

SCRIPT:

Welcome to Open House number three for the Parks Highway Alternative Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages, or PEL, Study.

PROJECT TEAM



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Project Manager

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Traffic Forecasting Support

SCRIPT:

This is a federally funded project led by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, or DOT&PF.

The consultant team is led by DOWL, with engineering support from Lounsbury & Associates and traffic forecasting support from Kittelison & Associates.

PROJECT BACKGROUND & HISTORY

- PEL Study preceded by several projects, dating back to 1980s
- DOT&PF, City of Wasilla, and Mat-Su Borough are working together to develop transportation solutions to benefit all travelers



SCRIPT:

This study was preceded by several projects, dating back to the 1980's, that sought to identify a bypass corridor around Wasilla.

Due to sustained population growth in the Mat-Su Valley and increased traffic between population centers in Anchorage and the Valley, the Parks Highway experiences significant traffic delays throughout the day and particularly during peak periods.

The DOT&PF, City of Wasilla, and Mat-Su Borough are all aware of the challenges within the study area and support the development of transportation solutions that benefit all travelers.

AGENDA

- Project Introduction
- PEL Process
- Purpose and Need
- Preliminary Alternatives Review
- Evaluation Process
- Alternatives Moving Forward



No recommended route(s) have been identified yet

SCRIPT:

This presentation includes an update on the project and the PEL study process; a refresher on the project's purpose and need, which serves as a guide through every step of the alternative development and evaluation process; a review of the preliminary alternatives and the screening and evaluation process used to make recommendations on the alternatives. Next, we will present the alternatives that have been selected to move forward into detailed development.

The project team has not selected a recommended route at this time and no funds have been allocated for any right-of-way acquisition.

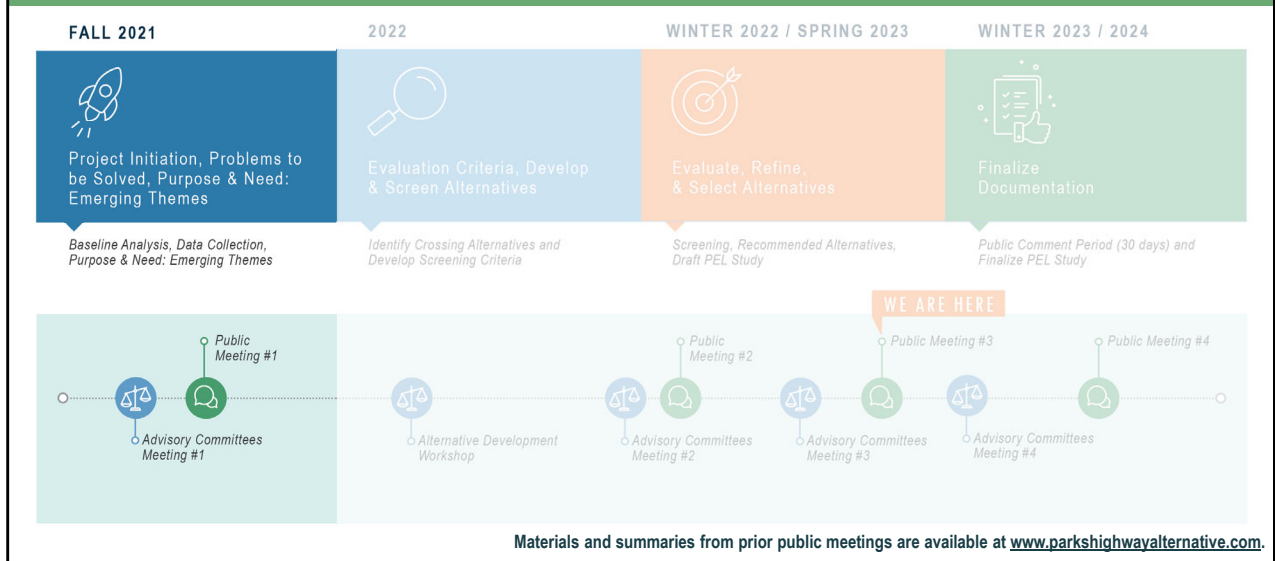


SCRIPT:

The shaded area on this map is the PEL study area, which is the maximum extent of potential alternative corridors.

At the start of this PEL study, areas north of the Parks Highway were eliminated from consideration due to environmental challenges that include the chain of lakes and more dense development, making a connection back to the Parks Highway difficult, particularly at the western end of the area.

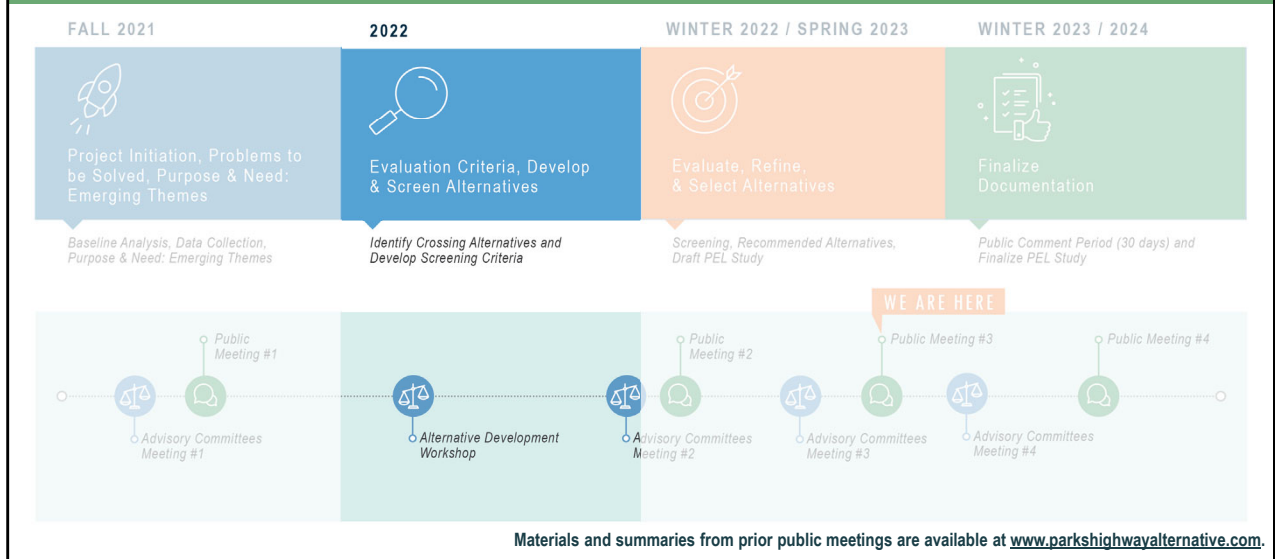
PEL STUDY SCHEDULE



SCRIPT:

[DARK BLUE] This study kicked off in Fall 2021 with baseline analysis and data collection and the first open house was held in March 2022 to discuss the emerging themes that would ultimately become the project’s purpose and need.

PEL STUDY SCHEDULE

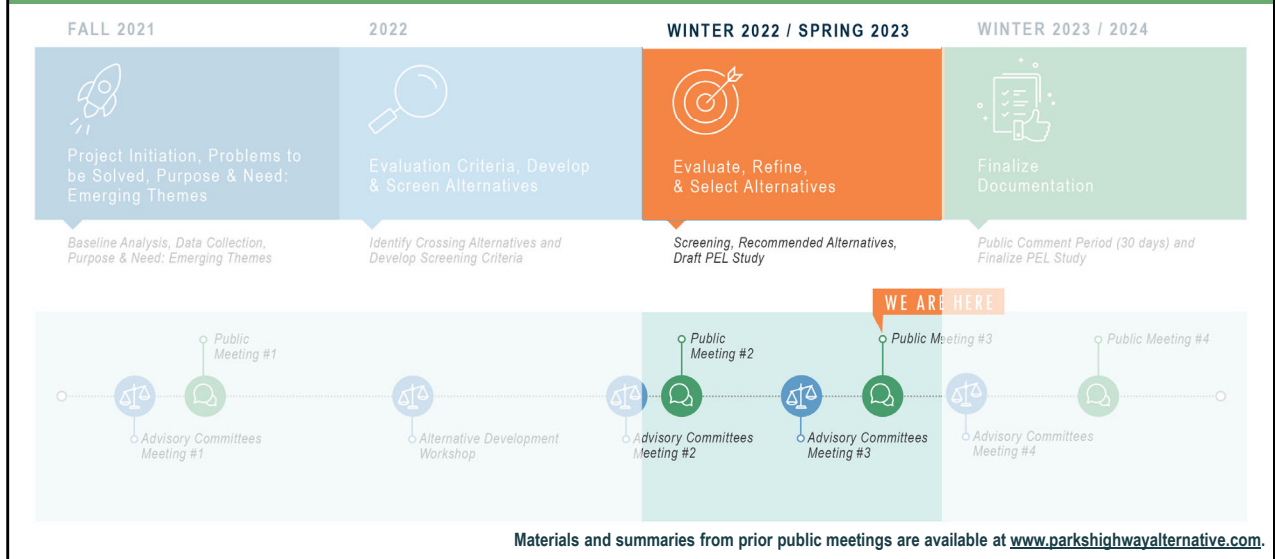


SCRIPT:

[LIGHT BLUE] In May 2022, members of the technical and stakeholder advisory groups participated in an alternatives development workshop where they developed preliminary alternative corridor alignments.

The project team further refined those preliminary alternatives and presented them to the public, along with screening and evaluation criteria, at the second open house in December 2022.

PEL STUDY SCHEDULE



SCRIPT:

[ORANGE] Work continued after that open house to identify which alternatives will advance to detailed development. This presentation is to share the results of the screening process and recommendations for which alternatives should move into detailed development and screening.

Keeping stakeholder feedback in mind, the project team will continue to refine the routes through detailed alternative development and screening. They will identify recommended alternatives and make recommendations on how these alternatives could be implemented through one or more independent projects.

The project team will also identify potential interchange locations to facilitate movement between the alternative corridor and the existing roadway network.

PEL STUDY SCHEDULE

FALL 2021

2022

WINTER 2022 / SPRING 2023

WINTER 2023 / 2024



Project Initiation, Problems to be Solved, Purpose & Need: Emerging Themes

Baseline Analysis, Data Collection, Purpose & Need: Emerging Themes



Evaluation Criteria, Develop & Screen Alternatives

Identify Crossing Alternatives and Develop Screening Criteria



Evaluate, Refine, & Select Alternatives

Screening, Recommended Alternatives, Draft PEL Study



Finalize Documentation

Public Comment Period (30 days) and Finalize PEL Study

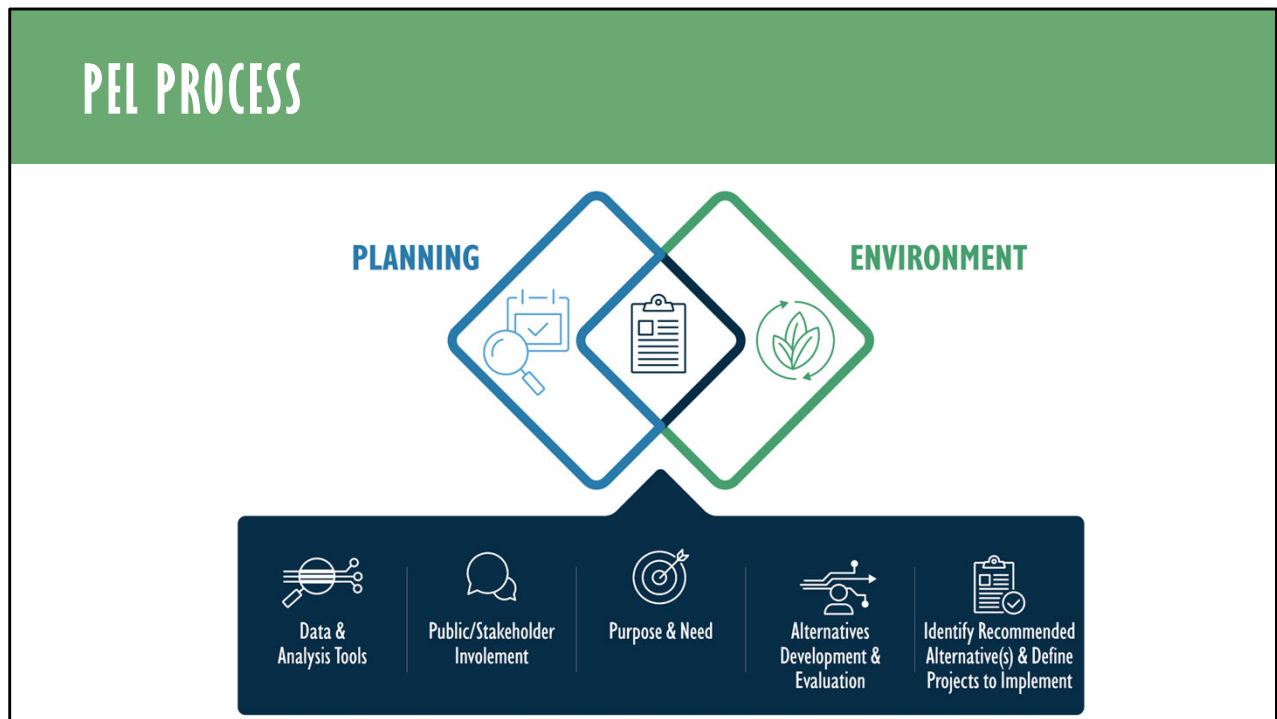


Materials and summaries from prior public meetings are available at www.parkshighwayalternative.com.

SCRIPT:

[GREEN] The recommended alternative corridor or corridors and potential projects will be presented to the public in Winter 2023/24 as a draft PEL study. Following the receipt of further public comments and input, the final study document will be published in Spring 2024.

PEL PROCESS



SCRIPT:

PEL studies allow us to consider environmental, community, and economic goals early in the transportation planning process and use that data to inform the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA process.

The goal of the PEL process is to ease the path of projects moving forward, enable the public to be more involved and, hopefully, save time and money as projects move to environmental review, design, and construction.



PURPOSE & NEED

SCRIPT:

The purpose and need statement sets out existing transportation needs this project should focus on fixing. It guides the alternative development process and keeps the project team focused on whether a future project is viable.

PURPOSE & NEED



PURPOSE

The purpose of the Parks Highway Alternative Corridor PEL study is to improve regional and local transportation through the Wasilla area of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough by identifying an alternative highway corridor that will improve safety for all transportation modes, reduce existing and future traffic congestion, and increase mobility.

The study will seek to improve transportation for non-motorized users, respond to community values, and support or enhance economic, social, environmental and energy conditions.

SCRIPT:

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The study will seek to improve transportation for non-motorized users, respond to community values, and support or enhance economic, social, environmental, and energy conditions.

PURPOSE & NEED



NEEDS

Through a collaborative process that balances multiple viewpoints of stakeholders, agencies, and the public, and working within regulatory requirements, DOT&PF determined that a successful solution should address the following needs:

- Improve safety in the corridor for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists
- Decrease fatal and serious injury crashes
- Reduce existing traffic congestion and intersection delay on Parks Highway
- Add roadway capacity to meet projected transportation demand in the corridor
- Improve the roadway network to better separate local, regional, and through trips
- Improve efficiency for freight transport
- Improve multi-modal access and flexibility for all users
- Improve the durability of roadway improvements and ease maintenance operations

SCRIPT:

Early analyses included baseline environmental conditions, a study to understand traffic origins and destinations, and a System Performance Memo that outlines existing performance of the Parks Highway in Wasilla.

This data helped the project team identify issues an alternative corridor must address, such as:

- Improving safety in the corridor for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists
- Decreasing fatal and serious injury crashes
- Reducing existing traffic congestion and intersection delay on Parks Highway

- Adding roadway capacity to meet projected transportation demand in the corridor
- Improving the roadway network to better separate local, regional, and through trips
- Improving efficiency for freight transport
- Improving multi-modal access and flexibility for all users
- Improving the durability of roadway improvements and easing maintenance operations

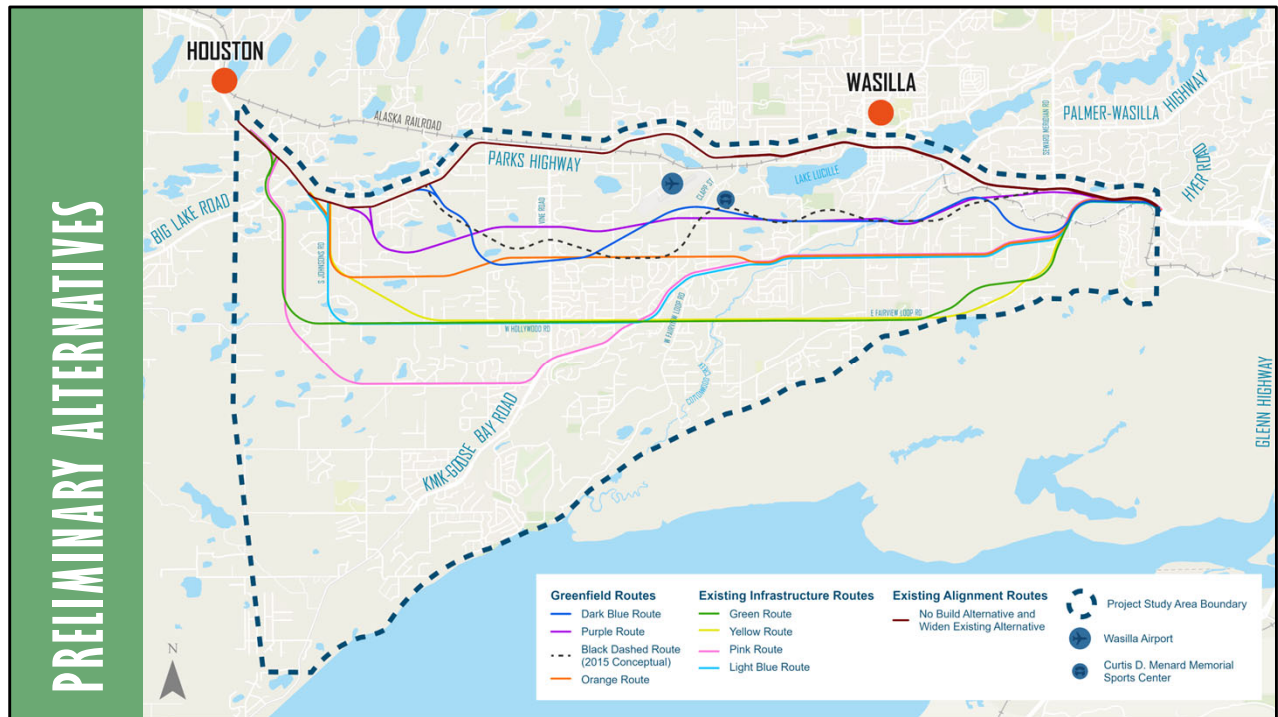
The purpose and need statement, which is available on the project website, sets out several additional goals the alternative corridor should strive to meet.



PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES

SCRIPT:

Over summer and fall 2022, the project team refined the initial workshop corridor routes and shared these preliminary alternatives at open house number two.



SCRIPT:

The preliminary alternatives included a no-build alternative which proposes no changes to the existing Parks Highway, an alternative that widens the existing Parks Highway, and eight additional corridors.

OPEN HOUSE #2

COMMENT SUMMARY

- More than 900 responses
- Most came from individuals who indicated they use the Parks Highway daily
- Most used roads: Parks Highway, Knik-Goose Bay Road, Seward Meridian Road, and Fairview Loop Road
- Most trips were defined as being local (e.g., trips to the grocery store, schools, doctors' office, etc.)

Topics that generated the most interest:

1. Less congestion
2. Safer driving, fewer accidents
3. New roadway - wider lanes, smoother surface, no potholes

Top concerns:

1. Homes and properties may be impacted
2. Environmental impacts – especially to wetlands, streams, and wildlife.
3. An alternate route will cut through their neighborhood



SCRIPT:

Following open house number two, the project team received more than 900 responses to an online survey. Topics that generated the most interest were:

1. Less congestion
2. Safer driving and fewer accidents
3. Creating a new roadway with wider lanes, a smoother surface, and no potholes

Top concerns voiced were:

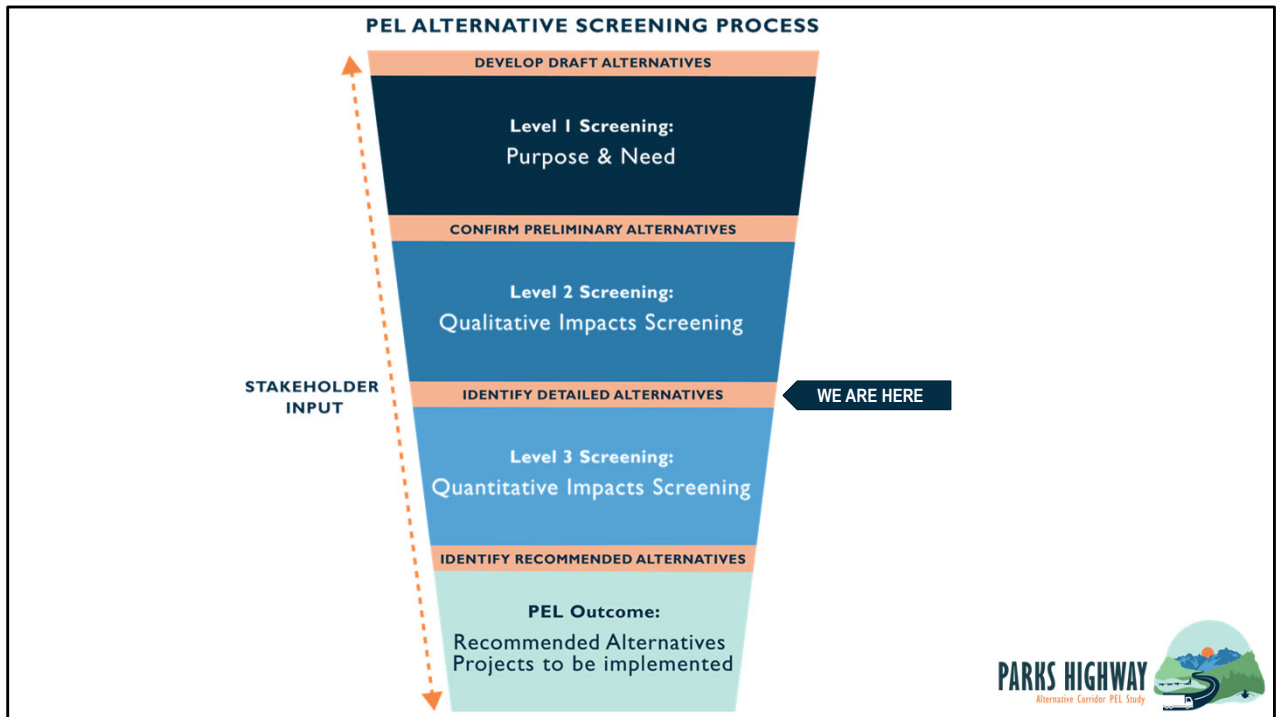
1. Potential impacts to homes and properties
2. Potential environmental impacts, particularly to wetlands, streams, and wildlife
3. That an alternate route would cut through neighborhoods



ALTERNATIVE SCREENING CRITERIA AND EVALUATION

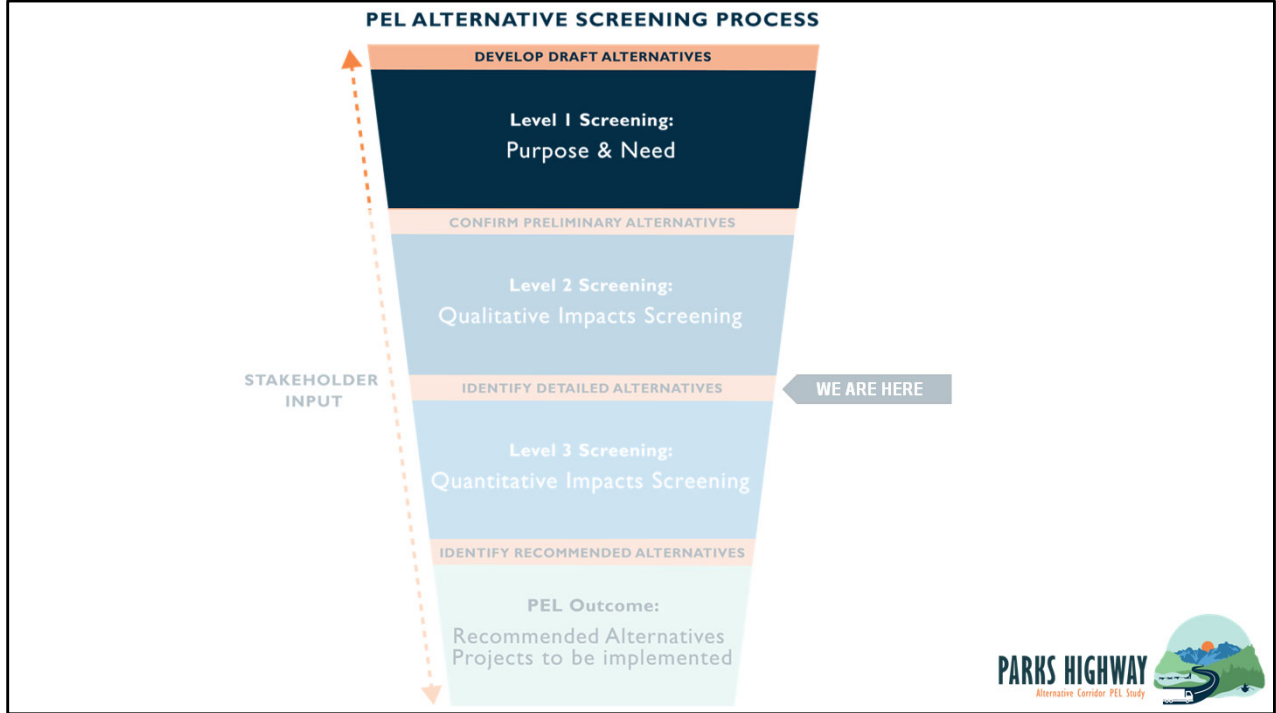
SCRIPT:

The alternatives development and screening process is intended to evaluate and narrow down options through an iterative screening process. The goal is to identify one or more recommended alternatives to move forward to design and environmental analysis. The PEL Study may recommend one or more build alternatives, or it may recommend the no-build alternative.



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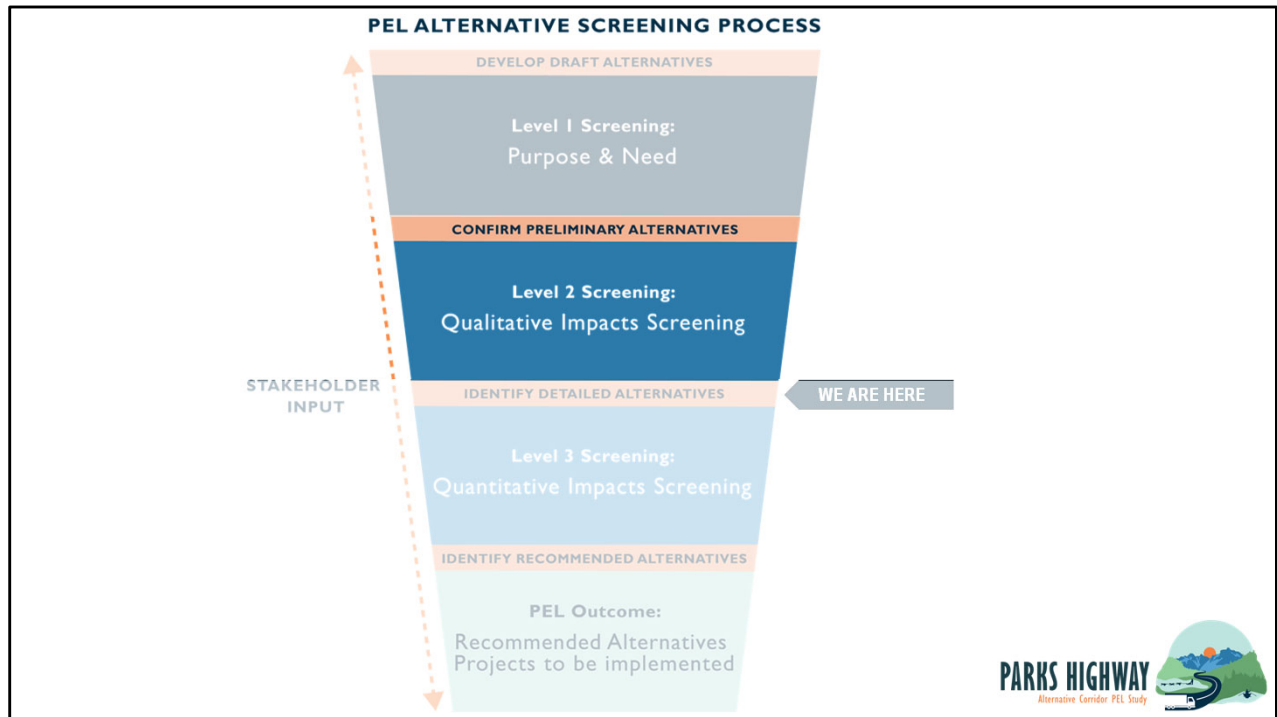
The alternative screening process can best be thought of as a funnel.



[highlight Level 1 Screening box]

SCRIPT:

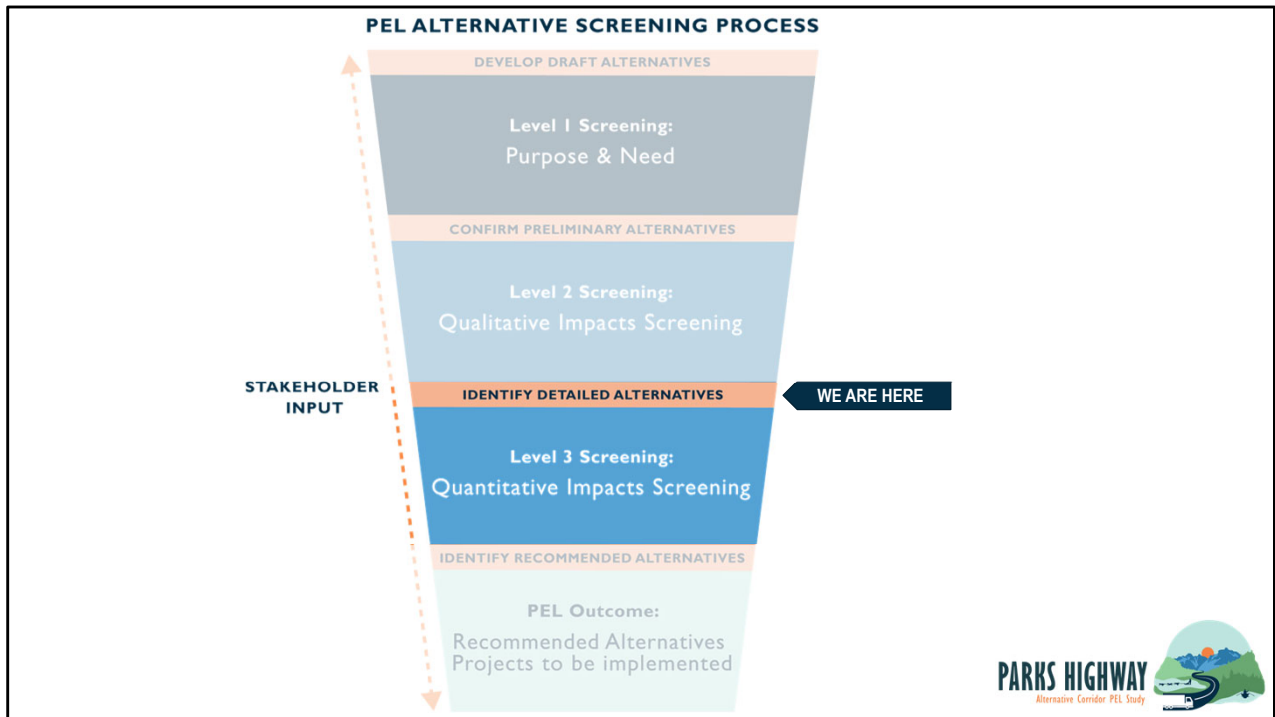
Draft alternatives are first screened to determine whether they meet purpose and need. Alternatives that did not meet these criteria were eliminated or adjusted to mitigate impacts.



[highlight Level 2 Screening box]

SCRIPT:

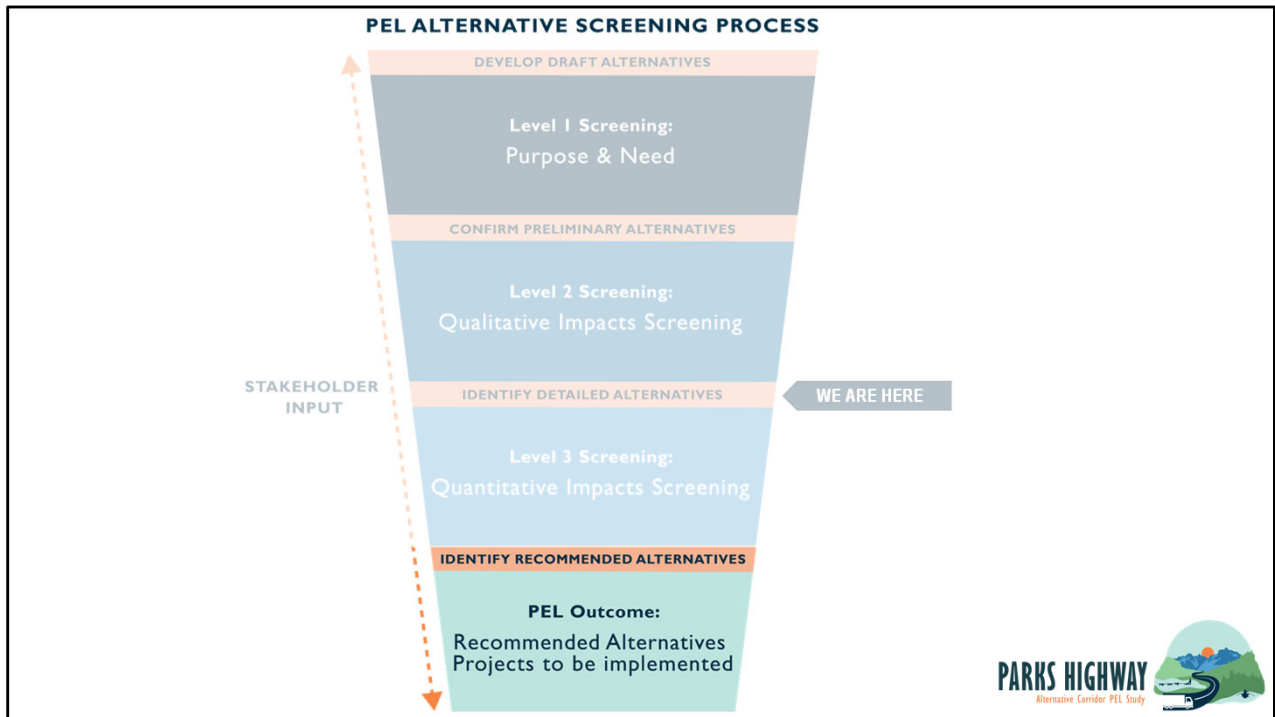
The project team has completed Level 2 screening, where preliminary alternatives are refined and evaluated qualitatively. The project team looked at environmental and community resources affected, safety factors, transportation system performance measures, rough right-of-way cost, and feedback from the public during this process.



[highlight Level 3 Screening box]

SCRIPT:

Next, the project team will conduct a more quantitative evaluation, looking at engineering feasibility, environmental, social, and economic impacts, roadway system performance, and more refined right-of-way and construction costs.



[highlight PEL Outcome box]

SCRIPT:

The outcome of this quantitative evaluation will be a recommended alternative or alternatives.

ALTERNATIVE SCREENING CRITERIA & EVALUATION

CRITERIA	MEASURE
Safety	Rate of fatalities per 100 million VMT
	Rate of serious injuries per 100 million VMT
	Number of nonmotorized fatalities and serious injuries annually
Mobility	Average PM peak period (mph)
	Level of travel time reliability index (LOTTR)
	Truck travel time reliability index (TTTR)
	Percent of person-miles traveled that are reliable
Pavement Condition	Percent pavement area in good/poor condition
Environment	Section 4(f) & 6(f) impacts
	Area of wetlands impacted
	Potential noise impacts on nearby residential properties
	Potential for wildlife mortality; impact on wildlife movement
Community Support	Level of community support for alternative
Cost	Capital cost, maintenance cost



SCRIPT:

The project team has developed screening criteria to guide the screening and evaluation process. These criteria includes measures for safety, mobility, pavement condition, environmental impacts, community support, and cost. During the Level 2 screening and evaluation, these factors were evaluated in a qualitative manner.

LEVEL 2 SCREENING EVALUATION & RESULTS

- Qualitative evaluation
 - Some high-level quantifying impacts where logical and needed
- Ranking alternative's performance against criteria
- Ranking scale used for each criteria
- No weighting applied

2	Alternative demonstrates strong performance against the criteria
1	Alternative demonstrates slightly strong performance against the criteria
0	Alternative demonstrates neutral performance against the criteria
-1	Alternative demonstrates slightly weak performance against the criteria
-2	Alternative demonstrates weak performance against the criteria

SCRIPT:

Each alternative was considered with respect to listed criteria and a recommendation was made about whether the alternative demonstrated strong, moderately strong, neutral, slightly weak, or weak performance in relation to the stated criteria.

The Preliminary Alternative Screening memo, which summarizes the Level 2 alternative screening process and scoring, is available on the project website.

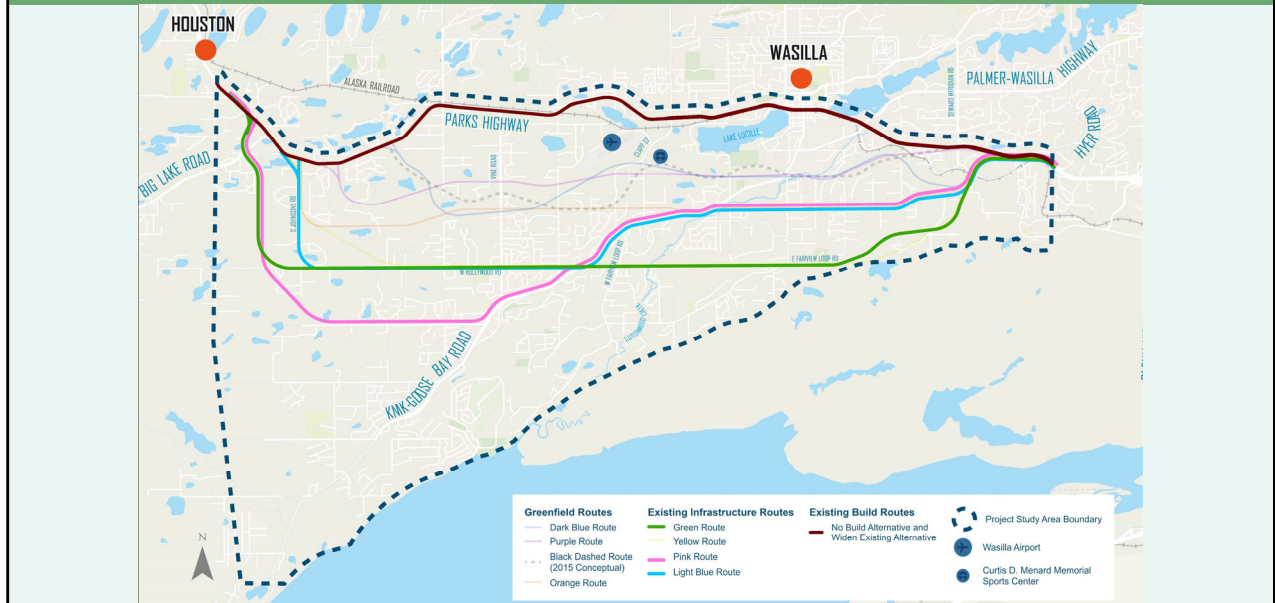


PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES MOVING FORWARD FOR DETAILED ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

SCRIPT:

The following slides summarize the alternatives that are recommended to move forward to detailed alternative development. The potential advantages and disadvantages of each alternative can be viewed on an interactive Story Map site, accessed from the project website.

DISMISSED ALTERNATIVES



SCRIPT:

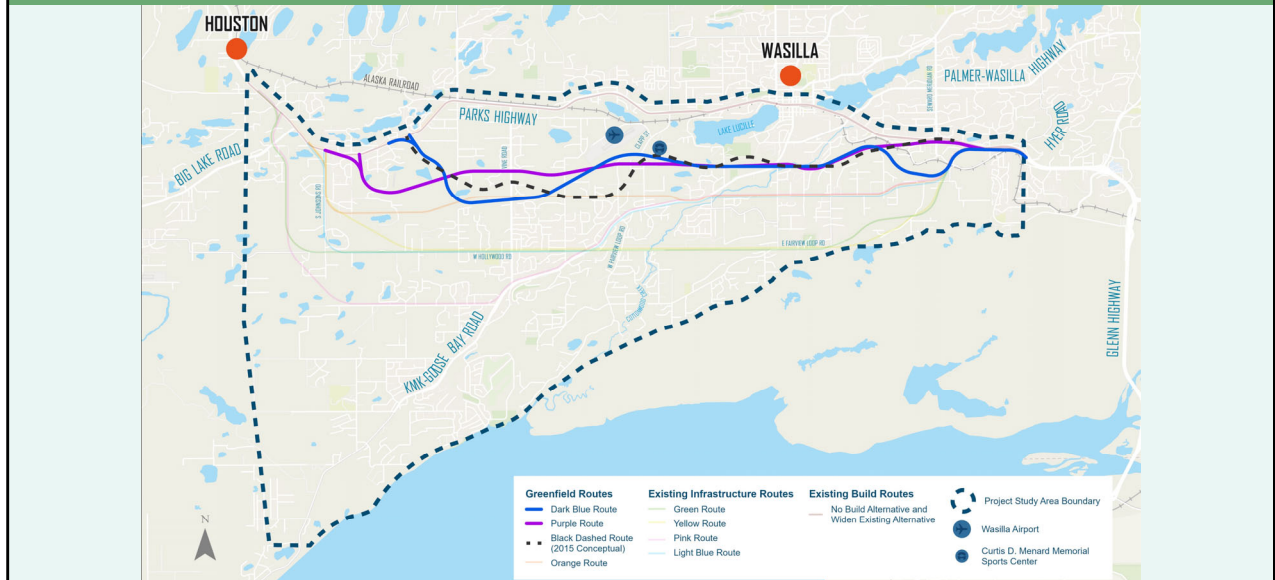
Of the initial 10 alternatives, the project team recommends dismissing four through the Level 2 screening process.

The no-build and widen the existing Parks Highway alternatives did not meet the Level 1 purpose and need screening. However, the no build alternative will be carried through each step of the screening process to provide a baseline for the evaluation of potential impacts.

The widen existing Parks Highway alternative was specifically requested to be a preliminary alternative by DOT&PF. It does not meet the purpose and need and has other social and environmental effects that were more impactful than other alternatives. In addition, this alternative did not perform as strongly in relation to transportation evaluation criteria.

The Light Blue, Green, and Pink alternatives also performed less strongly in relation to evaluation criteria. These routes were less frequently selected by the public in the preliminary alternatives survey, and they use large sections of the existing roadway network, creating access and right-of-way impacts. Property access would need to be recreated, which will likely result in additional right of way, environmental and social impacts. These three routes also result in more out-of-direction travel than other alternatives that are recommended to advance.

DARK BLUE, BLACK DASHED, & PURPLE ROUTES ADVANCE AS GROUP TO YIELD ONE ALTERNATIVE



SCRIPT:

The dark blue, black dashed, and purple route will be advanced as a group and evaluated in detail to yield a single alternative corridor with potential variants.

The Dark Blue Route parallels the existing Parks Highway approximately one- to one-and-a-half miles south.

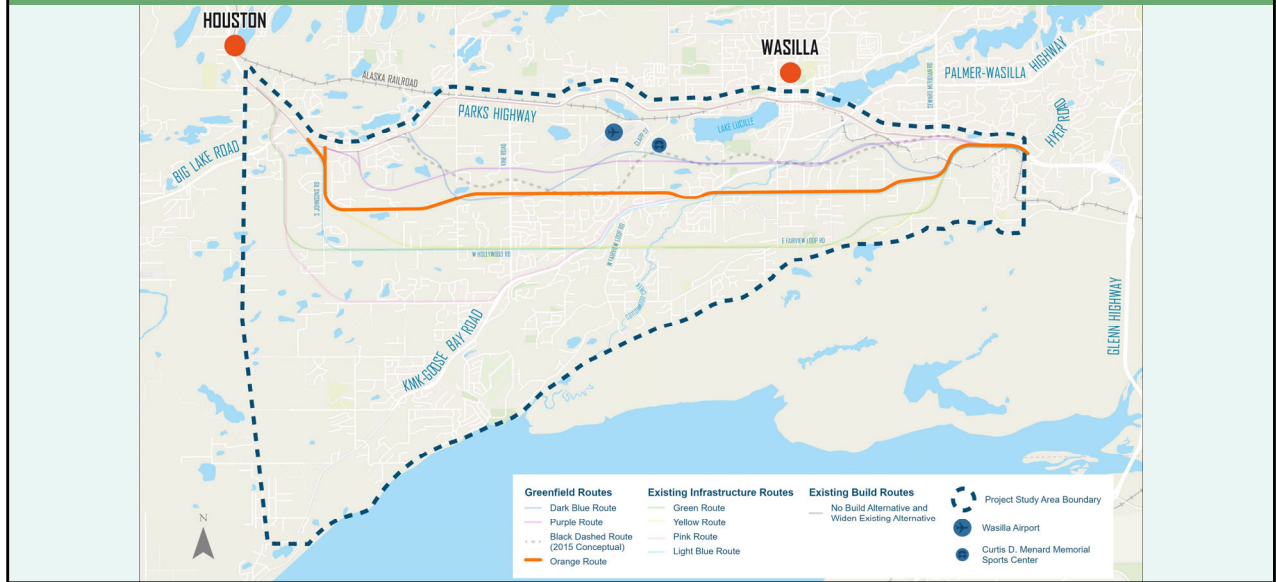
The Black Dashed Route is the recommended route from the 2015 Parks Highway Alternative Corridor Conceptual Planning Report. This route was selected in 2015 because the analysis concluded that it maximized the use of undeveloped land and minimized impacts to residences, wetlands, and environmentally sensitive areas.

This route parallels the existing Parks Highway approximately one- to one-and-a-half miles south and has the most curvature of the

alignments. There has been significant development in the study area since 2015 which reduce the desirability of this route.

The Purple Route parallels the existing Parks Highway approximately one- to one- and-a-half miles south and closely resembles the Dark Blue Route and the Black Dashed Route, but it has less curvature than the other alternatives in this group.

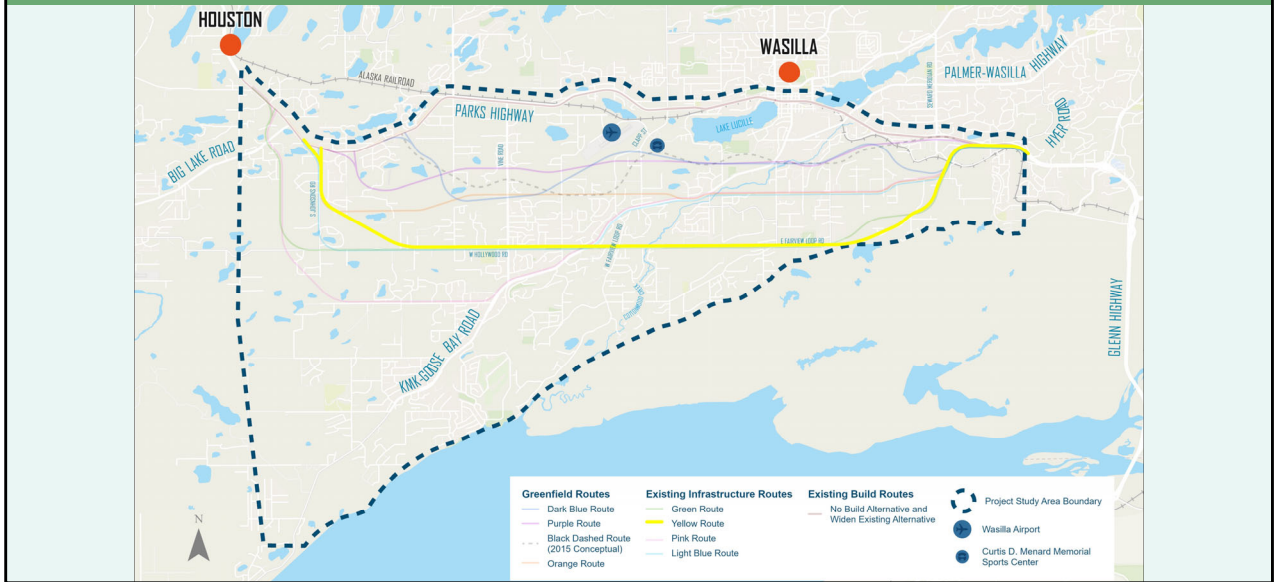
ORANGE ROUTE ADVANCE AS ALTERNATIVE



SCRIPT:

The Orange Route parallels the existing Parks Highway one- to one-and-a-half miles south. This route is a relatively straight alignment with minimal curvature. It uses Fairview Loop Road at the eastern end and joins with Johnson Road after following a relatively straight-line connection primarily through undeveloped land.

YELLOW ROUTE ADVANCE AS ALTERNATIVE



SCRIPT:

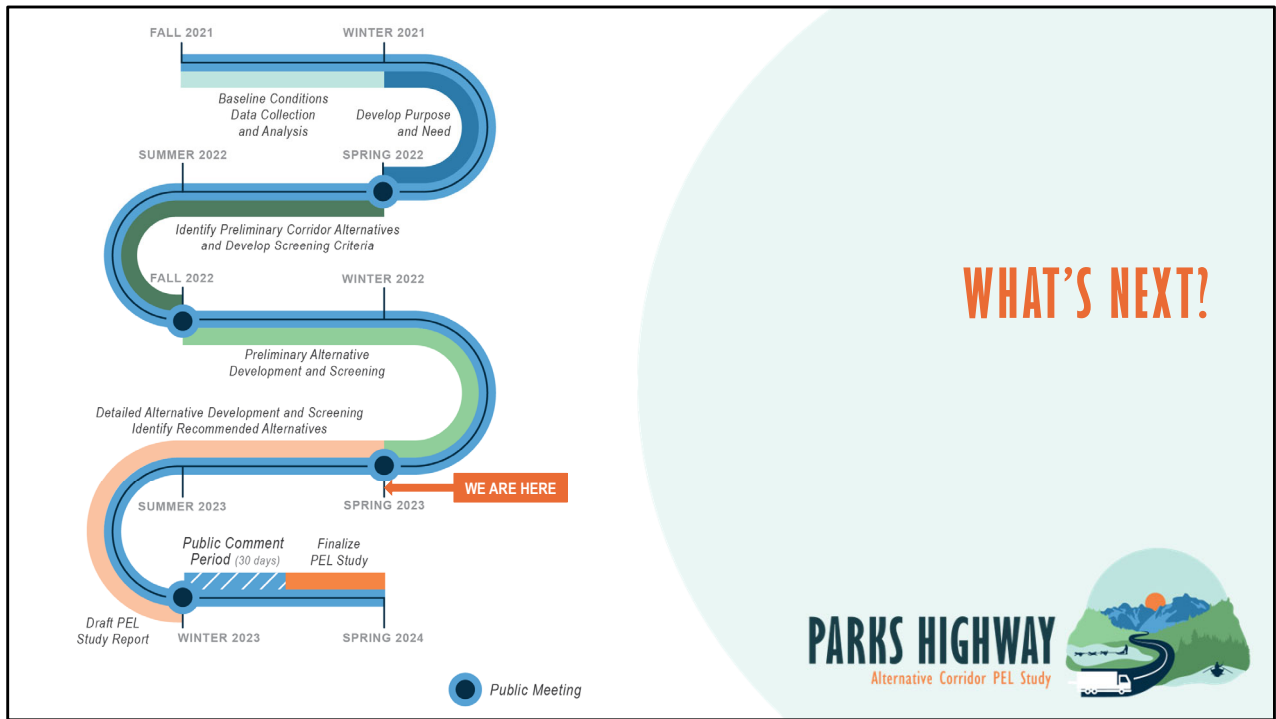
The Yellow Route uses a combination of undeveloped land and existing roads including Fairview Loop Road and Hollywood Road. Its eastern terminus is at the Parks Highway and Hyer Road Interchange, and the western terminus is at the Parks Highway at approximately MP 52.50. This route parallels the existing Parks Highway approximately two- and-a-half to three miles south, which means it will be the furthest out-of-direction for travel from the existing Parks Highway through Wasilla.

NO BUILD EXISTING CONDITIONS BASELINE



SCRIPT:

The No Build Route has no changes to the existing Parks Highway. All travelers will continue to use the existing Parks Highway with no improvements. This alternative will be carried through the analysis as it provides a baseline against which to consider the advantages and disadvantages of an alternative corridor.



SCRIPT:

So, what comes next?



[Animate bolding of orange line]

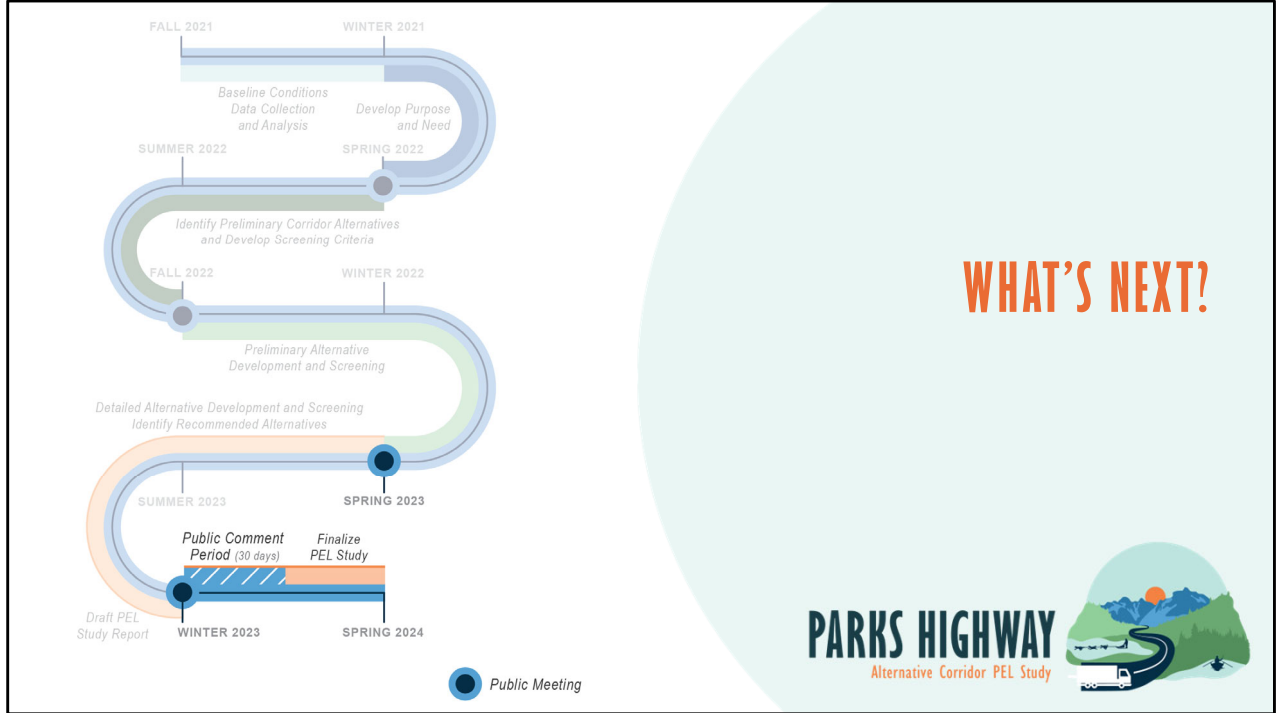
SCRIPT:

The project team will hear your input and feedback and use that to help with evaluating the alternatives.

They will be working through a process of refining the alternatives to understand how the corridors can meet the alternative design criteria, respond to environmental and community resources and impacts, and how each alternative corridor can tie in with the existing roadway network through interchanges.

The alternative screening process will help us understand which alternative corridors perform best in relation to the criteria and identify recommended alternative corridors.

All the work to date will be brought together into a draft PEL Study report that we will share with you at the final Open House in Winter 2023/24.



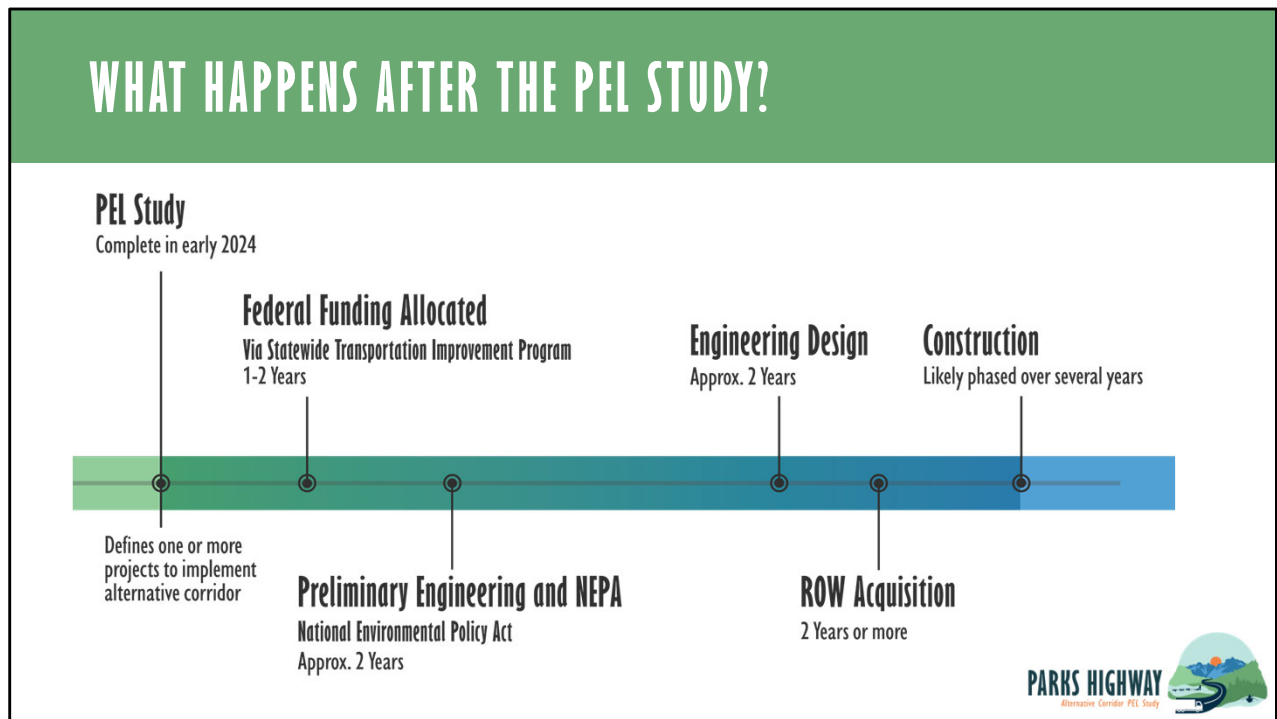
[Animate bolding of public comment period and Finalize PEL Study line]

SCRIPT:

A 30-Day Public Comment period will follow the final Open House, which is your opportunity to give us your comments on the recommended alternatives, projects for implementation and the PEL Study Report.

After the comment period, we will update the Study Report and publish a final version in Spring 2024.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE PEL STUDY?



SCRIPT:

The PEL Study will be complete in Spring 2024.

Following its completion, several steps need to happen before a project moves forward to construction. These steps include:

- Allocation of Federal funding through the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
- Preliminary Engineering and Environmental evaluation under the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA
- Engineering Design
- Right-of-Way Acquisition

These steps are expected to take several years, and there will be many opportunities for the public to be part of the process at each step.



SCRIPT:

The project team is asking for you to provide input on the alternatives that have been identified to move forward for detailed development.

Scan this code with your smartphone to open the Story Map, learn more about each of the preliminary alternatives, and let us know what you think.

Later in 2023, the recommended alternative or alternatives, potential projects for implementation, and location of key features such as interchanges to connect with the existing roadway network will be shared as part of the draft PEL Study.

THANK YOU!

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SCRIPT:

That concludes our presentation. Thank you for your ongoing participation in this PEL Study process.

Stay informed by visiting www.parkshighwayalternative.com.

Submit questions and comments to parkshighwayalternative@dowl.com.