



# PELs Under the Northern Lights

*NAEP Conference  
May 13, 2026*



## Poll Question #1 – How familiar are you with the Planning and Environmental Linkages Process?

Scan the code to join  
the poll!



- A. None. What's a PEL?
- B. Some. I've heard of it. No experience.
- C. Experienced. I've worked on a PEL project.
- D. Expert. I know more than you, probably.



# 1. How familiar are you with the Planning and Environmental Linkages Process?

# PRESENTERS

---



**Laurie Cummings, AICP  
CTP ENV SP**

HDR

Senior Planner



**Ben White**

Alaska Department of  
Transportation and Public  
Facilities

Central Region Planning  
Chief



**Taylor Horne**

HDR

Alaska Transportation  
Environmental and NEPA  
Lead

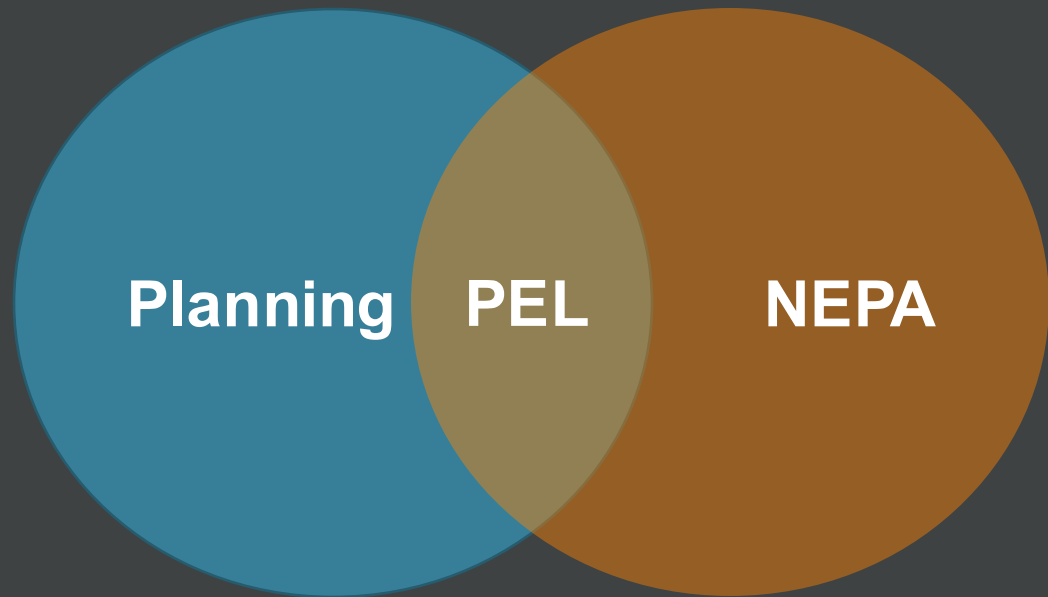
# Agenda

---

What is a Planning and Environmental Linkages Study?

Why are they used by the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities?

PELs in Alaska



- Planning Products:**
- System Analysis
  - P&N
  - Environmental Alternatives Screening



- NEPA:**
- CE
  - EA
  - EIS
  - Alternative Selection

# What is a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study?

**Collaborative and integrated approach to transportation projects**

- Considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the process, before NEPA

**Information, analysis, and products during transportation planning**

- Adopted or incorporated by reference into the environmental review process (NEPA)


# Why should you care?

## Requirements for NEPA:

- NOI requirements
- Time limits – EIS 2 years; EA 1 year
- Page limits – EIS 150-300; EA 75
- Single NEPA Document

## Benefits:

- Develop products for NEPA earlier
- Uncover issues
- Help with funding, implementation planning and early actions
- Build project support and agency relationships



**To help satisfy  
latest NEPA  
requirements**

# What are the Overlaps?



Scoping



Purpose & Need



Range of alternatives



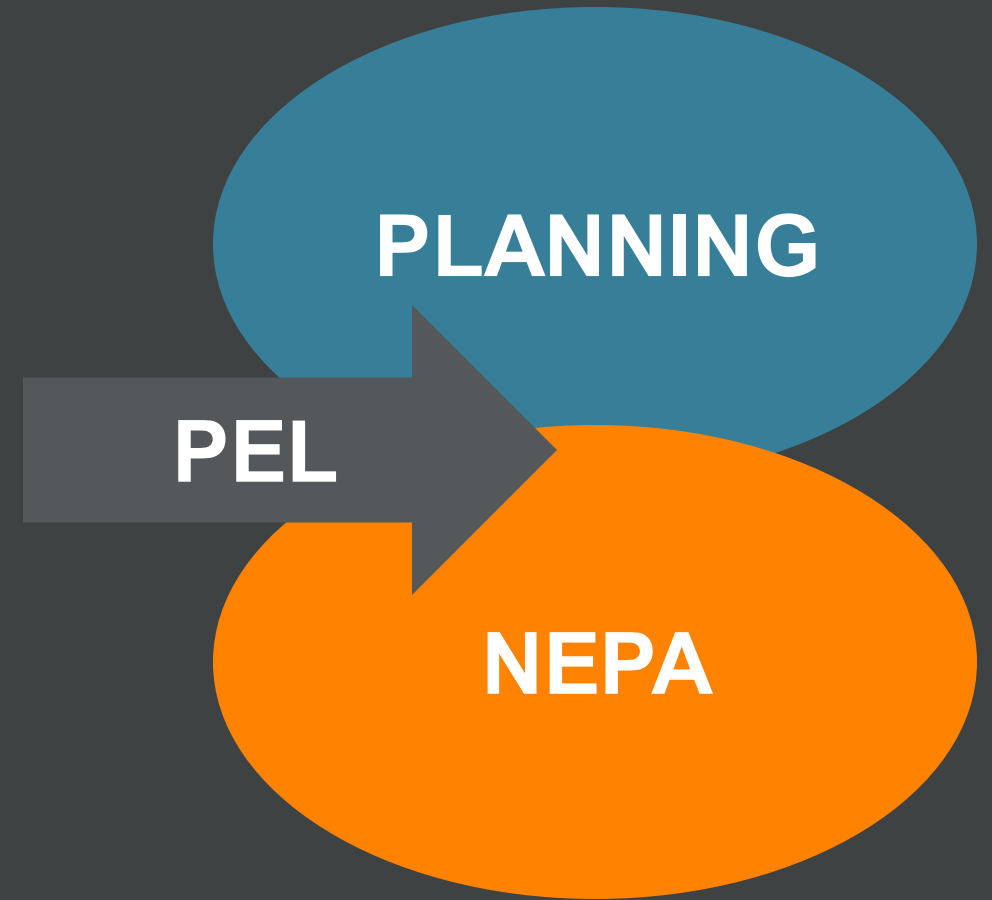
Agency coordination



Public involvement



Environmental Setting



# Keys to ensuring PEL studies will be useful in the NEPA process



Consideration of environmental issues



FHWA/FTA/FRA Involvement, or State DOT under full NEPA Assignment



Public and agency vetting



Appropriate timing and phasing



Documentation

# Trigger

**Must have a federal nexus to be a PEL.**

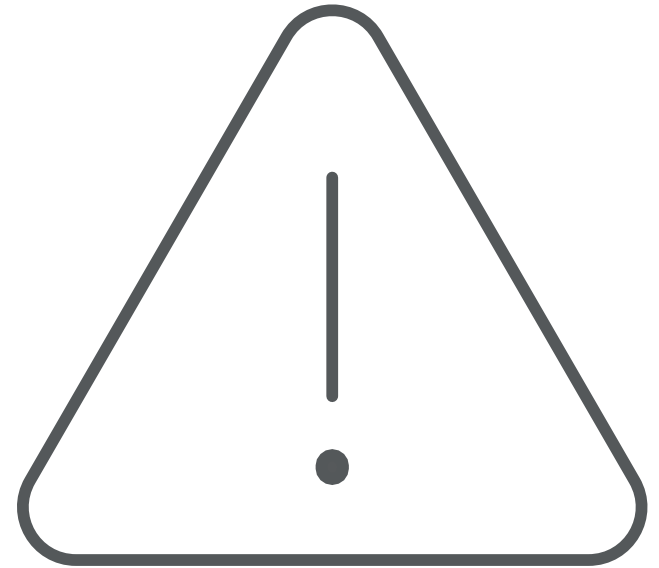
**FHWA must be involved in approval to use it in NEPA.**

## **PEL studies can be helpful when:**

- Project funding not yet identified
- Problem not well defined
- Solutions to problem not identified

## **PEL studies do not:**

- Guarantee federal funding for a project
- Reduce the level of NEPA analysis required
- Change the class of NEPA action



## Poll Question #2 – Which one does the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities not manage?

Scan the code to join  
the poll!



- A. Roads
- B. Ferries
- C. Airports
- D. Railroads
- E. Parking Garages



## 2. Which one does the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities not manage?

# DOT&PF's Use of PELs



Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

## Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Guidebook



April 2021

# Why not just do a planning study?

What tools does DOT have at its disposal?



---

Feasibility  
study



---

Recon study



---

Corridor  
study



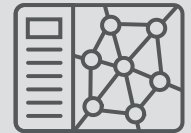
---

Master plans



---

NEPA



---

Planning and  
Environment  
al Linkages

# What can a PEL study accomplish?

- Identify stakeholders
- Identify environmental issues/ applicable regulatory processes
- Define scope & class of action
- Establish purpose and need
- Identify/analyze potential alternatives
- Narrow the range of alternatives



# What can a PEL study accomplish?

- Clarify funding availability/source
- Build consensus on corridor/subarea vision
- Identify/Prioritize projects in a corridor
- Improve program predictability
- Identify mitigation opportunities



## Poll Question #3 – All PELs must carry the following items into NEPA?

Scan the code to join  
the poll!



- A. Purpose and Need
- B. Alternatives
- C. Outreach
- D. Data Collection
- E. All of the Above
- F. None of the Above



### **3. All PELs must carry the following items into NEPA?**

# Success Stories

**EGAN / YANDUKIN**  
Intersection Improvements

## Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study Report

Egan Drive and Yandukin Drive  
Intersection Improvements  
IRIS Program No. SFHWY00079  
Federal Project No. 0003208

Juneau, Alaska  
August 2021

Prepared by:  
**HDR**

The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by DOT&PF pursuant to 23 USC 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated November 3, 2017 and executed by FHWA and DOT&PF.

Seward ↔ Glenn  
**CONNECTION**

**JUNEAU DOUGLAS**  
North Crossing PEL Study

**Cantwell to Healy**  
PEL Study  
Parks Highway MP 203-259  
Planning & Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study  
Project No. NFWY00492

**MINNIE STREET CORRIDOR STUDY**  
PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL LINKAGES STUDY REPORT  
PROJECT NO. RFP-17-08

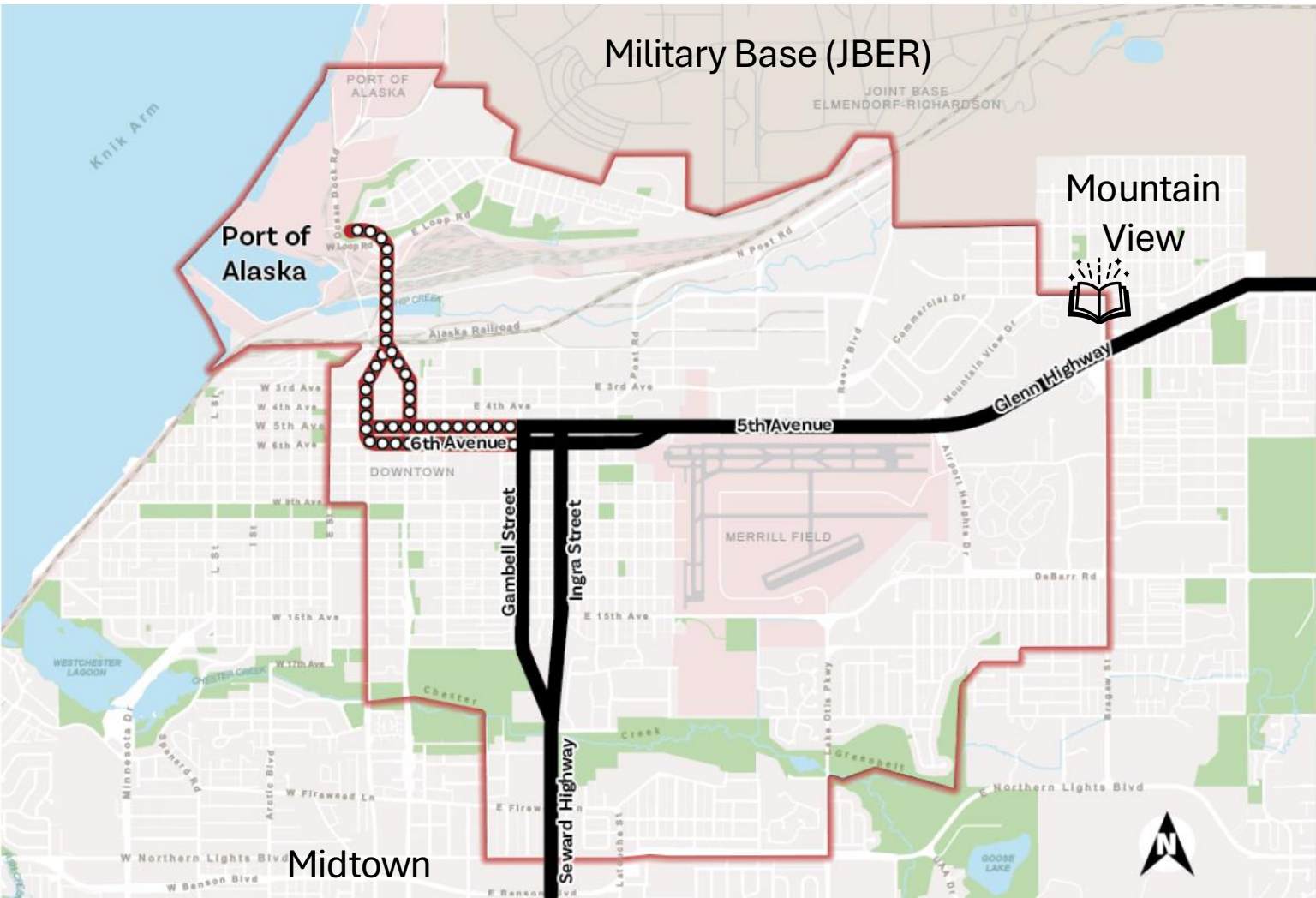
**Minnie Street Corridor Study**

**Minnie St. Corridor**  
**Downtown Fairbanks**

PHILLIPS FIELD RD  
JOHANNSEN EXPY  
COLLEGE RD  
MINNIE ST  
STONITTI ST  
CUSHMAN ST  
BARTLE ST  
AIRPORT WAY  
CHENA RIVER  
OLD STEESE  
STEESE CANY



# Seward Glenn PEL



**LEGEND**

- Study Area
- Park Land
- Existing Port Connection
- Existing Highway Corridor

## Glenn and Seward Highways

- Interstate Highway System (IHS)
- National Highway System (NHS)

## Port Connection & Freight Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET)

- “highways important for defense mobility and deployment of military equipment and personnel”

Questions left unanswered by Highway to Highway (H2H) EIS that was cancelled.

# Balancing Issues & Challenges



Non-motorized Safety & Emergency Response



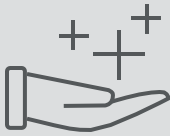
Improve Port Access



Reduce Conflicts between Regional & Local Users



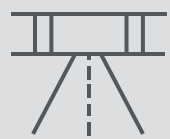
Improve Livability



Consider Needs of All Users



Promote Neighborhood Investment



Maintain Functionality & Intent of National & Interstate Hwy Systems



Accommodate Adopted Plans

# We Heard You!

## What We Heard



Concerns for neighborhood impacts: noise, air, environmental justice, right-of-way (ROW), and property values



Concerns about ROW impacts (residential and commercial)



Concern for park impacts/ support for Alt D



General sentiment against freeway options; questioning whether a freeway is needed

## What We Did About It



» Screened-out/eliminated high-impact freeways



» Reduce ROW impacts with tunnels, parkways, and at-grade intersections

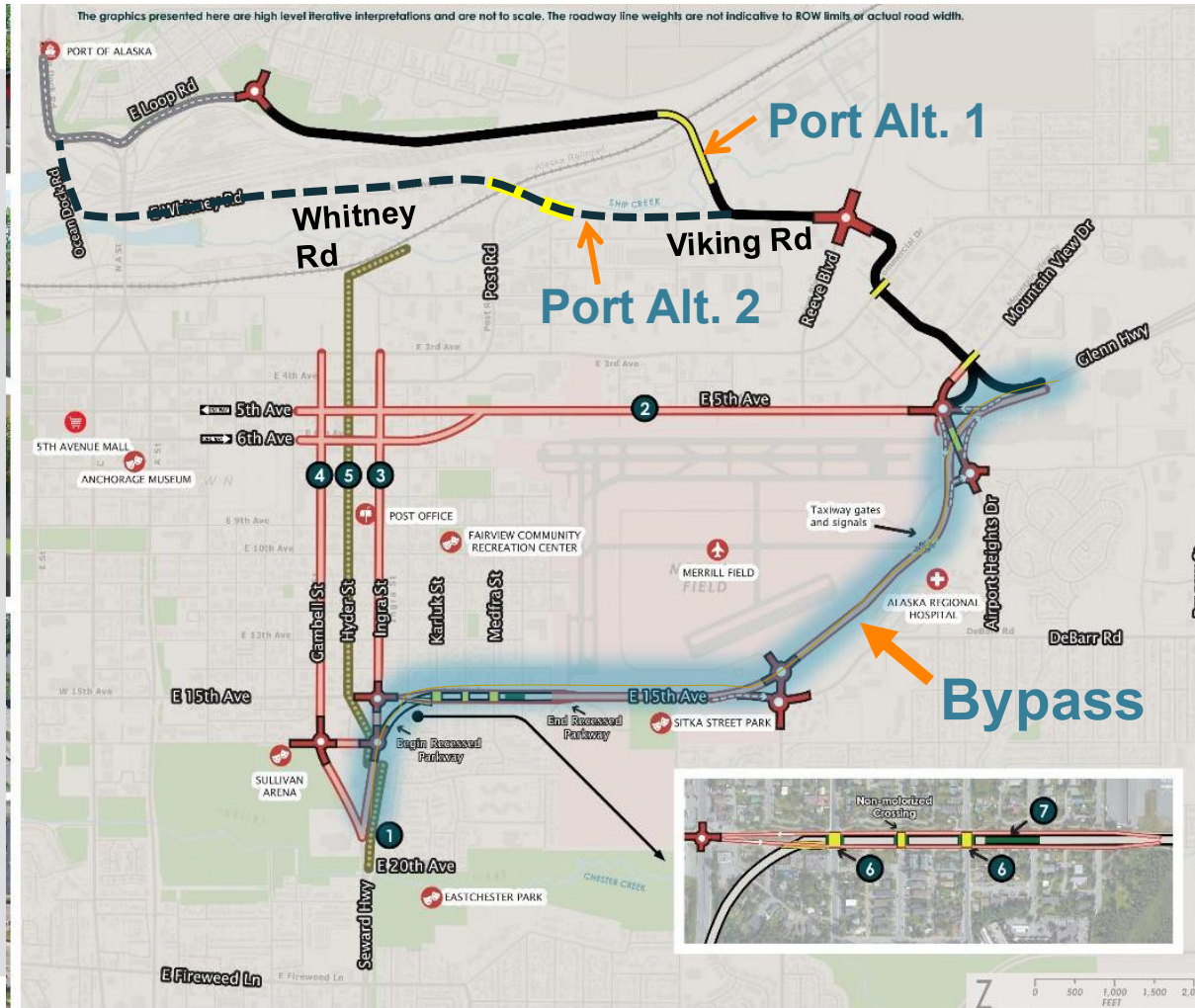


» Reduce footprint  
» Slower speed allows better park avoidance and reduces noise  
» Shift road farther away from green spaces and homes



» Created a parkway connection for regional traffic  
» Created at-grade intersections  
» Reduced speeds and number of lanes  
» Reduced ROW impacts with tunnels  
» Added MTP+ alternative

# Recommended Alternative

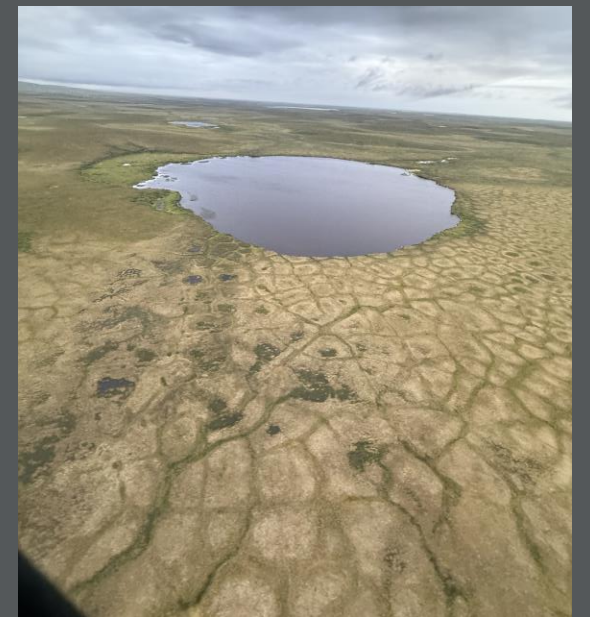


- Best for Safety
- Most green space and linear miles of new/upgraded non-motorized infrastructure
- Meets *Reconnecting Fairview* objectives
- Attracts most trips (i.e. high usage investment)
- Lowest traffic diversion – widespread traffic reductions
- Improved livability, safety, & neighborhood cohesion
- Improves connectivity across 15<sup>th</sup> Ave using cut & cover design
- Highest # of relocations
- Noise concerns
- Airport concerns
- Former landfill

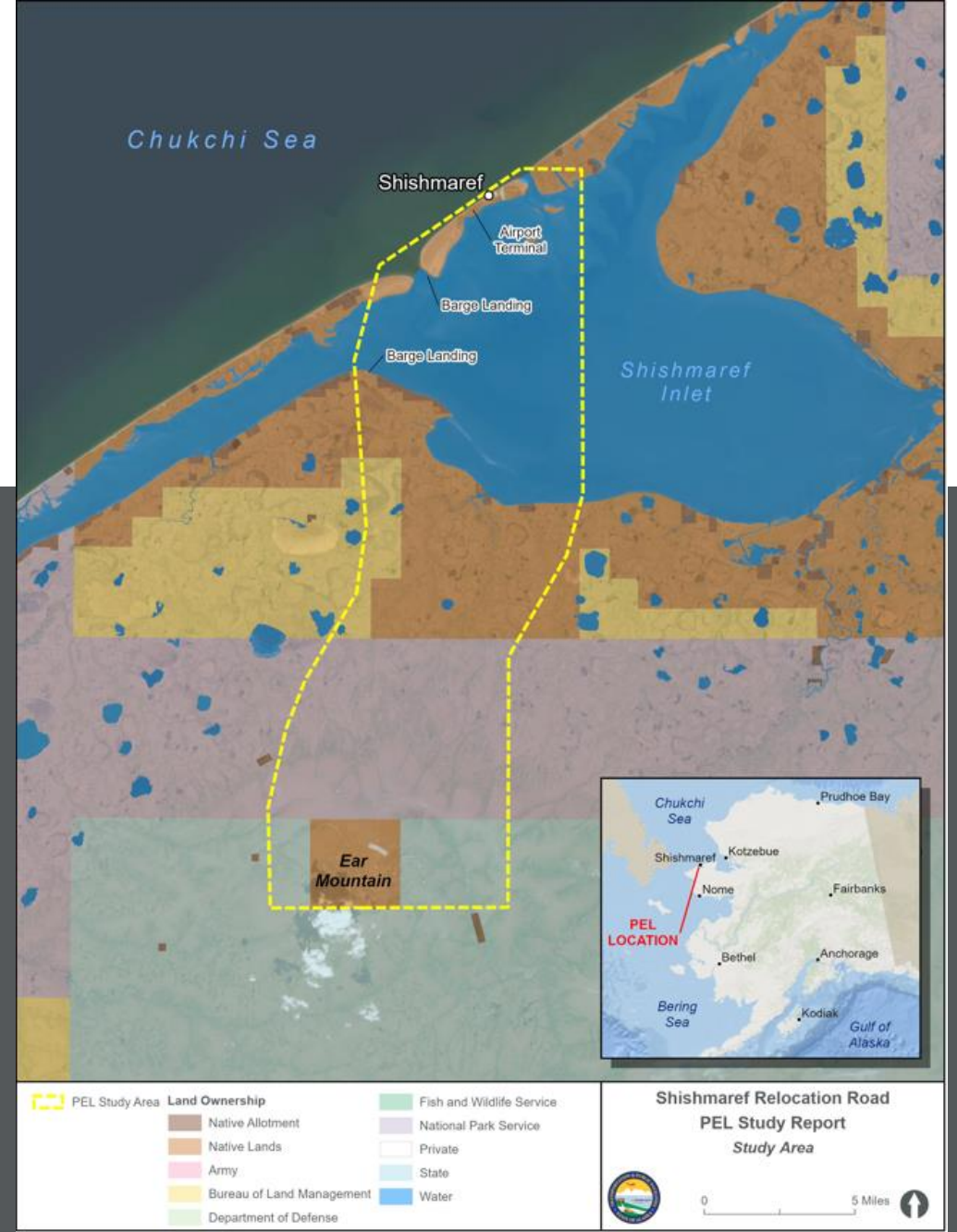
# Shishmaref Road PEL Study



# Field Work



# Community and Agency Engagement



# Kodiak PEL



Sargent Creek  
Bridge #0989

Russian River  
Bridge #0990

# Community Priorities

## Sargent Creek Road floods for second time this year

KMXT | By [Brian Venua](#)

Published June 10, 2024 at 5:26 PM AKDT





Additional Goals

# Key Takeaways for using PEL Studies

PEL studies are most efficient when conducted for

1. complex corridors/subareas to identify and prioritize separate independent projects,
  2. to cover the typical scoping, purpose and need, and preliminary alternatives analysis/screening steps traditionally done in the early stages of NEPA for an EIS or complex EA.
- or*

*Transportation Research Board PEL Research paper coming this summer*



Questions?