

PUBLIC INTEREST FINDING

#25-13-007-PIF

Project: Seward Highway Infrasonic Avalanche Detection System

Project Number: STP-0106(42) / 80821

Introduction: The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is seeking a Public Interest Finding (PIF) to allow brand specific and proprietary equipment to be purchased and installed by a Contractor as part of this project. In addition, the DOT&PF is requesting the maker / developer of the brand specific equipment to be hired as a sub-consultant during the construction phase of this project.

The DOT&PF is proposing the installation of an Avalanche Sentry™ system, a unique and proprietary infrasonic avalanche detection system, near mile 21 of the Seward Highway due to several large snow avalanche paths that affect DOT's ability to maintain the highway at this location. During construction the developer of the proprietary equipment will be sub-contracted to provide guidance and aid in installation.

Project Background: Almost yearly there is a slide large enough to cover this section of the Seward highway. Recent snow avalanches in this area have closed the highway for more than 30 hours, destroyed guardrail, covered the Alaska Railroad tracks, and destroyed power lines that supply the Seward area. As a result, these avalanches pose a risk to the welfare of the traveling public, local economy, roadway maintenance crews, and utility lines.

This system, if installed, will allow DOT&PF staff to remotely monitor avalanche conditions at this location as well as immediately notify staff when avalanches occur. This will be especially beneficial as staff currently has to drive 70 miles to check conditions and visibility is often hampered by bad weather. Even during bad visibility the system will provide staff with real time mapping of avalanche activity in the area, thus allowing staff to determine if a response is necessary and to issue travel advisories to the traveling public in a more timely fashion.

The project is FHWA funded with construction anticipated to begin in 2013 and conclude in fall 2014. The estimated project cost is \$850,000.

Public Interest Finding: Based on DOT&PF research, Inter-Mountain Laboratories, Inc. (IML) produces the only commercially available infrasonic avalanche detection system in the United States of America. According to IML consider many aspects of their detection system to be proprietary information that is protected as a trade secret. As such, hiring IML as a sub consultant during construction will allow IML to adequately install the Avalanche Sentry™ and still maintain any trade secrets.

Based on the above and the reasons listed below, it is in the public's best interest to install the Avalanche Sentry System at mile 21 of the Seward Highway:

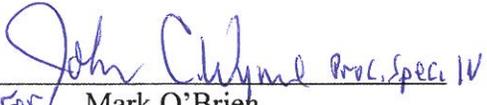
1. The system will better DOT&PF time management by allowing staff to monitor remotely the snow avalanche conditions.
2. This system will eliminate the need to drive 70 miles one way to visually inspect conditions.
3. This is the only known commercially available avalanche detection system in the United States that can provide current and accurate conditions even during times of low visibility and bad weather;
4. This is the only known commercially available avalanche detection system in the United States that will accurately map active snow avalanches as they are occurring and provide this information to DOT&PF staff so they can assess if a response is needed; and,
5. This is the only known commercially available avalanche detection system in the United States that can be used to detect and map avalanche activity during active avalanche mitigation efforts.
6. The system instantly notifies staff the intensity levels of avalanches crossing the highway, which will allow staff to better determine what and how much resources (equipment) is required.

It is hereby found to be in the Public's best interest and consistent with the Code of Federal Regulations Title 23, Section 635.411 and Alaska DOT&PF Policy and Procedure 10.02.013 and 10.02.050 to purchase and install brand specific equipment as part of this project and employ IML as a sub-consultant during construction.

Submitted by:  11/21/2012
 Barrell Nickerson
 M&O Specialist
 Date

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Recommended by:  11.21.12
 Robert A. Campbell, P.E.
 Central Regional Director
 Date

Approved by:  11/27/2012
 For Mark O'Brien
 Chief Contracts Officer
 Date