

# Reaching & engaging rural residents with virtual tactics

How Alaska DOT & Public Facilities' all-virtual fair engaged **25X more** residents than typical in-person fairs.

## Informing the public on multiple projects

Alaska DOT & Public Facilities (Alaska DOT&PF) can have as many as 300 projects in development at any given time. To ensure the public is informed, they often hold transportation fairs to cover multiple projects at once.

### ❓ The Question:

How can you reach & engage the broader community in a rural area?

While in-person meetings were the primary forum for public engagement in the past, Alaska DOT&PF has now embraced virtual public meetings and is using digital outreach tactics to supplement traditional outreach like mailers, radio, and in-person meetings.



# The Kenai Peninsula Transportation Fair

## Multiple projects & stakeholders at one virtual meeting

The Kenai Peninsula Transportation Fair engaged the public on **36** different road, trail, and airport projects located in the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

Working with consultants Camden Yehle (Yehle & Associates LLC) and Karin McGillivray (Michael Baker International), Alaska DOT&PF hosted the fair 100% online with participation from the Alaska Railroad, Kenai Peninsula Borough, Seldovia Village Tribe, the City of Seward, and the City of Soldotna.

### Outreach & Engagement Tactics

- Email notices to project stakeholder groups
- City staff outreach
- Community group outreach
- Facebook advertising
- Radio
- Project websites
- Virtual Public Meetings

### The Takeaway

Engagement from Alaska DOT&PF's email outreach is proof that the public wants to hear from government organizations: fair related emails had **open rates as high as 49%**.

The fair also gathered **155 new email subscribers**, which were added to their PublicInput | Community Database to easily follow up and inform about future projects.

### Engagement by the numbers

**2,000+**  
MEETING ATTENDEES

**162**  
SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

**155**  
EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS

# Asynchronous engagement meets residents “where they are”

## Multiple ways to participate at any time

By holding a virtual public meeting, residents were able to participate while the meeting was occurring via live comment, call-in, or voicemail “from the comfort of their own couch,” said McGillivray of Michael Baker International.

By listing all project pages on the meeting website before the meeting and keeping the meeting video on the website after the meeting, residents were also able to participate on their own time.



One of our biggest challenges [historically] is the number of people that aren't available from a [particular] time window.

We've had significantly more participation...and reach[ed] a wider audience. As we go along, we're going to progressively continue to expand that audience.

Jim Amundsen,  
Central Region Highway Design Chief  
Alaska DOT&PF.

The screenshot shows a virtual meeting interface. At the top, there's a slide titled "Project Status & Next Steps" with three bullet points: "Survey- nearly completed" (with a green checkmark), "Design- next 1-2 years. Complete in 2022.", and "Construction- Summer of 2023". Below the slide is a "Your meeting question or comment" input field. Underneath it, a user named "Logged in as hunter@publicinput.com" has posted a comment. The comment reads: "Can you share the link to the list of project please". Another user, "Sean Baski", has replied with a link: "https://publicinput.com/kenaitransportationfair is the website. If you scroll down you will find the links by clicking "Participate" next to a project. Hope that helps!". Both comments were posted 10 days ago.

April 2020 to February 2021

**10,300+**  
MEETING ATTENDEES

**955**  
VIEWED DURING

**9,351**  
VIEWED AFTER

According to AKDOT&PF, the typical attendance at an in-person transportation fair is ~ 80 residents.



## What's the future of public meetings?



We're receiving better feedback from a wider variety [of residents] than just the in-person [fair]. **I see us continuing to take advantage of these newer technologies for even broader exposure to more people out there.**

— Jim Amundsen; Central Region Highway Design Chief at Alaska DOT&PF



### The same public meeting experience, for all residents

Virtual tactics are here to stay, but with that realization comes a new set of questions and challenges.

As we look toward the future, **hybrid public meetings**, with a combination of in-person and virtual participation, are emerging as the future-proof, more equitable solution for public engagement.

[SEE IT LIVE](#)