

16 October, 2007

Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Port MacKenzie Rail Spur

Big Lake Community Council
P.O. Box 520931
Big Lake, Alaska 99652

Dear Board Members,

The Big Lake Community Council carefully considered the proposed rail spur routes being studied to connect Port MacKenzie to the existing railroad. We would like to share with you our concerns and suggestions for the route we support.

The west route is the one favored by our council as it has the least impact on our area. This route is mostly on borough, state or federal land and has minimal private property along the right of way. It would cross a number of our recreational trails but with crossings incorporated into the design of the route we feel it is a workable route. The route is also mostly on a natural moraine and would minimize wetland crossing. From the borough's perspective, this route would open up a large area of inaccessible land for sale and development, increasing the tax base. Finally, noise pollution caused by rail traffic would be generally far away from existing dwellings.

The central route is the least desirable route of the options presented. This route would impact a tremendous amount of private property and proximity to existing dwellings would create a noise pollution nightmare. Much of the route is wetlands and is in the Big Lake watershed area. Construction of a raised railbed crossing to the west and north of Big Lake would create essentially an earthen dam across a large part of this watershed. This would create havoc with the existing drainage pattern

and would have unknown consequences. This route would cross virtually every trail in and around Big Lake, resulting in many crossings to accomodate the trail users. We are also concerned about the negative impact on the borough from devaluing of property as a result of the rail line, potentially reducing tax revenues.

The eastern route is also not recommended due to the route crossing many private lands. Noise pollution would be another issue due to proximity to dwellings. This route would also require a road crossing at Hollywood and at Big Lake Road. It also crosses many wetlands and the Iditarod Trail. The main rail line is across the Parks north of the hiway, requiring an over or under pass to reach the main line.

The council is not opposed to the development of the port and supports a rail spur to service it. We are concerned about the character of the lake and its surrounding areas. This is one of the most prized recreational areas in this state and supports robust summer and winter recreational activities. It is also becoming increasingly popular with year round residents.

The recreational trail system in this area is extensive with thousands of miles in and around Big Lake. It is often called the gateway to the western Susitna Valley area and is extensively used by snowmobilers and dog mushers in the winter. I have enclosed a map of the major Big Lake trails with an approximation of the routes of the rail spur indicated. You will note that the central route crosses and recrosses many of the main trails in this area and many more that are not indicated. The western route has the least impact on the trail system.

Please consider our input during your decision making process. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

William O'Hara, President
Big Lake Community Council