

Beluga Point Pedestrian Public Safety Improvements

Background

Beluga Point is a rocky outcrop jutting into Turnagain Arm, located just south of Anchorage along the Seward Highway. Identified as a wildlife viewing area, the point is named for the white whales often spotted in the inlet. It features a parking lot with interpretive signs that overlook railroad tracks running parallel to the highway.

The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC), Alaska Department of Natural Resources (Alaska DNR), and Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (Alaska DOT&PF) have all identified Beluga Point as an area of public safety

concern. Year round – and especially during spring and summer – the popular site is accessed by residents and visitors who cross railroad tracks to get to Beluga Point’s waterfront.

Despite *No Trespassing* and *Stay off the Tracks* messages on the rails and numerous signs, some people continue to walk on and along the tracks, putting themselves at risk. ARRC has documented multiple near miss incidents involving pedestrians lingering on the tracks while trains were moving through the area.

Project Scope

Given shared concerns the Alaska Railroad, Alaska DOT&PF and Alaska DNR have formed a multi-agency working group to improve public safety at Beluga Point and along Turnagain Arm, in the area between the Seward Highway and the waterfront. The group is pursuing both short-term and long-term solutions.

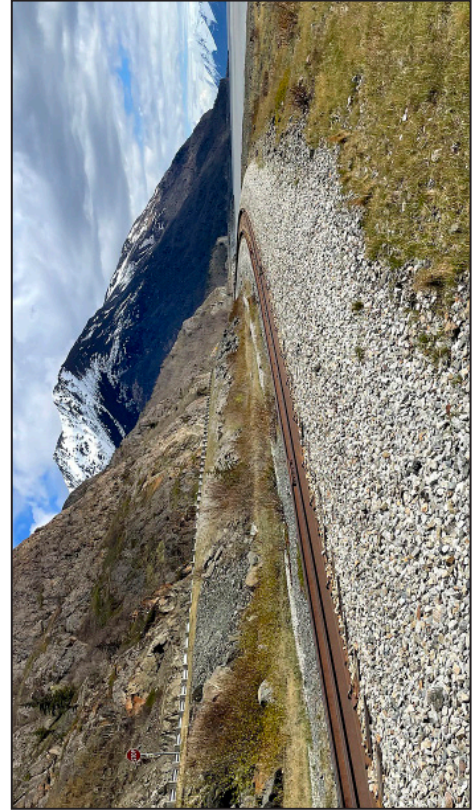
A proposed short-term solution would channel pedestrians to one at-grade crossing location, as



Beluga Point along Turnagain Arm is a popular spot, annually attracting thousands of residents and visitors who frequently cross the railroad tracks to access the waterfront.



A preliminary concept and site plan for the short term solution involves fencing to channel pedestrians to a single track crossing point with better visibility.



From Beluga Point, looking east, the track presents a blind curve for both pedestrians and trains.



From Beluga Point, looking west, the track presents a blind curve for both pedestrians and trains.

opposed to people crossing all along the segment of curved track that offers poor visibility. This solution includes fencing on either side of the tracks along this curve, and a new pathway leading from the parking lot to the single at-grade crossing.

Long-term, the preferred solution is to construct a pedestrian overpass from the Beluga Point parking to the south side of the railroad tracks.

Project Benefits

- **Near-term:** A single crossing reduces safety concerns by improving line of sight for pedestrians crossing where they can better see the train.
- **Future:** An overpass will eliminate the potential for a pedestrian-train conflict.
- **Derailment Risk:** Decreasing pedestrian-train conflicts lowers the chance that a train crew will have to initiate an emergency stop due to people on the tracks. Trains can derail during an emergency stop, and derailments can result in passenger, crew and trespasser injuries.

Project Status and Schedule

The following activities are scheduled or underway:

- **2021-2022:** The multi-agency working group evaluated site conditions and developed preliminary planning documents for the proposed improvements.

- **2023:** The Diagnostic Team Study for Beluga Point was completed. Funding for a potential short-term solution was identified.
- **2024-2025:** Collaboration is ongoing to identify long-term solutions.

Project Cost and Funding

- Estimated short-term solution cost is approximately \$1.1 million.
- Estimated long-term overpass solution cost is approximately \$15 million.

Funding may come from state or federal grants, funds from each agency, or a combination.

More Information

For more project information or to provide comments, email the Alaska Railroad at Public_Comment@akrr.com.



Identified as a wildlife viewing area, Beluga Point features a parking lot and interpretive signs situated between the Seward Highway and the Alaska Railroad tracks.