

1 SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
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3 TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC MEETING
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5 DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
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7 FOR THE ALASKA RAILROAD CORPORATION'S
8
9 PROPOSED NORTHERN RAIL EXTENSION PROJECT
10
11 FINANCE DOCKET 35095
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Delta Junction, Alaska
January 15, 2009
5:00 p.m.

18 APPEARANCES:

19 Mr. Dave Navecky, Surface Transportation Board
20 Mr. Don Perrin, Alaska Department of Natural Resources
21 Mr. Alan Summerville, ICF
22 Ms. Melissa Elefante DuMond, ICF
23 Mr. Dave Johnson, ICF
24 Mr. Mike Nagy, ENTRIX
25

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. NAVECKY: Good evening, everyone. I think
3 we're ready to begin this evening's meeting. My name is
4 Dave Navecky with the Surface Transportation Board. And this
5 evening's meeting is to receive comments on the
6 Alaska Railroad's Proposed Northern Rail Extension, which would
7 extend their current main line from near North Pole down to
8 Delta Junction.

9 The board -- the Surface Transportation Board
10 is the federal agency within the government responsible for
11 authorizing railroads to construct and operate their rail lines
12 within the United States. The railroad filed a petition or
13 application with my agency in July of 2007 requesting the
14 authority to construct this railroad, and the board took the
15 lead in preparing the national -- the Environmental Impact
16 Statement under the National Environmental Policy Act.

17 The purpose of the Environmental Impact
18 Statement, or EIS, is to identify and disclose potential
19 impacts of the project and make those results available to the
20 public and agencies for review and comment. And, of course,
21 we're here tonight to receive your comments on the
22 Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

23 The meeting tonight will occur, and there will
24 be two formats. The initial format will be a formal meeting in
25 which we will receive oral comments from individuals interested

1 in speaking to the group formally. Your comments will be
2 recorded by a court reporter, and those transcripts will be
3 entered into the record and considered during the preparation
4 for the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

5 After we've run through the list of individuals
6 that would like to speak formally, we will adjourn that portion
7 of the meeting and then break off, and we will be free to
8 answer any questions one on one with you that you may have
9 about the project. More likely on the process of the project.
10 We may not know necessarily all the answers off the top of our
11 head on the details of the document. If you've seen the EIS
12 itself, it's a two-volume, 1,100-page document, and my memory
13 isn't that good.

14 And for those individuals who may be
15 interested, the court reporter will stay in the room if you'd
16 be more comfortable providing comments to her one on one rather
17 than in front of the group, and she will also transcribe your
18 comments as well.

19 The process, our environmental review process,
20 began approximately four years ago when the railroad initially
21 contacted my agency, the Surface Transportation Board,
22 expressing an interest in constructing this rail line. They
23 presented to us the whole, what we refer to as a spaghetti bowl
24 set of potential alignments that they had been studying over
25 the past year or two, and have been studied in the past by

1 others, and kind of gave those as our -- what they were
2 suggesting as our suite of alignments to select for
3 alternatives to evaluate in the EIS.

4 At that point we did not make any decision on
5 alternatives, but we began a process called scoping. And the
6 purpose of scoping is to collect comments from the public and
7 the agencies on issues that should be considered in the EIS,
8 potential impacts that should be addressed in the
9 Environmental Impact Statement, alternatives that should be
10 considered in the Environmental Impact Statement.

11 And we received written comments during that
12 process. And we also had public scoping meetings during that
13 scoping phase. And, in fact, we were in this very same room
14 for the scoping meeting we held here in Delta Junction. We
15 then took all those comments from individuals, the public and
16 the agencies, and finalized a scope of study for preparation of
17 the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

18 And it was that scope of study that guided our
19 efforts over the next year or two on data we needed to collect,
20 analyses we needed to complete, and the impacts we needed to
21 review and disclose in the Draft Environmental Impact
22 Statement. And that Draft Environmental Impact Statement, as
23 you may know, was issued last month, in December of 2008.

24 And we have a comment period for that draft
25 document that extends through February 2nd. After the comment

1 period closes, we will then take all those comments, and we
2 will address those comments in the Final Environmental Impact
3 Statement.

4 Within the Final Environmental Impact
5 Statement, my agency -- or actually the section that I work for
6 in the agency, referred to as the Section of Environmental
7 Analysis, will identify the environmentally preferred
8 alternative. The document is currently absent -- or silent on
9 that issue. And we will then recommend -- also recommend a
10 suite of mitigation measures, and those recommendations are
11 going to the actual three-member Surface Transportation Board.

12 The Surface Transportation Board will then take
13 the Final Environmental Impact Statement, the
14 Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and all the comments that
15 were received during our environmental review process and make
16 a decision on whether or not to license the construction and
17 operation of the rail line.

18 If they choose to issue the license, they will
19 identify which alternative the railroad has the authority to
20 construct and operate, and they will also choose which of the
21 environmental mitigation measures we recommended that they
22 adopt. Or they may also identify their own mitigation measures
23 that they may come up with as they review the Draft and
24 Final EISs and the comments in the record.

25 For tonight's meeting, we are interested in

1 receiving your comments on the project across the board. We'd
2 like to hear any comments you may have on the alternatives, if
3 you support the project. We would like to hear which
4 alternative you may prefer, if you have a preference. And it
5 would be most helpful to us if you identify a preference, the
6 reasons behind your preference. That will be very valuable to
7 us. If you oppose the project, we would also like to hear your
8 reasons for opposing the project. That helps us understand
9 where you're coming from and what your concerns are.

10 We would also like to hear from you in the area
11 of mitigation. The document identified a fairly lengthy list
12 of preliminary mitigation measures. If you think we should
13 have additional mitigation measures, we'd like to hear from you
14 on what those might be. If you'd like the existing mitigation
15 measures revised to, you think, would be something more
16 appropriate, we'd like to hear about that as well.

17 Again, that's a lot to provide us in your oral
18 comments. And we would also encourage you, if you feel it
19 would serve you appropriately, to provide us written comments.
20 And the written comments are due, again, on February 2nd.
21 Those written comments may be provided to us by mailing those
22 to us. And those need to be postmarked by February 2nd. You
23 may also provide us written comments through our Web site, and
24 we simply need to receive those comments through our Web site
25 by the end of the day on February 2nd.

1 Let's see if I'm forgetting something here.
2 There were a number of other federal and state agencies that
3 assisted us in the preparation of this Draft Environmental
4 Impact Statement, and through the environmental review process.
5 Those agencies either have permits to issue for the project, or
6 they have some type of approval or a grant that they need to
7 issue for the project. If the board were to approve the
8 licensing and construction of the project, the railroad would
9 still need to obtain those permits, approvals, or grants before
10 they can proceed with the construction and operation of the
11 railroad.

12 Those agencies that specifically assisted us on
13 the project as cooperating agencies are the U.S. Department of
14 Defense, Alaskan Command, the Bureau of Land Management, the
15 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Federal Railroad
16 Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, the
17 United States Coast Guard, and the Alaska Department of Natural
18 Resources.

19 Sitting to my right is Don Perrin with the
20 Alaska Department of Natural Resources. They also have a
21 slightly different role on the project, and that's why Don is
22 up here. And the Alaska Department of Natural Resources is
23 a -- although all the cooperating agencies are sponsoring
24 tonight's public meeting, DNR has a unique role in the meeting,
25 and I'll let Don explain what that is.

1 MR. PERRIN: Thanks, Dave. Hi. I'm Don Perrin with
2 the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources. And as
3 Dave said, DNR is a cooperating agency with the EIS, and we've
4 been working with the railroad and the STB and other agencies
5 to try to identify environmental concerns as well as right of
6 way and access concerns to minimize impacts on where folks go
7 and how they use the area.

8 In addition to being a cooperating agency in
9 the NEPA process, we're also entrusted with implementing a
10 state law that was passed in 2004 entitled Extension of the
11 Alaska Railroad. Now, that law allows the railroad to identify
12 a 500-foot-wide corridor from roughly North Pole all the way to
13 the Canadian border. At this time they've identified a
14 corridor from North Pole to Delta Junction. And at which time
15 they are licensed and construct the rail, then DNR will convey
16 200 foot of that corridor to the railroad, 100 foot either side
17 of the centerline, for operation of the rail.

18 Before DNR can reserve that corridor, we need
19 to make a finding, and we need to consult with affected
20 parties, including you folks, the public, on whether or not the
21 location of the rail line minimizes adverse effects on existing
22 rights of way and uses, and also whether or not it would affect
23 the construction, location, and operation of a gas pipeline.

24 So as I said, the railroad has done some
25 initial analysis, and they've submitted us their proposed route

1 that they want us to reserve. So what we're doing right now is
2 trying to consult with affected parties and find out where they
3 go and where they could be impacted by this rail. And
4 particularly in terms of access for hunting, fishing, trapping,
5 and other uses.

6 Once we've crafted what we call a proposed
7 decision that will include all the information we've collected
8 to date, in addition to locations that we think, after
9 consulting with you folks, need to be -- that the railroad
10 needs to provide crossings for, we will issue this proposed
11 decision and offer a 30-day public notice so folks can comment
12 back to us on what they think of it.

13 After that period, we'll analyze the comments
14 and we'll issue a final decision reserving the corridor. And
15 at this point we've just reserved the corridor. We have not
16 conveyed the land yet. So as I said earlier, we'll net down
17 the 500 feet to 200 feet, at which time the railroad actually
18 constructs the rail.

19 As Dave said, the project would require
20 numerous other state and federal permits, Fish & Game, stream
21 crossings, and right of ways for crossing navigable waters.
22 For these meetings we're interested in where you folks go, how
23 you get there, what do you use, and when do you go. And this
24 is not the only opportunity that you'll have, or that we'll
25 have to try to get information from you.

1 But we do have some maps in the back of the
2 room, and AJ can help you with those. And if you have time, if
3 you could take one of the markers there and just write down --
4 indicate where you go and where your access points are across
5 the rail, that will help us try to collectively figure out
6 where the best places are to keep folks going where they
7 traditionally have gone.

8 And if you have any questions about this DNR
9 involvement in this process, I'd offer you to call the Division
10 of Mining, Land and Water in Fairbanks at 451-2740. And that's
11 all I have at this point. Thanks.

12 MR. NAVECKY: Thanks, Don. So we'll begin in
13 the oral comments in a moment. I just wanted to just point out
14 that the oral comments and written comments are considered
15 equally, so if you don't speak this evening, that's no problem
16 for us. If you do speak this evening, you're certainly welcome
17 to submit written comments as well. We don't put any limit on
18 your method in which you provide your comments.

19 So far we only have a couple people signed up
20 to speak formally. When I call your name, if you could come to
21 the front of the room over here to my right. We have a couple
22 microphones. In addition to her transcribing away over there,
23 she also is recording it so she can catch anything she may miss
24 as she's typing. Come to the front of the room, state your
25 full name, and spell your last name for us if you could.

1 And again, we're looking for comments. After
2 we've completed the formal portion of the meeting, we'll break
3 up, and we'll be happy to try and answer any questions you may
4 have one on one related to the process or where we're going
5 from now or any of that nature. Let's see, the first person is
6 Peter Hallgren.

7 MR. HALLGREN: That's me.

8 MR. NAVECKY: If I pronounced it correctly, I
9 hope.

10 MR. HALLGREN: Yeah, that was pretty good. My
11 name is Peter S. Hallgren, H-a-l-l-g-r-e-n, and I'm the mayor
12 pro tem of the city of Delta Junction. We've got the mayor
13 here. And we have Dolly here, too. And we were authorized by
14 the city council to come and make the city council's comments.
15 So that's what I'm going to do.

16 MR. NAVECKY: Very good.

17 MR. HALLGREN: In essence, the city council
18 strongly supports the rail extension to Delta Junction on
19 Delta 1, alternative 1. And we have major concerns over the
20 Delta 2 alternative route. So I guess in short, if Delta 1 is
21 chosen, many of our concerns -- that's the one that goes down
22 to Jarvis Creek on the other side of the Delta River, and it
23 doesn't go right through the city limits. So if Delta 1 is
24 chosen, that would mitigate most of our concerns, environmental
25 concerns on this project.

1 So Delta 2 through the middle of the city
2 boundaries would cause needless safety, noise, and vibration
3 irritants to Deltans that are avoided by utilizing Delta 1.
4 And I noticed in here that you say there are no real noise or
5 vibration irritants, but I -- no adversely affected noise
6 vibration receptors.

7 However, if you're going to put a railroad
8 right through the middle of town, you're going to have three
9 main grade crossings, all three of the paved exits to the town
10 area from the Richardson Highway. It appears that you would be
11 crossing Tanana Loop Extension, Jack Warren, and Nistler Road.
12 Those are the three main paved roads that we've got. If you go
13 through there, you're going to be having warning noise --
14 warning horns.

15 And I don't think it would probably be too bad
16 right now, but we look and see the problems that the city of
17 Fairbanks has. And not to say that Delta ever would or would
18 want to become the size of the city of Fairbanks, ultimately
19 the -- a lot of people hope to connect to the continental rail
20 system. In which case we would likely see long freight trains
21 coming up going through Delta. They would have to slow down,
22 they would have to cross those three grades.

23 If you ended up with a freight train with 100
24 or 200 or 300 cars going through, you would be greatly
25 hindering the ambulance, fire, commuters to work in town, and

1 school busses, depending on when they would come through. And
2 it would be adding a lot of noise.

3 There are no easy ways to go if one of those
4 three roads is blocked to -- if Jack Warren is blocked, you
5 have to go miles out of your way to get around. If Nistler is
6 blocked, you have to go miles out of your way to get around.
7 And if Tanana Loop Extension is blocked, you have to go miles
8 out of your way to get around. So those would be major worries
9 for us on a good number of reasons.

10 Vibrations can be interesting around here.
11 We're used to shelling and bombing at the range. And a number
12 of people are used to their houses vibrating when there are
13 bombs going off several miles away. I know that on our unpaved
14 streets in town when we run the roller to pack things down, you
15 can often feel it several blocks away in your house. So
16 vibration isn't necessarily something that we wouldn't worry
17 about here. It's something that's noticed.

18 We would like to avoid the many problems
19 Fairbanks is having right now. If we're ever connected to the
20 continental rail system, it would be so much better with having
21 the railroad on the other side of the Delta River and cross at
22 Jarvis Creek. It wouldn't slow the rails down, it wouldn't
23 impact the public here.

24 And both of the alternatives have the same --
25 you know, the same spot for a terminal here in Delta on the

1 Alaska Highway. So the one we really like is Delta 1. Delta 2
2 appears to be highly problematic for us.

3 A number of other issues, it appears to us -- I
4 mean, we're not military, but we live here, and it appears to
5 us that the Striker Brigade training areas, the access on the
6 other side of the Delta River would be much better for the
7 military if it were at the Delta 1 alternative with the river
8 crossing at Jarvis Creek. So I point that out.

9 The city council generally likes to take the
10 time, wherever we're given the time, to say that we do not
11 support high-speed commuter as a means of having soldiers who
12 serve at Fort Greely live in Fairbanks. We can come up with a
13 whole pile of reasons why we don't think it's good. We're not
14 trying to tell the military their job, but it appears to be a
15 bad idea, not just economically, but also for the services that
16 they provide.

17 I think somewhere in here you mention that
18 there is no public transport between Delta and Fairbanks.
19 There actually is. For many years there's been a van that goes
20 up -- a public van that goes up on a daily basis during the
21 weekdays. And that still continues.

22 Lastly, we have some concerns, and we'd like to
23 have those addressed further. Concerns about restricted in
24 crossing the tracks for hunters and recreationists. When we
25 read in there that you wouldn't be able to cross the tracks and

1 go down the right of way except at designated spots, that
2 probably won't sit too well with a whole lot of people. So
3 anyway, that's -- we would like that further explored. So
4 thank you very much.

5 MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.
6 Next is Mary Leith-Dowling.

7 MS. LEITH-DOWLING: Well, he just gave my whole
8 speech. Here's my name, Mary Leith-Dowling. And I'm mayor of
9 Delta Junction, and I -- basically I'm confirming what he just
10 said. The council has taken the stand that we are in favor of
11 this. We think it would be a very positive -- going to have a
12 very positive effect to our community.

13 It would hopefully keep some of the convoys off
14 the road when you're driving to Fairbanks, which is something
15 that we would love to see. Most of this part of the world
16 would like to see that you don't have to get caught behind
17 convoys.

18 And there is some concern about how many
19 passenger transports per day and what possible negative
20 effects, even though we all like the positives of it that you
21 could get on a passenger transport and leave your car in
22 Delta Junction and go to Fairbanks and catch a plane and know
23 that your car is in the garage and catch the ride back, we're
24 all pretty positive about that. So that's a real plus.

25 And the access to the other side of the river.

1 Already I've had several people tell me, you mean they're going
2 to build a bridge across the river and there's no way we can
3 get over there when there's land that we have over there? And
4 finally there's something that would hopefully make it so that
5 we could -- you know, we could get to it? And I've had several
6 people say that to me, so this obviously is a -- you know,
7 there's quite a bit of this feel in the community.

8 And so I just want to confirm that the city of
9 Delta Junction is in favor, and we really would rather not have
10 number 2 and having you crossing all of the major paved roads.
11 And, you know, we've taken a stand that number 1 is the only
12 one we're in favor of.

13 MR. NAVECKY: Okay. Thank you for your
14 comments. Okay. Those are the only two individuals that had
15 signed up to speak formally. Is there anyone else that would
16 like to come up and speak formally? Calling once, calling
17 twice.

18 Okay. We'll then close the formal portion of
19 tonight's meeting. And again, the court reporter will remain
20 here in case you'd like to speak with her one on one and not in
21 front of an audience of folks. And we will also be available
22 to answer any questions you may have about the -- our
23 environmental review process and where we're going to go from
24 here. Thank you very much for coming this evening.

25 (Off record)

PUBLIC COMMENTS

STEVE JOSLIN: Steve Joslin, J-o-s-l-i-n.

Let's see, I'm with the State of Alaska Division of Forestry, and we have been putting in access throughout the Delta area for access in timber sales. And we would like to see access accommodated for the road crossings, timber sales, the ones that are already there, plus some that are planned for the future.

And we'd like to see the bare minimum for the Delta River crossing would be a -- at least a single land bridge with -- that's open to state business. And it could be gated. Once we get to the other side we can build our own roads, but it would be nice if there is a road there. That's it. The same thing would apply down by Delta Creek and Delta Road.

MR. MORRIS: Jack Morris, M-o-r-r-i-s. And the comment I was making, I'm all in favor of the railroad coming through. I hope someday it goes on into Canada.

The one thing that I -- when Pogo went in, we voiced our opinions to have the road not a public road going to the Pogo. And we view the railroad the same. The river crossings at the Tanana and at the Jarvis not to be open for the general public. The state, the federal, you know, people with a business and stuff like that on the railroad, but not just an open gate that the general public can go in.

1 The environment over there as far as erosion
2 goes because of the wetlands, the military is already in there,
3 and the game populations, it just won't take that kind of
4 abuse. And so if there's any way not allow general public
5 usage of the right of ways across the rivers, both on the
6 Tanana and the Jarvis. Like, forestry, you know, they build
7 their own roads over there and anything else. The military,
8 they can do theirs and stuff like that. They can use that
9 crossing, but not the general public. That's what we want to
10 keep off this. Okay? Thank you.

11 (END OF PROCEEDINGS)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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2 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)
3 STATE OF ALASKA) ss.

4 I, Crystal D. Scotti, Notary Public in and for the
5 State of Alaska, residing at North Pole, Alaska, and electronic
6 reporter for Liz D'Amour & Associates, Inc., do hereby certify:

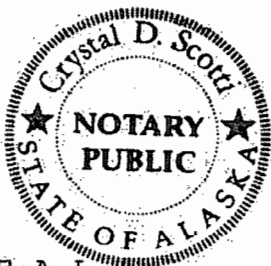
7 That the annexed and foregoing Public Meeting was taken
8 before me on the 15th day of January 2009, beginning at the
9 hour of 5:00 p.m., at Jarvis West Building, Milepost 1420.5
10 Alaska Highway, Delta Junction, Alaska;

11 That this meeting, as heretofore annexed, is a true and
12 correct transcription of the testimony of all parties, taken by
13 me and thereafter transcribed by me;

14 That the transcript has been retained by me for the
15 purpose of filing the same with Ms. Melissa Elefante DuMond,
16 Project Manager, ICF International, 9300 Lee Highway, Fairfax,
17 Virginia 22031;

18 That I am not a relative or employee or attorney or
19 counsel of any of the parties, nor am I financially interested
20 in this action.

21 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and
22 affixed my seal this 26th day of January 2009.



23 S E A L

24 Crystal Scotti
25 Crystal D. Scotti
Notary Public in and for Alaska
My Commission Expires: 9/15/2010