



Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project

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



Public input helps refine corridors

■ MANY SUPPORT RAIL EXTENSION BUT VOICE CONCERNS ABOUT PROPERTY, TRAILS

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Alaska Railroad Corporation hosted a series of public open house meetings Oct. 1-5, 2007, for the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project. More than 350 people showed their interest by participating in the meetings at Wasilla, Houston, Willow, Knik, and Big Lake. Project consultants HDR Alaska and TNH-Hanson also attended. Landowners and residents asked questions about engineering and environmental issues, project timeline, right-of-way, and how specific properties might be affected by the project.

“These meetings were critical to prepare an effective application to the

Comments by the numbers

At the project open house meetings held in early October, **37** people gave their remarks to a court reporter, **95** wrote and submitted their comments, and **137** comments were written on large aerial maps that were provided at each meeting. To date, the project team has received more than **317** comments.

Surface Transportation Board (STB),” said Brian Lindamood, project manager from the Alaska Railroad. “People who live, recreate, and do business in this area helped inform the project team of issues not otherwise readily apparent.”

The STB, a federal agency based in Washington, D.C., is responsible for approving the new rail extension.

“The reason for this preliminary analysis is to provide information to the people who will be preparing the environmental document. The more information we give to the STB the better off we are,” said Joe Perkins, project consultant for the Borough, as well as former commissioner of the Alaska Department of Transportation.

“We’re providing Alaska-specific information that we think they need to save them time,” Perkins said.

The purpose of the public outreach was to gain as much information as possible about potential impacts and environmental concerns. Some of this information has already helped refine the proposed corridors.

“The public pointed out a lot of things

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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 early October.

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 happens next?

COLLECTION OF PRELIMINARY DATA FORWARDED TO STB FOR CONSIDERATION

Now that the Borough and the Railroad have completed their fact-finding efforts, the preliminary engineering and environmental data will be sent to the STB, and an application to construct and operate the new rail will follow. The application will describe the project, identify areas of concern, and discuss proposed alignments. Upon receipt, the STB is expected to publish a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register, kicking off the formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental documentation process. At this time, it is not known if the environmental document will be an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Once the formal process begins, the STB will select a third-party contractor to prepare the environmental document. At this point, the role of the Borough and the Railroad becomes secondary – providing information to the STB as requested.

The current consultants, HDR Alaska and TNH-Hanson, will remain on contract to provide supplemental information to the Railroad and the Borough as needed. The public will continue to be involved throughout the process. To learn more about the STB, go to: www.stb.dot.gov/.

While NEPA establishes a framework for conducting environmental reviews, procedures vary from agency to agency. The process can take as little as a year and a half, but some projects can take five years or longer.

The Borough and Railroad estimate that the environmental documentation process for the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project could begin as early as the end of the year with the hiring of a third-party contractor. The STB will likely hold public scoping meetings to solicit comments.

Although the Borough and the Railroad cannot be directly involved with the project during the environmental documentation stage, our goal is to continue to offer updates on the project Web site (www.portmacrail.com).

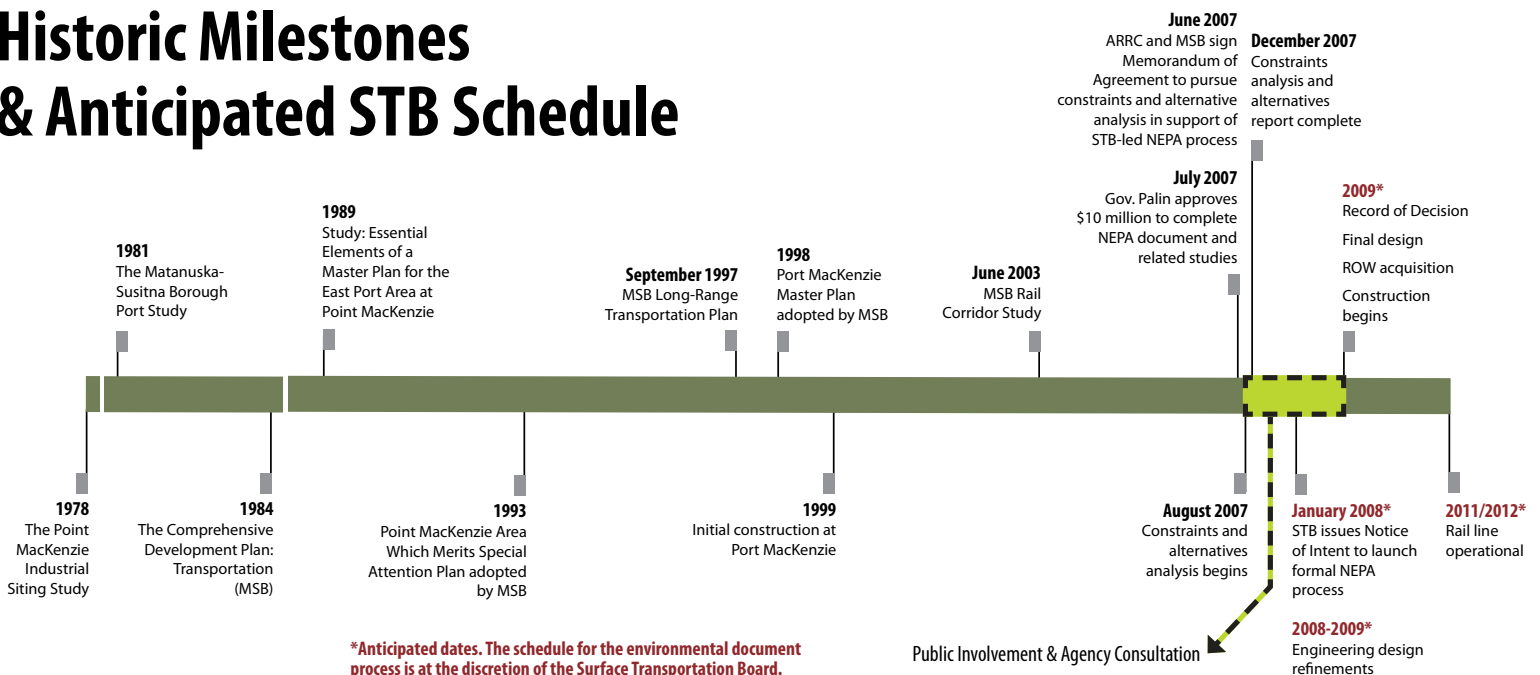
Thank you!

The Borough and the Railroad thank the following groups that met with the project team and everyone who expressed interest and participated in this phase of the project:

- Alaska Department of Natural Resources
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- State Historic Preservation Office
- NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Area Legislators
- Willow Dog Musers Association
- Houston City Council
- Iditarod Trails Committee, Inc.
- Knik Tribal Council Historic Preservation Committee
- University of Alaska Lands Office
- Mental Health Trust, The Trust Land Office
- CIRI
- Knikatnu, Inc.
- Willow Area Community Organization
- MSB Assembly
- MSB Planning Commission
- MSB Transportation Advisory Board
- MSB Port Commission
- MSB Historic Preservation Commission

Comments received by Nov. 2 were considered in analyzing the alignments and preparing the project application. We will continue to accept comments and relay them to the STB.

Historic Milestones & Anticipated STB Schedule



How were the alternatives evaluated?

The project team developed eight alternative alignments (see map on insert) based on previous studies, constraints analysis, other factors such as engineering and environmental considerations, and discussions with agencies and the public.

The project team then developed the strengths and weaknesses of these proposed routes using 10 measureable categories. The preliminary engineering and environmental data

is presented in a matrix (see matrix on insert), which will be considered by the STB. Below is a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of each proposed route based on the matrix results.

Matrix categories include factors related to constructibility, the natural environment, and impacts to local communities. The matrix, as part of a larger project background report, will lay the foundation for the STB's environmental document.

Proposed Routes Strengths & Weaknesses

PROPOSED ROUTES	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Mac West - Willow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires fewer number of new road crossings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crosses more incompatible land uses Has higher probability of impacting archeological and/or historical sites Has greatest impacts to designated state refuges and recreation areas
Mac West - Houston North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires fewest number of new road crossings Impacts fewer developed parcels Requires smaller expenditure of train energy Has less probability of impacting archeological and/or historical sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crosses more incompatible land uses Has less suitable soil conditions Impacts more wetlands Impacts a designated state recreation area Crosses more mapped anadromous streams
Mac West - Houston South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires fewer number of new road crossings Impacts fewer developed parcels Has less probability of impacting archeological and/or historical sites 	
Mac West - Big Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires smaller expenditure of train energy Involves greater number of mapped anadromous streams Has higher probability of impacting archeological and/or historical sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crosses more incompatible land uses
Mac West - Willow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires smaller number of mapped anadromous streams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has higher probability of impacting archeological and/or historical sites Fragments designated state recreation areas
Mac East - Houston North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crosses more compatible land uses Impacts fewer developed parcels Requires smaller expenditure of train energy Has less probability of impacting archeological and/or historical sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has less suitable soil conditions Fragments a designated state recreation area
Mac East - Houston South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts fewer developed parcels Crosses more compatible land uses Impacts less wetlands Has less probability of impacting archeological and/or historical sites Avoids designated state refuges and recreation areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires moderate expenditure of train energy, but less than the Big Lake alternatives Involves moderate number of new road crossings, but less than the Big Lake alternatives Has less suitable soil conditions than the Big Lake alternatives, but better than the Houston North alternatives
Mac East - Big Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoids designated state refuges and state recreation areas Crosses more compatible land uses Has more suitable soil conditions Impacts less wetlands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts more developed parcels Involves greater number of new road crossings Requires greater expenditure of train energy Crosses greater number of mapped anadromous streams Has higher probability of impacting archeological and/or historical sites

UPDATE!

The Strengths & Weaknesses table has been updated since the newsletter was published.
Go to: http://www.portmacrail.com/documents/strengths_weaknesses_12-18-07.pdf

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that weren't really evident," said Lindamood. "They provided depth in certain areas, such as soils issues near Horseshoe Lake and land use such as the snow machine trails and access to recreational areas."

Discussions about trails — not only where they are but how they are used — will likely affect the types of trail crossings, Lindamood said. "Individual alignments were modified after the public meetings to avoid direct impacts in some areas."

The project team also received public feedback about potentially poor soil conditions, which has been used to help guide the geotechnical investigations.

At all meetings, many people's comments supported the rail extension as a good idea, but often opposed locations close to residential areas. Comments included concerns for trail connectivity, noise, safety, wildlife impacts, and disturbances to recreational cabins, among many others. A comments summary is posted on the project Web site (www.portmacrail.com). Agency and public comments are also available for public review at the Borough public affairs office, 350 E. Dahlia Ave., in Palmer. Please call Patty Sullivan, public affairs director for the Borough, at (907) 745-9577 to make arrangements to review the comments.

Project team members also provided project briefings at a



WENDY LONGTIN/HDR ALASKA

MORE THAN 317 COMMENTS have been collected, to date, from the public and agencies during the preliminary engineering and environmental analysis for the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project. Above, members of the public discuss the project with staff from the Alaska Railroad at a public meeting held in Wasilla in early October.

work session with the Borough Planning Commission on Nov. 5 and reviewed the matrix of proposed alignments at the Borough Assembly meeting on Nov. 20. A work session is planned for 3 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 11, to allow members of the Assembly time to review and evaluate the matrix.



HDR ALASKA INC.
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Questions or Comments?

Please contact:

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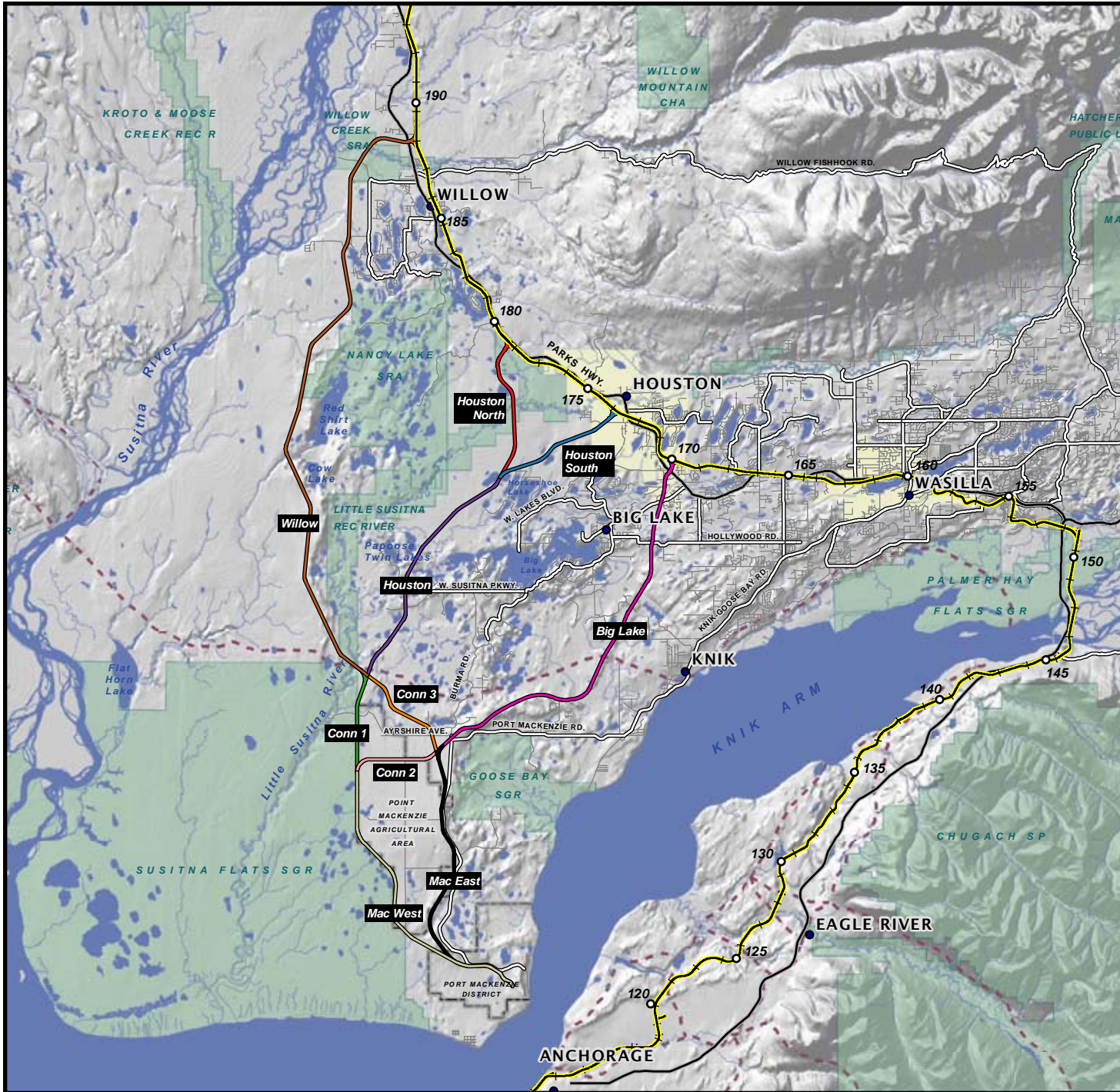
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ALTERNATIVES



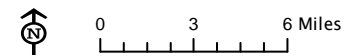
LEGEND

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Preliminary Alternatives* | —+— ARRC Track |
| — Mac East | ○ ARRC Milepost |
| — Mac West | — Highway |
| — Conn 1 | — Medium Rd. |
| — Conn 2 | — Minor Rd. |
| — Conn 3 | - - - Iditarod Trail |
| — Houston | ■ City Boundary |
| — Houston North | ■ Park or Refuge |
| — Houston South | |
| — Willow | |
| — Big Lake | |



*These lines generally represent corridors which are subject to further refinement.

This map represents a conceptual level of utility, detail, and accuracy. The information displayed here is for planning purposes only. Base information shown constitutes data from various federal, state, public, and private sources. These maps are for review purposes only and are not intended for use in securing permits, design or for construction purposes.



Date: November 5, 2007
 Projection: Alaska State Plane Zone 4, NAD 83
 Author: HDR Alaska, Inc.
 Sources: ADNRR, ARRC, HDR Alaska, Inc., MSB GIS, TNH- Hanson, USGS.

Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Criteria Matrix

PROPOSED ROUTES	CRITERION ^a										+/-	Total	Cost Estimate ^e (millions)	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10				
	Poor or Highly Compressible Soils (million cubic yards)	New Road Crossings (#)	Land Availability ^b (acres/mile)	Developed Parcels (#)	Designated Land Use ^c (acres)	Train Energy Required (horsepower-hours)	Wetlands (acres)	Mapped anadromous fish streams (#)	High Potential for Archeological Sites ^d (acres)	Fragmentation of designated refuges and recreation areas (yes/no)				
Mac West - Willow	0	+	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	-	1/6/3	-2	\$320	-
Mac West - Houston North	-	+	0	+	-	+	-	-	+		4/1/5	-1	\$250	0
Mac West - Houston South	0	+	0	+	-	0					5/5/2	+1	\$220	+
Mac West - Big Lake	+	-	-								7/7	-6	\$290	0
Mac East - Willow	0									-	4/4/2	+2	\$330	-
Mac East - Houston North	-							0	+	-	4/4/2	+2	\$260	0
Mac East - Houston South	0				+	0	+	0	+	+	6/4/0	+6	\$230	+
Mac East - Big Lake	+	-	0	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	4/1/5	-1	\$285	0

UPDATE!
 The Criteria Matrix has been updated since the newsletter was published.
 Go to: http://www.portmacrail.com/documents/matrix_12-18-07.pdf

a (+) Positive; (0) Neutral; (-) Negative. Criteria not weighted and routes are unranked.

b Large parcels of undeveloped land owned by the State of Alaska (land not specifically designated for parks or refuges),

Matanuska-Susitna Borough, University of Alaska, Mental Health Trust, and Alaska Native corporations.

c Lands that are designated for parks, refuges, or agricultural uses.

d Routes impacting greater than 500 acres were given a minus and

routes impacting less than 300 acres were given a plus.

e Costs do not include approximately \$10 million for loop track construction within the port (all alternatives)