

Ambler Road Environmental Impact Statement

Fact Sheet—Alaska

Overview

The BLM is the lead federal agency developing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to evaluate whether or not to grant a right-of-way for the proposed Ambler Road across BLM-managed lands. The Alaska Industrial and Development Export Authority (AIDEA) has proposed the project. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) are cooperating agencies helping to prepare the EIS.

The proposed project would construct a new 211-mile roadway on the south side of the Brooks Range, extending west from the Dalton Highway to the south bank of the Ambler River. The road would be open only to mining-related industrial use; it would be closed to the public. The project would include bridges, material sites, maintenance stations, and related infrastructure and utilities.

The proponent's proposal for the Ambler Road project would provide surface transportation access from the Dalton Highway to the Ambler Mining District, allowing for exploration and development of mineral deposits in the Ambler Mining District. According to AIDEA, the access corridor, which crosses the Western (Kobuk River) unit of the Gates of the Arctic National Park, is needed to increase job opportunities and encourage Alaska's economic growth. Without access, the mineral assets associated with the Ambler Mining District would likely remain stranded, and AIDEA would be hindered in its efforts to support economic development and increase job opportunities within a region known for high unemployment rates.

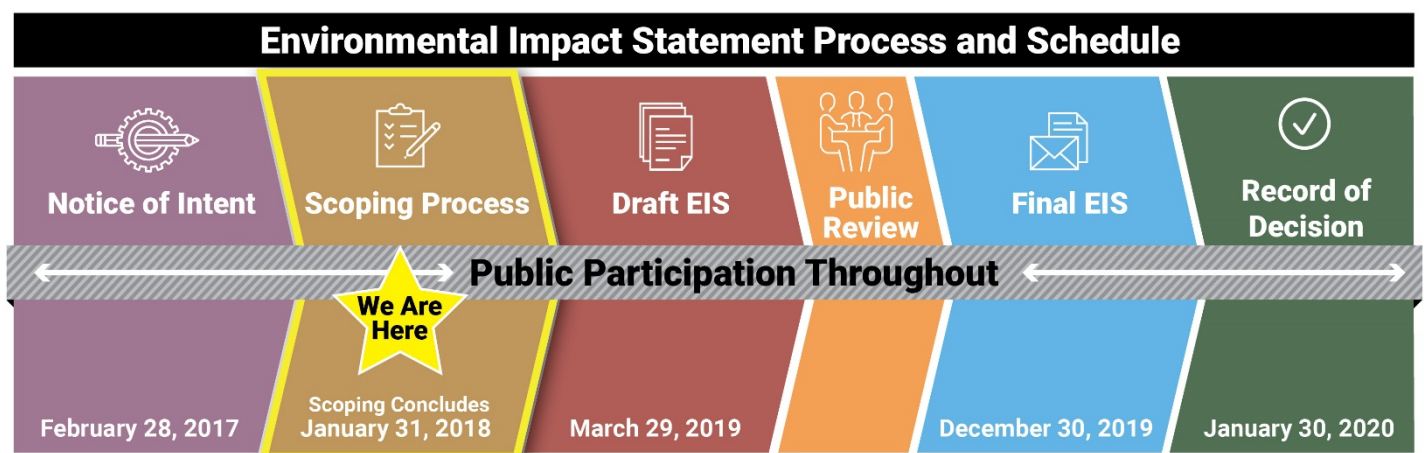
Construction would occur in three phases over 4 to 6 years. AIDEA's cost estimate for construction of the full build-out of the two-lane access road is \$350 million; operations and maintenance costs are expected to range from \$8 to \$10 million per year. AIDEA, as a development finance authority, would develop the access route as a Public-Private Partnership. This means AIDEA funds and bonds would be used in conjunction with private capital for the construction and operation of the Ambler Road. The roadway corridor is expected to operate for up to 50 years.

The Scoping Process

A 90-day public scoping period on the proposed project commenced when the BLM published a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register in February 2017 to prepare the EIS. The BLM has extended the public scoping period until January 31, 2018.

Public Scoping Meetings are being held in November and December in Allakaket, Anaktuvuk Pass, Alatna, Fairbanks, Wiseman, Anchorage, Kobuk, Ambler, Kotzebue, Shungnak, Hughes, Huslia and Evansville/Bettles. For more information on the meetings, visit the website at www.blm.gov/AmblerRoadEIS.

The purpose of public scoping is to determine relevant issues that will influence the scope of the environmental analysis, including alternatives, and to guide the development of the EIS. The public comment period gives stakeholders the opportunity to be involved in BLM’s decision-making process and to offer thoughts on alternative ways to accomplish what is being proposed. To be considered for the Draft EIS, all comments must be received by January 31, 2018.



Permitting

The proposed road crosses State lands (61%) and Native corporation lands (15%), but also crosses federal lands (24%) managed by the BLM and the National Park Service. AIDEA has submitted a permit application to request right-of-way across BLM lands. The road, if approved, would conform to the BLM’s 1991 Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan and the 2008 Kobuk-Seward Peninsula Resource Management Plan.

The project will require federal authorizations from BLM, the USACE, and the USCG. The USACE will evaluate the application under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act, and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. As a cooperating agency, the USACE will use the BLM EIS as a basis for the USACE permit decision. The USCG has authority for permitting bridges over navigable waters and will use the BLM EIS for its permitting decisions. Subsistence resources will be evaluated in accordance with ANILCA Section 810, and cultural and historic resources will be evaluated under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Next Steps

Preliminary alternatives for the Ambler Road project will be developed based on the project purpose and need, and on the input received from public and agency comments. Those alternatives will be analyzed using screening criteria that will be developed after the scoping period. That analysis will help determine which of the alternatives are feasible and should be carried forward for further analysis in the Draft EIS, and which alternatives should be eliminated from further analysis. The analysis will make it clear how and why alternatives developed, what input was used in their development, and why each alternative was retained or eliminated from further consideration.

Under the current project schedule, the Draft EIS is scheduled to be completed by March 29, 2019, and the Final EIS is scheduled for completion by December 30, 2019.

For more information

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www.blm.gov/AmblerRoadEIS for more information or to make a comment.

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Proposed Project Area map

