With the Equinox Marathon course experiencing its most significant changes in decades, participants are surely wondering what this means for the speed of the course.
Is it slower, faster or virtually unchanged? Read on to find out.

I recently ran each of the five alterations (they are detailed in the website article “Course Changes Finally Nailed Down”) and compared the times from the previous course to the new course. I attempted to run each section at the same effort level, which is easier said than done when not using a heart-rate monitor.

Keep in mind that there is a significant margin-of-error due to the unscientific nature of the experiment along with factors such as a runner’s preference for road or trail running and the efficiency with which the runner covers different types of terrain.

Here are my results:

Between Miles 1 and 2 — Mosquito Lake shortcut (SUBTRACT 92 seconds)
Some may lament the elimination of a short, rooty section but otherwise the new route follows a similar UAF trail as it did before, just for a shorter time.

Mile 8-8.5 — The airstrip across from Ann’s Greenhouses plus section navigating Goldstream Sports (ADD 28 seconds).
Note that I received special permission to run this section; otherwise the Equinox has been granted a permit for race-day only. This route adds a little distance on a slower dirt trail while eliminating a stretch of Sheep Creek Rd.

Mile 9-9.5 — St. Patricks/single-track reroute (ADD 183 seconds)
Adding about three minutes to the total ascent of Ester Dome is significant, but this re-route provides a much more gradual climb and replaces the grueling lower road portion with an enjoyable trail.

Mile 21.5-22 — Powerline shortcut (SUBTRACT 112 seconds)
Some may groan at the prospect of running an additional third of a mile along the powerline. But surely no one will miss what has been cut out: the cramp-inducing transition onto Goldhill Road and the spirit-sapping climb to Cloudberry.

Mile 25.75-26 — Butrovich traverse (ADDS 9 seconds)
This replaces the final paved hill down Kuskokwim Drive with a winding trail along the adjacent hillside. While the quads may get a little break, the mind will need to stay engaged to navigate the more challenging terrain.

The Turnaround — To offset the other changes, the turnaround will be moved uphill about 10 meters (SUBTRACT 10 seconds)

Start and finish route — To be determined once the utilidor project is complete

Therefore, by my calculations, all the course changes will add a whopping 6 seconds to one's Equinox time.
However, one additional factor has yet to be considered: some smoothing on the out-and-back as well as on miles 18-19.
I believe this will speed up the course just enough so that the 2012 route will be a smidgen faster than in previous years. Rejoice!

Now get out there and train on the new route so there will be no surprises on race day!