

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

STB Finance Docket No. 35095

Alaska Railroad Corporation Construction and Operation of a Rail Line Extension to Port MacKenzie, Alaska

Lead Agency: Surface Transportation Board;

Cooperating Agencies: Federal Railroad Administration (FRA); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District (USACE); U.S. Coast Guard (USCG).

Proposed Action: The proposed action is the construction and operation of approximately 30 to 45 miles of rail line to connect the Port MacKenzie District to a point on the existing Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) main line between Wasilla and just north of Willow, Alaska to provide a rail connection for freight services between Port MacKenzie and Interior Alaska.

Location: The proposed rail line's southern terminus would be approximately 2 or 3 miles from the Port MacKenzie docks in the Port MacKenzie District and the northern terminus would be at one of four locations along the existing ARRC main line between Wasilla and just north of Willow, Alaska, depending upon the alternative.

Abstract: On December 5, 2008, ARRC filed a petition with the Surface Transportation Board (STB or the Board) pursuant to 49 United States Code (U.S.C.) 10502 and 10901 for the authority to construct and operate approximately 30 to 45 miles of rail line to connect the Port MacKenzie District in Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) to a point on the existing ARRC main line between Wasilla and just north of Willow, Alaska. The Applicant has stated that the purpose of the proposed rail line is to provide rail service to Port MacKenzie and connect the Port with the existing ARRC rail system, providing Port MacKenzie customers with rail transportation between Port MacKenzie and Interior Alaska. The proposed rail line would thus provide Port MacKenzie's customers with multi-modal options for the movement of freight to and from the Port similar to that offered by other ports handling large vessels. The proposed project would also support ARRC's statutory goal to foster and promote long-term economic growth and development in the State of Alaska. The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) and the cooperating agencies have prepared this Draft EIS, which identifies and evaluates the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed action and alternatives, including the No-Action Alternative. The proposed action and alternatives, with the exception of the No-Action Alternative, could adversely affect topography, soils, surface water, wetland, biological, subsistence, cultural, land use, and recreation resources. SEA has included recommended preliminary mitigation measures in this Draft EIS. The mitigation measures will be considered by the Board as potential conditions if the Board decides to grant ARRC authority to construct and operate the rail line. The proposed action and alternatives would cause negligible impacts on all other resource areas. The cooperating agencies' Federal actions could include an FRA decision to provide funding to ARRC for rail line construction through a grant, USCG's decision on issuing bridge permits under Section 9 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 U.S.C. 401 et seq.), the General Bridge Act of 1946 (33 U.S.C. 525 et seq.), and the USACE decision to issue a discharge permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977 (33 U.S.C. 1251-1376) and a permit to perform work or place a structure in navigable waters under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 U.S.C. 403).

Comment Period: The public and any interested parties are encouraged to make written comments on all aspects of this Draft EIS. All comments must be submitted within the comment period, which will close May 10, 2010.

Contacts: Written comments on the Draft EIS may be submitted to:

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Washington, D.C. 20423-0001
ATTN:
Section of Environmental Analysis
STB Finance Docket No. 35095

Comments may also be filed electronically on the Board's Web site, www.stb.dot.gov, by clicking on the E-FILING link. Then select "Environmental Comments," which does not require a Login Account. It is not necessary to mail written comments that have been filed electronically. Please refer to STB Finance Docket No. 35095 when filing.

Further information about the project can be obtained by calling SEA's toll-free number at 1-888-257-7560 (FIRS for the hearing impaired 1-800-877-8339). This Draft EIS is also available at the Board's website at: www.stb.dot.gov.

Public Meetings: In addition to receiving written comments, SEA and the cooperating agencies will host six public meetings on the Draft EIS at the following locations, dates and times. Interested parties may submit written comments or make oral comments at these meetings.

1. April 6, 2010, 6:30-8:30 pm at Wilda Marston Theater, 3600 Denali Street, Anchorage, AK
2. April 7, 2010, 6:30-8:30 pm at Big Lake Elementary School, 3808 South Big Lake Road, Big Lake, AK
3. April 8, 2010, 6:30-8:30 pm at Menard Sports Center, 1001 S Mack Drive Wasilla, AK
4. April 12, 2010, 6:30-8:30 pm at Houston Middle School, 12801 W. Hawk Lane, Houston, AK
5. April 13, 2010, 6:30-8:30 pm, at Willow Community Center, Mile 70 Parks Highway, Willow, AK
6. April 14, 2010, 6:30-8:30 pm, at Knik Elementary School Gym, 6350 Hollywood Boulevard, Wasilla, AK