

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
SECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

PORT MACKENZIE RAIL EXTENSION PROJECT
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

Big Lake, Alaska

April 7, 2010

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Big Lake, Alaska - April 7, 2010)

(On record - 6:30 p.m.)

MR. NAVECKY: Okay, folks. I think we're about ready to begin if you could please have your seats. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for attending this public comment meeting on the draft environmental impact statement or EIS for the proposed Port MacKenzie rail extension. I would like to officially call this meeting to order. I am Dave Navecky of the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis otherwise known as SEA. The board is the federal agency responsible for constructing and operating -- for authorizing the construction and operation of new rail lines and associated facilities. In December 2008 the Alaska Railroad Corporation filed a request for authority to construct and operate approximately 30 to 45 miles of new rail line and related support facilities from the Port MacKenzie district to a point on the existing Alaska Railroad mainline between Wasilla and just north of Willow. The Mat-Su Borough is working with the railroad as a sponsor to the proposed rail line and is responsible for obtaining funds to conduct environmental reviews and preliminary engineering for the proposed rail line. The Surface Transportation Board is the lead federal agency responsible for preparing the CIS which is intended to identify and evaluate potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed rail

line. We also have three cooperating agencies assisting in the preparation of the EIS. They are the US Army Corp of Engineers, the Federal Railroad Administration and the US Coast Guard. Sitting in the audience this evening with us is Ben Soiseth, to my left, of the US Army Corp of Engineers. Tonight, we do not have representatives from the other two agencies. A team of consultants led by ICF International assisted my office, SEA, in preparing the EIS. At the table with me is Alan Summerville, project manager for ICF EIS activities.

If you have not already done so, please sign in at the table to my right and indicate whether you are interested in providing oral comments on the draft EIS at tonight's meeting. This meeting is part of the draft EIS stage of the environmental review process conducted by the board and the cooperating agencies. As you know, the draft EIS was issued last month and we are now accepting comments on the document. Prior to preparing the draft EIS we conducted agency and public scoping meetings to listen to your questions and concerns. The information you provided helped us frame our analysis and understand your concerns about the project and helped us finalize the scope of study for the EIS which was issued in July of 2009. This final scope of studies served as our guide concerning what to address in the draft EIS.

After the draft EIS comment closes on May 10th, we will review all of the hearing transcripts from tonight's meeting,

last night's meeting and the four additional meetings we will be convening and all written comments and we will prepare written responses to all substantive comments. All comments, the hearing transcripts and all comment responses that we prepare will be published in the final EIS. The Surface Transportation Board will then issue a final decision on the proposed project based on the transportation merits of the proposed rail line, the contents of the draft and final EISs and all public and agency comments in the public record. This final decision will take one of three actions; approve the proposed rail line, deny it or approve it with mitigating conditions including environmental conditions. Construction, if approved by the board could not begin unless and until the cooperating agencies issue their final decisions approving or permitting the proposed rail line. The handout that we provided with you this evening contains additional information about this environmental review process.

Whether you speak tonight or not, you can also provide us with handwritten comments this evening by filling out the last page of your handout and turning it in at the sign in table. We also have blank comment forms at the sign in table if you like. Oral and written comments are given equal consideration and weight so if you choose not to speak this evening, your written comments will be fully considered. In addition, this evening is just one option for you to provide comments. We are accepting written comments until May 10th. And then you may use the

comment forms provided to you this evening or your own handwritten or typed comment letters. Your handout provides the information you need to submit your written comments either by mail or electronically via our website. In preparing your written comments, we encourage you to be as detailed as possible in describing your concerns. We are also interested in receiving comments on the potential project impacts, your opinions on the preferred alternative, adequacy of the preliminary mitigation and draft EIS, the purpose and need for the project and the need for additional mitigation. We also encourage you to provide us with questions you may have about the EIS or the impacts that are contained in the EIS or the mitigation or whatever your concerns are. By providing us those comments in writing we will then be obligated to answer those questions in writing in the final EIS.

In a minute I will begin calling on those individuals who would like to speak. Your oral comments will be documented by the court reporter located to my right. When I call your name, please approach the microphone then state and spell your first and last name for the benefit of the audience and for our court reporter. To ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak, each person will be limited to approximately five minutes. If we do not have enough individuals, if we have extra time at the end, that everyone has spoken that has signed up, I will then poll the audience for anyone that would like to speak that has

not yet signed up. And then once everyone has had an opportunity to speak, if anyone that has already spoken would like to come back up to the microphone, they will be given an additional five minutes until the end of the meeting at 8:30.

At this time, I would like to invite Dan Kruse, our first commentor, to the microphone. Again, if you could state and spell your first and last name for the court reporter.

MR. KRUSE: Okay. Dan, D-A-N, Kruse, K-R-U-S-E. I'm here to speak on behalf of the Big Lake Trails Organization, a nonprofit organization responsible for managing the 130 miles of Mat-Su Borough endorsed trails that are under ordinance in the greater Big Lake area. I have provided a map of these trails to you to help you follow along. And what I am going to read into the record is the feedback from our organization, after looking at these trails, their potential impact and then our preferred recommendation. Okay.

First, who am I. I am the vice president of Big Lake Trails. I'm also a member of Mat-Su Trails. I was a member of the Big Lake Comprehensive Planning Team. I am also a member -- a steering member of the multimillion dollar Wasilla to Big Lake Trail Committee that is currently looking at trails coming into Big Lake. I'm also the project manager of the project we just installed nine miles down the Iron Dog to remove a property -- private property conflict. And that's my night job. My day job for the last seven years, I have been the manager of the larger

North American oilfield, Prudhoe Bay. So that's where I'm coming from. Okay.

Trails are a vital part of the environmental, social, historical and economic fabric of Big Lake. Both secured and non-secured trails provide a critically important stimulus to the Big Lake economy. They provide value, recreational opportunities for residents, and provide required transportation links to cabins, settlements and other communities. The rail extension through Big Lake is of grave concern to all trail users, because it threatens to permanently divide, damage or destroy the tapestry of the community that so many of us have so carefully woven with these trails. The attached map that you have in front of you shows the impact of the proposed rail alignments it will have on the Big Lake trail system. Those are the orange arrows intersecting rail and trail points.

The proposed rail extensions will impact Big Lake recreational trails as follows. The Big Lake route currently intersects and conflicts with trails in two locations. Not shown of course is the conflict that we believe will occur with the proposed Wasilla to Big Lake trail currently under study. This proposed trail, when developed, will be of economic importance to the whole Mat-Su Borough. The Willow route, it intersects and conflicts with trails in three locations as shown on the map. The Houston routes, both north and south, they intersect and conflict with trails in seven locations. By the way, we have 15

trails in Big Lake spanning 130 miles.

Now the trails are important to Big Lake. Many residents and non-residents joined together a couple of years ago as guardians of these current trails and essentially formed Big Lake Trails, a nonprofit, and we have 100 members in our organization today, one of the largest trail organizations in the state. Many of our citizens rely on this organization to protect the area trails and the members in the board of Big Lake Trails have unanimously approved the following position as it applies to the rail extension through Big Lake. Real quickly.

The Willow route provides the best alternative for the community because it provides the least conflict with private property owners and will minimally impact legally protected trails. It is our understanding that these legally protected trails will be provided with adequate crossings and they will allow us -- allow use of the general public as well as grooming access for large groomers that will enable us to maintain these trails. Choosing this route may have the unintended benefit of opening up land to the west of Big Lake, we understand that, allowing for the growth of the borough tax base and allowing for future westward expansion of our road system. This would be viewed as a positive benefit of the rail extension versus a negative.

Secondly, the if the Willow route were to be removed from consideration, the Big Lake route to the south would be our

second, but poor choice. Clearly, the Big Lake route has the least impact to recognized trails. Unfortunately it does have a high impact on private property owners and property ownership.

Lastly, the two Houston routes are totally unacceptable to our trail users because of the very high impact on our existing trails under ordinance and to private property owners. It would be better for the STB, Service Transportation Board, to take the no action alternative rather than to consider either the north or south Houston routes. These routes would completely destroy winter recreational trail opportunities and would create high noise and safety issues for property owners. Our position is supported by many residents of the community, the current Big Lake Comprehensive Planning Team, the Big Lake Community Council, the Big Lake Chamber of Commerce. It is our hope that the Surface Transportation Board recognizes the right of this community to manage change in a way that fits our lifestyle, our vision for the future. Any funding concerns or politics that have to come into play regarding choosing either of the Houston routes needs to take a backseat to the destruction of the quality of our life. The additional rail options for consideration in your draft EIS located to the south of the routes I just discussed namely Conn 1, Conn 2, Conn 3, Mac West, Mac East do not present conflicts with our existing trail system. Therefore, we have no state of position or preference. Big Lake stands ready to work with your engineers to help ensure that adequate

design working on our future trail crossings with whatever rail option is selected. It goes through to the best that we can do. So please feel free to contact us. I've got, of course, this letter submitted into the record.

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. Thank you very much. Before we.....

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Before we go onto the next speaker, I just wanted to mention a couple housekeeping things or one housekeeping thing. The women's restroom is located right here to my right. The men's restroom is a little more difficult to find. It's back behind the curtain also on the right side wall. And also I wanted to add that after this formal component of tonight's meeting where we are receiving your comments and questions on the record through the court reporter, I will adjourn the meeting and -- but myself and the members of the ICF team will be available to discuss with you one-on-one any general questions you might have about the -- our environmental review process, where we go from here or anything of that nature. Next I would like to call Grace Whedbee, please.

MS. WHEDBEE: Good afternoon, my name is Grace Whedbee, G-R-A-C-E W-H-E-D-B-E-E, and my topic tonight is is the rail extension necessary. Is the port a viable port or is it just a build it and they will come pie in the sky dream? Is Port MacKenzie is not a good business deal, then the rail extension is

not necessary and a huge waste of the taxpayer's dollars. Proper demographics have never been done on the port, just maybes. Shipping customers nor shipping mines have ever been committed to any type of contract. There are a few customers -- or a few companies that are leasing space at the port. And this is probably hindered because the roads are atrocious and the commute to the port takes an hour. They are -- there's no areas anywhere out there for employees in the industrial commercial complex or is there anyplace to build anything in this protected agricultural area.

The port of Anchorage on the other hand started their expansion in 2004 and they are planning to complete it in 2014. And due to their expansion, the only item that is still vital in the purpose statement made by the borough is the fact that they can accommodate ships that have a deeper draw. All the other points in there are now void. However, at this time they only have one deep draft dock, 1200 feet, with one conveyor belt for dry goods. The borough brags about the money that they made from the dockage of one ship in their financial report; however, we have to question whether the exorbitant cost that was incurred to the customer due to the extreme time frame they had to sit there waiting to be loaded or unloaded was due because the port does not have adequate equipment that contributes to the lack of current or future customers. At this time the port has no equipment for loading or unloading anything other than the dry

goods. The port's ability to expand beyond their current condition is extremely questionable. Port MacKenzie is at the narrowest point in the Knik Arms and it has a 41 foot tidal action of the area, which is one of the greatest actions anywhere in the North American continent. The water goes from a large body of water into a very small canal. And by the way, the port was not this deep until the earthquake of 1964 which rendered the Knik Arms unnavigable and made this port a lot deeper. Now we are in -- we're sitting right in the middle of an earthquake fault in an earthquake belt. If these other earthquake area could have made this fall, what happens if we have an earthquake right here in this area? And by the way it's very important to point out we had four earthquakes today on the Castle Mountain fault and no one seems to think that is a problem. We are destined for a much larger quake.

The port of Anchorage's protection for all of their ships -- and this is pointed out by the fact that they do have to dredge every year -- they're in a protected area. And where the water has the least flow is where the sediment is going to happen. The port on -- Port MacKenzie on the other hand has rapidly moving water and they don't have any sediment that goes there. But by the same token, the speed of the water, the amount of riptides that they have, the tremendous amount of ice flow, breakage off of the glaciers that comes through there puts any ship that is in that port in a very perious [sic] condition and

it makes it a dangerous situation for a ship to use that port.

It is totally exposed.

They have used a tremendous amount of riffraff to build our bulkheads. In fact, some of the largest riffraff they had to import as far away as the Pebble Mines, because there was not that large of rocks in this area to put in there as riffraff. This large amount of riffraff has totally helped to plug off, close off and narrow the Knik arms making the water run faster at a much more dangerous situation than it ever has been in the past.

MR. NAVECKY: One more minute, please.

MS. WHEDBEE: Okay. Any further expansion on this port will make this much more dangerous. The effects of this narrowing effects our salmon. They migrate through this area. But more importantly than that, these salmon are the food to the beluga whale. This is the number one area for beluga whale in this -- the whole area. Beluga whale went on the endangered species list in 2008, in October, because we went from 5,000 in 1970 down to only 300 today. In fact, NOAA clearly states that they will not approve our bridge across Knik Arms because of the damage it could do to the whales. The Corp of Engineers states that this bridge itself could change the currents and cause more sediment to the port of Anchorage, which is a federally funded project. And as I am sure you are well aware, federal money can not be made available to anything that interferes with a

federally funded project. So this money can -- no money can come from the federal government if it's going to interfere with Anchorage. If the bridge pier can do this, what will having all of this riffraff do? So therefore I have to say -- state that the port of Anchorage is considered to be a strategic national security and defense port. It only makes sense that this riffraff is going to cause more problems.

Another area to ponder is why would a state this small in population need two ports within two nautical miles of each other? And why would a rail line that will save only 35 miles be necessary if the freight is being shipped from the interior averaging 1000 miles? Does 35 additional miles really make a significant difference at five cents a ton mile? Please give the no action item great thought at this time. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next I'd like to call in Mike Whedbee, please.

MR. WHEDBEE: My name is Mike Whedbee, that's M-I-K-E, last name Whedbee, W-H-E-D-B-E-E. And I just had a couple of things I wanted to address tonight and I'll submit this one -- what is is, I've got pictures of an eagle's nest, just a brand new eagle's nest in the adjoining property to me right in the sound area of the railroad. The nest is three years old. They nested last year and had little ones for the first time and then

I'm sure they'll be returning this year. That was item one I wanted to submit for your review.

The second one I wanted to address was dealing specifically with my runway. I have a runaway, it's a private runway. It's Kucera Airport and it was addressed in the first EIS saying that if the Houston south route was chosen, that that runway would have to be closed. It wasn't addressed in the second EIS anywhere that I found in it. I haven't gone through all the -- the whole -- I haven't gone through the whole EIS, but I didn't see anywhere that it was addressed. A little bit of history about the Kucera Airport. I don't know if it's on the historical register, but it was put in by the late Herb Brazil (ph), as I understand it, so it's 50, 60 years old -- or 40 or 50 years old probably. It was the primary access to the property that he acquired. And the person that I acquired the property from was the Kuceras and they had heired the property from Brazil. I purchased the property as an airport development three years ago and it's divided into four parcels. If this runway -- or this runway is our commuter runway for work in Anchorage. If this runway is used -- this runway was used to evacuate people during the Miller's Reach fire as well as other rescue operations. Losing this runway would be financially devastating to our family as well as changing our entire lifestyle. We currently have three families that live in the development and we plan on developing it further. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next I like to call Doug Smole, please.

MR. SMOLE: Thank you and good evening. I'm a 40 year resident in Alaska and 10 year resident.....

MR. NAVECKY: Could you spell your last name for the court reporter.....

MR. SMOLE: Smole.....

MR. NAVECKY:please?

MR. SMOLE: S-pO-L-E. Really, my name is Harry Douglas Smole. I'm a retired dentist. And I'm one of many people that built a future retirement home in the Big Lake community and I'm speaking on behalf of myself and other friends of the lake -- of the lakes in general. Excuse me. The need for improved infrastructure to allow for the prudent use of Alaska's vast natural resources is important. Equally important is the necessity for Alaskans and visitors to safely gain access to the lands for recreation and development. Less than two percent of Alaska's 572,000 square miles of land in Alaska is under private ownership. Prudence and logic dictates that constructions of projects such as this railroad spur should avoid adverse impact on that paucity of privately held land and should avoid adverse impact on the quality of human life.

The greater Big Lake community has been on record as early in my time in Big Lake as 1992, 2003, 2007 in opposition to

various proposed railroad routings that would seriously impact the essential features that enhance this major recreational area. The area is growing in population with a greater number of full time residents. The 2000 -- 10 years ago I think the population was in the range of 2600 residents. We're 10 years later had a census and it's much larger. And I don't believe that that figure includes those people that have a stake in this area that have recreational interests and property with an eye toward future retirement here. So this is essentially one of the larger communities being considered for these various routes.

Many homes are constructed, as I said, for future retirement. So Little Horseshoe Lake in the northwest corner of Horseshoe Lake where I live has had more than 20 new homes, good quality homes constructed since the Big Lake fire. As we all know, there was a study in 2003 commissioned by the borough and conducted by Tryck Nyman and Hayes that rejected what is now known as the Houston South route referred to as Route 4 in that study because it appeared to have the largest level of impact on wetlands and did not receive public support. The same study indicated that the Willow route was the best route and was strongly supported by the strategic planner for the Alaska Railroad, Mr. Bruce Carr. Appendix M to that study has his comments in which he expresses his relief that the railroad spur in the Willow area was to be away from a population area thereby avoiding the need to relocate railroads as now is happening in

Wasilla and in Fairbanks.

Additionally in the area of the Houston South route, there's a very unique hydrological drainage system that needs consideration and I'll address that in the interest of time in another comment, but it's quite unique and it's separate from the Big Lake drainage and I'm not sure that everyone here knows that it is different and it affects the overflow of the Little Su and the water levels in our area.

MR. NAVECKY: One more minute, please.

MR. SMOLE: And then one of my frustrations. I came across a fact book, a nice, glossy brochure from the borough, and it's called the fact book. In that book they talked about the formation of a regional transportation organization wherein the borough, Anchorage Municipality, legislative committees, the military and the railroad would coordinate their transportation activities. That was a great concept, but it is now defunct. It's obvious that coordination is not occurring. Examples of that, we have seemingly competitive port activities going on. We have a ferry under construction that doesn't have a place to dock in Anchorage. And so we don't have the coordination of the various stakeholders in these projects. And unless this kind of coordination can really happen, I would suggest a no build until the various entities can talk to one another, coordinate and plan for the long term. Too many projects in this state have been supported with government money that have been failures because

the money was made available before the plan. And there are many examples of that and we all know what they are. And I urge you to consider the no build unless there's clear evidence that all entities are working together on a plan.

And our Senator Huggins told me in this very room about three weeks ago, that's one of his dreams before he leaves the legislature is to have a strategic plan for the state of Alaska. It seems like common sense to me. Let's get the plan first and then the money. But that isn't the way it happens in this state and I hope that changes. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next I'd like to call Cathi Kramer, please.

MS. KRAMER: I will be brief. It angers me that we have to come and.....

MR. NAVECKY: Could you spell your name.....

MS. KRAMER: Oh, I'm sorry.

MR. NAVECKY:please for.....

MS. KRAMER: Cathi, C-A-T-H-I, Kramer, K-R-A-M-E-R.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you.

MS. KRAMER: And I represent Horseshoe Lake Firewise Community. And I just want to voice my opinion. It angers me that we have to keep coming to these meetings and saying the same thing over again and over again and over again. I feel like

we're not being heard. We live in.....

(Applause)

MS. KRAMER: Horseshoe Lake is going to be affected by the Houston route greatly. We lost 26 homes in the Miller's Reach fire in our area alone. That railroad is coming right through our neighborhood. We are the only Firewise Community in the whole Mat-Su Borough. My -- the members of my community spend thousands of hours volunteering their time trying to rebuild and improve the area as well as going out into the bigger Greater Big Lake and trying to teach people about Firewise. You folks are trying to put a railroad in an area that is a very high fire risk area. This is a borough map. High fire risk. Both Big Lake routes, Houston and Big Lake routes, run right through high fire risk. You guys start another fire with that railroad and you're going to destroy our homes again. This is not a good idea. You folks need to listen to what people have been saying, go back to what we said before and read it. I do not support this and I think you guys need to vote for a no approval of this. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Next I'd like to call Greg Strong, please.

MR. STRONG: My name is Gregory Strong, S-T-R-O-N-G, and I want to echo what Mrs. Whedbee pointed out to you a little bit ago and that was that 20 years ago there were 1300 beluga

whales in the Cook Inlet. Today there's 300. Now I'm not an environmentalist. I'm a pro-development fellow. I develop real estate for a living, so I like to have people living where there's a possibility of getting jobs. But I'm also the kind of guy that likes planning and I'm like the kind of guy that doesn't like to see residential neighborhoods and subsequent property values destroyed for the luxury of a legacy project that bureaucrats are trying to install upon us.

Now the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, also known as NOAA, and their fishery service, which is their administrative arm, has worked with the Alaska Fisheries Science Center and published a report. And the name of that report that they published was the Status Review and Extinction of the Cook Inlet Belugas. This parallels another report entitled a Final Environment Impact Statement issued under the auspices of the Marine Mammal Protection Act through their operational arm known as the Conservation Plan. On Page 71 of that plan it says, under habitat alteration, number 2, which is a priority, that action must be taken to foster salmon recovery and conserve salmon habitat so that this food is available for these beluga whales. Taking away the food source for any mammal is obviously going to result in extinction.

Now you'll notice that paper that I gave you has a tab. And that tab shows you what Mr. Smole was referring to and that is that there is a watershed that's unique to this place and

there's a watershed that's 20 miles long and it runs just west of Horseshoe Lake and it goes into the Little Su. Now that's different than the Big Lake watershed that goes into Cook Inlet. Now if you divide that watershed with a earthen dam to support a rail line and a 200 foot wide right-of-way to support an access road -- and in addition now apparently there's discussion in the legislature to add to that phenomenon a bullet line for gas -- you are going to effectively bisect and destroy a watershed that produces salmon that feeds the beluga whales. Now again, not being an environmentalist, I can only speculate that the environmental community is going to tie this thing up for years. And in so doing, this project will in fact become cost ineffective. This project will under its own weight, because the federal government has basically said you're going to not take away the food source for the beluga whales. This plan clearly does that and I'm afraid that there are a number of environmental organizations in this state when they get into this that are going to stop this project in its tracks. And I think most of us in this room are going to become an environmentalist for a moment to see that happen. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next I would like to call Robert DeLoach. I don't know if I pronounced that correctly.

MR. DELOACH: My name is Robert DeLoach, R-O-B-E-R-T

D-E-L-O-A-C-H. I'm here tonight representing the Big Lake Chamber of Commerce as a president for the Chamber of Commerce for 2008-2009. Our current president, Margaret Billinger is here, but she was a little late. One of the things that I want to say, first of all, is that the chamber is very much in favor of the port project and also in favor of its tie-in to the existing rail lines that exist in the primary state rail system in the state.

We are very concerned on several areas about some factors that involve the routes that you're considering. The Houston route, for example, as has been pointed out already here tonight, not only it impacts the trail system of the Big Lake area, which we -- the Big Lake Chamber of Commerce has been very active in trail preservations over the last several years, but it very much impacts the trail system that is in the Big Lake area.

In addition, it's also been pointed out that the watershed system -- I'm also a real estate broker and a construction company owner, and the -- as a real estate broker I have seen the watershed programs. I've got a big book that's about this thick with all the maps and so forth of the drainages in this particular area. And should you build a levy that was -- talking about a little bit earlier on which to build the railroad tracks and all of its supporting area, you're going to transact that area and have a major change on the inflow of the water

systems in the Big Lake drainage area.

Additionally, it is my opinion that the Willow route, the north route, is the one that's going to obviously impact very much less any of the residential areas. I also have property in the Horseshoe Lake area, but I live in beautiful downtown Big Lake right now. But it's going to very much impact the Horseshoe Lake area because there is some -- a lot of very nice residences in that area and this proposed -- the Houston route proposes to cut right through it.

The Willow route would not only open up additional area for people to expand into trail areas and to have access to a greater portion of our continent, our area that we have here, and it would less impact because of that particular route covers a lot more of state owned and borough owned land whereas doesn't involve private properties. So I don't want to belabor this and take up a lot of your time, but Big Lake Chamber of Commerce would like to come out in favor of the port and specifically in the Willow route. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: And next I would like to call Ken Walsh, please.

MR. WALSH: My name is Ken Walsh, W-A-L-S-H, first name Ken, K-E-N. First suggestion, I'd recommend that in your next meetings you have a podium or a table or something where people

can lay their materials. I think it would really help out the people that are trying to give you information.

I'm a resident of Big Lake. I'm a civil engineer by profession. I lived in Alaska for 40-some years, in the Big Lake area for about five years. I am the chair of the Big Lake Community Council Transportation Committee but I'm here tonight speaking as an individual. The handout that I gave you is primarily to show the residential lot development within the community council area. I had hoped to expand that map to take it on up to Willow, and if it would be helpful I can do that for you and submit it before your May deadline. But I didn't see anything in the EIS report that really addressed the density of residential development and this is an attempt to try to fill that gap.

I need to compliment you on the effort you made on the EIS report. For a technical person, it's probably pretty good. It has a lot of good and informative maps, but I got to tell you for a public group the information that you can get out of the report is very difficult to come by. It is technically written. It is not easy to pull together and I don't know if there is some way to develop some better matrixes for bringing that information to the attention to the public or not, but it really is difficult for us to digest a document like that, 500 and some pages, in the very short time that you've given us to look it over.

I do want to say that I do speak in favor of the rail

extension and of the port. I, like many others, have some very deep concerns over the Houston route. And I'm going to get into those in a little bit, but I'm speaking primarily from the community's quality of life viewpoints. The Big Lake area, if you have had a chance to review our comprehensive plan, you see that our goal is for kind of a laid back, quiet, rural, quiet community with recreational development as being probably our core sustaining industry. The area of the Houston route runs right through that core development area, both the Houston South and the Houston North. They go through valuable lake front property, they go through the area that is the primary winter recreational area for both dog mushers and snow machiners and it is probably the -- well, it is the least attractive area for a rail development of any of the area that you have considered. So I very much am opposed to the Houston route.

I do favor as the most favorable route the Willow route to the west. This provides a corridor that sort of encompasses what we consider are valuable recreational lands. With the railroad is going to come further development. That is far enough from the Parks Highway development that it probably provides a reasonable alternative for industry and businesses and development, far enough away from the Parks Highway route that it makes some sense logistically speaking.

I am concerned with some of the information in the study that you've done with the EIS. There is some

misinformation. Some of it's been already been talked about. I think there's some concern about the seismic fault areas that as been already brought up. There is some concern about some of the watershed areas. I noticed that on your project development plan at least one of the routes for road development, the Burma Road, is shown on the wrong locations. There seem to be some substantial errors in that report and I'm hoping that during this process of public input some of those can be addressed or at least noticed and in the final report. Perhaps some of those areas can be corrected.

There is a no alternative option that you talk about obviously with each of the considerations and I'm not sure what your criteria is for determining that the no action alternative has no impact. If you look at impact caused by railroad construction, that's obviously true. If you look at impacts caused by what it's going to do for highway traffic, heavy truck traffic, the impacts are tremendous. And I think the rail alternative, particularly with the Willow route, reduces the load, traffic load that would otherwise be picked up by surface transportation trucks. And we've got some very serious problems, all the same problems you talk about with the rail extension except with the highway transportation mode with a much more severe impact I believe than what the rail option is. So if you can re-look at your evaluation of the no impact status of the no build option, I would certainly like to see that addressed.

MR. NAVECKY: One more minute, please.

MR. DELOACH: Pardon?

MR. NAVECKY: One more minute, please.

MR. DELOACH: I'll think cut it short. Thank you for letting us have this opportunity. I appreciate your work. I wouldn't want your job for all the money in the world and good luck.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next is Noreen Austermuhl.

MS. AUSTERMUHL: Good evening.

MR. NAVECKY: Could you, again.....

MS. AUSTERMUHL: Yeah, it's N-O-R-E-E-N A-U-S-T-E-R --
Noreen Austermuhl.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you.

MS. AUSTERMUHL: The biggest concern I have is the Houston route. That is the one that should not be used at all. I understand the problems with the Willow route and with the South Big Lake route and the impact that they will have is nothing compared to what the Houston route would do to the community, the watershed, the fish, anything. That one should just be crossed off and not even used. That's all I have to say.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: That represents the end of the

individuals who indicated that they definitely wanted to speak this evening. Now I'm going to run through a handful of names of people who put question marks next to their names. And apparently they weren't certain when they came in. I'll see if they made up their mind at this point. The first is Kelly -- yes.

MS. MAIXNER: All right. My name is Kelly Maixner M-A-I-X-N-E-R, first name Kelly. I am actually a property owner. And for some reason I didn't even get any notification of this and it's proposed to go basically right on my property if not right on the side of it. And I just bought my property in November, so there should be a record of that. So I'm very surprised I didn't get any notification at all. Found out from my neighbor, which is kind of disappointing. And I'm speaking against the Big Lake route, the south route. There's many private property owners on that system and there's also -- it runs right through a swamp that all our dog trails are on and also crosses a salmon spawning stream that I know of. So I just like to speak against that. Since there's plenty of public property or state owned land on the Willow route, I would go that way. All right.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Mary Crowley, would you like to speak?

MS. CROWLEY: No, thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you. Jesse -- is that a Jesse?
Post Office Box 520029?

(Laughter)

MS. SCHUPE: That's June Schupe.

MR. NAVECKY: I'm sorry.

MS. SCHUPE: J-U-N-E S-C-H-U-P-E. Well, obviously I'm not prepared or I would have known if I wanted to speak or not. I've only been in Alaska for two and a half years. I moved 5,000 miles to what I thought I had found heaven. And for these two and a half years I have. I'm actually a neighbor of Kelly's. There's a small area maybe 12, 14 families, it was a homestead area. Many of the people in that area were the original homesteaders. And I have to say along with Kelly that we've had a tremendous time getting information. I've been to other meetings, I've signed up, I haven't received things in the mail. I have been on the internet and did not realize exactly how close this was coming to my property until today. And I'm really disappointed in my total inability to get information. This will totally change my lifestyle and I guess they're not enough of us, maybe we're not significant at all, but this will totally change our little neighborhood. And we take care of our own roads. We're out grading our roads, we take care of our roads. We've got a delightful little area there and it's -- this will just totally destroy it. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Margaret Billings [sic].

MS. BILLINGER: It's Billinger, B-I-L-L-I-N-G-E-R.

MR. NAVECKY: Oh, I apologize.

MS. BILLINGER: That's okay. Bob pretty much said it for the chamber. I'm the chamber president here in Big Lake. We do support the development of the port and we do see why the trains do need a B route through Wasilla there. You know, we've been to all the train meetings, but we are -- do favor the west Willow route more than the other two routes because of the impacts to the lakes, to the environment, to our neighborhoods. So please consider the west route. We do have trails, some in there, but that's the least invasive. I think we have about three trails that it effects versus the other seven or more trails if we go the other two routes. Just consider the western route if you have to do it. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: That is all of the individuals that had given us a yes and a question mark that they would like to speak. Is there anyone else that would like to speak that did not -- okay, I think we will have time to get to everyone. We'll just start in the front row here.

MR. CROWLEY: Hello. My name is Marcus Crowley, M-A-R-C-U-S C-R-O-W-L-E-Y. I'm a land owner that's in --

probably in the high impact area, because it goes right beside my piece of property, that if you plan to go through the Big Lake area, the South Big Lake area, as far as for that. Reading down through this big wad of documents that I got off the internet on the whole proposal for this whole thing, you know, you're taking a look at the amount of private property that you got to impact alone just to go through the Big Lake area. You're looking at 307 pieces of private property alone. If you take the Willow area, you're down to 187 pieces of private property. And, you know, you got less state land, less borough land, you know, in the Big Lake and the Houston area versus the more state and borough land that you got to go through with the Willow area. You know, it's kind of a no-brainer there as far as for going through and doing that.

And, you know, you look at just the other pieces of property that you got impact, you know, you look at the intersection of where this Big Lake route's going to come in. I -- if I'm not mistaken, looking at the map, it's going to go right through the senior center that we have there. So you're going to look at displacing a whole bunch of people that their livelihood alone was this state and here they are, they're retired in a place and now you're going to move them out of the area in itself. You know, that's uprooting people in a lot of areas.

You know -- and I -- you know, and I have questions too. Even if you're going to go through and do the Big Lake or

Houston area, how are you planning on acquiring the property? Are you going to do it reasonably, if you're going to go that route, or are you just going to, you know, condemn it in that aspect there? As far as for the Willow route that's the most feasible. You know, I'm not against the port and I'm not against the railroad. You know, there's a lot of good that's going to come to this as far as for the railroad itself. You know, I can see them taking everything up the railroad and making a commuter train out of that whole area that goes into Anchorage through the Wasilla area now where the railroad is. I don't see why that -- that would be a better feasible impact by doing that, but you're looking at a whole bunch of swamp and uprooting some people if you come through the Houston/Big Lake area there. I think the Willow area is probably a better choice out of anything. And the amount of the streams that you have to cross. You're going to cross what, the Little Sue twice, maybe Willow Creek. You look at the amount of smaller creeks. You know, you got Fish Creek and some of these other ones that maybe are not so big as far as for salmon spawning, but they have just as much impact as these other ones do. That's the biggest concern, is the impact on fish, you know, as far as for fish habitat and the streams. There's a lot more in this area along with the lakes and stuff there. Granted I gather that the Army Corp of Engineers has done their impact statements on what the feasibility of covering up swamp and everything else is. You're trying to build the roads

on that stuff as the land owners as we do now, it takes a lot of dirt and a lot of preparation to go through and do it. Granted, the government seems to have endless pockets to where they can go through and do stuff like that and it can happen. Why we don't take for a higher ground to cut down the amount of costs it's going to cost to go through and do it that way. Granted, I know the Willow route is longer versus the shorter route that goes through Big Lake, but I think the impact would be much, much greater if you go through the Big Lake and Houston area than it would be as far as for the Willow area. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: There will be time for your both. Don't worry.

MS. LADD: Hi, my name is Laurie (ph) Ladd, L-A-D-D, and we live -- have property, we don't live there yet. We're going to be moving back out to -- off of Echo Lake Road, which is out across Fish Creek, which is actually almost only on this side of Knik Arm major salmon stream. And I was just wondering, I haven't seen any reports on the impact this would have for the salmon stream in our properties. All our properties -- there's a bunch of us here that live back there -- it's going to be like right in our backyard. And the noise -- I don't like the idea of having two trains a day coming, you know, within what 25 miles of my house because they're very loud. And I was just wondering

what -- I didn't see any comments in here on that for the noise impact. And that's all I have to say. I'm really against the idea for Big Lake -- actually for all three. I don't think it's necessary. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MS. CROWLEY: Thank you. My name is Mary Crowley, M-A-R-Y C-R-O-W-L-E-Y. I'd like to speak on behalf of the trail use. The basin where the Big Lake route would go is rather unique. We've spent quite a few years, almost 20 in fact, involved with dog mushing and primarily and junior dog mushers. And the Aurora Dog Mushers have a lease agreement with the borough where we have close to a hundred miles of trails back there and it is not heavily trafficked at all by motorized. So in that basin that stretches from the Big Lake route proposed all the way across the Houston routes that had been mentioned for the recreational snow machine trails, we basically coexist very well there. Our kids can run dogs in there and not have to worry for the most part of having the, you know, conflict with snow machines as we take them further out or they explore further. We know we're getting into area where there's motorized traffic.

I am very concerned about the watershed issues. I'm very concerned that the issues with the port. I can see it getting basically hamstrung by environmental issues, by the different things. And I think it's an idea that needs to be

addressed, but not -- I feel like this is a hasty situation.

I am also property owner in that area. And my concern is a 200 foot right-of-way. This right-of-way touches the edge of our property and there are no sanctioned crossings. Like my -- the road to my house is not on there as a trail that would have a culvert, a crossing. How do I get home? What is going to be permitted there and then will I be able to walk off my property and hike my property line or hike through the woods? I mean, I can't cross the right-of-way, you know, until I get down in the swamp on Iditarod what, five miles away. And so I think the trails, the local trails, there's just -- there's so many to count that feasibility-wise there's no way you can make crossings for all of them. And so I'm concerned about the access. But I'm more concerned that perhaps the whole rail extension is a concept that is -- has come too early for the development of the port in our general area. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: There was somebody in the back. Yes, sir.

MR. AMIDON: Hi, my name is Steve Amidon. That's S-T-E-V-E A-M-I-D-O-N. I am a property owner and my property butts up to where the Big Lake extension for the railroad supposedly might be going. I too have not been informed by mail, by anything of this. I only got informed the last couple of days by

word of mouth. I do have a post office box in Big Lake and I have a mail box and I do get mail and I have not been informed. I am very worried about it going that way. It's going to affect a lot of us property owners back there. There is dog mushing, sledding a lot of stuff that people use plus several of the people that have spoke tonight are my neighbors in there and there is a big concern to us going that way. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Yes, ma'am.

MS. SMOLE: I'm Sharon Smole, S-M-O-L-E. You sent us a disc to our Big Lake library even though it wasn't listed originally. And since this community is the largest that is impacted by the three Big Lake routes, could you please send a hard copy to our Big Lake library? We also have very few computers at our library. That would be very appreciated if it could be done before the final May 10th when they have to give their opinions. We would appreciate that. Thank you. And I also am not in favor at all of any of the three that goes through Big Lake.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Anyone else like to speak? Yes, sir.

MR. ROWE: My name is Jim Rowe, Jim, J-I-M, R-O-W-E. And I live in Big Lake. I've lived up here for quite a few

years. I have a piece of property on Hollywood Road. And the way it looks to me, I think that railroad's going to run right through my living room going by the Horseshoe Lake. So I just have a problem with the two routes that go through Big Lake, seems like they'd displace more residences than any of the other ones and there's more private land being displaced, you know, taken away to develop. And I just, you know, I hate to see it go through there. I'm very opposed to it. You know, I've spent quite a few years developing the property and that's where I want to retire and want to live there and I don't really want a railroad running through my living room. So that's all I have to say.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Anyone else that would like to speak? Yes, sir.

MR. CHERNESKI: My name is Cherneski, C-H-E-R-N-E-S-K-I. I guess that's part of your protocol. I would like to know if either one of you gentlemen were present at Houston High School when they first presented this.

MR. NAVECKY: I'm not -- I don't believe I was. No, I was -- if it was a railroad sponsored meeting I was not there.

MR. CHERNESKI: Okay. I don't mean to be belligerent, but whoever the representative was -- first of all, he shoved it down our throat that the railroad was going to come through here, it was going to be preceded along the same route by the road.

Originally he told us it was going to come out at Nancy Lake. I have been a member of the Aurora Dog Mushers for almost 50 years. We were told two weekends ago when we had a dog race -- it wasn't a race, it was a weekend for kids for autism. We were informed that the railroad would move our clubhouse. We don't know where, and who knows, it could have been downtown Big Lake, but who wants all this traffic in back of us? There's got to be something. Maybe you ought to figure on hovercrafts or something else. It's not right and you should -- ought to think of something else. You've embarrassed and you've done a lot of things that [sic] people have live here. You ought to think this thing over and that's the end I'm -- I'm going to say. I've got more, but I'll stop. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for coming up.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Yes, ma'am.

MS. HOLLINGER: Judy Hollinger, H-O-L-L-I-N-G-E-R. I wasn't going to say anything, but is this -- are these meetings just to placate all of us? Is this a done deal and like this -- the man said, it's going to happen and you're just -- when I say you, I don't mean you, but you. Are you just doing it so that we'll think we had some input, because I mean I've only heard maybe two, maybe three people that were in favor of any of them. And, I mean, all of us, you know, we pay a high price to live in Big Lake, especially if we live on the lake and I just wonder if

it's a done deal. I know the railroad's a big place, a big thing, you know. It would be good to know if we're wasting our time and you're just trying to make us feel better.

MR. NAVECKY: I'll address your question in my closing comments. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Yes, sir.

MR. MAYFIELD: My name is James Mayfield. I go by Dan. J-A-M-E-S M-A-Y-F-I-E-L-D. I am a board member of the Chamber of Commerce, also president of Big Lake Trails. Dan spoke on behalf of Big Lake Trails so -- excuse me, Cham -- I said Chamber of Commerce. I meant Big Lake Community Council. Dan spoke on behalf of Big Lake Trails so I really won't repeat any of that information, but I did do a lot of research prior to polling -- prior to writing the letter that you have in front of you in regards to Big Lake Trails. And it seemed to me as I was polling my members that they were pretty certain that if the railroad were to come through Big Lake we would choose the Willow route. There really wasn't a good choice other than the Willow route for us.

I'm kind of reminded that, from a historical perspective that, you know, the railroad really united the nation in years past. Well, it's dividing this community and I'm concerned about that. So if you are to push through the railroad through this area, it should be through the Willow area. It

shouldn't be any other route. I appreciate that. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Anyone else like to speak this evening?

MS. LIPSE: My name is Linda Lipse, L-I-P-S-E. And I was wondering on the railroads and stuff, if you're on a snow machine you have to stop and go across there, otherwise you get tickets. And there's trails all over the place and they were -- originally were saying, oh well, they're not going to have tickets for just having your -- not having your seatbelt on. Well, now they are. But now they're giving tickets on Big Lake. You give them an inch, they take a mile. And it's just more and more regulations that they're going to be passing on everybody here in Big Lake. And I'm against all the trails.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Anyone else? You sure? Okay. Thank you. I'll just add some closing comments and address the one question about the -- whether or not this is a done deal. I want to -- first of all, this is an important component of my agency's environmental review process for this project and I want -- need to stress that this is a review process of the Surface Transportation Board. It is not related to or is it being conducted by the railroad. We're doing this independently of what the railroad has done in the past. And yes, your comments

do have an impact. My office, the Section of Environmental Analysis, will take your comments at the end of the comment period and they are fully considered and they often influence the content of the final EIS and that might be -- it goes to issues of what -- the final EIS will contain a recommendation from our office, the Section of Environmental Analysis, on a preferred route if the board elects to authorize construction and operation of the railroad. And your comments this evening will be considered in what alternative that my office recommends to the board, but if they choose the license the rail line, which alternative we recommend to them as being preferred, considering your concerns on property impacts and trails as well as balancing all the other impacts related to water crossings and wetlands and the taking of people's property.

Your comments also influence the mitigation measures that we recommend in the final EIS regarding, for example, the number of crossings for trails and how those crossings are constructed, for example. It is those type of inputs that we receive from you folks that help us identify and refine the mitigation that we think is warranted for the project and that we recommend to the board. The board then -- the board is a three member panel. Those are the decision makers for my agency. They will consider the economic merits of the project. They will consider the contents of the draft and final EIS. And again, the draft -- I mean, the final EIS will contain all of your written

comments, it will contain all the transcripts from tonight's meeting and our responses to all those comments. And they will consider any other letters or comments that come into our agency after the close of our comment period in May. They will then take all that information and they will make their decision. And how they decide, that's -- I can't tell you how they will decide. It's a majority decision that requires two of the three board members to either deny or approve the project. If they approve the project they typically will implement all if not most of the mitigation measures that we recommend to them. So it's important for you to provide input to us on those mitigation measures. And I think that's all I have to say on the process and just to continue that it's not a done deal and this -- these meetings we have this week and next week are very important in our process and they do have an influence and play a major role in the content of the final EIS that we'll issue.

Going on, for those of you who did not speak this evening and you have comments or questions, I would encourage you to provide your comments in writing and submit those to us either by mail or through our website. For those of you who spoke this evening, you can -- if you have additional comments that you would like to convey to us or questions you would like answered in the final EIS that you do not believe are answered currently, you're more than welcome to provide written comments to us as well even though you spoke this evening. And let me stop right

there. I think one person wanted to speak.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I had a question regarding the closing comments. Does the final board (indiscernible - away from microphone)?

MR. NAVECKY: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible).

MR. NAVECKY: I'm sorry?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Which meeting will the final board members (indiscernible) panel? Which meeting will (indiscernible)?

MR. NAVECKY: The -- those -- the board members do not attend these meetings. This is a -- the -- my office, the Section of Environmental Analysis, is the office within our agency responsible for ensuring that the board complies with federal environmental laws, and we're the office within the agency that conducts the environment review process, and we're the ones that conduct these hearings. But they will have -- yes, sir.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible - away from microphone).

MR. NAVECKY: All the board members' names, addresses are available on our website for -- if you would wish to contact them directly.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You never did address how you (indiscernible - away from microphone).

MR. NAVECKY: The process for acquiring the property, I believe the railroad's intent, if the project were authorized, the railroad's intent would be to attempt to negotiate a sales price with the property owners of the right-of-way that they owned. If the property owner and the railroad could not could to terms on the price, the railroad would then have the authority to acquire the property through condemnation, but it would still be required to pay fair market value for that property. So I'm going to -- one last question.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible - away from microphone).

MR. NAVECKY: We don't have -- it's not a mathematical formula, for example, that we use. We need to -- we try to balance all of the issues and each project is unique. And we can't say that, you know, that impacting a stand of a true forest in one project is more important than impacting a wetland versus impacting large number of private property owners. I think it all needs to -- it needs to be balanced and considered as a whole when we make our recommendation to -- as the preferred alternative. And we encourage you to, in your comments, to make suggestions to us as you have tonight, obviously, which you feel the preferred alternative should be and not only identify what the preferred alternative to be, and many of you spoke this evening in favor of Willow, but what is useful for us is to also know why you feel which alternative is the preferred. It's -- it

helps us understand your concerns and it enables us to make a more educated decision -- or recommendation to the board.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible - away from microphone).

MR. NAVECKY: I wouldn't say it's arbitrary. I mean, the reasons that we will make a recommendation for a preferred alternative in the final EIS and it's not just a simple blanket statement that we recommend to the board that this alternative be preferred. We discuss -- my office, SEA, discusses why we're making that recommendation, that alternative A is preferred over alternative B or C. And we identify -- we try -- we go through all the different topical areas, the wetlands, threatened or endangered species, properties, socioeconomics, soils, water quality, wildlife. We run through all of those and explain why we're recommending to the board that one alternative over another is preferred. So the board understands why we came to that decision and if they disagree with us, then they will be free to -- and if they choose to authorize the project, they will choose the alternative they think would be best. Yes?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Dave, when do you anticipate issuing your final EIS?

MR. NAVECKY: It would be -- I can just say I would hope it would be later this year sometime. I can't say whether it would be this summer or the fall. It all depends on the nature and the extent of comments that we receive during the

comment period.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And also what is the time frame for borough government to inject its recommendations (indiscernible)?

MR. NAVECKY: They don't have any special role in this project. They would have to comment just as you would and they would have to provide us comments by May 10th just as any other interested party would.....

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: On the draft EIS?

MR. NAVECKY:on the draft EIS, yes. Okay. I want to thank you for coming this evening and I would just like to add that I've been working on this project since January of 2008 and I was up here once before for the scoping meetings and I've spoken with a number of you over the phone during the past year and a half, two years. And I understand that many of you have major concerns about this project and many of them are emotional concerns and issues to you. Notwithstanding that, I found that you have always been polite and courteous and I just wanted to thank you for that and recognize that. Thank you for coming this evening.

(Applause)

(Off record - 8:03 p.m.)

(END OF PROCEEDINGS)

TRANSCRIBER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Salena A. Hile, hereby certify that the foregoing pages numbered 2 through 49 are a true, accurate, and complete transcript of proceedings, transcribed under my direction from a copy of the electronic sound recording to the best of our knowledge and ability.

Date

Salena A. Hile