

CHAPTER 3: EXISTING TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

I. THE EXISTING ROAD SYSTEM

The major road system in the Chugiak-Eagle River area originated with the Old Glenn Highway traversing the area from Anchorage to Palmer. The system substantially expanded with development of the area and is now made up of a combination of State, local, and private routes. Major roadways in the Chugiak-Eagle River area include:

The Glenn Highway is the major north-south freeway serving the study area. It is also the only route available to persons desiring to travel north out of Anchorage. The Glenn Highway is the busiest road in the study area, averaging 47,111 vehicles per day between the Scalehouses and Hiland Road Interchange in 2000. Much of this traffic is from the Mat-Su Valley, with 23,000 vehicles recorded at the permanent counter located at the Mirror Lake Interchange of the Glenn Highway (1999). Most Chugiak-Eagle River residents also depend on the Glenn Highway to commute to work in Anchorage.

The number of lanes varies throughout the length of the Glenn Highway. It is a six lane, divided highway between Muldoon Road and the Hiland Road exit. At this point, it is reduced to a four lane, divided highway that continues through the study area to the intersection with the Parks Highway in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. (Note: the southbound lane between the Eagle River bridge and Hiland Road is three lanes.)

The Old Glenn Highway served as the primary north-south arterial prior to the construction of the Glenn Highway. It begins at the intersection of Artillery Road and Eagle River Road near downtown Eagle River and ends about a mile past the North Peters Creek exit of the Glenn Highway. Its width also varies. It is a four lane, undivided arterial with a two-way center left-turn lane through downtown Eagle River to the intersection of the North Eagle River Access Road where it narrows to a two-lane facility through its terminus.

The portion of the Old Glenn Highway passing through downtown Eagle River between Eagle River Road and North Eagle River Access Road is the second busiest segment of roadway in the area with approximately 15,253 vehicles traveling on it per day (2000). The remainder of the Old Glenn Highway passing through more rural areas is not nearly so busy with daily traffic averaging 3,820 vehicles daily between South and North Birchwood Loop Roads (2000).

Eagle River Road is a two lane arterial serving the largest population center (Eagle River Valley) in the study area. It begins near downtown Eagle River at the intersection of Artillery Road and the Old Glenn Highway and ends inside Chugach State Park at MP 12.55. Eagle River Road also experiences wide variations in the amount of traffic it carries. While the western portion between VFW Road and Eagle River Loop Road handled an average of 7,623 vehicles per day in 2000 and 9,700 vehicles per day to the east of Eagle River Loop Road, other more easterly segments closer to the Eagle River Nature Center only handled an average of 580 vehicles per day (1999).

Eagle River Loop Road is an arterial primarily serving the central portion of Eagle River. It consists of two parts: the older section, which connects the Old Glenn Highway to Eagle River Road, and the new section, which crosses Eagle River and provides a secondary access from the

population center of Eagle River to the Glenn Highway. The older section is a two-lane facility while the newer section is four lanes and divided. Daily traffic averaged 7,230 along the older portion, and 10,968 along the newer portion in 2000.

The completion of the Eagle River Loop Road extension in 1992 significantly changed the traffic patterns in the central part of Eagle River. During the first year of operation (1992), the new roadway attracted approximately 8,200 vehicles per day and greatly relieved pressure on other area roads. For example, traffic was reduced by 6,000 vehicles per day on the Old Glenn Highway between Eagle River Road and Eagle River Loop Road and 6,500 vehicles per day on Eagle River Road between Eagle River Loop Road and the Old Glenn Highway after the new extension was completed. The main intersection into Eagle River from the Glenn Highway at Artillery Road also experienced some relief due to the new road connection. One section of Artillery Road just off the northbound exit ramp from the Glenn Highway experienced a reduction of approximately 7,400 vehicles per day.

The North Eagle River Access Road serves as a two lane arterial connection between the New and Old Glenn Highways. Its location midway between the Artillery and South Birchwood Interchanges provides convenient access to the Glenn Highway from subdivisions in northern Eagle River and southern Chugiak. The construction of the North Eagle River Interchange in the early 1990's replaced the old at-grade intersection. This greatly improved the functioning of the intersection and had a notable impact on traffic patterns in the area. Prior to its construction, the majority of commuters accessed the Glenn Highway at the Artillery Road Interchange due to the difficulty of merging at-grade with the heavy southbound Glenn Highway traffic during the morning peak period. .

The remainder of the road system is composed of collector and local roads. Collector streets distribute traffic to and from the arterial system and local access roads. Among the more significant collector roads are: Hiland Road which is the primary collector serving residents living along the South Fork of Eagle River; Business Boulevard which serves the business district within Eagle River; Birchwood Loop Road which is the primary collector serving the Birchwood Community Council area; and Eklutna Lake Road which connects the Glenn Highway with Chugach State Park facilities at Eklutna Lake.

II. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND OTHER MODES

The Municipality of Anchorage currently operates three bus routes in the Chugiak-Eagle River area providing around 140,000 rides in 2001. The Municipal Public Transportation System is primarily oriented toward serving commuters traveling from their homes in the Chugiak-Eagle River area to places of work in the Anchorage Bowl (midtown or downtown). A 2001 Multi-Modal Transportation Survey revealed that of those persons surveyed in the study area, 4.1% rode the bus to work or school.

The Chugiak-Eagle River area is also served by a rudimentary bike path system consisting of two main bike trails. A bike trail paralleling the Glenn Highway from the Boniface Interchange in the Anchorage Bowl to North Birchwood forms the north-south backbone of the system. The Eagle River Road bike trail serves as the main east-west bike route and extends from the Old Glenn Highway to Eagle River Lane.