Ottesen, DOT&PF Program Development Division Director

Attached:

1. Sensitivity Analysis of Proposed Three-Lane Cross Section  
2. Project Cost Estimate