



Denali Citizens Council

www.denalicitizens.org * mail@denalicitizens.org * P.O. Box 78, Denali Park, AK 99755 * (907) 244-2510

January 24, 2022

RE: Parks Highway Milepost 231 Enhancements

Carl Heim
ADOT&PF
2301 Peger Road
Fairbanks, AK 99709-5316

Dear Mr. Heim,

Members of the Denali Citizens Council attended your virtual meeting on the MP 231 project on January 6. Many of our members have asked for safety improvements in this area for years, and our organization has been generally supportive of AKDOT&PF's efforts in this area. However, after listening to the presentation and to our members' reactions, I have to say we are disappointed in the outcome. The project as described seems only a half measure that will not address either the long-expressed vehicle or pedestrian safety concerns.

- Pedestrian safety has long been our most important issue, both because of pedestrians crossing the highway and utilizing the highway bridge to cross to the trails on the Denali National Park side of the river. For crossing the highway between Grizzly Bear and Denali Park Village, we are concerned that pedestrians will not take the roundabout route under the bridge, but will continue to use the more direct route across the highway. How will DOT&PF successfully direct pedestrians onto the safer route when it requires many more steps? We are skeptical that people will find the area under a highway bridge to be an attractive destination, given the abundance of spectacular scenery near at hand, and many places to get to the river that don't have highway noise and infrastructure.
- And of course, the pedestrian crossing of the river dropped out of this project altogether, deferred to a hoped-for federal project years from now. Pedestrians will continue to use the highway bridge in the interim. Even if it is built, its distance downstream from the highway bridge will mean that employees and guests at Grizzly Bear will still be tempted to short-cut across the highway bridge. How will DOT&PF convince them to go to the pedestrian bridge?



- The other major concern we have consistently expressed has been the hazard to vehicles turning into Grizzly Bear or Denali Park Village being rear-ended by highway-speed traffic coming behind them. While the project does add a right-hand turn pocket and an extra lane to alleviate part of the problem, left-hand turning traffic will be unchanged. The plan is only half a solution. While the additional southbound uphill acceleration lane is helpful to through traffic, it doesn't really address the safety concerns that were the biggest need.
- The project described does not address the need to calm traffic near Denali Park Village and the new Mile 231 Rest Stop, at least in summer months. This area is increasingly busy and congested, and drivers need to slow down to avoid accidents. The southbound acceleration lane may actually make existing problems worse, as some drivers take advantage of the short section of three-lane road to speed up to get around slow-moving RVs and the like. Ironically, this plan could result in one lane of traffic in this area that is moving faster than at present, to the detriment of safety. What tools can AKDOT&PF use to slow down traffic coming into this busy area?

We do appreciate that the new driveways for the NPS rest area and Ahtna property are getting left and right turn pockets, which is the optimal solution. And we also recognize that there were engineering and cost challenges associated with changing the existing Nenana River bridge. However, the ultimate result is that after 10 years we have a project that doesn't solve the problems. How can we do better in the future? How long will it be now before we can solve the remaining issues? And how will DOT&PF be measuring the success of this project?

Our fear is that we will now have all the same problems indefinitely, after already waiting so long.

Sincerely,

Charlie Loeb, President
Denali Citizens Council

On behalf of the DCC Board of Directors:

Charlie Loeb * Nancy Bale * Steve Carwile * Nan Eagleson * Nancy Russell