

Tribe and Local Government Collaborate to Improve Transportation Corridors in Wrangell, Alaska

In recent years, the City and Borough of Wrangell (CBW), and the Wrangell Cooperative Association (WCA), a Tribe in the CBW, have collaborated on transportation infrastructure projects in which the Tribe finances construction on CBW-owned roadways. The WCA benefits from the improved roadways that connect Tribal members to residences and workplaces, and the city gains newly constructed transportation corridors without incurring capital costs. The benefits realized by both parties demonstrate an effective collaboration between the WCA and the CBW.

A Framework for Collaboration

The WCA comprises 400 of the 2,400 residents in Wrangell, Alaska. The Tribe has a cooperative relationship with the CBW, which is formalized in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that the WCA and the CBW renew annually. The MOU establishes a general framework for cooperation between the CBW and the Tribe, including project development and



Prior to the Shtax-Heen Roadway Project, the associated roadways did not include accommodations for pedestrians. (Courtesy of the WCA) The Shtax-Heen Roadway Project includes paved roadways and pedestrian walkways (Courtesy of the WCA)

project resource information-sharing for transportation as a mutual Tribe and local government interest. The MOU also broadly outlines how the partnership will function, as each organization will work cooperatively in infrastructure-related projects by holding regular meetings as necessary.

In addition to this MOU, the WCA and the CBW develop a memorandum of agreement (MOA) for each transportation infrastructure project that the Tribe and local government jointly construct. The MOU sets a framework for collaboration and the MOAs help implement this framework at the project level. The WCA and CBW completed their first collaborative roadway project, the Shtax-Heen Roadway Project, in 2011.

The Shtax-Heen Roadway Project

The WCA began the Shtax-Heen

Roadway Project to improve access to local Tribal housing for both drivers and pedestrians. The project involved paving the roadway and installing pedestrian walkways along a total of 0.5 miles of four connecting roads in a Tribal housing development in the city of Wrangell. Each improved road segment was designed to include two 12-foot vehicle lanes and a six-foot pedestrian walkway on one side. Prior to construction, just 400 feet of the 2,700 feet of roadway were paved.

As the project area was entirely on CBW-owned property, the Tribe needed to partner with the local government in order to complete the improvements. The MOA for the Shtax-Heen Roadway Project outlined the roles and responsibilities of each government; the WCA agreed to fully design, construct, and fund the project and the CBW agreed to perform design review, project oversight, and conduct regular road maintenance after construction was complete.

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As the project area was entirely on CBW-owned property, the MOA gave the WCA authority to construct this project.

The WCA used a combination of Indian Reservation Roads and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding to complete the \$1.6 million project. The Tribe hired an engineering firm to design the roads and to provide design and project management services. The WCA included the CBW in meetings and conversations with the engineers throughout the design and construction processes.

After construction had begun on the Shtax-Heen Roadway Project, the CBW saw the potential to link the newly paved road to a recently constructed hospital on nearby property. The end of Etolin Street, part of the Shtax-Heen Roadway Project, abuts the hospital, and the CBW chose to fund a quarter-mile extension to the Etolin Street improvements in order to develop a secondary access road to the hospital for emergency vehicles. The CBW completed the project in May 2012 with \$1.1 million of city funds. The Shtax-Heen Roadway Project facilitated the Etolin Street extension and benefits both the WCA and CBW, as it improves Tribal member access to the Tribal housing development and the hospital.

The Tribe's cooperation with the CBW and its ability to design, construct, and fund the roadways allowed the timely completion of the improvements to the roadways included in the Shtax-Heen Roadway Project. The project and the extension of improvements to the hospital were ultimately collaborative and mutually beneficial for the WCA and the CBW.

Continuing the Collaboration

Building on the success of the Shtax-Heen Roadway Project, the WCA and CBW recently signed an MOA for the upcoming Webber Road Project. Though this project is shorter, improving just 500 feet of roadway, the improvements are more extensive. The Tribe plans to widen the roadway and must seek easements from local property owners in order to do so. The Tribe and local government will be assuming the same roles as they had for the Shtax-Heen Roadway Project; the WCA will design, construct, and fund the work, which will take place on city-owned roads, and the CBW will provide design review, project oversight, and continued maintenance of the infrastructure. The WCA and CBW are meeting regularly to discuss the plans for the Webber Road Project.

Continuing the Collaboration

Both the Shtax-Heen Roadway and Webber Road projects are high-priority improvements for the WCA and the CBW, as many Tribal and non-Tribal residents live along these corridors and will benefit from the improved access and safety that the projects provide. The WCA and the CBW effectively collaborated through establishing the MOAs to enable the use of funds acquired by the Tribe to finance construction on CBW-owned roadways that are in need of improvements. The mutual benefits gained by both governments in the MOAs show that the collaboration between the WCA and the CBW is effective. The Shtax-Heen Roadway and Webber Road projects are a model for successful cooperation between Tribes and local governments.

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