

Seward Highway MP 14 Railroad Crossing Reconstruction

What is a Jökulhlaup and how often do they occur?

A Jökulhlaup (an Icelandic word pronounced yo-KOOL-lahp) is a glacial outburst flood. They occur when a lake fed by glacial meltwater breaches its dam and drains catastrophically. Every 1–3 years, Snow Glacier produces a Jökulhlaup, bringing a surge of water and debris down the Snow River that threatens infrastructure along the riverbanks, including both the Seward Highway and the railroad. According to United States Geological Survey data, these regular glacial outbursts are becoming increasingly severe over time and pose a threat to the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) bridge that crosses the Snow River near Seward Hwy MP 14.

Why is the project proposed now?

ARRC is acting now to raise the bridge above the floodwater elevation, which will protect the bridge from future flooding. Before ARRC can build their improvements, construction work on the Seward Hwy at MP 14 must be completed, which will provide ARRC with the vertical and horizontal clearances they need for their track grade raise.

Why is DOT&PF reconstructing Seward Hwy MP 14?

In response to ARRC raising the railroad bridge above floodwaters and debris generated by glacial outburst, the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) needs to also raise the road and install a bridge on the Seward Hwy at MP 14. The

existing structural plate undercrossing that allows the railroad tracks to pass beneath the highway does not have enough vertical clearance to accommodate the proposed track raise; therefore, the structure must be replaced, and the highway must be raised to provide minimum clearance.

What is the construction timeline?

Construction is anticipated as early as summer 2025.

How will access be maintained during construction? Will there be delays?

Throughout construction, a two-lane detour will be maintained to allow northbound and southbound traffic continued access through the construction zone. During active construction, occasional flaggers will stop traffic from one or both directions for up to 10 minutes. Two alternatives are being evaluated for crossing the railroad tracks. One detour option is an at-grade railroad crossing, which will include flashers, bells, and gate-arms that will activate when trains approach the crossing. Traffic on the Seward Hwy will stop at the crossing whenever a train crosses the highway. A second option being considered is constructing a temporary detour bridge, which will maintain separation between roadway and railroad traffic.

What type of structure will be used for the new bridge?

DOT&PF is currently evaluating what type of bridge structure is best suited for this location. The structure will likely be a traditional bridge structure rather than another structural plate pipe because ARRC's current technical guidelines recommend a minimum railway clear zone that is most easily accommodated by a traditional bridge. Whichever structure is ultimately chosen, it will provide both the vertical and horizontal clearances necessary to comply with ARRC's requirements.

Is DOT&PF working with ARRC on their project?

While the ARRC Snow River Bridge project and the Seward Hwy MP 14 project are two separate undertakings, both agencies are working together to ensure project cohesion.

How much will this project cost?

The current Statewide Transportation Improvement Program includes \$20 million for construction. As design progresses, the estimated construction cost will be refined, and the total price may increase or decrease based on analysis and field conditions discovered through survey and geotechnical explorations. This cost estimate is for the roadway project and does not include improvements to the railroad tracks or the ARRC bridge over Snow River.

Where can I get more information on the project and receive updates?

Contact our project team

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