

Statement of Significance

Richardson Highway

(Portions of the current Richardson Highway are designated as Interstate Highway System and under the Interstate Exemption [2005] are exempt from consideration as a historic property during Section 106 Review)

Prepared for

**Alaska Department of
Transportation and Public
Facilities**

December 2014

*DOT&PF Note October 2015:
Rept does not address integrity;
NRHP eligibility status of
non-exempt segments not determined*

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Prepared by

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1. Introduction

This statement of significance was prepared as a component of the Applied Historic Context of Alaska Roads Project completed in 2012-2014 for the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF). The project began with the development of the *Alaska Roads Historic Overview: Applied Historic Context of Alaska's Roads* (Roads Overview) (February 2014) and the *Methodology for Assessing National Register of Historic Places Eligibility* (Roads Methodology) (December 2014).

For the project a select number of roads with potential for individual National Register of Historic Places (National Register) eligibility were identified for evaluation of significance. This study is limited to the evaluation of the road's significance. If a road meets one or more areas of significance, identification of essential physical features and an assessment of integrity needs to be completed to determine National Register eligibility. These statements of significance apply the Roads Methodology and utilize contextual information from the Roads Overview. The Roads Methodology outlines that the entire length of a road should be considered when evaluating significance. The entire length of the road, including bypassed portions of the road, were considered in the development of this statement of significance.

This report identifies and describes the important historic themes associated with the Richardson Highway. It summarizes these important themes to place the development of the Richardson Highway within an appropriate historic context to evaluate its historical significance.

2. Description of the Road

The Richardson Highway (Alaska Heritage Resources Survey [AHRs] numbers VAL-00533, GUL-00385, XMH-01429, XBD-00409, and FAI-02328; Coordinated Data System [CDS] number 190000) is approximately 365 miles long and runs from Valdez to Fairbanks. The highway is owned by the Alaska DOT&PF and passes through the Fairbanks-North Star Borough and the Valdez-Cordova Census Area of the Alaska Unorganized Borough. The highway begins at Egan Drive in Valdez and continues north through the Chugach Mountains via Thompson Pass, providing access to the Edgerton Highway to Chitina before reaching Glennallen, located at the junction with the Glenn Highway. A short distance further north, the Richardson Highway connects to the Tok-Cutoff at Gulkana. The Richardson continues north through the Alaska Range, linking to the Denali Highway at Paxson before traveling through the Isabel Pass to Delta Junction, where it is joined by the Alaska Highway. The Richardson Highway then follows the Tanana River northwest to Fairbanks, where it joins the Steese Highway and Parks Highway.

The Richardson Highway was constructed by the Alaska Road Commission (ARC). Completed for vehicular use in 1910, portions followed the alignment of earlier foot trails. The highway was gradually upgraded to automobile standards by the 1920s and was surfaced with gravel. Many segments were improved during World War II to complement construction of the Alaska Highway. The highway was also included in the ARC's large-scale post-World War II initiative to upgrade major routes by correcting alignment and adding hard surfacing, and was surfaced with asphalt in the mid-1950s. Since the mid-1960s portions of the highway south of Fairbanks to Eielson Air Force Base have been widened to a four-lane divided expressway, although the majority of the route is a two-lane undivided road.

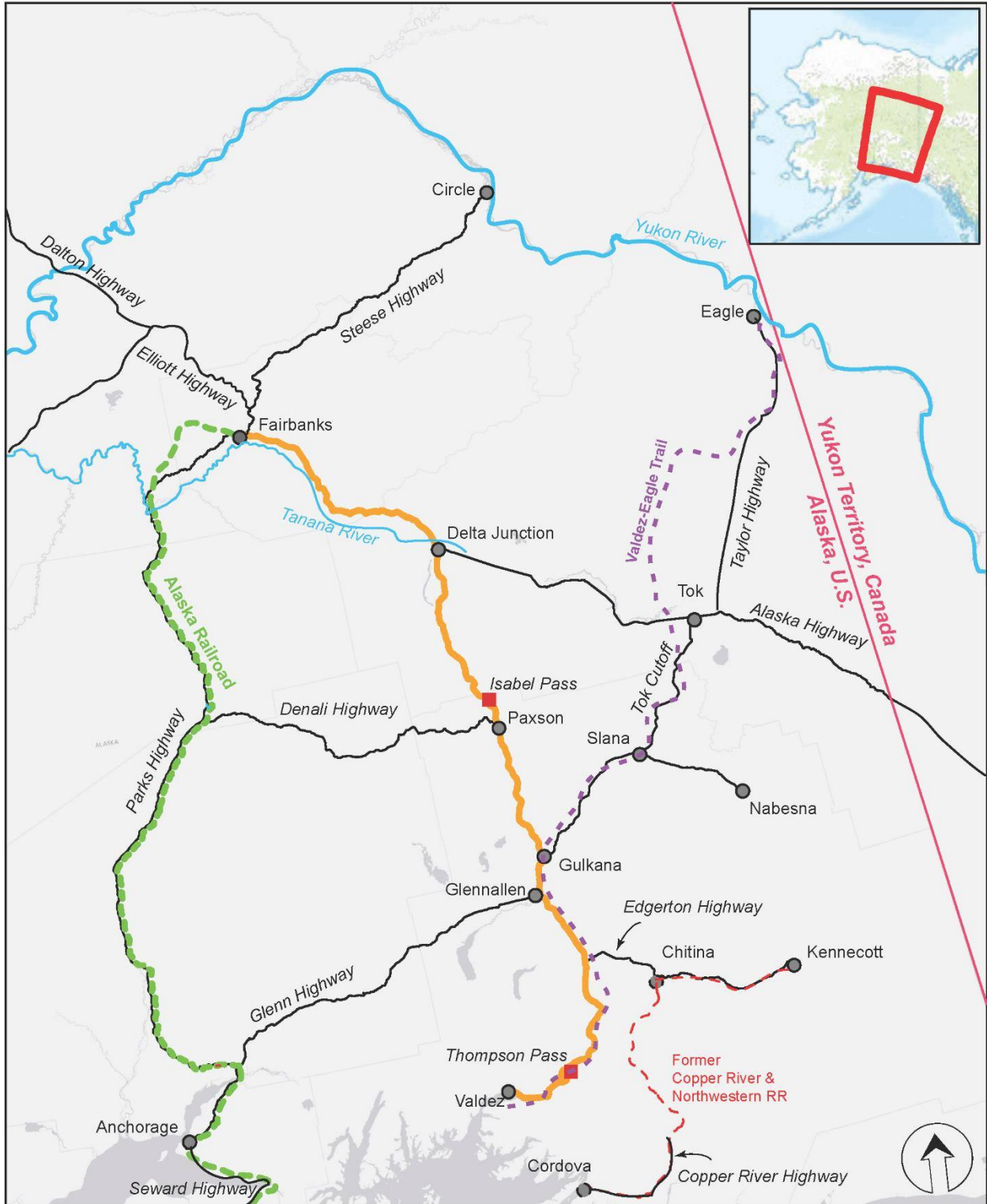
As the Richardson Highway was improved, portions of the road were realigned resulting in bypassed sections of roadbed, some of which are known today as the Old Richardson Highway.¹ Bypassed sections of roadbed that once carried the Richardson Highway are considered part of the road being evaluated for the purposes of this evaluation of significance. The highway is open year-round, and is designated as Alaska Route 4 from Valdez to Delta Junction; from Delta Junction to Fairbanks, it shares the Alaska Route 2 designation with the Alaska Highway. Two segments of the Richardson Highway were incorporated into the Interstate Highway System in 1981, although this designation does not include bypassed sections.² The portion of the highway between Fairbanks and Delta Junction is part of Interstate A-2 and a short segment between the junctions of the Glenn Highway and Tok Cutoff are part of Interstate A-1.

This statement of significance addresses both the current alignment of the Richardson Highway and previous alignments of the highway (now called Old Richardson Highway) that were subsequently bypassed. A map illustrating the location of the Richardson Highway in relation to other major features is provided on the next page.

¹ The Alaska DOT&PF's Coordinated Data System lists 14 sections of road named "Old Richardson" that range in length from just over one-tenth of a mile to approximately 7 miles. Former alignments and bypassed segments of the Richardson Highway were not identified definitively for this report. Further investigation may be needed to evaluate if there is potential to be impacted by a project.

² Sec 6007 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) exempts most components of the Interstate Highway System from Section 106 National Historic Preservation Act and Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act requirements.

Section 2
Description of the Road



- Richardson Highway
- - - Alaska Railroad
- - - Former Copper River & Northwestern Railroad
- - - Valdez-Eagle Trail

3. Historic Context

The 1886 discovery of gold near the mouth of the Fortymile River in Canada's Yukon Territory brought a rush of prospectors to the region, and placer deposits were first located on the Alaskan side of the U.S.-Canada border in 1887.³ Prospectors found additional gold deposits along creeks in the Eagle vicinity beginning in 1895 and established the settlement of Eagle on the Yukon River.⁴ The Klondike Gold Rush shortly thereafter brought a further influx of miners to the Fortymile region, and the establishment of mining in the area provided the impetus for what would later become Alaska's first highway.

By 1897 rumors had reached the War Department that miners in the interior were in danger of starvation, and the Secretary of War dispatched Captain Patrick H. Ray and Lieutenant Wilds P. Richardson to Alaska to determine the conditions and report their findings.⁵ Although Ray learned that reports of starvation had been greatly exaggerated, he reported that many miners, dissatisfied with Canadian mining laws, were relocating to Alaska. Existing routes to the gold fields required would-be miners to haul their goods over the Chilkoot Pass and continue through Canada, and stampeders were unhappy with the fact that the route was controlled by a foreign government, voicing their complaints to Ray. Based on their demands, he recommended that an "All-American" route be constructed to reach the Yukon.⁶

Amid the reports of lawlessness and starvation in the area, the U.S. Secretary of War also authorized the construction of a military fort, later named Fort Egbert, at Eagle in 1897 in order to "provide law and order, protect commerce, care for impoverished miners, build roads and trails, and develop better communication with the nation."⁷ In response to the pressure for an "All-American" route to the gold fields, the following year the Army sent Captain William Abercrombie to explore the Copper and Tanana Rivers and some of their tributaries, and to find a suitable route from Valdez to the newly established Fort Egbert and the town of Eagle, both of which were still accessed primarily via the Yukon River from Canada.⁸

With completion of the 1898 expeditions, the War Department issued General Order 51 on March 20, 1899, and sent Captain Abercrombie to oversee the construction of a trail from Valdez to Copper Center, and from

³ Edward Cobb, *Placer Deposits of Alaska*, U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 1374 (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1973), 132.

⁴ Cobb, 125.

⁵ Capt. Patrick H. Ray, "Relief of the Destitute in Gold Fields," *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska*, (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1900), 497.

⁶ Ray, 503.

⁷ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Historic Fort Egbert: History of the Fort*, http://www.blm.gov/ak/st/en/prog/culture/fort_egbert/ft_egbert_history.html (accessed 17 July 2014); U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Eagle-Fort Egbert: A Remnant of the Past*, (Fairbanks, Alaska: Bureau of Land Management, 1999), 3.

⁸ Claus-M. Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails: The Work of the Alaska Road Commission* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of American, Inc., 1986), 7; U.S. Army, Alaska, 7, 38.

there find the best route to Eagle.⁹ As part of that effort, the builders abandoned the dangerous Valdez Glacier route, previously used by prospectors to reach the interior, in favor of a route up the Lowe River valley, through Keystone Canyon on the north side, and over Thompson Pass to the Tonsina Valley.¹⁰

By the end of the 1899 construction season, 93 miles of trail had been built that were suitable for pack horses. The first recorded round-trip over the Valdez-Eagle Trail occurred later that year.¹¹ Following the establishment of the trail, the Army constructed the Washington Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) line from Valdez to Fort Egbert. Several years later, a branch line was constructed west to the Tanana River, following the river northwest to Fairbanks.¹² WAMCATS expanded over time to link virtually all of the mining settlements and communities along the Yukon River, westward to St. Michael and Nome.

Three years later, the discovery of gold at Pedro Creek launched a new stampede to the Fairbanks area, and by 1903, 200 miners were at work on the creeks in the region.¹³ Much of the gold in the area lay under deep layers of frozen gravel and muck, which required the use of heavy machinery for pumping, hoisting, and scraping.¹⁴ Prospectors also needed to thaw the frozen gravel using steam boilers in order to be able to work efficiently.¹⁵ Without sufficient transportation facilities, development of the area was hindered by the lack of machinery and the high prices of supplies. The district was accessible by boat from the Tanana River, but only smaller, shallow-draft vessels could reach Fairbanks and water travel was limited to the warmer months of the year. Trails from Eagle and Circle provided overland access from the Yukon River, although the 150-mile Fairbanks-to-Circle trail was the shorter of the two.¹⁶

Due to the influx of population into the Yukon River region during the gold rush, most of the \$100,000 Congressional appropriation provided to the War Department to build roads and trails in Alaska was spent on further development of the Valdez-Eagle pack trail.¹⁷ Governor Matthew Brady's 1902 report to the Secretary of the Interior appealed for wagon roads, in addition to railroads, to solve Alaska's transportation

⁹ United States Army, Alaska, *The Army's Role in the Building of Alaska*, Pamphlet 360-5, prepared by the Public Service Officer, Headquarters, United States Army, Alaska, 1969, 41-42; Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails: The Work of the Alaska Road Commission*, 7.

¹⁰ United States Army, Alaska, *The Army's Role in the Building of Alaska*, 41-42.

¹¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Eagle-Valdez Trail Northern Portion* (Tok, Alaska: Bureau of Land Management, Tok Field Office, 1994), 8.

¹² Neely, Lesondak, and Sakett, 12.

¹³ L. M. Prindle, "Gold Placers of the Fairbanks District, Alaska," in *Contributions to Economic Geology, 1903*, U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 225, (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1904), 64.

¹⁴ Cobb, 128.

¹⁵ Prindle, 72.

¹⁶ Prindle, 64, 66.

¹⁷ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska (ARC), 1914, 7; Governor of Alaska, *Report of the Governor of the District of Alaska to the Secretary of the Interior, 1901* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), 36.

problems and enable miners and traders to move their goods. In 1903 Governor Brady again reported to the Secretary of the Interior that people in Eagle, Valdez, Rampart, and Nome were clamoring for roads and trails to access the mining camps, and requested that the Valdez-Eagle pack trail be widened to wagon road standards.¹⁸ The following year, a Senatorial Committee on Territories subcommittee also recommended the federal government build a wagon road along the same general route between Valdez and Eagle. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) surveyed the route from Valdez to Eagle during the summer of 1904 and estimated that it would cost approximately \$3,500 per mile, or about \$1.5 million, to build the proposed wagon road. In an effort to augment resources, Alaska District road tax law (33 Stat. 391) was passed in 1904 that required all men between the ages of 18 and 50 who had lived in Alaska for 30 days to work two eight-hour days per year building roads and trails or pay an \$8.00 road tax.¹⁹ A supervisor was appointed in each judicial district to manage road-building activities.

In 1905 Congress established the Board of Road Commissioners (later renamed the ARC), which assumed responsibility for road construction and maintenance in the territory of Alaska.²⁰ When ARC members first traveled around Alaska in 1905 to consider transportation needs in the territory, they were most interested in providing roads to mining ventures in a way that would be the best expenditure of public funds. The ARC's first president, Wilds P. Richardson, took notes on the amount of gold being produced in different mining districts, the freight shipping rates, and the amount of time it took to transport people, goods, and mail at different times of year. The ARC's first annual report, in 1905, describes plans for trails and roads that were thought to be important in opening up Alaska to increased resource extraction. The Yukon and Tanana Valley drainages north of the Alaska Range, which encompassed a larger area than the southern and southeastern parts of Alaska, were expected to need the most work. Due to the growing importance of the Fairbanks Mining District, Fairbanks was proposed as the new interior terminus for an arterial road rather than Eagle. The ARC expected that travel along this route was going to be heavy and began making plans for improvements:

The Board gave early consideration to the improvement of the route from Valdez to Fairbanks, with a view of facilitating the service of the mails for the winter and to meet the demand of large prospective travel by that route before the opening of navigation next year. This route is made up of three separate trails—the first, from Valdez to Copper Center, being mostly over the old military trail and wagon road located and opened up by Major Abercrombie from Valdez to Eagle; the second leading up the Tanana River from Fairbanks; the third connecting these two from Copper Center to mouth of the Big Delta, or Isabelle Pass.²¹

¹⁸ Governor of Alaska, *Report of the Governor of the District of Alaska to the Secretary of the Interior, 1902* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 17; Governor of Alaska, *Report of the Governor of the District of Alaska to the Secretary of the Interior, 1903* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), 6.

¹⁹ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1913* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), 9; Governor of Alaska, *Report of the Governor of the District of Alaska to the Secretary of the Interior, 1904* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 50.

²⁰ The Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska was renamed the Alaska Road Commission in 1926, was briefly subsumed by the Bureau of Public Roads between 1957 and 1958, and was replaced by Alaska's public works agency following statehood in 1959; for the sake of simplicity, this text refers to the pre-statehood organization as "ARC" throughout. Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails: The Work of the Alaska Road Commission*, 28.

²¹ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, "Report of Operations for the Season of 1905," in *War Department Annual Report, 1905*, Vol. 1, 1905, 299.

In the first decade of the ARC's operations, emphasis was placed on reducing freight costs to mining areas by constructing wagon roads. Much of the ARC funding and manpower over the next five years was put into upgrading the Valdez-Fairbanks trail to a wagon road. Work included repairs on the earliest portion north from Valdez, reconnaissance surveys, location and partial trail construction on the Copper Center to Big Delta and the Tanana River sections, and bridge construction.²² The segment between Fairbanks and Big Delta followed the earlier route of the Fairbanks branch line of the WAMCATS.²³ The Valdez-Fairbanks Road was considered the main arterial to which other roads did or would attach, and by 1911 it was the longest route in Alaska at 379.5 miles. The Fairbanks area to which it led had a population of over 13,000 people.²⁴ The ARC regarded the Valdez-Fairbanks Road as "the most important route of the territory," because it was the primary mail, passenger, and supply route that connected the interior mining districts with the coast at Valdez.²⁵ The first wheeled vehicle trip over the entire route occurred in the summer of 1910 and took 14 days by buckboard wagon and stagecoach.²⁶

Over the course of the next three decades, the Valdez-Fairbanks route remained the principal highway in the territory. As expected, further development branched off this main artery, beginning with a branch to Chitina constructed in 1910-1911, now known as the Edgerton Highway. When complete, this provided an overland connection to Cordova and the important Copper River mining region by linking to the railroad between Cordova and Kennecott.²⁷ By 1913 the Valdez-Fairbanks Road had been improved to the point where many sections were suitable for automobile travel, but the entire length was still not considered an automobile road.²⁸ Within three years, however, automobiles carried regular passenger and mail service between Valdez and Fairbanks during the summer season, and the ARC expected this use to increase rapidly.²⁹ Roadhouses were established along the route to provide food and lodging to travelers, and the ARC's efforts to improve and gravel-surface segments of the road continued over the next several years.³⁰ By 1920 all but a 4-mile portion through Keystone Canyon, near the southern

²² Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, "Report of Operations for the Season of 1905," 308-310; Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, "Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska of Operations for the Season of 1906," in *U.S. House of Representatives Document No. 523, 59th Congress, 2nd Session, 1906*, 19-24.

²³ Neely, Lesondak, and Sakett, 12.

²⁴ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1912* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912), 7, 9; Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails: The Work of the Alaska Road Commission*, 38.

²⁵ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1910*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910), 7-8.

²⁶ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1912*, 6.

²⁷ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1910*, 8.

²⁸ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1913*, 17.

²⁹ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, *Annual Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1916*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), 6.

³⁰ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, *Report upon the Construction and Maintenance of Military and Post Roads, Bridges, and Trails, Alaska*, in *Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, 1920* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920), 59.

terminus, was open for automobile travel.³¹ The route was then renamed to honor former ARC president Wilds P. Richardson, who had left Alaska permanently in 1917 to serve in World War I.³²

In 1922 two pivotal events occurred in Alaskan transportation: repairs to the segment of the Richardson Highway through Keystone Canyon opened the highway for automobile travel for its entire length, and the government-funded Alaska Railroad was completed (with the exception of the final bridge across the Tanana River at Nenana, completed the following year), offering service between Seward and Fairbanks. To promote travel on both routes, Colonel James G. Steese, Richardson's successor as head of the ARC, published an article that year describing the combined route as the "Horseshoe Tour." With the completion the Richardson Highway and the Alaska Railroad, the territory's two main routes both had their northern terminus at Fairbanks. Tourists could now arrive by steamship and travel "comfortably, quickly, and economically" by rail from Seward to Fairbanks and then from Fairbanks to Valdez by automobile service, through what Steese described as a "scenic wonderland."³³

In addition to serving as half of this tourist route, the Richardson Highway continued to serve as the main trunk road from which others branched, particularly those highways constructed to serve mining regions. By 1922 construction was already underway on an extension from Fairbanks northeast to Circle, later designated the Steese Highway.³⁴ This provided road access to the Circle Mining District, another mining region located on the Yukon River. By this time the Richardson Highway was the principal highway in the territory with a total length of 371 miles, and the Steese extended from it 162 miles further. During the 1930s the ARC expanded the reach of the highway system to two additional mining regions, constructing the Elliott Highway, which branched from the Steese just north of Fairbanks to reach mining operations near Livengood, and a road that branched from the Richardson Highway at Gulkana to reach the Nabesna mining region, known as the Gulkana-Nabesna Road and later partially incorporated into the Tok Cutoff.³⁵ The Fairbanks Mining district itself remained an important mining region as well. The introduction of large dredges in 1928 enabled more cost-effective extraction from even the poorer gravels in the region's creeks, and Fairbanks was the largest gold-producing region in Alaska. The industry was vital to the local economy, and by 1941 the territorial commissioner of mines reported that the city was "entirely dependent on gold mining operations."³⁶ The Richardson Highway and the Alaska Railroad remained the only two overland means of reaching Fairbanks and the rest of the interior during this time. Not until the onset of World War II did Alaska's highway system see a wave of substantial expansion.

³¹ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, *Report upon the Construction and Maintenance of Military and Post Roads, Bridges, and Trails, Alaska*, in *Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, 1920*, 59, 2095.

³² Brian Hart, "RICHARDSON, WILDS PRESTON," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fri12> (accessed 25 July 2014).

³³ James Gordon Steese, "Across Alaska by Automobile," *American Motorist*, March 1923, 12.

³⁴ Steese, 13.

³⁵ United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of Alaska Road Commission 1935* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935), 2, 9.

³⁶ Terrence Cole, "Golden Years: The Decline of Gold Mining in Alaska," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, April 1989, 65.

General Simon Buckner was appointed head of the U.S. Army forces in Alaska in 1940 and immediately began a buildup of military forces throughout the territory in response to the perceived threat from Japan. At the time, much of Alaska was supplied by sea and air, as plans for a land link through Canada had been consistently met with disapproval from the War Department.³⁷ In 1940 the territory had only two mainland ports that were ice-free year-round: Seward and Valdez. Seward was connected to Anchorage and the interior only by the Alaska Railroad, which was inadequate even for peacetime freight quantities.³⁸ The Richardson Highway, the territory's main highway during this period, provided an overland link between Valdez and Fairbanks, but was not sufficient to support military needs as snow and ice blocked the mountain passes of the southern section and the road was only usable end-to-end for an average of 120 days per year.³⁹ In the fall of 1940 Governor Ernest Gruening requested that the ARC focus on three main routes that would contribute to improving territorial defense, which included the existing Richardson Highway as well as new roads to link Anchorage with the port of Seward and with the Richardson Highway. Gruening believed that these projects were "indispensible [sic] from a military standpoint, but also would be of inestimable benefit for Alaska's development."⁴⁰

With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the War Department reversed its position on the military necessity of a land link to the lower 48 states and began construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942, resulting in a major expansion of the Alaskan road network.⁴¹ The new highway linked a series of military airfields before connecting to the Richardson Highway at Delta Junction. To complement the new construction, the military upgraded portions of the Richardson Highway as well. The 97th Regiment improved the existing Richardson Highway north from Valdez to Gulkana, as well as the existing Gulkana-Nabesna Road as far as Slana. They then constructed a new road northeast from Slana to what is now the community of Tok near the Tanana River, completing what is now known as the Tok Cutoff.⁴² The Tok Cutoff shortened the distance to supply military airfields at Tanacross and Northway.

Additional work by the ARC during this period facilitated the use of the southern portion of the Richardson Highway as well, including the construction of the Glenn Highway, which linked Palmer and Anchorage to the Richardson Highway at Glennallen. With the completion of the Glenn Highway, some freight could be diverted from the railroad and hauled by truck from Anchorage to the Richardson Highway. A fleet of 80 military and 60 civilian trucks supplied Fairbanks and the airfields on the northern portion of the Alaska

³⁷ Joseph Bykofsky and Harold Larson, *The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Dept. of the Army, 1957), 59.

³⁸ Bykofsky and Larson, 46-47; Lauren Hummel, "The U.S. Military as a Geographical Agent: The Case of Cold War Alaska," *Geographical Review*, January 2005, 61.

³⁹ Bykofsky and Larson, 47, 57.

⁴⁰ Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails*, 208.

⁴¹ Bykofsky and Larson, 57-59.

⁴² The Tok Cutoff today ends at Tok and the stretch north from Tok to the Tanana River is known as the Old Alaska Highway. Presently, the Tok Cutoff is considered to be part of the Glenn Highway. Lyman L. Woodman, *Duty Station Northwest: The U.S. Army in Alaska and Western Canada, 1867-1987, Vol. 2* (Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Historical Society, 1996), 187-188.

Highway from Valdez until 1943, when operation shifted back to the railroad. The 1943 completion of port facilities at Whittier substantially improved the railroad's performance, and from that point onward only the northern portion of the Richardson Highway between Big Delta and Fairbanks was used to truck freight from the northern rail terminus at Fairbanks to the airfields along the Alaska Highway.⁴³

This wave of wartime construction had a substantial impact on the Richardson Highway. Additional appropriations in 1942 and 1943 provided approximately \$3 million in funding for "extraordinary" maintenance, bridge construction, widening, and realignment of the Richardson Highway. Although previously improved to automobile standards, the Richardson Highway saw heavy traffic and needed modernization to serve military needs.⁴⁴ From 1942 to 1944 the ARC constructed a number of new bridges on the route and completed reconstruction work, improving geometry and surfacing to address narrow roadways and poor road conditions.⁴⁵ Although many improvements had been made, the ARC's 1944 annual report noted a continued need for Richardson Highway construction funds.⁴⁶

At the end of the war, Alaska's transportation system had been transformed. Anchorage had developed into the largest south-central population center, and was now connected to Fairbanks, the largest interior population center, via the Glenn and Richardson Highways. These two roads, along with the Alaska Highway, comprised the main routes in the territory. Gold mining had been halted by government order during the war and the industry, previously a major economic driver in Alaska, never fully recovered. By contrast, government and military spending had become the new mainstay of the territory's economy and remained so after the war.⁴⁷ Although the ARC regarded the Alaskan highway system as far from complete or even sufficient to serve its transportation needs at the war's end, the postwar period saw a new era of road construction and improvement as transportation within the territory was viewed as a national defense priority and continued to receive large congressional appropriations for road building.

The Cold War ensured that Alaska would remain a focus for the U.S. military, as the territory was geographically positioned to be the first line of defense in the event of an attack.⁴⁸ In the postwar period, the military was particularly interested in developing new sources of strategic raw materials and supporting and expanding existing facilities and installations at Anchorage and the greater Fairbanks

⁴³ Bykofsky and Larson, 54, 57.

⁴⁴ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report, Alaska Road Commission, 1942* [Juneau, Alaska: Alaska Road Commission, 1942], 1; Alaska Road Commission, 1943, 8; Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report, Alaska Road Commission, 1944* [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944], 1.

⁴⁵ W.H. Spindler, "Rebuilding Alaska's Richardson Highway," *The Highway Magazine* (September-October 1944), 124-129.

⁴⁶ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report, Alaska Road Commission, 1944*, 8.

⁴⁷ Cole, 70.

⁴⁸ Hummel, 48.

area, including developing the Mile 26 Satellite Field (established in 1943) into Eielson Air Force Base.⁴⁹ In a 1947 correspondence with Secretary of the Interior Julius Krug, Secretary of the Army Kenneth C. Royall cautioned that the existing transportation systems in Alaska were not capable of withstanding the level of use that would be required in an emergency. Royall noted that the Fairbanks area, with numerous military facilities, was the most important region in need of an adequate highway system, and he therefore included the Richardson Highway among those routes most vital for defense.⁵⁰

Prior to World War II, the territory's major highways were gravel surfaced, but by 1948 the ARC recognized that military operations in the territory required the stabilization of the gravel surface on the main highways.⁵¹ In the same year, the Alaska Highway opened to the public for the first time, and tourists began driving to Alaska from the lower 48 states and utilizing the Richardson and Glenn Highways as well.⁵² Tourism had declined during the war years, and by the 1940s the shift from wagon to automobile travel had led to the decline of many of the roadhouses along the Richardson Highway.⁵³ The Department of the Interior hoped that opening of the Alaska Highway would encourage increased recreational use of the highway system, particularly as road quality and access to roadside amenities increased.⁵⁴

In 1949 the ARC began planning for a six-year road-building program intended to reconstruct, widen, and pave existing primary roads, including the Richardson, Glenn, and Alaska Highways. Congressional appropriations for Alaskan roads rose dramatically after World War II as the territory continued to be a strategic defense priority, and by 1953 the ARC had completed asphalt surfacing of 118 miles of the Richardson Highway south from Fairbanks.⁵⁵ In addition to providing an improved driving surface, paving of the Richardson Highway also enabled year-round use of the highway for the first time. A combined effort by the ARC and private trucking interests kept the Thompson Pass open through the winter of 1949-1950, but the Isabel Pass remained closed for the season. In 1954 the newly paved surface reduced the cost of winter maintenance and made it possible to keep both the Thompson and Isabel

⁴⁹ 354th Fighter Wing History Office, Eielson Air Force Base, "History of the 354th Fighter Wing and Eielson Air Force Base," September 2010, 8, <http://www.eielson.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-090923-132.pdf> (accessed 24 July 2014).

⁵⁰ Naske, 227.

⁵¹ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report for F. Y. 1948* [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948], 6.

⁵² *The Milepost*, "About the Milepost," Morris Visitor Publications, http://www.milepost.com/publisher_information/about_the_milepost (accessed 24 June 2013); *The Milepost*, 19th ed. (Juneau, Alaska: Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., 1967), 2.

⁵³ U.S. Department of the Interior, *Recreational Resources of the Alaska Highway and Other Roads in Alaska*, (Washington D.C.: US GPO, 1944), http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/alaska/chap3.htm (accessed 15 September 2014).

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of the Interior, *Recreational Resources of the Alaska Highway and Other Roads in Alaska*.

⁵⁵ United States Department of the Interior, *Alaska Road Commission, Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 1953* [Juneau, Alaska: Alaska Road Commission 1953], 17.

Passes open through the winter.⁵⁶ This saved 100 miles of travel, as drivers no longer had to use the Tok Cut-off to bypass this section of the Richardson Highway to reach Big Delta and Fairbanks.⁵⁷ At the end of the 1956 fiscal year, paving was complete except for a 42-mile segment north from Paxson.⁵⁸

Following Alaskan statehood in 1959, responsibility for road construction and maintenance was transferred to a newly created state agency.⁵⁹ The Alaska Department of Highways (Department) improved and realigned a number of short segments over the next several years, but no large-scale work on the Richardson Highway occurred until 1964, when the Good Friday Earthquake struck Alaska. The largest recorded earthquake to date in the U.S., the seismic activity and accompanying tidal waves caused extensive damage to the road system of south-central Alaska.⁶⁰ At the time of the quake, over half of the total paved mileage in Alaska was located within the damage radius.⁶¹ The Richardson, Copper River, and Seward Highways, located near the epicenter, experienced the most damage.⁶² The Department abruptly shifted its focus from planned work to emergency repairs to restore access to hard-hit areas. The first 129 miles of the Richardson Highway north from Valdez were affected, and emergency reconstruction began immediately on the first 6 miles north from Valdez.⁶³ The following year, the Department awarded a contract for bituminous resurfacing on the Richardson Highway and emergency repairs continued between Mile 1 and Mile 66.⁶⁴ Other highway improvement projects

⁵⁶ John R. Noyes, *Report of Operations of the Alaska Road Commission for the Fiscal years 1949, 1950 & 1951* (Juneau, Alaska: Department of the Interior, 1951), 15; Alaska Road Commission, *Alaska Road Commission Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1954* [Juneau, Alaska: Alaska Road Commission], 1954 27.

⁵⁷ Alaska Road Commission, *Alaska Road Commission Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1954*, 27-28.

⁵⁸ Alaska Road Commission, *Alaska Road Commission Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1956* [Juneau, Alaska: Alaska Road Commission], 1956, 31.

⁵⁹ After statehood, Alaska's state highway agency changed names three times, from the Department of Public Works, Division of Highways (1959-1961) to the Alaska Department of Highways (1962-1976) and finally to the current Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (1977-present). Naske, *Alaska's Inclusion in the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956*, 341.

⁶⁰ There are conflicting sources on the magnitude of the 1964 earthquake, ranging from 8.3 to 9.2 on the Richter scale. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the 1964 Prince William Sound earthquake was the largest in the United States, measuring at 9.2; see U.S. Geological Survey, "Largest Earthquakes in the United States," *Earthquake Hazards Program*, http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/states/10_largest_us.php (accessed 7 December 2012).

⁶¹ Gary G. Sturman, "The Alaska Highway System," in *The Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1973), 987.

⁶² John Galvin, "Great Alaskan Earthquake and Tsunami: Alaska, March 1964," *Popular Mechanics*, n.p., <http://www.popularmechanics.com/science/environment/natural-disasters/4219868> (accessed 7 December 2012); Gary G. Sturman, "The Alaska Highway System," in *The Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1973), 989-992, 999.

⁶³ State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report, 1964*, [Juneau, Alaska: Department of Highways, 1964], 1, 8.

⁶⁴ State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report, 1965*, [Juneau, Alaska: Department of Highways, 1965], 31, 33.

included reconstructing the first 7.5 miles between Fairbanks and Eielson Air Force Base from a two-lane to a four-lane facility, as well as construction of a 1-mile segment at the southern terminus leading to the new dock at Valdez.⁶⁵

Within a few years most of the emergency work on the highway system was complete and the Department turned its attention to overall improvements.⁶⁶ In anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the territory's acquisition by the U.S., the 1966 season saw an all-time high in construction activity, during which the Department leveled and resurfaced over 300 miles of primary highways, including portions of the Richardson Highway. The Department's new Title III highway beautification program began that year, which provided funds for viewpoints, rest areas, and roadside park facilities.⁶⁷ For the first time the annual report included expenditures for roadside beautification, re-seeding, and construction of six viewpoints along the Richardson Highway south of Delta Junction.⁶⁸ Efforts continued the following year, with the construction of an additional rest area and tourist turnout on the highway.⁶⁹

As the population of Alaska increased, the Richardson Highway, along with other roads in the state, provided residents and visitors with vehicular access to recreational and subsistence hunting and fishing. From the late 1950s onward the Alaska Department of Fish and Game noted that a large proportion of these activities were concentrated in areas close to highways due to the direct connection and ease of access that these roads provided. The Richardson Highway provided access to sport fishing destinations.⁷⁰

The northern portion of the Richardson Highway from Fairbanks to Delta Junction remained an important corridor between Fairbanks and the military installations to the southeast. The Cold War continued to prompt military expansion, and by the 1970s this area was the site of numerous airfields, testing and training facilities, and bases. The Army assumed control of Ladd Field in 1961, renaming it Fort Wainwright, and its satellite airfield 26 miles south along the Richardson Highway was expanded into Eielson Air Force Base.⁷¹ The airfield located near Delta Junction developed into Fort Greely, today a missile defense site and the home of the Cold Regions Test Center.⁷² This expanded military use of the

⁶⁵ State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report, 1965*, 35.

⁶⁶ State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report, 1966* [Juneau, Alaska: Department of Highways, 1966], 34.

⁶⁷ State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report, 1966*, 34, 35.

⁶⁸ State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report, 1966*, 18, 35, 39.

⁶⁹ State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report, 1967* [Juneau, Alaska: Department of Highways, 1967], 37.

⁷⁰ Alaska Department of Fish and Game, *Annual Report, 1963-1964*, 13-14, 61.

⁷¹ Fort Wainwright, Alaska, "Fort Wainwright History," United States Army, http://www.wainwright.army.mil/history/FWA_history.pdf (accessed 24 July 2014).

⁷² United States Army Garrison, Fort Greely, "History of Fort Greely," United States Army, <http://www.greely.army.mil/about/history.aspx> (accessed 24 July 2014).

Delta Junction site had an impact on two nearby communities along the Richardson Highway. Delta Junction was established in 1919 as an ARC camp. The community of Big Delta, located 8 miles north at the confluence of the Tanana and Delta Rivers, was established in 1904 as a U.S. Army Signal Corps telegraph station, which included a post office and a roadhouse. Between 1950 and 1967 the population of Big Delta fell from 155 to 50 residents, and the post office closed in 1959. In contrast, the community of Delta Junction expanded during this period due to its location near the military installation and at the intersection of the Alaska Highway and the Richardson Highway.⁷³

In addition to aesthetic and physical improvements to and along the Richardson Highway, the dawn of the 1970s saw the completion of a new highway linking Fairbanks with Anchorage.⁷⁴ The George Parks Highway, formally opened in 1971, was intended to create a more efficient vehicular route between Anchorage and Fairbanks. The Parks Highway also enabled visitors to drive to Denali National Park from either city, and the Department anticipated that it would provide tourists with an interesting “circle route” that would incorporate the Richardson Highway.⁷⁵ For the first time it was possible to reach Fairbanks by vehicle without traveling on the Richardson; moreover, the new route provided a substantial savings in time and distance, shortening the trip between Alaska’s two principal population centers of Anchorage and Fairbanks by 80 miles. From the 1960s through the early 1970s the Department also made improvements to the Richardson Highway between Fairbanks and Eielson Air Force Base in which portions were realigned, bypassed, and widened into a four-lane facility.⁷⁶

Although the gold mining industry at Fairbanks declined, by the mid-1970s another type of natural resource extraction began to utilize the Valdez-Fairbanks corridor. The Atlantic Richfield Oil Company announced the first commercial oil strike on Alaska’s arctic coast at Prudhoe Bay early in 1968, and subsequent drilling confirmed that the oilfield was the largest ever discovered in North America.⁷⁷ In the summer of 1969 the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, an entity owned by eight oil companies with holdings in the Prudhoe Bay oilfield, began planning for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS), an oil pipeline beginning at the drilling operations near Deadhorse and continuing south across the Yukon River to Livengood, then on to a marine terminal at Valdez for transfer to tanker vessels for further transport. As the existing road system did not extend beyond the Yukon River, north of Fairbanks, the plans also

⁷³ Donald J. Orth, *Dictionary of Alaska Place Names*, Geological Survey Professional Paper 567 (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1967), 130, 266.

⁷⁴ State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report, 1968* [Juneau, Alaska: Department of Highways], 1968, 8-9.

⁷⁵ State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report, 1968*, 8.

⁷⁶ State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report, 1971* [Juneau, Alaska: Department of Highways], 1972, 29.

⁷⁷ Peter A. Coates, *The Trans-Alaska Pipeline Controversy* (Bethlehem, Pa.: Lehigh University Press, 1991), 164; Arthur C. Banet, Jr., *Oil and Gas Development on Alaska’s North Slope: Past Results and Future Prospects*, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management Alaska State Office, March 1991, 6.

included a parallel 420-mile, gravel, all-weather haul road from Livengood to Prudhoe Bay.⁷⁸ From Delta Junction to Valdez the pipeline closely parallels the Richardson Highway and crosses the Alaska Range and Coast Range, using the Isabel and Thompson Passes as well. The first section of the pipeline was laid in March 1975.⁷⁹ Pipeline contractors established a number of temporary construction camps near old roadhouses along the portion of the Richardson Highway south of Glennallen.⁸⁰ Additional construction camps near the highway were located at Delta Junction, Isabel Pass, Sourdough, and Glennallen, as well as at each of the five pump stations along the route south of Fairbanks.⁸¹ Although the camps were removed, the pump stations are permanent facilities (of those along the Richardson Highway, only the Glennallen and Delta Junction pump stations are still in use).⁸² North Slope crude oil first flowed to the southern terminal at Valdez in July 1977.⁸³ During the period of TAPS construction between 1973 and 1977, the state's population increased by 25 percent, and a further 30-percent increase occurred between 1980 and 1985, correlating to the economic boom resulting from the state's oil revenues.⁸⁴ Along with Valdez, the site of the terminal and operations center, Fairbanks was the community most affected by the construction boom, as it served as the project headquarters for what was ultimately an \$8 billion project.⁸⁵

Although the opening of the Parks Highway ended six decades of the Richardson Highway's dominance as the sole vehicular route from the Alaskan coast to the interior, the highway continues to form an important part in the state's transportation network. The portions of the Richardson Highway between Delta Junction and Fairbanks and between the Glenn Highway and the Tok Cutoff were added to the Interstate Highway System in 1981, forming parts of Interstates A-2 and A-1, respectively. In the early

⁷⁸ "Interior to Grant Permit for Oil Pipeline Haul Road," *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, 29 July 1969; Ashenmiller, 469. The Alyeska Pipeline Service Company was created by Amerada Hess, Atlantic Richfield, British Petroleum, Humble (Standard Oil of New Jersey), Mobil, Phillips, Union, and SOHIO (Standard Oil of Ohio); originally known as TAPS, the name was changed in 1970. For clarity, this document refers to the entity throughout as Alyeska Pipeline Service Company (Alyeska Pipeline) and the pipeline itself as TAPS.

⁷⁹ Coates, 252.

⁸⁰ G.R. Winkler, R.J. Goldfarb, W.J. Pickthorn, and George Pflaker, *The Alaska Mineral Resource Assessment Program – Background Information to Accompany Geologic and Mineral-Resource Maps of the Valdeze Quadrangle, South-Central Alaska*, USGS Circular 1087, US GPO 1992, 3.

⁸¹ James P. Roscow, *800 Miles to Valdez: The Building of the Alaska Pipeline* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; Prentice-Hall Inc., 1977), 101.

⁸² Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, "Pipeline Operations," <http://www.alyeska-pipe.com/TAPS/PipelineOperations/PumpStations> (accessed 22 July 2014).

⁸³ Coates, 255.

⁸⁴ Linda Leask, Mary Killorin, and Stephanie Martin, *Trends in Alaska's People and Economy* (Anchorage, Alaska: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska, Anchorage, October 2001), 2.

⁸⁵ Coates, 252; Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, *Facts: Trans Alaska Pipeline System* (Anchorage, Alaska: Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, 2013), http://www.alyeska-pipe.com/assets/uploads/pagestructure/NewsCenter_MediaResources_FactSheets_Entries/635078372894251917_2_013AlyeskaTAPSFactBook.pdf (accessed 22 July 2014).

Section 3 Historic Context

1990s Alaska established a state Scenic Byway program to recognize routes that provide access to scenic, cultural, and recreational areas and focus enhancements on roads that served tourism and recreation.⁸⁶ The state program grew out of the 1991 National Scenic Byway and All-American Roads Programs, federal programs recognizing significant American transportation routes.⁸⁷ Two segments of the Richardson Highway were designated as Alaska Scenic Byways; the northern segment connects Fairbanks and Fort Greely, while the southern segment lies between Valdez and Glennallen.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, "About the Scenic Byways Program," *Alaska's Scenic Byways*, <http://dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/scenic/org-themes.shtml> (accessed 7 November 2012).

⁸⁷ Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, "About the Scenic Byways Program."

⁸⁸ Mead & Hunt, Inc., *Alaska Roads Historic Overview: Applied Historic Context of Alaska's Roads*, prepared for the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, February 2014, 136.

4. Significance

The Roads Methodology provides guidance on the application of the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, identifying areas of significance, and evaluating significance under *Criteria A, B, C, and D*.

A. *Criterion A: Events*

To meet the threshold for significance under *Criterion A*, a road must possess a direct and important association in one or more supplemental areas of significance as identified in the Roads Methodology in addition to *Transportation*.

The Richardson Highway includes numerous sections of bypassed roadbed that may represent the road's significance. This evaluation of significance under *Criterion A* considered all potential areas of significance identified in the Roads Methodology for the current alignment and bypassed sections of roadbed. Based on research and context development, only the applicable areas of significance for this road are addressed below.

Transportation

The Richardson Highway has an association with *Transportation* because, following its initial completion as a wagon road, the route was the principal means by which people, supplies, and mail reached the interior prior to the completion of the Alaska Railroad in 1923. The highway is the first major highway constructed in Alaska, and was the only automobile road between the important population center at Fairbanks and a year-round, deep-water port until 1971. In addition to the direct connectivity it provides, the Richardson Highway also serves as a connection between many of the state's other highways, including the Glenn Highway, Edgerton Highway, Tok Cutoff, Denali Highway, Alaska Highway, Steese Highway, and Parks Highway. The period of significance for *Transportation* will relate to the historical purpose this road had in the conveyance of people and goods as defined in one or more supplemental areas of significance.

Industry

The Richardson Highway has a direct and important association with the gold mining industry in interior Alaska and is significant at the state level in the area of *Industry*. Following its completion in 1910, the highway provided direct access to the Fairbanks Mining District, Alaska's most productive placer gold district. The Richardson Highway was the only vehicular route between a year-round port and the heart of the district and played an important role in bringing in supplies and equipment. From its earliest efforts, the ARC prioritized this route because it led to the gold district and facilitated more efficient and inexpensive movement of freight. The period of significance is 1910 to 1942, beginning with the completion of the vehicular road and ending when the federal government ordered the shutdown of gold mining activity during World War II. Although gold production continued at Fairbanks into the 1960s, the industry never recovered from the shutdown, and by the postwar period military expansion was the major factor in the development of Fairbanks.

The Richardson Highway, along with other highways such as the Dalton and the Elliott, facilitated the construction of the southern portion of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Completed in 1977, the pipeline

construction represents an event of exceptional importance. The Richardson Highway has an association with this event and continues to facilitate maintenance along the pipeline. The Richardson Highway's role in the pipeline has potential significance, but does not rise to the level of importance to qualify as exceptional to meet *Criterion Consideration G*, which is needed due to the pipeline's construction less than 50 years ago. The Dalton Highway better demonstrates the exceptional importance under *Criteria Consideration G* because it was built expressly to facilitate pipeline construction and maintenance and provided access all the way to the North Slope.

Military

The Richardson Highway is significant at the state level for its association with military activity during World War II and the Cold War. Military interests drove initial trail construction, connecting the port of Valdez with Fort Egbert at Eagle and providing a route for the WAMCATS line, but the Army was not directly associated with the initial effort to upgrade the Valdez-Fairbanks trail to a wagon road later constructed by the ARC along a similar route. With the onset of World War II, Alaska's strategic importance led to the expansion of military facilities in interior Alaska, and the Richardson Highway played an important role in providing access to these facilities, complementing the Alaska Highway. Throughout the Cold War the highway continued to serve as a link between Fairbanks and airfields, testing and training facilities, and bases, including Fort Wainwright, Eielson Air Force Base, and Fort Greely, and provided connectivity between Anchorage and Fairbanks via the Glenn Highway. The period of significance begins in 1942 with the construction of the Alaska Highway and upgrades to the Richardson Highway to serve the needs of the military, and ends in 1971 when the completion of the Parks Highway provided an alternate route to connect major military installations at Fairbanks and Anchorage.

Entertainment/Recreation and Conservation

The Richardson Highway does not meet the requirement for significance in the area of *Entertainment/Recreation and Conservation*. This area of significance focuses on the specific use of roads to provide critical and direct access to important entertainment or recreational facilities or conservation activities. The road was developed to provide an overland route for mail, supplies to support the mining industry, and passengers to reach interior Alaska from a year-round port. The Richardson functioned as part of a larger intermodal touring route beginning in the 1920s that included rail and steamship transportation. The road itself, however, did not facilitate tourism on its own as it was part of the intermodal touring route. An increase in auto-based tourism was first made possible by the opening of the Alaska Highway, which enabled drivers to reach Alaska by road from the lower 48 states. The Richardson Highway functioned in tandem with the Alaska Highway to facilitate auto-based tourism. The Richardson Highway also later linked to the Denali Highway, but did not provide primary access to Denali National Park.

The construction and subsequent use of regional and state highways in Alaska, like the Richardson, frequently led to the development and increases of recreational activities and points of interest due to the access a major transportation corridor could provide. Research did not reveal that the Richardson Highway provided critical access to important entertainment or recreational activities or areas deemed critical for the management of natural resources. The activities related to *Entertainment/Recreation and*

Conservation accessed by the Richardson Highway do not transcend normal patterns of recreational development and conservation seen throughout Alaska and do not allow this road to possess National Register significance in these areas.

Community Planning and Development

The Richardson Highway does not meet the requirement for significance in the area of *Community Planning and Development*. This area of significance focuses on roads that play a crucial role in the development pattern within a community. The Richardson Highway was constructed to provide an overland route for mail, supplies, and passengers to reach interior Alaska from a year-round port. Research did not reveal that it was constructed to or subsequently improved the physical structure within specific communities in an important way related to this area of significance. The Richardson Highway facilitated settlement and provided an important transportation connection to the communities that developed along the route, such as Glennallen, Big Delta, Delta Junction, and Fairbanks. However, the road's function and impact on these communities is related to *Transportation* and represents the common function and overall development pattern that roads have on communities. Glennallen located to the east of the Richardson Highway and developed from the relocation of the ARC camp for the construction of the Glenn Highway, not the Richardson Highway. Delta Junction was created by the confluence of both the Richardson Highway and the Alaska Highway and grew as a result of its crossroads location and nearby military installations. For Fairbanks the Alaska Railroad played a vital role in its development. As such, the Richardson Highway did not play a crucial role in the physical development pattern within these communities to be significant in the area of *Community Planning and Development*.

B. Criterion B: Persons

As outlined in the Roads Methodology, a road is not likely to qualify for National Register significance under *Criterion B* for association with a significant person. To qualify under *Criterion B*, the road would need to best exemplify a person's contribution to history. Mere association with a road, such as involvement in design or construction, or roads named for an individual that is commemorative in nature, would not render a road significant under *Criterion B*. Although Wilds P. Richardson was the president of the ARC during the construction of the road, he was one of multiple officers of the Board of Road Commissioners.⁸⁹ The highway represents the collective efforts of the agency rather than Richardson himself, and does not best exemplify his contribution to history. No other individuals were identified through research to have played a significant role in the Richardson Highway that would qualify it under *Criterion B*.

C. Criterion C: Design/Construction

The Roads Methodology explains how a road would meet the threshold for significance under *Criterion C*. Roads will generally reflect patterns of features common to a particular road type, and under the Roads Methodology this does not convey significance on its own. In order to possess significance, a road must also reflect other important or distinctive design features and/or construction practices or be a surviving

⁸⁹ American Automobile Association, *Highways Green Book*, (Washington, D.C.: American Automobile Association, 1922), 70.

example of a rare road type. This evaluation of significance under *Criterion C* considered the current alignment and bypassed sections of roadbed.

Most roads reflect patterns of features common to a particular road type under distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. In order to possess significance, a road must also reflect other important or distinctive design features and/or construction practices and the requirements under this criterion, or be a surviving example of a rare road type.

A review of the ARC's annual reports and other materials from the period in which the initial construction and substantial postwar reconstruction occurred yielded no evidence of any extraordinary challenges or solutions that transcend normal methods of road engineering or construction. Although the Richardson Highway was constructed relatively early in the history of the Alaskan highway system, the construction methods employed were the same as those used on many shorter wagon roads constructed elsewhere in the territory during the same period. Nothing in the literature noted any engineering significance; the highway's design and construction fall within the ARC's established standard practices of the time and it does not represent any significant or innovative developments in highway engineering or construction. Early segments of the Richardson Highway that may remain as the result of realignments or bypasses; do not constitute significance under *Engineering* because they were designed and constructed utilizing routine methods and therefore would not represent a rare road type. The Richardson Highway does not meet the threshold for significance in the area of *Engineering*.

D. *Criterion D: Information Potential*

Criterion D is most often applied to archaeological properties. As outlined in the Roads Methodology, roads in vehicular use are not likely to be significant under *Criterion D* for the ability to yield information. The Richardson Highway is in vehicular use and remains an above-ground property type. No evidence was found for potential significance under *Criterion D*.

5. Recommendation

The Richardson Highway including bypassed segments possess significance at the state level under *Criterion A* for its direct and important association with *Transportation* and under the supplemental areas of significance of *Industry* and *Military*. The Richardson Highway has an association with *Transportation* because the route was the principal means by which people, supplies, and mail reached the interior prior to the completion of the Alaska Railroad and was the first major highway constructed in Alaska. The Richardson Highway was also the only automobile road between the important population center at Fairbanks and a year-round, deep-water port until 1971.

The Richardson Highway is significant in the area of *Industry* for its direct and important association with the gold mining industry in interior Alaska. Following its completion in 1910, the highway provided direct access to the Fairbanks Mining District, Alaska's most productive placer gold district. The Richardson Highway was the only vehicular route between a year-round port and the heart of the district and played an important role in bringing in supplies and equipment. The period of significance is 1910 to 1942, beginning with the completion of the vehicular road and ending when the federal government ordered the shutdown of gold mining activity during World War II.

The Richardson Highway is significant in the area of *Military* for its association with military activity during World War II and the Cold War. With the onset of World War II, Alaska's strategic importance led to the expansion of military facilities in interior Alaska, and the Richardson Highway played an important role in providing access to these facilities, complementing the Alaska Highway. Throughout the Cold War the highway continued to serve as a link between Fairbanks and airfields, testing and training facilities, and bases, including Fort Wainwright, Eielson Air Force Base, and Fort Greely, and provided connectivity between Anchorage and Fairbanks via the Glenn Highway. The period of significance begins in 1942 with the construction of the Alaska Highway and upgrades to the Richardson Highway to serve the needs of the military, and ends in 1971 when the completion of the Parks Highway provided an alternate route to connect major military installations at Fairbanks and Anchorage.

The Richardson Highway does not possess significance under *Criteria B, C, or D*.

Portions of the Richardson Highway (Alaska DOT&PF CDS number 190000) has an Interstate Highway System designation, and under the Federal Highway Administration Interstate Exemption (2005) these segments are exempt from Section 106 consideration as a historic property. However, portions of the highway and bypassed segments not covered by the exemption possess significance under *Criterion A*. Identification of essential physical features and an assessment of integrity would be needed to determine National Register eligibility of those segments.