FUTURE NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

FAST Planning MTP Update

Fairbanks Area Surface Transportation

Prepared for

FAST Planning

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Introduction

This Needs Analysis document identifies needs for the next 20 years for the FAST Planning area, incorporating local data analysis and public input to develop future transportation needs, including vehicles, non-motorized users, transit, freight, and rail. The Needs Analysis informs an interim Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) update through 2050 while an updated transportation demand model is finalized for the urban boundary. The transportation demand model will further analyze system performance, and identify critical areas of concern including nodes, gateways, links, and corridors.

Methodology

This interim Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) builds upon the 2045 *FAST Planning 2050 MTP Update Existing Condition Report* (October 2025), *FAST Planning 2045 in Motion MTP* (March 2023), steering committee and public involvement throughout the 2050 MTP, and through data analysis available beyond the transportation demand model.

Demographic and Employment Needs

Age-friendly infrastructure and services

Over the next 20 years, FAST Planning and partners will need to invest in age-friendly infrastructure and services that prioritize accessibility, safety, and ease of use. Examples include:

- Complete streets designed to accommodate all types of users
- Improvements to reduce stress on pedestrians such as:
    - Narrower streets at crossings
    - Curb extensions
    - Refuge islands
    - Smooth transitions between sidewalks and streets
    - Longer walk interval timing at traffic lights
    - Accessible pedestrian signals for those with visual and hearing impairments
- Access to transit
    - Available transit when needed
    - Accessible and adaptable features such as low-floor bus boarding, seat height, sign legibility, and wheelchair accommodations

    - Bus stop improvements such as shelter, heat, lighting, and wayfinding
    - Technology support such as real-time mobile route updates and audio-visual announcements onboard
    - Affordable fees
    - First- and last-mile support (e.g., covered and lighted sidewalks, winter maintenance, chaperones, etc.)
- Demand-response services
    - Improved access to Van-Tran paratransit
    - Human services support and coordination such as volunteer driver programs
- Targeted improvements near senior centers/senior living facilities that support people with disabilities or those without access to a vehicle

What is driving the need

The Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) population, like Alaska in general, is aging. The number of FNSB residents who are 65 years or older has more than tripled since 2003, reaching more than 13,000 in 2024. FNSB's population has a similar age distribution to the state, though the median age of 34 years in FNSB is slightly lower than that of the state (37 years).

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Transit stop projects including bus pull-outs and bus shelters
- Explore collaboration with employers to incentivize employee use of transit
- Increase MACS and VanTran ridership through fee waiver and other promotional campaigns
- Sidewalk and ADA improvements on Cowles Street near Raven's Landing (Cowles Street Reconstruction – Phase II, East Cowles to 1st Avenue)
- Reconstruct Eagan Avenue and Moore Street near Fairbanks Senior Center and Fairbanks Pioneer's Home to add sidewalks and improve connectivity for MACS Transit
- Prioritize sidewalk and ADA improvements near Golden Towers and Southall Manor (3rd and 7th Avenue and throughout Fairbanks Central Business District)

References

- https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2023/senior-friendly-transportation.html

System preservation over system expansion

The trending population loss, even if small, suggests a need to generally prioritize system preservation over system expansion. Projects to maintain and improve the quality of the existing network may be better investments than new facilities. Preservation-focused projects are also more resilient in planning documents in the event of further air quality conformity freezes due to Fairbanks $PM_{2.5}$ air quality issue.

What is driving the need

The FNSB population has been declining over the last decade, from a high of more than 100,000 in 2012 to 97,327 in 2024. In 2024, Alaska's state demographer predicted for the first time a long-term decline in the interior region's population, suggesting a loss of 7,200 residents in the FNSB (a 7.5% reduction) before 2050.

Most residents currently live in the borough's unincorporated areas outside the cities of Fairbanks and North Pole, while about one-third of the population lives within the Fairbanks city limits. The Badger Census Designated Place (greater North Pole area outside North Pole City limits) increased by 17% between 2005-2024 due to growth between 2005-2012. Six of eight CDPs showed declining population since 2012, contributing to a net FNSB-wide population decline of 3%. Only Eielson (+48%) and City of North Pole (+10%) CDPs showed growth since 2012, though Eielson is still below its 2005 population.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Projects addressing fair to poor condition pavements and bridges in the metropolitan planning area (MPA), as well as non-motorized facilities in disrepair
- Sustained funding of the FAST Improvements Program and DOT&PF's Preventive Maintenance/Preservation Program to address preservation needs throughout the MPA
- Creating a FAST Drainage Improvement Program to target problematic culverts, ditches and storm drains in the MPA to preserve roadway embankment and surfacing

References

- https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/projections/pub/popproj.pdf
- https://www.webcenterfairbanks.com/2024/07/25/interior-among-regions-projected-lose-most-people-recent-alaska-population-forecast/
- Employment projections by TAZ
- Draft FNSB Comprehensive Plan, 2026

Targeted improvements around military installations

Personnel increases at Eielson Air Force Base (AFB) may increase demand for multi-family homes and utility development in the North Pole, Badger, and Salcha areas. Eielson is expected to see an increase of 500 personnel over the next five years, many of whom are accompanied by families and must reside within 45 minutes of base. This population increase could increase the need for local subdivision roads with pedestrian facilities in areas around Eielson as new housing developments are constructed.

Growth is also expected at Fort Wainwright. With potentially 1,000 additional service members over the next five years, the increased housing need is expected to be absorbed by new barracks and available housing in the Fairbanks area.

No imminent changes are expected to base access points and the existing transportation network to and around the bases is expected to be adequate to handle staffing increases.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Old Richardson Highway roundabout near Eielson AFB gate
- Parallel frontage road network between Peridot Street and North Pole (MR-61 in 2045 MTP), with consideration to expand through Chena Flood Control and Old Richardson Highway at Moose Creek (recently expanded extents of MPO boundary). Consideration should be given to expanding the frontage road network to MP 353 (Old Richardson Highway) while also addressing a non-motorized facility gap east of 6-Mile Badger Road on the Richardson Highway.
- Resurfacing east and west urban sections of Badger Road
- Construct a roundabout at Badger/Holmes/Montgomery (Ft. Wainwright access) Roads, where Badger Road transitions from five lanes to three lanes

References

- Land Use Workshop, March 2026

Monitor changing school trip generation and evolving need for Safe Routes to Schools

School closures will change vehicle traffic patterns and the locations of concentrated pedestrian activity across the MPO. Bus routes will be modified, which could impact where signage and facilities are needed.

Travel distance will increase for some families, which may increase vehicle miles traveled per capita. This translates to decreased school bus ridership due to more parents choosing to drive

children to school and increased enrollment at charter schools, most of which do not offer bus services. This could increase congestion and pressure on transportation networks around schools and increase congestion and circulation needs at and near schools. MPO-wide reassessment or modifications to Safe Routes to Schools, pedestrian facilities, school circulation, traffic calming needs, school bus stop facilities, and signs may be warranted.

Recently closed schools may be repurposed for other uses, which could further impact traffic patterns and transit needs.

What is driving the need

During the 2023-2024 school year, 12,541 children were enrolled in schools operated by the FNSB School District (FNSBSD). Enrollment peaked in 2006-2007, again in 2012-2013, but subsequently declined along with the borough-wide population. Enrollment was lowest during the 2020-2021 school year due to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Declining school funding and enrollment in the past three years has led the FNSBSD to close seven schools. In addition to these, the district recommended closing Salcha and Hunter elementary schools as part of the 2025 school consolidation plan.

The decrease in overall district enrollment between 2005 and 2023 coincided with an increased enrollment in alternative district education programs, including district charter schools and the FNSBSD's Fairbanks B.E.S.T. homeschool program. The trend of more families choosing these options at a time of overall declining enrollment has magnified the impact of these declines on traditional public schools.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Update 2012 Safe Routes to Schools Plan to account for charter school additions and closed schools
- Utilize excess road width and available right-of-way to construct a sidewalk on the south side of 30th Avenue between Peger Road and Lathrop Street (serves Chinook Charter School and Fairbanks Montessori School)
- Advocate for incorporating orphan roads surrounding Watershed Charter School (Discovery Drive and Decathlon Avenue between Broadmoor Avenue and Discovery Drive) into the Smith Ranch Road Service Area (RSA) as the first step toward eventually constructing a sidewalk on these roads
- Construct a sidewalk or separated path on the north side of Hurst Extension (Richardson Highway to Badger Road) to connect to Badger Road shared use path (serves Discovery Peak Charter School)

- Trainor Gate Road and F Street Intersection Safety Improvements (serves Tanana Middle School and Ladd Elementary)
- School zone and pedestrian improvements in the University West subdivision (serves Woodriver Elementary)

References

- Draft FNSB Comprehensive Plan, 2026

Future Land Use Needs

Support rail network development, realignment, and expansion

Industrial operations in Fairbanks need additional spur lines to support development, a need that could be exacerbated by significant mining and energy projects north of Fairbanks which will likely result in more industrial development along existing rail lines. Spur line development is constrained by the need for property acquisition, cost, and the need to avoid adding at-grade rail crossings to the network.

Major expansions and realignments such as the rail yard relocation, track realignment around the urban Fairbanks area, and track expansions to the southeast and north, continue to be identified as needs. However, the high cost and competing needs statewide make these projects unlikely to occur within the 20-year planning horizon.

What is driving the need

As the northern terminus of the Alaska Railroad, Fairbanks plays a critical role in the multi-modal freight network. Goods and supplies heading to the North Slope are transported from ports in Anchorage and the Kenai Peninsula to Fairbanks via rail, where they are moved to trucks for the final haul up the Dalton Highway. Potential developments north of Fairbanks, including the Alaska LNG and the Ambler Mine, could increase freight movement through Fairbanks, increasing the need for local spur lines to commercial and industrial developments.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Continue to pursue road-rail grade-separation projects in and around Fairbanks
- Phillips Field Road Realignment
- Work with the Alaska Railroad (ARRC) and partner agencies on funding a feasibility study to expand rail realignment around the Fairbanks core and associated relocation of freight yard.

References

- Existing Conditions Report
- FMATS Freight Mobility Plan, 2019
- Land Use Workshop, March 2026
- Fairbanks Road/Rail Crossing Reduction/Realignment Plan, 2021

Development along rail network

The rail network is critical to industry operations, and the prospective buildout of energy mining projects has created a current and future potential need for development along the rail network. A high priority area is the undeveloped lands adjacent to the rail network between Fairbanks and North Pole, much of which is zoned general use. Extensive wetlands in the area, however, may preclude development. Industrial development in this area will require road network expansion, including adding a potential frontage road network on the north side of the Richardson Highway between Old Richardson Highway and Peridot Street. Reasonable access in this area is competing with the high-speed, high volume Richardson Highway traffic, creating an inherent safety conflict.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Implement recommendations of Richardson Highway and Peridot Street Road Safety audit (underway, pending completion) to include low-cost, quick build median modifications
- Richardson Highway MP 341-357 (Eielson to 6-mile Badger Road) Corridor Study

References

- Existing conditions report
- FMATS Freight Mobility Plan, 2019
- Land Use Workshop, March 2026

Invest in developing areas

Growth in North Pole and adjacent areas will continue to increase demand for new housing, especially for multi-bedroom single family homes. This growth could require additional transportation infrastructure, including facilities for vulnerable road users like children.

The Geist Road corridor and west end of College Road have, or will have, new large church and apartment developments, which will alter travel patterns through increased trip generation. These routes are already high-volume arterials with schools and/or major retail areas nearby,

and this type of development highlights the need for access control, appropriate mid-block crossing and intersection treatments, and other safety improvements.

What is driving the need

Despite the FNSB's overall population decline since 2012, the population in North Pole grew by 10% between 2012 and 2024. The Eielson AFB census designated place (CDP) east of North Pole grew by 48% during this period, which could put additional pressure on services in North Pole. Over the past decade, the FNSB reports that North Pole and Badger Road, adjacent to the North Pole city limits, have experienced the highest rates of new subdivisions and structures in the past decade.

This growth is expected to continue as Eielson AFB continues to increase the number of personnel. Over the next five years, an additional 500 people are expected to move to the area, some of whom have a maximum commute of 45 minutes to the base increasing demand in North Pole and surrounding areas.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Richardson Highway MP 341-357 (Eielson to 6-mile Badger Road) Corridor Study
- Geist Road Corridor Study (underway)
- College Road Safety & Access Improvements
- College Road and Geist Road Vulnerable Road User Road Safety Audits (underway)
- Richardson Highway MP 350-357 shared use path
- Park and recreational facility and access improvements to North Pole recreational facilities (Chena Lake Recreation Area and Fifth Avenue Park) particularly those that are eligible for CMAQ funding
- Old Richardson Highway roundabout near Eielson AFB gate
- Parallel frontage road network between Peridot Street and North Pole (MR-61 in 2045 MTP), with consideration to expand through Chena Flood Control and Old Richardson Highway at Moose Creek/Eielson (recently expanded extents of MPA boundary).

References

- Existing Conditions Report
- Land Use Workshop Notes

Plan for mineral development and ore hauling

The recent increase in freight traffic due to the Manh Choh ore haul has put additional pressure on the National Highway System (NHS) transportation network within the MPA. Most critically, increased freight has illuminated a need for upgrades to the Steese Highway MP 5 bridge at Chena Hot Springs Road to bring it up to current design standards. Currently, most permitted overweight loads and some legal loads (including Manh Choh ore haul trucks) are required to exit the highway at Chena Hot Springs Road and use a limited access gate to bypass the roundabout, increasing travel time, coordination needs, and congestion.

Other potential mineral developments in the area, including near Ester Dome and Murphy Dome, may create a need for road improvements on local, minor collector, and major collector routes to address conflicts between increased industrial traffic and pedestrian, bicycle, and other recreational uses of these facilities. While most of these areas are outside the MPA, the potential for user conflict has the potential to be exacerbated throughout the community.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Peger Road Chena River Bridge #1191 Replacement
- Steese Expressway Chena River Bridge #0231 Replacement
- Richardson Highway MP 357-362 Resurfacing
- Other projects addressing poor pavement condition on the NHS

References

- Existing Conditions Report
- Alaska/Richardson/Steese Highways Corridor Action Plan
- Ester Antimony Project Fairbanks Mining District Memorandum of Decision, 2025

Coordinated utility expansion

Access to utilities, especially water, sewer, and natural gas, has a substantial influence on the cost and feasibility of development. As utilities commonly share road right-of-way, early coordination with property owners, developers, and utility companies prior to roadway design and improvements may lead to opportunities to reduce the costs of expansion. Therefore, this may increase the feasibility of expanding the utility network. Expanding utilities supports addressing other needs such as densification (by enabling smaller lot sizes per FNSB Title 18 code), investing in the urban core, and improving air quality (by enabling transitions to more air-friendly heating sources).

Large-scale utility projects, such as a possible spur line from Fairbanks to a proposed natural gas line from the North Slope, may influence local land use, transportation demand, and investment in (and expansion of) local natural gas utilities and infrastructure. Early planning and coordination need to identify areas where traffic volumes might increase and where existing infrastructure might tie into and expand.

What is driving the need

- High cost of electricity. In June 2026, GVEA raised its quarterly fuel and purchased power charge to customers to $0.1277, resulting in an effective residential rate of $0.41/kwHr. The cost of electricity and home heating are directly correlated in Interior Alaska, given GVEA's limited access to renewable and natural gas facilities.
- Expansion of Interior Gas Utility. Interior Gas Utility (IGU) intends to continue expansion in the North Pole area in support the reduction of $PM_{2.5}$ emissions, with eventual expansion to other areas of the borough.
- Development in the North Pole and Badger East area due to expansions at Eielson. Continued development is likely to expand the desire for natural gas in these areas.
- Lack of utility build-out (especially water and sewer) outside the core urban areas. Water expansion has occurred in recent years due to concern for PFAS contamination in residential areas near fire training facilities, the airport, or former oil refining facilities. There do not appear to be near-term expansion plans for piped water and sewer beyond this. PFAS plumes may develop or shift over time into new residential areas, spurring new needs.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Promotion of IGU availability and potential connection incentives: it is imperative to ensure that North Pole residents understand the costs and benefits of connecting to available natural gas, especially given this region need to show the most demonstrated improvement in $PM_{2.5}$ emissions.
- Coordination of road projects and potential utility upgrade/expansion projects to reduce overall costs and traffic impacts during construction.

References

- https://www.interiorgas.com/
- https://GVEA.com/

Infrastructure and regulation to support densification

Denser and multi-family residential developments have been identified as part of a wide approach to addressing local housing needs and the high costs of development. Recent efforts by the FNSB and City of Fairbanks have relaxed certain requirements, provided incentives, and adopted planning recommendations to encourage densification and infill development, mostly in the urban core, downtown, and near transit. As new developments concentrate population in smaller areas, roadway improvements need to account for potential increased vehicle and pedestrian volumes in those areas.

References

- Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Plan, 2024
- Draft FNSB Comprehensive Plan, 2026
- Land Use Workshop 3/19/2026 - Summary
- FNSB Comprehensive Plan, 2005
- FNSB Zoning

Air Quality Needs

Maintain air quality improvements and conformity as a high priority

Overcoming air quality non-conformity remains a critical challenge for the MPA. The 2024 Serious State Implementation Plan (SIP) Amendment has significantly reduced the Motor Vehicle Emissions (MVE) budget for the non-attainment area (for winter days, from 0.33ppb for 2017+ to 0.074-0.049ppb between 2020 and 2029). Conforming to this drastically reduced budget may require new and aggressive approaches which are described in more detail in the next two needs. Generally, the MPO will need to:

1. Actively seek out and nominate projects that may reduce emissions and dust.
2. Continue to highly prioritize these projects through project scoring criteria and weighting.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Aggressively pursue CMAQ-eligible projects that reduce vehicle emissions (new sidewalks or shared use paths, EV infrastructure projects, gravel-to pavement projects, and motor vehicle plug-ins), especially in the North Pole, Moose Creek/Eielson, and Chena Lake Recreation Areas, where $PM_{2.5}$ exceedance patterns remain.

References

Fairbanks $PM_{2.5}$ Serious SIP

Continue to budget for Air Quality Conformity Reporting

To evaluate progress toward meeting the 2024 Serious SIP Amendment's reduced MVE budget for the non-attainment area will require careful, frequent, and precise monitoring and reporting. FAST Planning will need to:

1. Continue to budget for professional services to generate up-to-date air quality conformity reports in the future; and
2. Continue to highly prioritize projects that improve air quality.

Airshed approach to air quality management

FAST and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) have identified the need to divide the FNSB into two distinct airsheds— Fairbanks and North Pole—to better target management, assessment, and improvements where needed to meet Clean Air Act standards. ADEC is currently considering making this request to the EPA, which would establish a "Fairbanks Maintenance Area" and a "North Pole Non-Attainment Areas." While CMAQ funds would still be eligible to be spent in either area, priority should be given to expending funds in the North Pole Non-Attainment Area to help improve air quality.

Strategies may include North Pole-specific area plans for bikeways, non-motorized network, transit service expansion, and identification of paving needs (dust reduction), or priority funding for FNSB Road Service Area (RSA) projects in the North Pole area.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- To open additional opportunities for North-Pole area projects eligible for CMAQ, prioritize incorporating North Pole into Alternative 2 of the FAST RSA Expansion Plan, potentially as a pilot project for six RSA districts. (Alternative 1 is one consolidated RSA district and may be more complex to initiate as a pilot program). Consolidation may increase available capital matching funds for RSA districts to participate in the FAST Improvement Program or other programs/projects available through FAST Planning.
- Work with FNSB Rural Services and Community Planning departments to promote an orphan road incentive program to target North Pole area roads that are not in an existing RSA.

Roadway & Vehicular Needs

Maintenance

Road system expansion within the MPA generally increases overall maintenance needs and costs. Likewise, as projects in FAST Planning's Non-Motorized Plan are implemented and

pedestrian and bicycle facilities are expanded, there will be more facilities to maintain even if the road system is not expanded. Decreased funding from the State of Alaska over the past decade has put additional pressure on FAST Planning funding programs to cover necessary maintenance, since state-funding for local road upgrades have been largely unavailable. Prioritizing investments on system preservation over system expansion may ease some these maintenance pressures. Still, several maintenance-related needs for the system remain, including:

- Prioritizing pavement repairs, grading, and pedestrian facility maintenance during project selection
- Coordinated asset management
- Address increased permafrost thaw
- Address orphan roads, rural road maintenance, and maintenance standards
- Coordinated and strategic winter maintenance and snow storage

Prioritize maintaining a state of good repair during project selection

Declining funding from the State of Alaska over the past decade has put additional pressure on FAST Planning funding programs since state funding for local road upgrades has been largely unavailable. Without state dollars to fund capital improvement projects on non-NHS routes, FAST Planning's limited budget is one of the only sources for this funding, making it difficult to keep up with needs. These pressures may be exacerbated by a trend of decreased state funding for road maintenance. The state maintains 25% of the centerline miles in the MPA, including all NHS routes. These pressures may necessitate establishing new methods to prioritize and fund maintenance activities such as pavement repairs, grading, and pedestrian facility maintenance.

Coordinated asset management

Different agency partners approach asset management to varying degrees and with different methods. Lack of information (or access to it) about the conditions of road surfaces, sidewalks and paths hamper a comprehensive understanding of facility conditions and effective project selection. FAST can improve the direction of maintenance efforts and project funds by coordinating with partners and adopting and implementing an asset management protocol and database.

Address increased permafrost thaw

The warming climate is exacerbating maintenance issues across arctic and sub-arctic environments, including within the MPA. Degrading permafrost and poor soils contribute to maintenance challenges for transportation officials. Increasing permafrost thaw and warmer

winter weather will put additional pressures on maintenance budgets and staffing across the MPA, resulting in the need for more maintenance funding and staff to avoid degraded levels of service. New developments should avoid unstable and permafrost-laden soils to the extent possible.

Address orphan roads and maintenance standards for RSAs

There are 131 miles of "orphan" roads in the MPA that have no agency with maintenance authority or responsibility. Residents who live on orphan roads not only have little to no maintenance (other than what is volunteered by property owners). A significant challenge to having their road become eligible for adoption into an RSA is that the road must first meet FNSB road standards.

For orphan roads outside of city limits and not maintained by the state, FNSB RSAs are the most viable option for road maintenance. However, the 103 RSAs within the FNSB have their challenges. Highly variable density yields highly variable tax revenue available to different RSAs. This is compounded with a lack of uniform maintenance (performance-based) standards which results in disparities in levels of service across RSA roads. Orphan roads, and even some RSA roads in areas with poor subbase, drainage or aufeis can become impassable during winter and summer without regular plowing and grading, hindering emergency response, school bus access, and the delivery of essential goods like fuel and water.

Maintenance and Operations

Maintenance, and especially winter maintenance presents ongoing challenges for all agency partners, especially since state funding (and resulting funding available to local governments) started declining in 2014. Dissatisfaction with the condition of non-motorized facilities (sidewalks, paths, and transit stops) in winter is a recurrent theme in public surveys and comments related to transportation. Generally, agency budgets are held flat or nominally increased (in some cases reduced) and have not kept up with inflation or the competitive labor market for skilled equipment operators. Progress has been made using CMAQ funding to purchase articulated tractors tailored for sidewalk snow removal on behalf of agencies, but even the most abundant fleet of equipment does not make an impact without an operator. Snow hauling and storage is a significant labor and equipment cost in a community with snow that stays six months a year, as most urban rights-of-way do not have adequate storage without stacking snow and blocking the facilities' (i.e. sidewalk) use.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Continue to emphasize preservation (road surface and drainage) projects throughout the MPA, including funding and nominations to the FAST Improvement program and DOT&PF's preservation program.
- Streamline RSA administration through consolidation and prioritize establishing maintenance for orphan roads through incentives and/or pilot programs. The FAST Planning RSA Expansion Plan identified solutions including establishing one borough-wide RSA with a single mill rate for all borough roads, consolidating existing RSAs and into six larger RSAs (that can also encompass orphan roads, which will then be eligible for capital improvement funding) or establishing an additional RSA to encompass all orphan roads. Since the completion of the RSA Expansion Plan, however, no alternatives have been selected or acted on. The FNSB, with support from FAST, will need to decide on and pursue one of the alternatives to improve the provision of rural road maintenance.
- Establish standards of care across all agency roads for greater uniformity and to emphasize performance-based standards. The public and elected officials are most likely to understand the impact of maintenance funding decisions when budgets reflect a performance standard. Adopting winter maintenance practices and policies that establish a visual condition[1] and clear description of driver expectation for that condition within a certain timeframe is an established standard for public works agencies across the U.S., including, and especially for, those that contract these services. Level of service standards can be established for winter conditions, non-motorized facilities and for paved and unpaved roadways, which would be particularly beneficial in closing disparity gaps in service levels on RSA roads. In addition, establishing route priority levels throughout the community that follow a generally consistent methodology (example, DOT&PF Priorities 1-5) would also help the public understand how agency personnel must prioritize operations.
- Continue multi-agency maintenance agreements and explore opportunities for efficiency. Road ownership and agency jurisdictions within the MPA do not have a clean, connected grid of road network, resulting in some overlapping jurisdictional areas and potential inefficiency in equipment transport and travel time, particularly for non-motorized facilities. FAST Planning, through its various committees including the Winter Maintenance Task Force, can facilitate workshops for potential maintenance exchanges among agencies that may result in more efficient operations for all agencies.

[1] See Alaska Highway Maintenance and Operations Handbook, Table 7-1, Highway Winter Performance Targets

Resources

- FAST Planning Road Service Area Expansion Plan, 2021
- Connect Fairbanks, FAST Planning Non-Motorized Plan, 2021
- Existing Conditions Report

Targeted traffic flow and circulation improvements

Bottlenecks and congestion are not a network-wide issue within the MPA, but targeted improvements could improve mobility for all users and improve air quality. Some areas in need of targeted improvements (outside of at-grade rail crossings, which are discussed in the freight section) include:

- Steese Highway MP 5 Bridge at Chena Hot Springs Road: Permitted loads and some legal loads (including the Manh Choh ore haul trucks) are required to exit the Steese Highway and use a limited access gate to bypass the roundabout, causing congestion for Chena Hot Springs Road vehicle traffic.
- Peger Road and Van Horn Road: This intersection serves the adjacent industrial area but does not have sufficient swing room for doubles heading south then east on Van Horn Road. The FMATS Freight Mobility Plan proposed consideration of a roundabout to replace the three-way stop intersection.
- Bicycle Circulation in Downtown Fairbanks: Bicycles are prohibited from using sidewalks downtown, but limited road shoulders make bike travel difficult, increases conflicts between bikes and vehicles, and can contribute to congestion. Additional bicycle facilities downtown are needed to address these needs.
- Evaluate downtown Fairbanks street network for converting one-way streets to two-way, including opportunities for designing conversion (or segments of conversion, matching Cushman Street) into existing TIP projects

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Chena Hot Springs Undercossing (Bridge #1342, Steese Highway and Chena Hot Springs Road) Replacement. This is a state-funded project that is not yet incorporated into the STIP.
- Steese Expressway Chena River Bridge #0231 Replacement
- Peger Road and Van Horn Road roundabout, designed through truck trials like Danby-Wembley roundabout
- Barnette St and Lacey Street Reconstruction

References

- Existing Conditions Report
- FMATS Freight Mobility Plan
- Downtown Fairbanks 2040, 2024

Corridor planning and implementation

Recent plans for individual corridors have identified unique challenges and needs associated with each corridor and design alternatives to address those needs. For some corridors, the next step will be to select an alternative or develop and design projects of various scales and scopes to begin implementing the corridor plan. Corridors with recent plans to review for progress and potential projects include:

- Airport Way (2007 Reconnaissance Study and 2018 Functional Features Analysis)
- College Road
- Richardson Highway – Steese Highway
- Minnie Street Planning and Environmental Linkages Study

The first three plans listed above need review given the age of the plans and changes in development since they were written.

Corridors recommended for corridor study include:

- Airport Way Access Control Study
- Peger Road (TIP project)
- Geist Road/Chena Pump Road (TIP project)
- Richardson Highway MP 341-357 (Eielson AFB to 6-mile Badger Road)
- Trainor Gate Road

Aesthetic Improvements

Recent plans have identified the importance of and need to improve the aesthetics of local public spaces and transportation corridors. This was most recently highlighted by the enthusiastic responses to the 2025 MTP public survey question asking ‘what is the ugliest road in Fairbanks?’. Airport Way was a heavy favorite for the title of “Ugliest Road,” while sections of Cushman and Old Steese tied as distant runners up. Chain link fencing, jersey barriers, lack of landscaping and trees, and inadequate (or absent) bicycle and pedestrian facilities were cited as the primary reasons for nominations.

Considering roadway aesthetics is not superfluous or a practice of "form over function." Aesthetics functionally support a sense of place and livability, economic development, environmental health, system resilience, safer and calmer traffic, and are closely linked to perceptions of comfort and actual lower levels of traffic stress felt by bicyclists and pedestrians. Aesthetic improvements often go together with following Complete Streets policies and integrating Green Infrastructure for stormwater runoff.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

Priority areas of the community for low-cost, quick build aesthetic improvements should be recommended by the FAST Planning Project Enhancement Committee, and potential partnerships with adjacent businesses should be explored. Aesthetics and landscaping improvements are eligible for FHWA funding as components of transportation projects, but not as stand alone projects.

Improvements that could be eligible to be completed on a voluntary basis (no project funds required) under DOT&PF's Beautification program should also be evaluated.

Suggestions for various locations include:

Airport Way:

- Landscape enhancement between Market Street and Peger Road (south side)
- Landscape enhancement between W. Barnette and Cowles Street (north side, likely partner project with FNSB for work within Noel Wien Library/Weeks Field Park)
- Removal of barrier (landscape and/or fence enhancement) between Marlin Street and Washington Drive (north side – the section separating sidewalk from westbound Airport Way without frontage road)
- Landscape enhancement between University Avenue and Sportsman Way (both sides, emphasis on north since Fred Meyer parking lot has perimeter landscaping)
- Other recommendations from the Airport Way Functional Features Analysis

Bikeway or other more significant modifications to Airport Way, for non-motorized and/or aesthetic improvements on Airport Way may be constrained by the access control established in its right-of-way map. For more background, see Appendix B of the Airport Way Functional Features Analysis.

College Road:

- Median/sidewalk landscaping at northeast quadrant of Johansen Expressway intersection

Johansen Expressway:

- Landscape enhancement (consider fence need and removal) between College Road and Merhar Avenue, undeveloped area, south side

Complete Streets

A Complete Street is a roadway designed and operated to provide safe, convenient, and equitable access for all users, regardless of their age, ability, or mode of transportation. This includes pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, public transit riders, and freight vehicles.

Following a Complete Streets framework supports meeting a wide range of needs within the local transportation network related to safety, integration with land use, network connectivity, environmental challenges, modality, aesthetics, and maintenance. An up-to-date Complete Streets policy is needed to guide projects through their lifecycle regarding how to apply Complete Streets principles to the unique context of each corridor. Necessary steps to applying a Complete Streets policy to local projects include:

- Develop and adopt an updated Complete Streets policy
- FAST to coordinate with partners who will help implement the policy
- Supply training and educational opportunities for FAST and partners
- Integrate Complete Streets principles into the project selection process
- Develop project screening procedures and checklists for each project
- Facilitate early and continuous public involvement
- Track and analyze data to evaluate project progress and success

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Update FAST Planning's Complete Streets Policy
- Incorporating dedicated non-motorized facilities into roadway resurfacing or rehabilitation projects

See Non-Motorized and Transit needs in the following sections for examples of projects that achieve Complete Streets.

Bridge rehabilitation and replacement

The Minnie Street Bridge over Noyes Slough, owned by the State of Alaska, is the only bridge in the MPA rated in poor condition and considered structurally deficient. The bridge was constructed in 1953 and has sidewalks on both sides. While a project to improve Minnie Street is currently in development with Alaska DOT&PF, the project does not include work on the

existing bridge due to the high cost of replacement. It is believed that rehabilitation of this bridge is not practical, and replacement is required to address its poor condition. The Peger Road Bridge over the Chena River, also owned by the State of Alaska, was constructed in 1977 and is rated in fair condition. Peger Road, including the Chena River Bridge, was designated as a primary freight route in the 2019 freight plan and serves trucks traveling from the Van Horn industrial area to the Johansen Expressway and Steese Highway. Despite this, the bridge has limitations for oversize permits, complicating some freight movements. The need for oversize loads to utilize this bridge could increase if industrial developments north of Fairbanks (including Alaska LNG and Ambler Road) advance to construction. In addition to freight issues, the pedestrian path under the bridge needs geometry improvements to improve reliability. The path is frequently closed due to flooding, resulting in either significant out of direction travel for pedestrians seeking to cross Peger Road or, more likely, risky crossing maneuvers.

The Steese Expressway Bridge over the Chena River (State of Alaska) was built in 1977. It had a deck and rail rehabilitation completed in 2023. This bridge experiences high volumes and regular freight movements of ore from the Tetlin mine headed to the Fort Knox mine.

Both Chena River bridges mentioned above are rated in fair condition, but given their age, freight loading and traffic volumes, it is reasonable to expect they will degrade to poor condition during the 20-year timeframe of the MTP.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Peger Road Chena River Bridge #1191 Replacement
- Noyes Slough Bridge (#295, Minnie Street) Replacement
- Steese Expressway Chena River Bridge #0231 Replacement
- Rehabilitation or seismic retrofit of bridges in fair condition or with substandard design elements

References

- Existing conditions report
- FMATS Freight Mobility Plan, 2019
- 2023 Bridge & Tunnel Inventory Report, Alaska DOT&PF Bridge Section
- Minnie Street Improvements project website, Alaska DOT&PF
- Alaska DOT, Fairbanks seek input on Minnie Street project, Fairbanks Daily News Miner, Feb. 5, 2026

Roadway Safety (all modes)

The Existing Conditions identifies the top 30 intersections and road segments of highest concern based on number of past crashes, crash severity, and equivalent property damage (EPDO) associated with them between 2020-2024. EPDO analysis looks at crash occurrences and associated damage, so accounts for frequency and minor injuries.

Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) screening results focus on locations of serious injury (generally a hospitalization required) and fatal crashes. Among these, the locations of highest concern are:

- Road Segments (in order of highest crash costs per mile and within the MPA):
    - Geist Road (University Ave to Chena Ridge)
    - Old Steese Highway (Johansen Expressway to W. Clay Street)
    - Airport Way Westbound (Steese Expressway to Peger Road)
    - College Road (Danby Street to Deborah Avenue)
    - Parks Highway (Geist Road to Lost Lane)
    - Badger Road (full length)
    - Airport Way Westbound (University Avenue to Old Airport Road)
    - Steese Expressway MP 1-4 (approximately Chena River to near Chena Hot Springs Road)
    - Farmers Loop Road (Steese Expressway to Skyline Drive)
    - Airport Way Eastbound (Hoselton Road to Lathrop Street)
    - Chena Hot Springs Road MP MP 0-10 (within MPA is from Steese Expressway to Eastview Lane)
    - Peger Road (Airport Way to Sanduri Street)
    - Holmes Road (Badger/Ft. Wainwright Gate to Doyle Drive)
    - Chena Pump Road (Grebe Avenue to Chena Ridge)
    - Johansen Expressway Westbound MP 2-4 (east of Danby Street to Noyes Slough)
    - Richardson Highway Northbound/Inbound MP 359-362 (Weigh Station to near Mitchell Expressway exit)

    - Richardson Highway Southbound/Outbound (Airport Way to MP 361 near Old Richardson on-ramp)
    - McGrath Road (full length)
    - Farmers Loop Road (Grenac Road to Ballaine Road)
    - Dennis Road (full length)
    - Nordale Road Ravenbell Street to one mile south of Chena Hot Springs intersection (MPA to Chena River is within MPA)
    - Miller Hill Road (full length)
- Intersections of concern within these segments showing serious crash trends:
    - Old Steese Highway and College Road
    - Geist Road and Parks Highway
    - Geist Road and Chena Ridge/Dartmouth
    - Parks Highway and Airport Way
    - Airport Way and Cushman Street
    - McGrath Road and Farmers Loop
    - Badger Road and Nordale Road
    - Badger Road and Plack Road

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- College Road Safety and Access Improvements
- Airport Way/Cushman Street Intersection Reconstruction
- Geist Road/Chena Pump Road Corridor Study
- Airport Way Access Control Study
- Richardson Highway MP 341-357 (Eielson to 6-mile Badger) Corridor Study
- Holmes Road Rehabilitation
- Old Steese Highway Reconstruction
- Steese Highway MP 2-5 Resurfacing
- Roundabouts at intersections in the Badger Road Corridor:
    - Old Badger Road
    - Holmes and Peede Roads

- Bradway Road
- Marigold and Repp Roads
- Peridot Street
- Plack Road
- Airway Drive

References

- MTP 2050 Existing Conditions & System Performance Report
  - Alaska DOT& PF pavement condition data
  - Alaska DOT& PF bridge condition data
  - Alaska DOT&PF travel time reliability data
  - Alaska DOT&PF crash data 2020-2024, updated with FFY27 HSIP Screening Results for the MPA
- Corridor Studies (Minnie, College, Airport Way, Steese/Richardson)
- FNSB Area Plans
  - Salcha/Badger Road Subarea Plan 2019
  - Downtown Fairbanks 2040, 2024
  - North Pole Land Use Plan, 2010
  - Chena Riverfront Plan, 2016
- Alaska DOT&PF HSIP Presentation to FAST Technical Committee, April 2026
- Survey and feedback to date

Nonmotorized Needs

Inventory and address surface conditions

The City of Fairbanks completed a sidewalk inventory in 2017 that assessed the condition of city-owned sidewalks, which provided valuable information to identify and prioritize repairs. There is a need to establish a process for regular updates to this inventory and to expand it to facilities owned by other entities such as the State of Alaska and the City of North Pole (see also “Coordinated asset inventory” under roadway and vehicular maintenance needs).

In addition to sidewalk needs, inventory and repair of separated multi-use facilities is an ongoing need. While capital funding is regularly invested in path repairs, including through FAST

Planning ADA Improvements projects, regular updates to path inventories and condition assessments would assist in identifying and prioritizing locations for repair.

While improvement has been made in connecting gaps in the non-motorized network, gaps in the network remain with some roads that have no dedicated facilities for bicycles or pedestrians, and/or places with discontinuous separated facilities.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Trainor Gate Road and F Street Intersection Safety Improvements
- Ballaine Road Path Improvements
- Nelson Road Bicycle/Pedestrian Facility
- 7th Avenue (Fairbanks) Sidewalk

References

- City Sidewalk Inventory and Condition Assessment Project Report, City of Fairbanks, 2017
- Existing conditions report
- Steering Committee input

System expansion and connectivity

In the past 15 years, there has been growing recognition in the greater Fairbanks and North Pole area that safe and convenient non-motorized transportation options improve the health of residents, improve air quality, benefit the economy, and improve the equity and accessibility of the transportation network. As the FNSB navigates its continued non-attainment status under the Clean Air Act and the population continues to age, expanding and improving the non-motorized transportation network will be key to supporting the needs of residents.

Top infrastructure needs identified in Connect Fairbanks, FAST Planning's Non-Motorized Transportation Plan, include constructing connections between existing non-motorized facilities, extending current facilities, and expanding and improving bicycle and pedestrian crossings. Although there has been progress in bringing pedestrian facilities into compliance with ADA standards, non-compliant facilities in need of upgrades remain across the urban network. Additionally, while improvement has been made in connecting gaps in the non-motorized network, gaps in the network remain with some roads that have no dedicated facilities for bicycles or pedestrians, and/or places with separated facilities that are discontinuous.

What is driving the need

A strong active transportation network has a myriad of community-wide benefits. Non-motorized facilities create a more equitable transportation network by providing cheaper commuting alternatives to owning a personal vehicle, providing those without the ability to drive (including disabled and elderly individuals) easier access to essential services, and promoting safety across the network for all users. Non-motorized facilities also encourage more physical activity, create a healthier community, and improve air quality. Economic benefits include a more tourist-friendly community and potentially more spending at local businesses as pedestrians are more likely to make purchases when walking by.

Potential projects or strategies to address the need

- Richardson Highway MP 350-357 Shared Use Path
- Mitchell Expressway Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities
- Shared Use Path between Steelhead Drive and Chena Pump Road
- School zone and pedestrian improvements in the University West subdivision surrounding Woodriver Elementary
- Sheep Creek Extension Shared Use Path
- 30th Avenue Reconstruction and Pedestrian Improvements
- Lathrop Street Sidewalk (Eagan Avenue to 16th Avenue)
- New program for Non-Motorized Connections to quickly initiate projects as needs arise
- Eagan Avenue and Moore Street Reconstruction/Sidewalks

References

- Connect Fairbanks, FAST Planning Non-Motorized Plan, 2021
- Steering Committee and public input

Safety improvements

Pedestrians and bicyclists face an outsized risk on FAST Planning area roadways. From 2020 to 2024, non-motorized users were involved in just over 1% of all crashes but made up 26% of fatalities and 12% of serious injury crashes. These data show bicyclists and pedestrians are overrepresented in serious crashes and underscores their vulnerability. The Safe System Approach supports an emphasis on safety measures for all road users but particularly vulnerable road users through safer speeds, safer streets, safer vehicles, safer users, and improved post-crash care.

Safety improvements suggested in existing plans and studies include:

- Add and improve crossings where:
    - There are major transit stops
    - Locations with a history of crashes related ped crossing
    - Locations with critical access to major bike paths
    - Key destinations (schools, grocers, libraries, health centers, community centers, parks)
    - High density areas
- Improved crossings by:
    - Improving visibility, especially at high-speed/high-volume roadways
    - Improving signal timing by increasing crossing time and/or providing a pedestrian crossing lead time.

Intersections and crossings with recent bike and pedestrian crashes are shown in the existing conditions report. Signing and striping marked crosswalks must conform to the requirements of the Alaska Traffic Manual Supplement to the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

References

- MTP 2050 Existing Conditions & System Performance Report
- Alaska DOT&PF crash data 2020-2024

Winter maintenance

Increased winter maintenance of pedestrian and bicycle facilities is a priority non-motorized need. According to Connect Fairbanks, 80% of survey respondents noted that lack of maintenance is a barrier to walking and cycling. Winter maintenance is an especially high need for those with mobility issues who may not be able to easily traverse sidewalks and paths with ice and snow.

Regional non-motorized activity in the winter is only 20% of summer levels. Insufficient winter maintenance of facilities is at least a partial contributor. Better winter maintenance would encourage more wintertime activity.

While federal funds are heavily utilized to construct and rehabilitate non-motorized infrastructure, routine maintenance, including winter maintenance, is the responsibility of facility owners who are at the mercy of budget appropriations. There will be a need for those

appropriations to increase as the non-motorized network is expanded and to improve the existing level of service in the winter.

The FAST Planning Seasonal Mobility Task Force has contributed to improvements in winter maintenance across the MPA, and a continuation of that effort would ensure continued collaboration between agencies.

See "Maintenance & Operations" subsection under Roadway and Vehicular Needs for more discussion.

References

- Connect Fairbanks, Non-Motorized Plan, FAST Planning 2021

Reduce user stress (more low stress facilities)

When expanding and connecting the existing bicycle and pedestrian network, constructing low-stress facilities will encourage more use of the network and improve safety, especially for the most vulnerable road users. Areas of greatest need and potential solutions vary between pedestrians and cyclists, with pedestrians encountering far more high-stress facilities than cyclists. Approximately 73 miles of roads within the MPA are not comfortable for most cyclists unless a bicycle facility is constructed. For pedestrians, connections between low-stress facilities should be prioritized so users are not forced onto high-stress roadways to reach their destinations.

What is driving the need

According to Connect Fairbanks, 80% of respondents said safety concerns are a barrier to walking, and 90% said safety was a barrier to cycling. To achieve the full benefits associated with a robust active transportation system, low-stress facilities should be prioritized.

References

- Connect Fairbanks, FAST Planning Non-Motorized Plan, 2021

Accessibility

Although recent strides have been made to bring sidewalk facilities into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), many needs remain on state- and city-owned facilities. Two studies in 2017 and 2018 by Alaska DOT&PF and the City of Fairbanks identified specific prioritized needs. Implementation of these plans is the path forward toward ADA compliance and increased accessibility of the non-motorized network.

What is driving the need

According to the DOT&PF ADA Reconnaissance Study, compliance was between 5% and 36%, indicating a strong need for continued upgrades. The City of Fairbanks identified over $13 million in upgrades needed to reach compliance. Implementation of these plans to achieve ADA compliance is a performance.

References

- Connect Fairbanks, FAST Planning Non-Motorized Plan, 2021

Design criteria

Road design criteria for projects in the MPA generally follows the practices of the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials and Alaska DOT&PF's Alaska Highway Preconstruction Manual. Local and low-volume road criteria is generally flexible and open to engineering judgement, while increasing road classifications (arterial, National Highway System) and speeds generally make design criteria more rigid, primarily to address safety.

FAST Planning can and has made policy recommendations to design criteria in projects designed in the MPA through Green Streets Policy and its pending update to Complete Streets Policy. Criteria recommendations should be adopted through these policies to address a specific need. It is recommended to work closely with the FNSB Community Planning department to also address criteria standards for new subdivision roads, and to also consider the need for ATV space when possible, to avoid conflicts with vehicular and non-motorized traffic.

Visitor experience and tourism

Robust, accessible, and low-stress non-motorized facilities can support the tourism industry by providing an alternative mode for exploring the area, supporting visitors with mobility issues, and encouraging more spending at local businesses. Continued regular updates of the Fairbanks Region Bikeways map, project enhancements through aesthetics and engagement with the tourism industry fulfill the need to engage visitors in the non-motorized network.

References

- Connect Fairbanks, FAST Planning Non-Motorized Plan, 2021

Transit Needs

Bus stop inventory, improvements and expansion

Improvements are needed to route configurations, bus stop locations, and transfer locations on MACS Transit's fixed routes to improve ride time, comfort, and route clarity for riders. A system-

wide (as opposed to route-specific) approach is needed to ensure the system as a whole works for riders, including where and how often transfers must occur, the extent of out-of-direction travel required by riders, and how redundant routes are communicated to ensure ease in trip planning.

To assist with the implementation of these improvements, software upgrades are needed. The software MACS Transit uses to track ridership, route performance, revenue, and bus stop inventory is plagued with outages, provides incomplete data, requires manual tracking, and is not compatible with other essential software. Similarly, its real-time bus tracking platform is outdated and unreliable. MACS Transit requires investment in new or modified software to improve data collection and data sharing. Better data will allow MACS Transit to be more responsive to rider needs, provide essential information to riders and partners, and make more data-informed decisions about operations.

What is driving the need

Robust and equitable transit helps ensure all community members can get where they need and want to go, regardless of whether they own a personal vehicle. Several goals in the 2024 Fairbanks Transit Plan, which supports "continuing to provide transit services that meet the needs of the FNSB," drive the need for route improvements and expansion.

References

- Fairbanks Transit Plan, FAST Planning, 2024

Targeted roadway improvements

Construction of roadway improvements that enhance connections to transit was identified as a need in the Fairbanks Transit Plan. As roadway improvements are planned, coordination with transit partners will ensure transit needs are integrated into designs. For example, reconstruction projects can incorporate new or improved bus shelters, space for buses to pull out of traffic lanes at regular bus stops, marked pedestrian crossings, and new or improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities along transit routes.

Other roadway improvement types identified in the transit plan as needs are constructing new and formalized transit points, road diets, and bus stop accessibility improvements.

References

- Fairbanks Transit Plan, FAST Planning, 2024

Formalized coordination (HSP Coordinator)

The transit plan identified the need for a Human Services Transportation Coordinator position, a role that would be independent of existing agencies, to assist riders in navigating the multi-provider transit system. This position would create a virtual or telephone-based system for communicating with the public about different transit options and connecting people with the services they need.

What is driving the need

The greater Fairbanks community has many transit providers beyond the borough's MACS Transit and Van Tran. Other providers include hospitals, community centers, Native associations, University of Alaska Fairbanks, and taxis. A "clearinghouse" where all this information is provided in one place will make it easier for riders to navigate options.

References

- Fairbanks Transit Plan, FAST Planning, 2024 (including Needs Analysis)

Driver recruitment and retention

MACS Transit and VanTran struggle to recruit and retain staff, creating a critical workforce need. Driver shortages can result in reduced service and increased pressure on existing staff. The borough is already working to improve recruitment and retention, but additional strategies were identified in the Transit Plan including analyzing compensation packages, increased marketing of benefits, more flexibility in schedules, doing more to protect drivers from harassment and assaults, and including operators in agency decision-making.

What is driving the need

This need mirrors a national recruitment and retention issue for transit agencies nationwide. Other agencies may be able to provide insight into solutions, and national studies may provide additional context and ideas to address the need.

References

- Fairbanks Transit Plan, FAST Planning, 2024 (including Needs Analysis)

Service improvements

Service improvements to existing fixed routes are needed across the board, including establishing weekend service, increased frequency, and longer service spans to cover trips from early mornings to late nights. New routes or connector routes that serve rural areas of the borough are also needed to improve coverage, as well as potential new routes to serve Ft. Wainwright and a route connection to the Alaska Railroad's Fairbanks Depot. Along with route

enhancements, more borough control of transfer points that are currently located on private property is needed to allow for improvements that ensure accessibility and comfort at those locations.

Service improvements are also needed for VanTran operations to better serve borough residents. Expanding VanTran service beyond the required three-quarters of a mile outside fixed route service is needed to serve the borough's low-density and aging population outside the urban core. Expanding service to all adults over 60, regardless of disability status, would also improve accessibility of the transit system.

The VanTran application process is also a barrier to accessibility and needs to be simplified. Additionally, more support should be offered to help prospective riders in submitting all necessary information. The requirement that a doctor complete part of the form can be particularly cumbersome for individuals with disabilities who lack access to transportation services.

Improvements to the existing fare system would also improve access and operations. Options proposed in the Transit Plan include providing weekly and annual pass options, establishing electronic fare payment options, fare capping, and expanding free fare options to specific groups.

References

- Fairbanks Transit Plan, FAST Planning, 2024 (including Needs Analysis)

Funding levels

Transit funding is a barrier to increased service and accessibility. Identifying and securing additional funding sources is a need that will support all other transit efforts. Funding source options include local funding appropriations, federal grant and formula funding, and FAST Planning for vehicle purchasing.

References

- Fairbanks Transit Plan, FAST Planning, 2024

Accessibility

Systemwide accessibility needs include improving pedestrian and bicycle connections to high need fixed route stops, improving bus stop amenities at high ridership stops, and improving winter maintenance practices to ensure year-round bus stop accessibility. The Transit Plan lists stops with high pedestrian and bicycle needs. It also identifies the highest ridership stops:

1. Fred Meyer West

2. Downtown Transit Center
3. Herb Miller Road Westside (Walmart/Lowe's, Bentley Trust area)
4. Lacey Street at the parking garage
5. Herb Miller Road Eastside (Walmart/Lowe's, Bentley Trust area)

References

- Fairbanks Transit Plan, FAST Planning, 2024

Potential projects or strategies to address transit needs:

- Evaluate developer agreements or potential partnerships in the Bentley Trust/Retail area of private road network to better support transit stop and shelter needs, and/or right-of-way transfer agreements to make these routes eligible for public capital funding
- New bus shelter/ in North Pole near Three Bears Grocery Store
- New bus shelter/pullouts on Easy Street and Chena Pump Road in Fairbanks

Freight Needs

Intersection safety improvements

There is a need for enhancements to at-grade rail crossings throughout the MPA to improve safety and mobility for the traveling public and operational efficiency for rail movements. Some potential solutions presented in the 2021 Fairbanks Road/Rail Crossing Reduction/Realignment Plan to address this ongoing need include constructing overpasses, adding pedestrian traffic control to existing pedestrian/rail crossings, improving site distance by removing vegetation and relocating hardware, increasing vehicle storage capacity, and adding flashing advance warning signs at the Richardson Highway 12-mile crossing.

What is driving the need

According to the 2021 Fairbanks Road/Rail Crossing Reduction/Realignment Plan, there are 31[2] public at-grade rail crossings in the MPA, all of which inherently present safety and mobility issues. Although rail realignment and rail yard relocation away from the urban road network has been studied and discussed since 1985, the high price tag and operational disruptions make it a very long-term solution not likely to occur during the planning period.

[2] The plan identified 32 public at-grade crossings, but one at Richardson Highway MP 359 has been eliminated with a recently-constructed grade separated facility.

References

- 2021 Fairbanks Road/Rail Crossing Reduction/Realignment Plan

Access to natural resources

Prospective development of significant mining and energy projects north of Fairbanks, along with continued oil and gas activity on the North Slope will continue to generate truck traffic through Fairbanks to access the Parks Highway to Anchorage, the Port of Valdez, and/or the Alaska Railroad freight yard. With expected continued development of projects such as Willow and Pikka, a steady or increasing volume of truck traffic is expected on FNSB's road network, along with associated impacts from heavier loads on road and bridge infrastructure.

Increase miles of road that meet DOT&PF performance standards

Capital projects should continue to assess and address freight movements during the design phase to ensure truck turning radii and signal mast arm clearance needs are accommodated. Bridges not meeting current design standards for freight should also be prioritized for upgrades, specifically the Steese Highway MP 5 bridge at Chena Hot Springs Road. Upgrading this bridge has become a higher priority since the start of ore haul operations from the Manh Choh mine to Fort Knox.

What is driving the need

Some areas continue to have inadequate geometry for large trucks, causing challenging left-turn movements for oversize loads and double trailers. Low clearance for overhead signal mast arms is also an issue in some areas, but the ongoing Systematic Signal Upgrades project has addressed clearance issues at many intersections.

The recent start of ore hauling from the Manh Choh mine in Tetlin to the Fort Knox north of Fairbanks has illuminated some issues related to freight traffic, which could increase in the next several years if construction on the Alaska LNG project moves forward.

References

- Existing conditions report
- Alaska DOT&PF Performance Data (Pavement and Bridge)
- FMATS Freight Mobility Plan, 2019

Support expanding e-commerce

The Fairbanks Amazon delivery warehouse opened in December 2024, reducing the amount of time it takes for people to receive goods ordered from this major online retailer. As of October

2025, it was operating at full capacity, processing an average of 5,500 packages per day. Amazon trucks handle last-mile delivery of these packages serving an area from Murphy Dome Road to Salcha and part of Chena Hot Springs Road. A route to Nenana is currently being considered.

References

- Fairbanks Amazon facility operating at full capacity after 2024 opening

Support rail development, realignment, and expansion

- See discussion in Future Land Use section

Address known bottlenecks and prioritize the urban freight corridor

Although congestion is largely not an issue in the greater Fairbanks area, at-grade rail crossings create bottlenecks and delays for road traffic when trains are present. In addition to reducing at-grade rail crossings, targeted improvements along the Critical Urban Freight Corridor (CUFC) routes could address several freight bottlenecks:

- Van Horn Road
- South Cushman Street (Richardson Highway to Van Horn Road)
- Steese Expressway (Johansen Expressway-Hagelbarger Avenue)
- Old Richardson Highway (Richardson MP 351/12 Mile Village to Petro Star Refinery/H&H Lane)
- Peger Road

Potential freight bottlenecks have recently been amplified at the Steese Highway MP 5 Bridge at Chena Hot Springs Road. Permitted loads and some legal loads (including the Manh Choh ore haul trucks) are required to exit the Steese Highway and use a limited access gate to bypass the roundabout, causing congestion for Chena Hot Springs Road vehicle traffic.

Northbound Peger/eastbound Johansen truck traffic typically headed north of Fairbanks report struggles to merge on the Johansen Expressway due to the length of merge lane.

A major intersection along the CUFC route of Peger Road is its intersection with Van Horn Road. This intersection serves the adjacent industrial area but does not have sufficient swing room for trucks pulling double trailers heading south then east on Van Horn Road. The FMATS Freight Mobility Plan proposed consideration of a roundabout to replace the three-way stop intersection.

References

- Existing Conditions Report
- FMATS Freight Mobility Plan, 2019

Reduce conflicts between freight and non-motorized traffic

Nearly all routes identified in the 2019 FMATS Freight Mobility Plan as critical freight routes were also identified in FAST Planning's 2021 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan as in need of new or upgraded pedestrian and bicycle facilities. These routes include:

- Mitchell Expressway
- Richardson Highway
- Steese Highway
- Parks Highway
- Airport Way
- Johansen Expressway
- Van Horn Road
- Phillips Field Road
- Peger Road
- Sheep Creek Road

In addition to these road freight improvements, several at-grade rail crossing locations were identified in the 2021 Fairbanks Road/Rail Crossing Reduction/Realignment Plan as in need of pedestrian traffic control:

- College Road crossing between Johansen Expressway and Illinois Street (this was addressed in 2024)
- Old Steese Highway crossing (this will be addressed in 2027)
- Steese Expressway crossing
- Trainor Gate Road at Farwell Avenue crossing (includes relocating path)

A proposed grade-separated facility that would elevate the rail tracks above the road between Noyes Slough and Farwell Street would eliminate four at-grade crossings, which would eliminate pedestrian/rail conflicts at those locations.

What is driving the need

The 2019 FMATS Freight Mobility Plan established the following objective to address bicycle and pedestrian safety: "Increase the safety of bicycle and pedestrian routes near and around freight-intensive land uses." Related to this objective, the plan called for pedestrian facility upgrades on Phillips Field Road and safety upgrades for pedestrians at at-grade rail crossings.

Potential projects or strategies to address freight needs:

- Projects addressing fair to poor condition pavements and bridges in the MPA, with priorities for the freight network
- Airport Way Access Control Study (addresses frontage to Amazon warehouse facility near Washington Drive)
- Chena Hot Springs Undercossing (Bridge #1342, Steese Highway and Chena Hot Springs Road) Replacement. This is a state funded project that is not yet incorporated into the STIP.
- Peger Road and Van Horn Road roundabout, designed through truck trials like Danby-Wembley roundabout
- Johansen Expressway Eastbound Merge Lane Extension (Peger Road to Alaska Railroad Depot)

Resources

- FMATS Freight Mobility Plan, 2019
- Connect Fairbanks, FAST Planning Non-Motorized Plan, 2021
- Fairbanks Road/Rail Crossing Reduction/Realignment Plan, 2021