

Instructions and Tips to Testify at the Mat-Su Borough Open House

When: Wednesday, February 23, 2022
Time: 4 to 7 PM, Presentations at 4, 5, & 6

Online: https://bit.ly/susitna_access
Phone: 253-215-8782, Meeting ID: 860 7777 0537, Passcode: 150663

Background:

The West Susitna Road is a proposed 100+ mile industrial access road. The road would begin at Port Mackenzie and cut through the currently roadless heart of the Western Susitna drainage to end at a gold mining claim being explored by an Australian gold mining company. The road would include 156 stream crossings, 145 of which will get culverts and 90 of which will be designated for fish passage. There will be 11 bridges, 4 of them complex bridges.

On [December 21, 2021](#), despite robust public testimony against, the Mat-Su Borough Assembly ignored their constituents voices and voted to approve Phase III of the West Susitna Access Road. The would be a 100+ mile industrial gravel road. Public testimony was well thought out, and the [Assembly members received a lot of contact from constituents](#) in the weeks leading up to the vote. Through this action, the Borough Assembly authorized AIDEA to continue down this route - with no requirements for public outreach, or independent cost-benefit analysis, on the timeline AIDEA proposed.

After this vote, the Mat-Su Assembly directed the Borough to use \$50,000 of already allocated Borough funding to conduct public outreach during the first quarter of 2022. This outreach includes the collection of public comments and two public meetings. The end result of this Borough public involvement project will be a summary of comments representing current public sentiment about the proposed West Susitna Access Road. A summary of the comments to the Borough Assembly and AIDEA will be made before submitting it to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for consideration during the upcoming Clean Water Act permitting process.

An in-depth description of the project can be found [HERE](#).

The Susitna River Coalition (SRC) is opposed to this project and recommends that it NOT move forward to permitting until more information about impacts, usage, and an independent cost benefit analysis is complete.

WE NEED YOU TO PARTICIPATE. A quick written comment or oral testimony during one of these meetings is key to ensuring the Borough and the permitting agencies know that residents of the Borough do not want this private access road or to be a part of another expensive, drawn out, unnecessary AIDEA project. Tell them why this road would negatively impact you and how you interact in this area.

Participate:

Remotely:

1. Online: https://bit.ly/susitna_access
2. Telephonically: 253-215-8782, Meeting ID: 860 7777 0537, Passcode: 150663

We do not know what to expect at this meeting as there has been no agenda posted. There is no in-person option for attendance. Currently there are no instructions for testimony other than links and phone numbers.

Potential Points to Consider Using in Testimony

1. The road and cost estimates as presented by AIDEA are for a private industrial road. AIDEA's messaging surrounding public access has been entirely misleading and confusing. At this point, the road is slated to be public just to the Susitna. What are the true costs of road construction and what would the Borough and its constituents tax dollars be responsible for.
2. In recent years, the West-Su Road, the Donlin Pipeline, Susitna Valley Oil and Gas Development, colossal gravel needs for road construction and building pads in a predominately wetland area, weakened habitat protections, and removal of the Recreational Rivers habitat plan have all been proposed for this region of Alaska. These proposals are being looked at individually while the cumulative impacts of these projects need to be addressed as a whole. Individually, these projects will alter and impact the landscape, together they will exacerbate negative impacts from habitat loss, fragmentation, illegal harvest, vandalism, pollution including air, ground and noise, and overwhelming change the face of the region forever.
3. Locals in the West Susitna area are just now hearing about this project. Three months of public outreach is entirely inadequate for large-scale project such as this. Two fast-tracked open houses with no agenda and minimal information on how to participate is not adequate outreach.
4. The project has been fast-tracked and the timeline for permitting much too rapid. One season of impact studies is not adequate to gain a comprehensive idea of environmental implications to economically valuable and environmentally important fish and wildlife habitat. In addition, utilizing environmental studies not specific to this area from projects such as Susitna-Watana Hydro Project or Donlin Natural Gas Pipeline studies, is inadequate to gain a comprehensive idea of effects of this specific project.
5. Timber, agriculture, coal, and hard rock mining have been touted as justifications for this road. There has yet to be a compelling description as to how these various resources would help pay for the road or benefit Alaskans. In addition, it is unclear how many side roads and additional development would be needed to access and utilize these natural resources.

6. Increased road construction into remote areas will result in increased illegal activity including poaching, vandalism, vehicle abandonment, and shooting. At the December 21, 2021 Borough Assembly meeting, the Assembly Persons spoke at length about the Jim Creek issue. Until the management of and budget is addressed, this project should not proceed into permitting. Who will be responsible for the additional costs and for paying for increased monitoring? The Borough has a very limited budget and we worry about a similar situation as the Jonesville Road or Jim Creek.
7. An independent economic analysis of the costs and benefits to the Mat-Su was recommended back in Phase I. It has yet to be completed. The assessment must be completed prior to any more investment in this project and utilization of our state's money to ensure that Alaskans and the Borough actually benefit from this project.
8. AIDEA has a laundry list of failed and abandoned projects which has proven them to be a bad partner. Their track record includes the Mustang Project with \$70 million dollars of loss, the Anchorage Seafood Processing plan with \$25 million in loss, Healy "Clean" Coal with \$89 million in loss, the Dead End Rail Spur at Pt. Mackenzie, the Ferry called Susitna, and the Skagway Ore Terminal.
9. The example project AIDEA cites as its shining star is the Red Dog Mine. In 2016, Red Dog Mine officially released 756 pounds of toxic chemicals and has been designated as America's most toxic site.
10. In the December Borough Assembly meetings where Assembly voted to approve Phase III, public opposition was overwhelming and clearly illustrated that the public does not want this road to go through. The individuals who testified in favor were predominantly non identified as industry-associated.

