



Northern Rail Extension

PROJECT FACTS

Project Description

The Alaska Railroad Corporation proposes to construct and operate a new rail line in the area between North Pole and Delta Junction. The project would involve approximately 80 miles of new rail line connecting the existing Eielson Branch rail line at the Chena River Overflow Structure and extending to a point near Delta Junction. The proposed rail line would provide freight and potentially passenger rail services serving commercial interests and communities in or near the project corridor.

The new rail line would be operated as part of the Alaska Railroad system. As a common carrier, the line would be available to the general public, commercial, and military shippers including agricultural and resource development businesses. With a top design speed of 79 miles per hour for passenger trains, the track could support public transit operations between Fairbanks, North Pole, Salcha, and Delta Junction.

In order to fulfill transport needs and avoid mountainous terrain along the northeast bank of the Tanana River, the project would require a Tanana River crossing. The new rail line may also cross the Salcha, Little Delta and Delta Rivers, as well as Delta Creek.

The current project scope is to complete sufficient engineering and analysis to support the development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This work includes identifying and analyzing feasible alignment alternatives, completing engineering design on alternatives selected for review in the EIS, and estimating anticipated construction costs.

Purpose and Need

The Northern Rail Extension Project would provide essential freight and passenger service to support transportation and mobility needs of the region. Specifically, the project may provide any or all of the following:

- Commercial freight service supporting communities and commerce in or near the rail corridor, including existing agricultural, mining, and petrochemical industries, thus reducing reliance and wear and tear on the Richardson Highway. Currently, both the agricultural community located near Delta Junction and mineral resource industries in the area receive materials that are initially shipped by rail. Materials must be off-loaded in or near Fairbanks, and then transported by truck via the Richardson Highway.

- Transportation alternative to the Richardson Highway for passenger transportation, with scheduled station stops between Fairbanks and Delta Junction by way of North Pole and other communities. Passenger rail service would be available for citizens, military personnel, contractors, and dependent families who wish to travel for work, shopping, medical, educational, or other reasons.
- Support regional tourism. Tourism is a major industry in Alaska and the rail line would provide further opportunities for visitors to enjoy the Alaska environment.
- Military support. Depending on military requirements, the rail line could provide access to military property west of the Tanana River and provide transportation alternatives to support military training exercises. Future training needs and uses for these training lands are currently being evaluated.

Benefits

- Common carrier rail service would provide for bulk transport of goods to and from existing agricultural developments, mineral resource developments, and other business enterprises. Freight and transit services in the area would enhance opportunities for economic expansion in a relatively isolated area of the state. The tourism support provided by the Alaska Railroad to other parts of the system could potentially be expanded to Delta Junction and provide additional opportunities to see Alaska by rail.
- Additional communities within Interior Alaska would be connected by rail to three ports, including the Port of Anchorage, recently designated as one of 15 strategic ports in the nation.
- Public transit would facilitate additional choices for families and individuals who desire safe, reliable, year-round transportation opportunities between the Delta Junction and Fairbanks areas. Rail transit would be an alternative to driving the Richardson Highway, which can present hazardous driving conditions during the long, dark, icy winter months.
- The rail extension could assist the military in accessing training facilities within the project corridor.

Status/Timeline

- The Alaska Railroad initiated the conceptual development in late 2004.
- March of 2005, HDR Engineering Inc. was retained to provide Program Management, preliminary engineering, and environmental support services.
- April of 2005, ICF Consulting was selected by the Surface Transportation Board (STB) as the Independent Third Party Contractor to prepare the EIS.
- November of 2005, STB publishes a “Notice of Intent” in the Federal Register.
- December of 2005, Public and Agency Scoping meetings.
- Early 2007, Draft EIS is expected to be complete.
- Late 2007, Final EIS and Decision by the STB is expected.
- Final design and construction will proceed based on available funding

Cost and Funding

- Preliminary engineering and design and NEPA-mandated environmental assessments and documentation are included in a \$12.5 million budget from a Department of Defense appropriation being administered as a grant through the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).
- Construction costs, currently estimated to be between \$450 and \$700 million, will be more accurately determined through the engineering process in support of the EIS preparation. Funding sources are being sought. All or part of the project could be financed through the sale of revenue bonds that are secured by advance shipping contracts.

Project Participants

There are a number of players involved with the Northern Rail Extension and its environmental study phase.

- **The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC)** is a self sustaining corporation owned by the State of Alaska. ARRC is the project sponsor of the Northern Rail Extension Project
- **The Surface Transportation Board (STB)** is the lead federal agency on the project. Because the project involves new line construction requiring federal approval, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) will be prepared. The EIS will evaluate, among other things, the proposed action and reasonable alternatives including no action. The Surface Transpor-

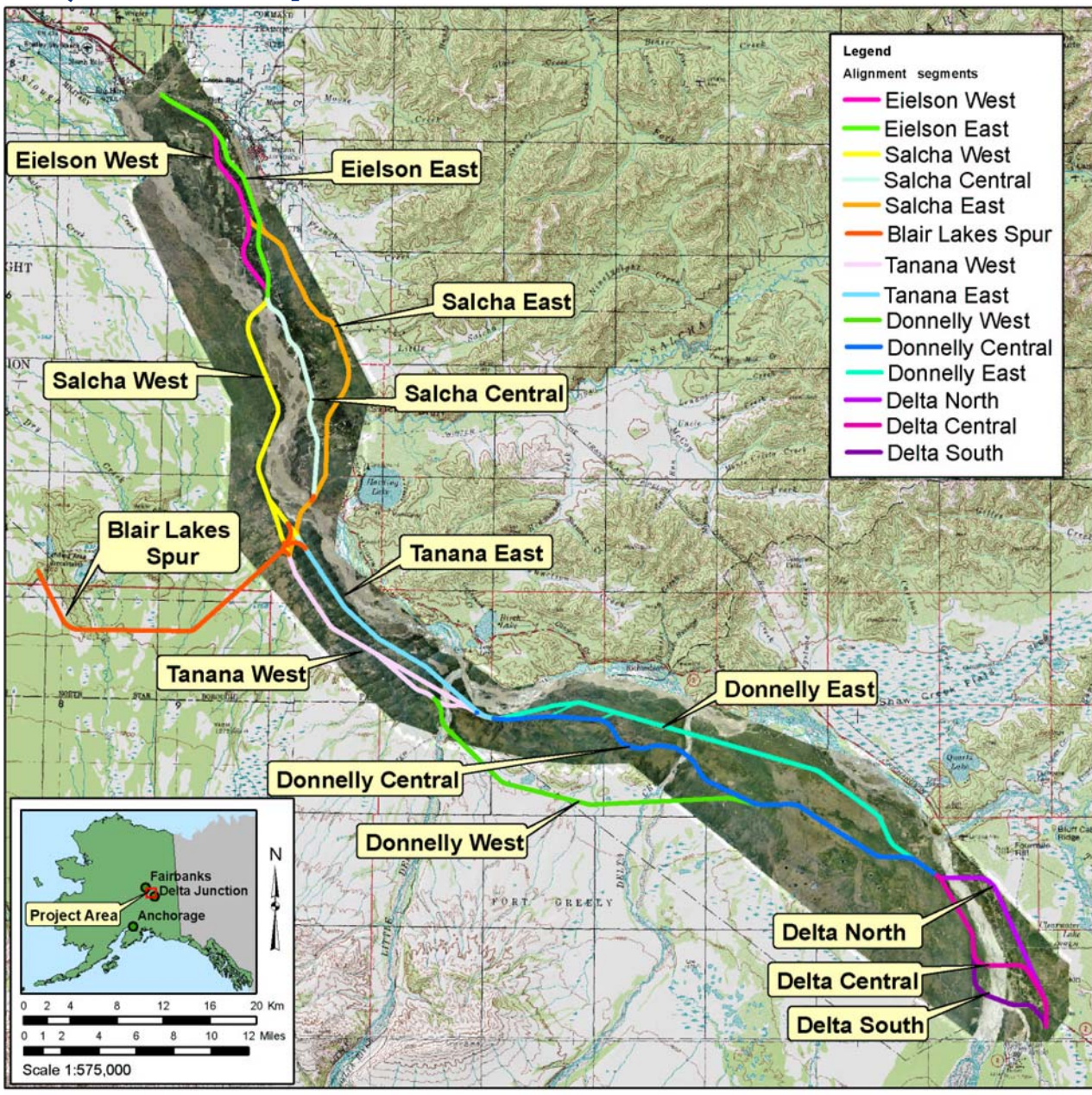
tation Board (STB), through its Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA), will prepare the EIS with the assistance of an independent third party contractor.

- **ICF Consulting, Inc. (ICF)** was selected as the independent third party contractor to assist the STB in the preparation of the EIS. ICF has extensive experience in environmental consulting and has served as the third party consultant to SEA in the preparation of NEPA documents (EAs and EISs) in other rail construction matters. ICF Consulting, Inc., with offices in the Washington, D.C. area, has hired several Alaska-based firms to assist with EIS tasks. ICF Consulting, and its Alaska-based subcontractors, will act under the sole direct supervision and control of SEA. As part of the environmental review process, the public will be notified and asked to provide comments.
- **HDR Alaska Inc. (HDR)** has been contracted by ARRC to provide preliminary engineering, environmental, and public relations services in support of the NEPA process. ARRC may provide technical and environmental information to SEA for possible use by the agency in preparing the EIS. In addition, ARRC plans to keep the Alaskan public apprised of progress of the project, HDR is assisting ARRC in preparing project newsletters, maintaining a project web site, and providing other public information services.
- **The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)** is a cooperating agency with the STB and the administering agency for the federal grant funding the EIS development. The FRA will provide technical oversight for the project.
- **Cooperating Federal Agencies.** In addition to the FRA the following federal agencies will be cooperating on the EIS; The Federal Transit Administration (FTA), The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), The Alaska Command (ALCOM), The U.S. Air Force (USAF) 354th Fighter Wing (Stationed at Eielson Air Force Base), The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and the U. S. Coast Guard (USCG). These agencies will provide review and comment on various aspects of the project throughout the development of the EIS.

To provide public comment

- E-mail to public_comment@akrr.com
- Mail to: Alaska Railroad Corporation - Capital Projects
P.O. Box 107500, Anchorage, AK 99510-7500
- or Fax to (907) 265-2365
- TTY/TDD 265-2620/voice 265-2494 or
Alaska Relay Service TTY 1-800-770-8973/voice 1-800-770-8255

Project Area Map



Potential alternatives for proposed railroad extension from Eielson AFB to Delta Junction area.