

How to get involved

■ Draft EIS available for public comment

The STB's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) will meet with state and federal representatives and the public to hear comments on the Draft EIS (DEIS) in April 2010.

Public meetings on the Draft EIS will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on the following days:

- April 6 (Tuesday) – Anchorage: Wilda Marston Theater (Loussac Library), 3600 Denali Street

- April 7 (Wednesday) – Big Lake: Big Lake Elementary School, 3808 S. Big Lake Road
- April 8 (Thursday) – Wasilla: Curtis D. Menard Sports Center, 1001 S. Mack Drive
- April 12 (Monday) – Houston: Houston Middle School, 12801 W. Hawk Lane
- April 13 (Tuesday) – Willow: Willow Community Center, Mile 70 Parks Highway
- April 14 (Wednesday) – Wasilla: Knik Elementary School, 6350 Hollywood Boulevard

Comments on the Draft EIS can also be filed electronically at www.stb.dot.gov/stb/efilings.nsf. By selecting "Environmental Comments" after the link, individuals will not be required to log in to submit their comments. Comments can be typed into the online form provided, or attached as Microsoft Word®, Corel Word Perfect®, or Adobe® Acrobat® files.

Please reference Finance Docket No. 35095 on all correspondence. Comments are due to the SEA by May 10, 2010.



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Questions or Comments?

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Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project

A cooperative effort of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Alaska Railroad Corporation



Surface Transportation Board Releases Draft Environmental Impact Statement

- Public open houses to be held in April 2010

The Surface Transportation Board (STB) published the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Port Mackenzie Rail Extension Project (the Project) on March 16, 2010. The Project proposes to construct a 30- to 45-mile rail line in the Susitna River Valley north from the port facility to the Alaska Railroad Corporation's (ARRC) existing main line track at a point between Meadow Lakes and north of Willow. The public comment period on the Draft EIS is through May 10, 2010.

The STB is the federal agency with approval authority over new U.S. rail lines and is the lead agency for the EIS. The EIS process solicits input from the public, interested parties, and agencies.

The purpose of a Draft EIS is to present the purpose and need for the project, describe the project area and the social and natural features, and evaluate

What is NEPA?

The National Environmental Policy Act requires federal agencies to consider potential environmental impacts before approving major projects that are subject to federal control and responsibility. If significant impacts are likely, the agency may decide to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts that may result from the project. The Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Draft EIS considers build options that include

several southern, northern, and connector segments (see Map, page 3). Given various combinations, eight possible build alternatives are being considered. The Draft EIS also considers a "no action" alternative. Alternatives were analyzed within the context of numerous studies that consider geology and soils, water resources, wetlands and floodplains, vegetation, wildlife, cultural resources, subsistence use, climate and air quality, noise and vibration, socioeconomics, environmental justice, safety, energy, and other considerations.

To see the Draft EIS visit www.stb.dot.gov/decisions/readingroom.nsf/WEBUNID/23F2838CFE793947852576E300555BAA?OpenDocument.

MEETING PHOTOS: PATTY SULLIVAN/MSB AND WENDY LONGTIN/HDR ALASKA ■ SHIP PHOTO: JORDAN MAY ■ RAILROAD PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE ALASKA RAILROAD CORP.

ABOVE LEFT: POINT MACKENZIE FARMER Lyn Baskin (right) discusses the proposed rail extension alignments with Brian Lindamood, project manager from the Alaska Railroad Corporation, and Donna Robertson, environmental project manager from HDR Alaska, at a public open house meeting in October 2008.

ABOVE RIGHT: ANCHORAGE RESIDENT Jim Seeley (left), a member of the Red Shirt Lake Landowner's Association, a group with about 50 cabins, discusses the proposed rail extension alignments with Brad Sworts (right), project manager from the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.



What landowners should know

Having a potential large project such as the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project being evaluated may be an unsettling prospect for landowners. While the STB's choice of an alternative to construct will not be made for some time, there are a few items landowners should know right now.

The STB is considering a number of potential alignments as part the NEPA process. Alignments currently under evaluation in the environmental review process are preliminary and will be refined during the final design process.

Right-of-way acquisition would begin only after the completion of the environmental review process. Acquisition would be achieved through a series of steps, including good faith negotiations with the property owners. At that stage, independent and impartial qualified appraisers will be contracted to conduct appraisals.

Property owners are entitled to receive just compensation for any acquired property rights. By definition, just compensation may not be less than the property's fair market value. Eligible displaced owners and tenants may also be entitled to displacement or relocation benefits.

The right-of-way acquisition process would be conducted in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (the Uniform Act) — a federal law that requires the equitable treatment of persons displaced from their homes, businesses, or farms by federal and federally assisted programs. (To see the Act's language in its entirety, go to <http://uscdo.house.gov/download/pls/42C61.txt>.)

The ARRC and MSB are committed to working with each property owner on a case-by-case basis. Landowners are encouraged to e-mail specific questions to wheelers@akrr.com.

Who's who on the project

The Port MacKenzie Rail Extension environmental study phase involves a number of key players. As the owner/operator of the port facility, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) is the project sponsor, responsible for co-managing and promoting the project. The Alaska Railroad, a state-owned corporation, is the project applicant. As the owner/operator of the railroad, ARRC is assisting with project management and technical support.

The rail extension requires federal approval because it involves construction of a new rail line. The Surface Transportation Board (STB) is the federal agency with the authority to approve new rail construction. As such, the STB's Section of Environmental

Analysis (SEA) is overseeing preparation of the project environmental impact study (EIS). The SEA is responsible for public meetings and collecting public comments as part of the environmental review process. Cooperating agencies include the Federal Railroad Administration; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District; and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Several contractors are involved as well. The STB SEA is assisted by ICF Consulting, Inc., an independent third-party contractor. In turn, ICF has partnered with a number of Alaska-based firms to accomplish the tasks necessary to complete the environmental review process. The MSB and ARRC hired HDR Alaska

and Hanson-Alaska, LLC to help provide supplemental environmental and engineering design information as required to support the EIS process.

The State of Alaska has provided funding for the environmental phase as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In 2007, the state appropriated \$10 million to support an alternative analysis, preliminary engineering, a financial feasibility study, and NEPA environmental documentation. The state added another \$17.5 million in 2008 to continue the NEPA EIS process. MSB requested another \$57 million during the current legislative session to finish the EIS and begin final design and right-of-way land acquisition.

After the Draft EIS

Once the comment period ends on May 10, 2010, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) will use public and agency comments to prepare a Final EIS. The Final EIS will identify one or more preferred routes based on a comparison of the options with regard to benefits, impacts, and mitigation. Based on the Final EIS, the SEA will recommend a preferred alternative to the STB, along with the basis for this choice, mitigation measures, and other environmental findings. The Final EIS will be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency, which in turn will publish a notice of availability in the Federal Register.

The Final EIS and record of decision by the STB are necessary before final design can begin. Final design would refine the route and associated engineering, and dictate a final right-of-way (ROW). Next, land would be purchased to accommodate the new ROW, and the final step is construction. Next steps after the EIS all hinge on the ability to secure adequate funding.

Alignments Under Consideration

The Draft EIS considers build options that include several southern, northern, and connector segments. Two southern alternatives (Mac West and Mac East) run on either side of the Point MacKenzie Agricultural Project. The three main northern alternative segments connect to the existing main line track at either Willow, Houston, or Big Lake. Connector segments link the northern and southern segments. Given various combinations, eight possible build alternatives are considered. The Draft EIS also considers a “no action” alternative.

