

# THEN AND NOW: A HISTORY OF THE KNIK ARM CROSSING



## Southcentral Alaska: 100 Years of Development

Over the last century, Southcentral Alaska has been characterized by drive, determination and development. At the heart of Southcentral is the Anchorage metropolitan area, a region that has experienced continual expansion since the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

An important transportation hub, Cook Inlet functioned as a shipping center for the state's mining industry. In 1914, the Alaska Engineering Commission established Ship Creek as a work and supply camp for construction of the Alaska Railroad, creating a town site that is now the city of Anchorage. The Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough also underwent great change and development, including the "New Deal," an agricultural colonization enacted by the federal government in the 1930s, and construction of the Glenn Highway as a way of accessing the colony.

The region continued to expand as the military established a strong presence in Alaska during the 1940s. Because control of Pacific transportation routes was so vital, Gen. Billy Mitchell told Congress in 1935, "I believe that in the future, whoever

*Continued inside:*

### **Ship Creek - 1915**

*Photographer Alberta Pyatt was an employee of Sydney Laurence in 1915 when both were early residents of Ship Creek. She captured this image in early summer.  
(Anchorage Museum of History and Art.)*



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.



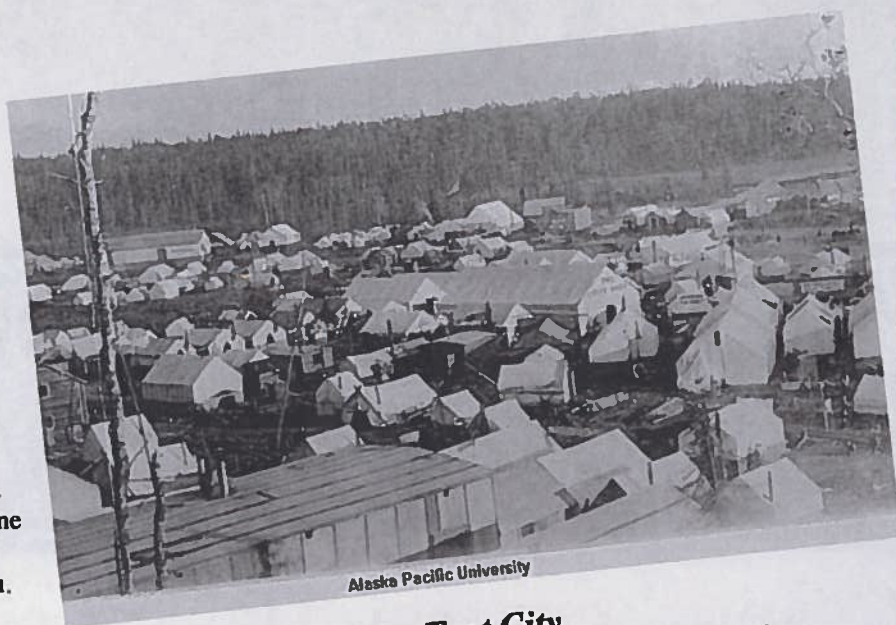
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**holds Alaska will hold the world. I think it is the most important strategic place in the world."**

**Anchorage was then established as a major military hub, which brought an increased need for infrastructure. Construction of the Alaska-Canada Highway connected Alaska to the continental highway system and the Glenn Highway was extended to Glennallen, connecting the Anchorage/Mat-Su area to this important road system.**

Alaska was granted statehood in 1959. The discovery of oil in Prudhoe Bay in the 1960s spurred construction of both the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System and the 323-mile Parks Highway. Southcentral Alaska's population surged at this time as workers and their families flooded the region. Many eventually settled in Anchorage and Mat-Su.

**The Anchorage metropolitan area now enjoys a more diverse economy with residents employed in a variety of retail, resource development, professional service and city, borough, state and federal occupations. Along with economic diversity comes economic stability. As more individuals move to the area it is imperative we connect Alaska's two largest population centers – Anchorage and Mat-Su – and provide a more direct route to the Interior.**



### Businesses Crowd the Tent City

**Businesses Crowd the Tent City**  
Amid the tents were the Crest House, Anchorage Fish Market, The Panhandle, Montana Pool Room, White Road House and Riverside Hotel. (Alaska Pacific University)

# An Early History of the Knik Arm Crossing

More than 80 years of transportation, land use and economic plans and studies for the Upper Cook Inlet region of Alaska have indicated a need to connect the Municipality of Anchorage with the Mat-Su Borough. As early as 1923, Alaska Railroad engineers made preliminary studies of a causeway to shorten the route to Fairbanks. By 1954, a multi-purpose proposal was made by a Seattle engineer for a combination causeway and tidal power plant stretching across Turnagain Arm and Knik Arm and connecting on Fire Island. Just one year later, the Anchorage formed a committee to explore a causeway. In 1956, the city hired Bloch and Associates to develop the "Proposed Knik Arm Causeway," a study that highlighted the economic and defense benefits of a Knik Arm causeway.

*"We wish to point out very strongly that to make the port 100 percent efficient, the causeway should also be built ... and the Chamber of Commerce could do Anchorage no greater service than to continue to push for it at every opportunity."*

*Anchorage News,  
July 2, 1957*





# The Knik Arm Crossing Draws Closer to Reality

In 1970, the Alaska Department of Highways commissioned a study of the general subsurface conditions of Knik Arm to identify geological factors that might influence the location and design of a proposed highway crossing. The department hired consulting engineers to study existing data for technical issues associated with engineering a structure across Turnagain Arm. The study concluded that a bridge crossing was the most economically feasible alternative and had the least negative effect on the natural environment.

By 1983 the Alaska Department of Transportation (ADOT) prepared an Economic Feasibility Report concluding the Knik Arm crossing and approach roads were economically feasible under conservative assumptions and compared favorably with other state transportation and infrastructure investments. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and ADOT evaluated alternative corridors for the best combination of positive features and documented their findings in the Final Corridor Alternatives Report created in support of the 1984 draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

From a historical perspective, the most comprehensive study conducted for the Knik Arm Crossing project was a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) prepared by ADOT

in 1984 under Gov. Bill Sheffield. An Implementation Options Report by the ADOT was prepared the following year. It presented the design, financial and development options for implementing a Knik Arm crossing. Due to a lack of funding and the dramatic downturn in the state's economy between 1985 and 1990, the project was never advanced beyond the DEIS stage. However, with today's diversified economy and current and projected populations, we are now able to afford this important piece of Alaska infrastructure using tolls.

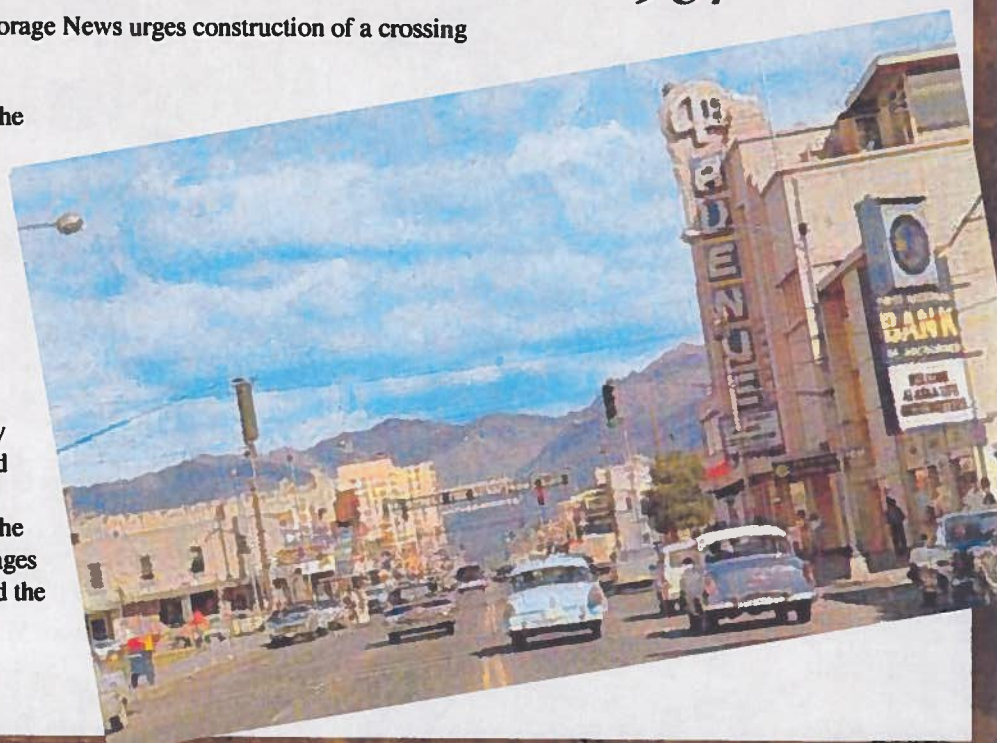
In 2003, the ADOT produced the Knik Arm Crossing Engineering Feasibility and Cost Estimate Update project that revised 1984 DEIS cost estimates using a general alignment deemed the "Hybrid Alignment." The update included a bridge crossing with connecting roads to the north and south. The state established the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority (KABATA) that same year to begin work. By 2004, Congress appropriated funding for advanced planning efforts to include startup and staffing of KABATA, engineering and environmental studies and initiation of a new DEIS. Today we are closer than ever to reaching our goal and we can begin construction as soon as FHWA issues a Record of Decision (ROD).

## Bridge Called 'Desirable' Back in 1957

An article published July 2, 1957 in the Anchorage News urges construction of a crossing over the Knik Arm:

"With the proposed Anchorage port again in the limelight we should not lose sight of the companion proposal which is the construction of a causeway across the narrow channel that connects the Anchorage mainland with the great Susitna valley and its adjacent country north and west."

The author goes on to state that "a land connection between Anchorage and the vast mainland of western and interior Alaska is very desirable from the standpoint of evacuation and dispersion." The article also refers to the 1955 Bloch report, saying "it shows very definitely the tremendous engineering and economic advantages that would come to a deep sea port here, should the causeway become a reality."

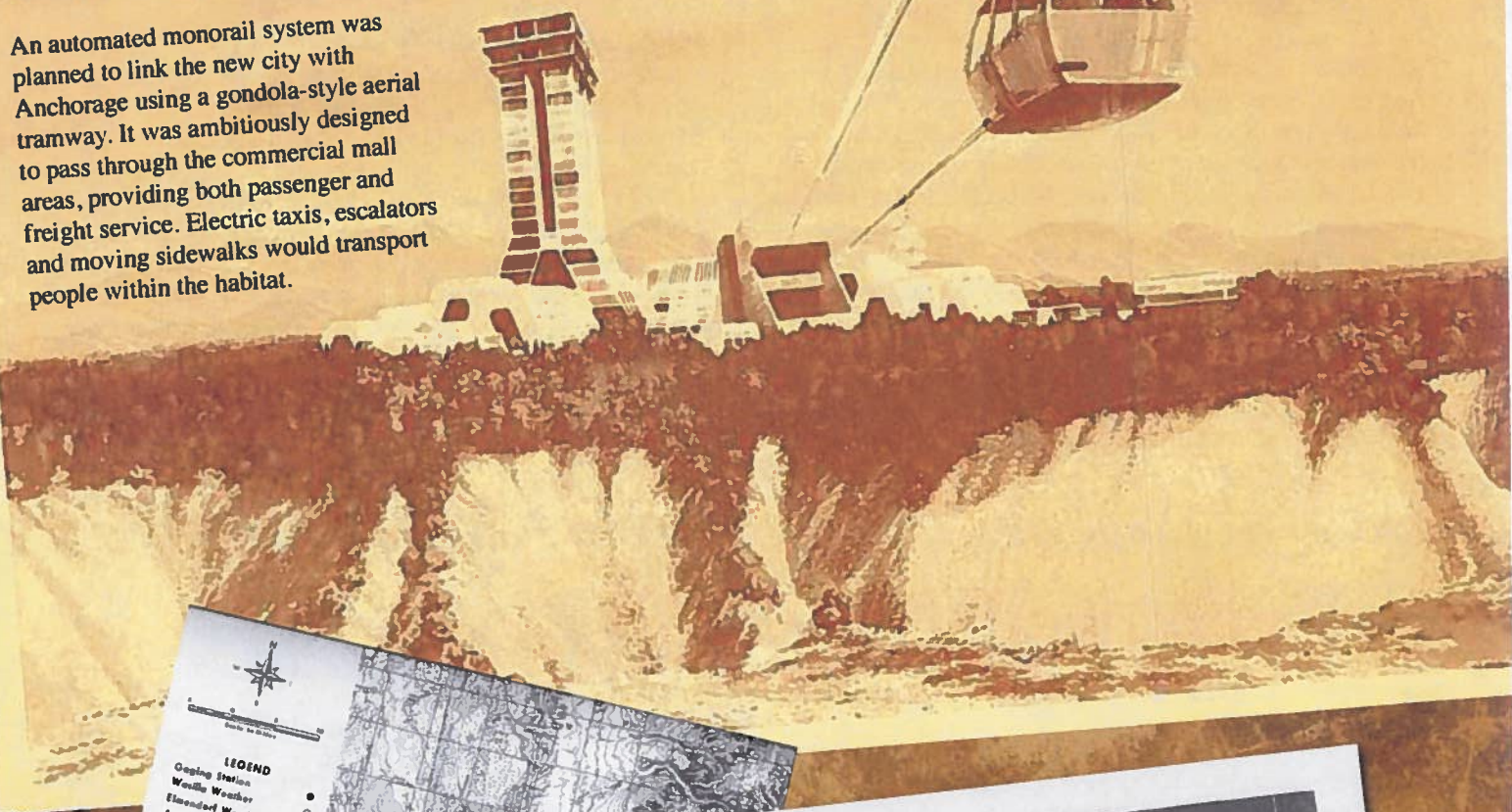




# Move Over Jetsons: Seward's Success Project is Conceptualized

In 1970, Oklahoma-based Great Northern Corp. proposed construction of a climate-controlled residential plaza for 50,000 people. It was to be built just two miles from downtown Anchorage, across the Knik Arm of Cook Inlet. The plan was to construct commercial and residential malls, a sports area, churches, schools, medical facilities, hotels, recreation facilities and a transportation system — all within a completely controlled, 68-degree habitat.

An automated monorail system was planned to link the new city with Anchorage using a gondola-style aerial tramway. It was ambitiously designed to pass through the commercial mall areas, providing both passenger and freight service. Electric taxis, escalators and moving sidewalks would transport people within the habitat.

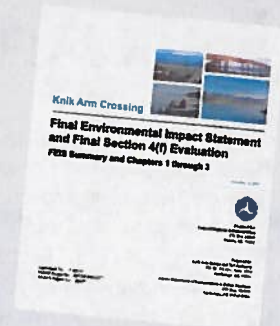


Seward's success commercial building





# KNIK ARM CROSSING: TWO STUDIES. THREE DECADES APART. SAME CONCLUSION.



1972 STUDY CONCLUSIONS*	2008 STUDY CONCLUSIONS**
Construction is feasible	Construction is feasible
Bridge is most suitable type of structure	Bridge is most suitable type of structure
Most favorable crossing site: 1.5 miles upstream from Cairn Point	Most favorable crossing site: 1.5 miles upstream from Cairn Point
Estimated total cost: \$140 million. Inflated at just over 4%: \$687 million in 2011 dollars.	Estimated total cost: \$687 million. Deflated at just over 4%: \$140 million in 1972 dollars.

\*Alaska Department of Highways engineering study

\*\*Final Environmental Impact Statement, prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act

## Knik Arm Crossing: Bridge to Our Future Video Now Available

Want to see what the Knik Arm Crossing might actually look like, or even fly over as trucks and cars travel across Knik Arm using the bridge? Now you can. The new Knik Arm Crossing project video takes you on a first hand tour of the project – including an animated fly-by of the proposed bridge.

Visit our YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/alaskaKABATA](http://www.youtube.com/alaskaKABATA) to view the extended or the shorter video as well as individual clips of project information. You can also view it at [www.knikarmbridge.com](http://www.knikarmbridge.com) or on GCI's Channel 1 each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 9 p.m., or by tuning into the Municipality of Anchorage's Channel 10.

Please contact KABATA at (907) 269-6698 for more information or to receive a copy of the DVD.





# Knik Arm Crossing Day, 1981

*"Representatives from the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, Assembly and the Administration; the Mat-Su Borough, including the Mayors of the Borough and Wasilla; and leaders of the State Legislature flew across the Knik Arm on Saturday, March 21, 1981, to celebrate 'Knik Crossing Day.' Coordinated by the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, the helicopter trip was a demonstration of support for the idea of building a crossing that would link Anchorage to Point MacKenzie and the lower Mat-Su Valley region. Most business and political leaders in this part of Alaska have agreed for more than 30 years that the concept is vital to the development and growth of the South Central region." — Greater Anchorage Today, the Monthly News Service of the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, Vol. 17 No. 8, April 1981*



The Knik Crossing Committee pictures above is Chaired by Roger Riddel and includes Jack Spake, Lou Dickinson, Eric Peterson, Conn Murray and Bob Penney.



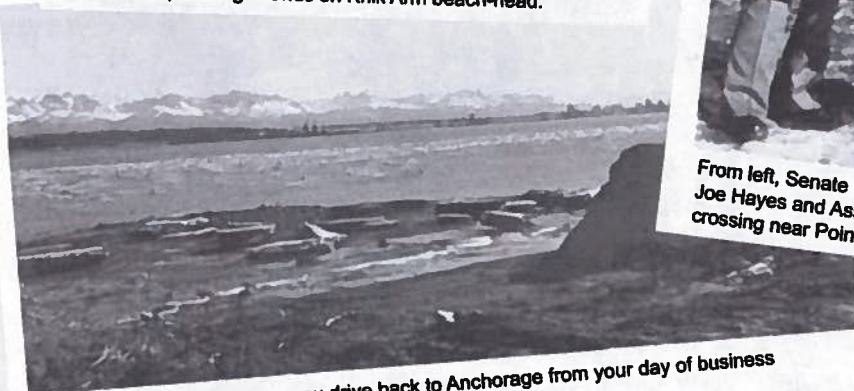
Time out for refreshments (furnished by Sheffield Hotels, now the Westmark)



ERA Helicopters flight lands on Knik Arm beach-head.



From left, Senate President Jalmar Kertulla, House Minority leader Joe Hayes and Assembly Chairman Ben March survey site of Knik crossing near Point McKenzie.



This is what you will see as you drive back to Anchorage from your day of business with the legislature at the capital in Willow.