47. REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION

47.1 Introduction

The objective of the transportation study was to document existing and proposed overland, water, and air transportation facilities and services in the Cook Inlet drainages study area.

The Cook Inlet drainages study area for the transportation study is the coastal strip on the west side of Cook Inlet between Lake Clark National Park and Katmai National Park. Because of Homer’s possible role as a marine support center, its port facilities are included.

The methods for this study relied on a review of existing transportation studies, plans, and documents for relevant information. This information was supplemented with interviews of several providers of transportation services.

47.2 Results and Discussion

The Cook Inlet drainages study area can be generally characterized as a remote area with a rugged coastline and often harsh weather and sea conditions. It has minimal local transportation improvements. Most of the uplands in the study area are state-owned lands designated for habitat and low-intensity recreational use. Private lands are owned mostly by Alaska Native corporations. There are a few dozen Native allotments and homesites, but no permanent year-round settlements. The primary human uses are wilderness recreation, wildlife viewing, and flightseeing.

The state-owned, 15.03-mile-long, unpaved Williamsport-Pile Bay Road is the only publicly maintained road in the study area. This road is also partially in the Bristol Bay drainages study area (Chapter 19). It is open for use only seasonally, between June and November. The road is mainly used to transfer commercial fishing vessels and gear between Cook Inlet and Bristol Bay communities. Approximately 50 fishing boats are transported between Cook Inlet and Pile Bay yearly. The state made some improvements to the road in 2009.

The only marine-transportation improvement in the study area is the privately-owned barge landing and small-boat haulout at Williamsport. Channel conditions limit barge delivery opportunities to 4 or 5 days a month. Until 2009, Homer-based Alaska Coastal Freight made most barge deliveries to Williamsport, approximately 10 to 12 annually. In 2009, Iliamna Development Corporation started a combination barge-road-barge service to ship fuel and freight from Homer to Iliamna Lake communities. This service shipped 22 loads in 2009.

There are no public airport facilities, rail facilities, or non-local pipelines in the study area.

The Port of Homer has two deep-draft docks and is equipped to support general-cargo vessels, roll-on/roll-off trailer ships, and petroleum tankers. The port has 35 acres of upland open storage. The City of Homer is pursuing a multi-year, $26 million project to upgrade its deep-
water dock facilities, enlarge its upland marine staging area, and improve road access to the staging area and dock facilities.

New major transportation infrastructure is likely to be driven by new large-scale resource development projects. The State of Alaska’s *Southwest Alaska Transportation Plan* (PB Consult Inc., 2004) proposes Williamsport navigation improvements and a dock facility, and roadway improvements for the Williamsport-Pile Bay Road. A third project, the Pile Bay public dock and boat-launch facility (in the Bristol Bay drainages study area), is closely linked to the two improvements in the Cook Inlet drainages. These three proposed port- and road-improvement projects are generally regarded as a set of complementary projects that comprise an integrated transportation system. The estimated cost of the improvements is $27,307,000. The cost-benefit analysis estimates the capital and maintenance costs at $2,786,800 annually in 2020 and the freight-cost savings at $3,848,400, for an estimated net savings of more than $1,000,000 annually. These improvements are the first leg of a Cook Inlet to Bristol Bay corridor proposed in the *Southwest Alaska Transportation Plan* that might eventually provide a road link between western Cook Inlet and the community of Iliamna.

As part of its Industrial Roads Program, the State of Alaska completed the *Iliamna Regional Transportation Corridor Analysis* (PND et al., 2007) to evaluate alternatives for a deep-water port site and a road corridor between Cook Inlet near Williamsport and the Pebble Deposit northwest of Iliamna. The state-preferred port site is located on a privately owned tract near the mouth of Iniskin Bay. The state-preferred road corridor generally follows the Cook Inlet to Bristol Bay corridor identified in the *Southwest Alaska Transportation Plan* (PB Consult Inc., 2004).

### 47.3 References


Williamsport-Pile Bay Road Corridor, Williamsport End (Map source: L&PB and ADCCED, 2005, drainage boundary label added).
Figure 47-2, Williamsport Barge Landing (LP&B and ADCCED, 2005, labels added).

Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Boundary

Boat and Barge Landing

Access Channel