



# Welcome

# WestSu Access

West Susitna Access Road Project

## August 2024 Public Meeting #1

The WestSu Access project would open up more than 6 million acres of public lands for recreation and other purposes, enhancing the region's transportation infrastructure and economy.

### Meeting Purpose

- ✦ Share information on the environmental document and study status.
- ✦ Collect your comments on the project's purpose and need as well as the issues and concerns that will help shape the project.

*DOT&PF is beginning the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the WestSu Access project. The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by DOT&PF pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated April 13, 2023, and executed by FHWA and DOT&PF. We encourage you to share what you like as well as your concerns or issues related to the proposed action, the purpose and need for the project, and any alternatives you think should be examined.*

## It IS



- ✦ A public road
- ✦ ~ 22 miles long
- ✦ ~ 24-foot wide
- ✦ Constructed from gravel
- ✦ Able to accommodate legal highway vehicles
- ✦ Intended for recreation, tourism, food gathering, settlement, and economic activities

## It is NOT



- ✦ A private road
- ✦ An industrial route
- ✦ ~100 miles long
- ✦ Part of a larger project



July 23, 2024 - September 2024

1

## Scoping

Scoping is the process of identifying and seeking input on important issues to be studied in an Environmental Assessment (EA), including possible impacts from project alternatives, the project's purpose and need, potential alternatives to the proposed action, and potential data gaps.

WE ARE HERE



October 2024 - March 2025

2

## Draft EA and Draft Design Study Report

The Draft EA provides impact analysis for reasonable alternatives. The purpose of an EA is to determine if there is potential for significant environmental impacts that would warrant preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EA will also explore opportunities to avoid, reduce, or mitigate potential impacts.



Public Engagement Opportunities

April 2025

3

## Final EA

If no significant environmental impacts are identified during the document's development, DOT&PF will issue a final EA and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The FONSI outlines the reasons why DOT&PF believes the project would not incur significant environmental impacts. If the EA determines that there are significant impacts, however, DOT&PF will develop an EIS.



*Note: Public engagement opportunities will take place during each phase. Dates are subject to change.*



## Purpose



The purpose of the West Susitna Access Road Project is to provide a safe public road linkage from the existing highway system west to public lands owned by the State and Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB). This improved access would allow for increased recreation, guiding and settlement opportunities, and economic development of State and MSB resources including forestry, agriculture, minerals, and energy.

## Need



The absence of road access inhibits Alaskans' ability to utilize lands selected and planned for recreation, settlement, and economic/resource development. [Adopted management plans](#) for the state and local government-selected lands in the study area identify and plan for development of these opportunities.



### External Web Resources:

For additional information on this poster, visit [westsuaccess.com/EWR](https://westsuaccess.com/EWR) or scan the QR code below with your smartphone.

- ✚ Adopted management plans







This is a gravel pioneer (or frontier) road that will look similar to the Nenana-Totchaket road.



This project will include a combination of boat launches and river crossings, as well as pullouts.



Design criteria, including bridges and preliminary culvert designs, will be included in the draft EA.



Design elements will be refined based on public input and recommendations from the various field studies, including geotechnical recommendations from drilling results collected during winter and fish passage design for all streams identified in the fish studies.



# Land Use Overview (Poster A)

The WestSu Access proposed action crosses through land with a variety of use designations including recreation, forestry, agricultural, and settlement. The western end of the project is approximately 1.5 miles west of Alexander Creek, ending at parcels previously platted by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB). This location would provide access to:

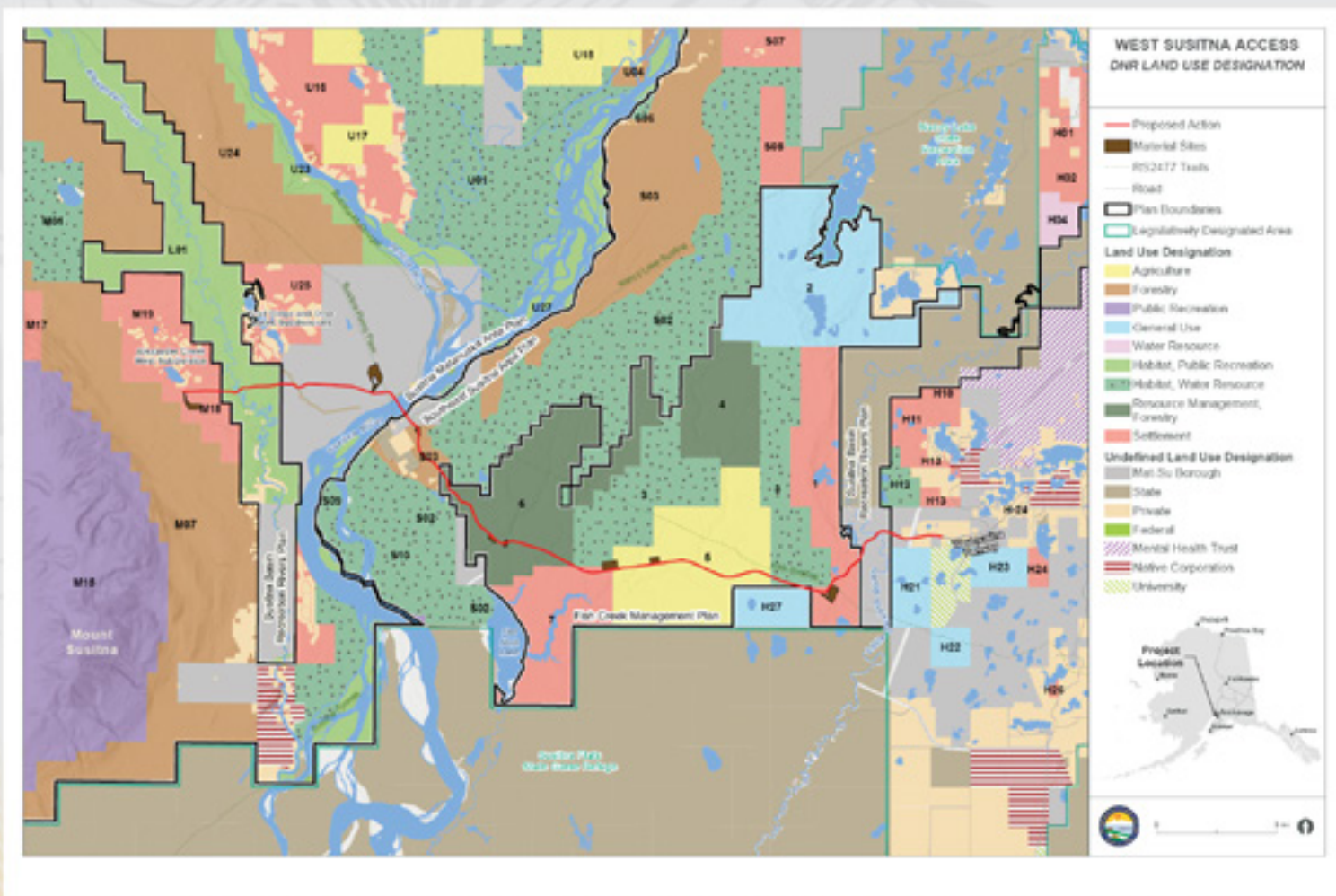
- ✦ Areas for sport hunting and fishing, subsistence, and public recreation
- ✦ State-managed lands designated for settlement and other uses
- ✦ State lands designated for forestry
- ✦ The terminus also provides an efficient turnaround point for vehicles and access to construction materials sites.

The unit numbers on this chart can be referenced on Land Use Overview (Poster B).

	Unit #	Primary Use	Secondary Use	Recreation	Settlement	Forestry	Agriculture	Minerals	Energy
Susitna Matanuska Area Plan	M-01	Habitat, Water Resources	N/A	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	M-07	Forestry	N/A	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	M-15	General Use	N/A	Yes	Yes	Potential	Potential	Yes	Yes
	M-17	Settlement	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	M-18	Settlement	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Potential	Partial	Yes
	M-19	Settlement	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Potential	Partial	Yes
	U-01	Habitat, Water Resources	N/A	Yes	No	Potential	No	Partial	Yes
	U-16	Settlement	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes
	U-23	Habitat; Public Recreation-Dispersed	N/A	Yes	No	Yes	No	Partial	Yes
	U-24	Forestry	N/A	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	U-25	Settlement	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Potential	Partial	Yes
	U-27	Habitat; Public Recreation-Dispersed	N/A	Yes	No	No	No	Partial	Yes
	L-01	Habitat; Public Recreation-Dispersed	N/A	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Southeast Susitna Area Plan	S-02	Water Resources, Habitat	N/A	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
	S-03	Forestry	N/A	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	S-09	Habitat, Water Resources	N/A	Yes	No	Potential	No	Potential	Potential
	S-10	Habitat, Water Resources	N/A	Yes	No	Potential	No	Yes	Yes
	S-12	Public Recreation-Dispersed	N/A	Yes	No	Potential	No	Yes	Yes
	H-10	Settlement	N/A	Yes	Yes	Potential	Potential	No	Yes
	H-11	Settlement	N/A	Yes	Yes	Potential	Potential	No	Yes
	H-12	Habitat; Water Resources	N/A	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
	H-13	Settlement	N/A	Yes	Yes	Potential	Yes	No	Yes
	H-21	General Use	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Potential	Yes	Yes
H-22	General Use	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Potential	Yes	Yes	
H-27	General Use	N/A	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	
Fish Creek Management Plan	1	Settlement	Forestry; Public Recreation; Wildlife Habitat; Agriculture; Public Community Service Uses	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	2	Resource Management	N/A	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
	3	Watershed Protection; Wildlife Habitat	Public Recreation	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
	4	Resource Management; Forestry	N/A	Yes	Potential	Yes	Potential	No	Yes
	5	Agriculture	Settlement; Forestry; Public Recreation; Wildlife Habitat	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	6	Resource Management	Forestry	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	7	Settlement	Public Recreation; Wildlife Habitat	Yes	Yes	Potential	Potential	No	Yes
Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Plan	1a	Recreation; Fish and Wildlife Habitat	N/A	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
	6a	Recreation; Fish and Wildlife Habitat	N/A	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes



This map details the land use designations across the approximately 22-mile proposed action alignment for WestSu Access. Please see the chart on Land Use Overview (Poster A) for a detailed breakdown according to the key land use plans associated with the project area.



## West Susitna Parkway Alternative

A 22.4-mile-long route that would begin at the western end of the West Susitna Parkway, southwest of Big Lake. The alignment proceeds to the west and slightly north, ending approximately 2 miles west of Alexander Creek on State land near an existing platted subdivision.

The proposed action for this project generally follows the corridor identified in the DOT&PF 2014 Reconnaissance Study as having the greatest access opportunities and lowest environmental constraints. The West Susitna Parkway avoids the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge and private property and leverages existing road rights-of-way. The proposed alignment also avoids wetland impacts to the extent practicable.

Bridges would be utilized at the Little Susitna River, Fish Creek, Susitna River, and Alexander Creek crossings. Boat launches will be considered. Culverts would be placed at other crossings as needed for drainage and fish passage.

The proposed roadway typical section includes a 24-foot-wide top surface. Turnouts would be provided at regular intervals. Material sites would be developed along the proposed route to provide embankment material for both initial construction and long-term maintenance requirements.





# The idea of pursuing road access up to and west of the Susitna River has been considered by State and Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MBS) officials for decades.



1

**2014:** DOT&PF's 2014 West Susitna Surface Access Reconnaissance Study.

2

**2019:**

Building off of the 2014 Reconnaissance Study, the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) and the MSB initiated the 100-mile-long West Susitna Access Project in 2019. This would connect the MSB's Point MacKenzie deepwater port to the Yentna Mining District's natural resources.



3

**2023:**

DOT&PF announced its intent to begin a separate project to build an approximately 22-mile public road, and associated facilities, to meet the region's growing demand for improved access to public land and recreational areas along and west of the Susitna River. This project will gain efficiencies from the robust environmental, cultural, and public involvement work done as part of earlier projects.



4

**2024:**

DOT&PF added the project to the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program and began the West Susitna Access Road Project to provide a safe public road linkage from the existing roadway system west to public lands.

AIDEA continues to study their access needs. Visit [AIDEA's website](#) for information on their projects and activities.

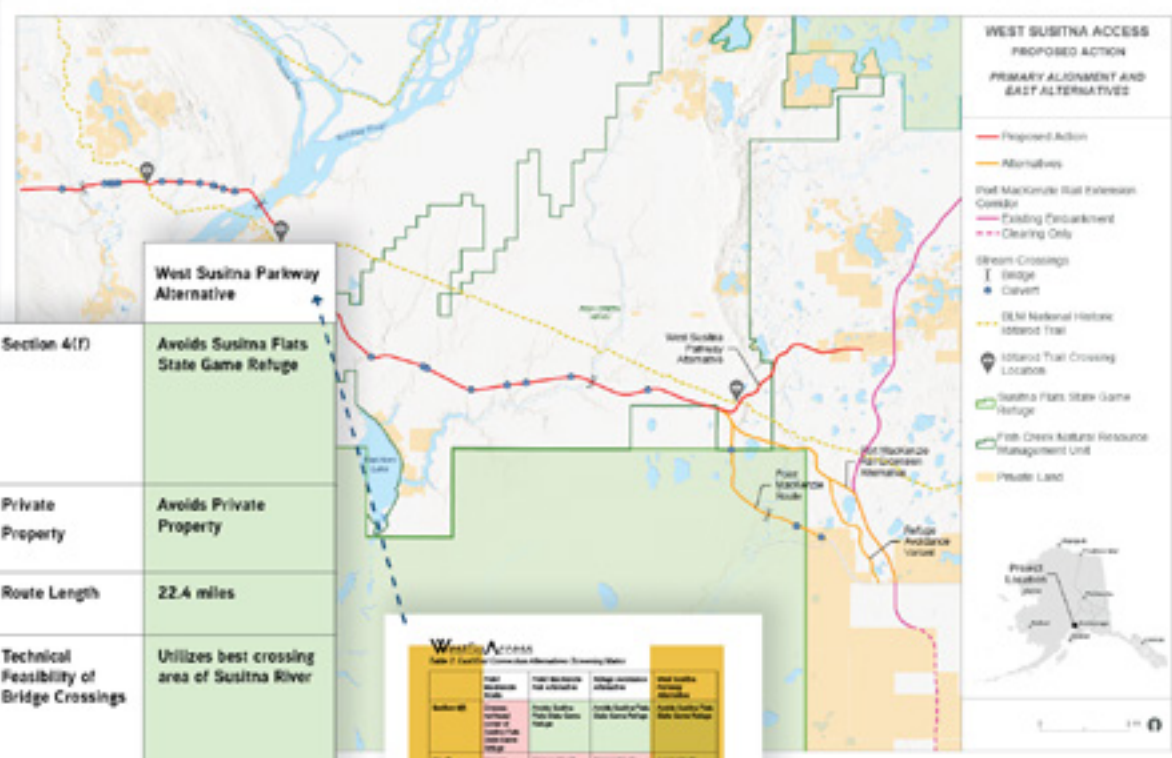


## External Web Resource:

✚ AIDEA's website: [aidea.org/Programs/Infrastructure-Development/West-Susitna-Access](https://aidea.org/Programs/Infrastructure-Development/West-Susitna-Access)



- ✦ A variety of alternatives for connecting to the road network at the east end have been studied over the years. Four were considered as part of WestSu Access; one remains, after screening.
- ✦ The West Susitna Parkway is the proposed action because it:
  - » Is shortest, meaning likely lower cost.
  - » Avoids the Susitna Flats Game Refuge and private property.
  - » Leverages existing rights-of-way.



Section 4(f)	Avoids Susitna Flats State Game Refuge
Private Property	Avoids Private Property
Route Length	22.4 miles
Technical Feasibility of Bridge Crossings	Utilizes best crossing area of Susitna River
Minimizes River & Creek Crossings	4 bridges (estimated)
Accesses 6 Million Acres of State Land	Yes
Access to Population Centers	Yes, under 25 miles
Federal Regayment Issues	No
Leverage Existing Right-of-Way	Yes (on east end)

WestSu Access				
Table 1: Feasibility Comparison Alternative Screening Matrix				
Alternative	West Susitna Parkway Alternative	West Susitna Parkway Alternative	West Susitna Parkway Alternative	West Susitna Parkway Alternative
Route Length	22.4 miles	22.4 miles	22.4 miles	22.4 miles
Technical Feasibility of Bridge Crossings	Utilizes best crossing area of Susitna River	Utilizes best crossing area of Susitna River	Utilizes best crossing area of Susitna River	Utilizes best crossing area of Susitna River
Minimizes River & Creek Crossings	4 bridges (estimated)	4 bridges (estimated)	4 bridges (estimated)	4 bridges (estimated)
Accesses 6 Million Acres of State Land	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Access to Population Centers	Yes, under 25 miles	Yes, under 25 miles	Yes, under 25 miles	Yes, under 25 miles
Federal Regayment Issues	No	No	No	No
Leverage Existing Right-of-Way	Yes (on east end)	Yes (on east end)	Yes (on east end)	Yes (on east end)



### External Web Resources:

[westsuaccess.com/EWR](https://westsuaccess.com/EWR)

✦ Project Background





WestSu Access is using data from a variety of sources including AIDEA's 100-mile proposed industrial project.

- ✦ AIDEA has studied access to the West Susitna Area.
- ✦ AIDEA evaluated a wide range of alternatives across a broad area.
- ✦ AIDEA identified a preferred place to cross the Susitna River and access resources.
- ✦ DOT&PF's recent work is building off AIDEA's work in addition to the DOT&PF 2014 Reconnaissance Study.
- ✦ The proposed action largely aligns with approximately 22 miles at the east end of the AIDEA-recommended corridor, the Port Mackenzie Variant.
- ✦ It is unknown if the industrial 100-mile corridor would be built, but AIDEA has a separate project that is considering it.



				Purpose and Need Screening Criteria						Engineering Feasibility Criteria
Alternative	Alternative carried forward?	Is there an alignment carried forward substantially similar to alternative?	Portion of alternative dismissed moving forward or other comments	Provides safe year-round road access to the existing highway system	Provides efficient access to existing port facilities and population centers (distance to port, distance to population center (miles))	Accesses land and resources in Fish Creek NRMU	Accesses land and resources in western Yentna and Sikwentna River basins	Connects to Whiskey Bravo airstrip	Provides public recreational access	Crosses Susitna River at suitable crossing location
Port Mackenzie Route	Yes			Y (19, 30)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y



## DOT&PF

WestSu Access is using data from a variety of sources including the 2014 DOT&PF West Susitna Reconnaissance Study.

- ✦ DOT&PF studied many routes over a broad area in 2014.
- ✦ The Middle Susitna-Skwentna River Corridor was found to have the highest access to opportunities and among the lowest costs per mile.
- ✦ The proposed action generally follows the recommended corridor and would build the first 22.4 miles.
- ✦ We are not pursuing an alignment past Alexander Creek. It is unknown if another entity such as AIDEA will pursue a transportation link beyond this project.



### External Web Resource:

- ✦ [View the 2014 Reconnaissance Study](#)





## WestSu Access is in the Scoping Phase for an EA. We're listening...

### NEPA



The National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA) requires agencies to “undertake an assessment of the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions.”

Under NEPA requirements, DOT&PF is initiating an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project that will identify key issues including direct impacts to the natural and human environment, and indirect and cumulative impacts related to other activities that are reasonably predicted to occur off of the road (e.g., recreation, settlement, and/or resource development).

The EA will consider the project’s purpose and need, alternatives to meet those needs, and potential environmental impacts, and DOT&PF will involve agencies and the public in the EA’s development. The completion of an EA will result in either a Finding of No Significant Impact or a determination to proceed with an Environmental Impact Statement if significant impacts to the quality of the human and natural environment are identified.



#### External Web Resource:

➤ Learn more about the NEPA process at [epa.gov/nea](https://www.epa.gov/nea)



To optimize the project budget and timeline, DOT&PF is utilizing environmental and cultural resource data from other project's and studies, with a focus on data that were developed for AIDEA's West Susitna Access Project:

- ✦ Many of the potential impacts have already been identified in previous studies.
- ✦ DOT&PF plans fieldwork in 2024 related to:



Wetlands



Noise impacts



Wildlife

Fish and Essential  
Fish HabitatHydrology and  
hydraulics

- ✦ The proposed action includes four bridged rivers and five culvert crossings, with another nine culvert-crossed waterbodies listed as probable for fish presence; these will require obtaining a habitat permit from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.
- ✦ The draft Environmental Assessment (EA) will identify potential mitigation measures.



- ✦ DOT&PF will work with agencies and Tribes to identify historic properties and places of traditional, religious, and cultural importance.
- ✦ DOT&PF is also coordinating with the State Historic Preservation Office and Bureau of Land Management.
- ✦ DOT&PF is planning field surveys this summer.
- ✦ The proposed action would include three crossings over the Historic Iditarod Trail.



**DOT&PF**

Acknowledges concerns previously expressed about AIDEA's project, including impacts to remote lifestyle, project costs, increase in trespass and crime, and increased pressure from hunting and fishing.

Understands that there are people who want this WestSu Access project and think access is good for recreation and economic development; the Department also understands that people have concerns that access could negatively affect the environment and businesses that rely on remote tourism opportunities.





Public Comment Period: July 23, 2024 – August 23, 2024

## Submit your comments today!

Remember, it is most helpful to focus on comments related to:

- ✦ A particular feature of the alignment, potential impact, or proposed mitigation.
- ✦ Concerns about the alignment and **why** it is of concern.
- ✦ How the project or proposed action would affect you.

Note: The next public comment period will be held when the draft Environmental Assessment is ready for review and feedback!

1

Online

[westsuaccess.com/comments](https://westsuaccess.com/comments)



2

By Email

[comments@westsuaccess.com](mailto:comments@westsuaccess.com)



3

By Phone

(907) 331-3878



For more information, visit [westsuaccess.com](https://westsuaccess.com)



## Sign in here to testify

The public hearing will begin following the presentation at 4:30 p.m. [You must sign in to speak during the public hearing portion of the meeting.](#)



## Ground Rules for Public Testimony

We ask that you please:

- ✦ Be respectful, courteous, and patient.
- ✦ Side conversations are important; we recognize that. However, **please take those conversations outside the room in order to provide people who are giving testimony the consideration they deserve.** Refrain from addressing the audience or asking for audience participation.
- ✦ Turn off cell phones or set them to vibrate only.

**Testimony from individuals**, including any representative from a commercial enterprise, will be **limited to 3 minutes**. **Testimony by a group** (an established non-profit, club, or association) or agency will be **limited to 5 minutes**.

