



# UNIVERSITY TRANSPORTATION CENTER RESEARCH BRIEF

**PROJECT TITLE:** Safety Evaluation of Statewide Off-Highway Vehicle Use in Alaska

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Nathan Belz (UAF), Keith Cunningham (UAF)

**INSTITUTION:** SINGLE-INSTITUTION PROJECT

**ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATE:** JANUARY 2018

**SPONSORS:** THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST TRANSPORTATION CONSORTIUM, AK DOT&PF



## **Background**

Dr. Belz has over ten years of experience specific to rural transportation issues. The types of transportation safety issues we see in these areas are very different than those in their urban counterparts. Lack of access to transportation is an important issue in rural environments. Alaska is among only a select few locations across the United States where Native Americans have greater representation in rural areas. Instead of reducing trips by car, these communities are experiencing significant social pressures on their traditional ways of mobility. Dr. Belz's research focuses on addressing the expansion and modification an automobile-focused roadway infrastructure system such that the mobility of those with limited travel options is not hindered. Dr. Belz is also the coordinator of a USDOT designated Beyond Traffic Innovation Center and will be working with other Innovation Centers and DOTs across the nation to engage and foster dialogue about rural areas and how to strategically prepare for and act on the changes our rural transportation system needs, recognizing that a better path to moving our transportation system forward should not exacerbate income inequality or social division.



## **Research Project**

Standard measures of risk and conflict, as well as design guidelines for off-highway vehicle users near the traveled way are not well established from a rural safety perspective. There is a need for statewide assessment of conflicts between these users and traditional roadway users. This should include: crash history review, main corridors of travel, and identification of both safety and usage thresholds that would merit the consideration of how to minimize conflicts for certain rural highway characteristics. The State of Alaska currently has a Department policy to not prohibit their travel within the off-pavement area, but does not currently design or address crossings or other conflicts when users approach the vehicle space/traveled way. Further, a recent ATV-related fatality in Akiachak, discussions on safety concerns surrounding ATV/OHV use and policies in Wasilla, Bethel and Kotzebue, and requests for DOT&PF to address conflicts in Rural Native Alaska communities off the main road network make this very timely research. Before DOT&PF can effectively address safety concerns, a statewide review of the data and types of conflicts occurring on highways needs to be conducted. This research will allow better data to be collected, digested, and presented on these modes and the safety concerns of users to address the transportation needs of the rural and small-urban areas of Alaska.