



# On Board!

## Alaska Railroad Corporation Hears from Landowners

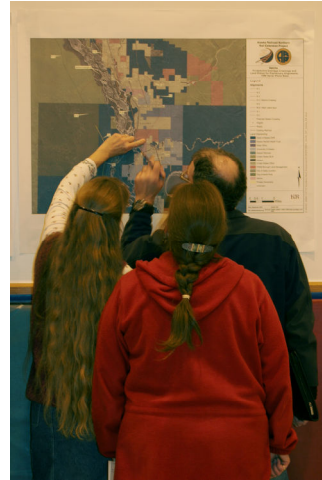
The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) hosted a series of open house meetings for landowners on September 19 and 20, 2005. More than 60 people from North Pole, Salcha, Delta Junction, and Fairbanks met with ARRC and HDR Alaska staff to ask questions about engineering and environmental issues, project timeline, right-of-way, and how specific properties might be impacted by the Northern Rail Extension Project.

“ARRC is aware that landowners have questions about the project, and we value their input. Holding open houses is a meaningful start to the many conversations that will be occurring throughout the project,” said

Brett Flint, Northern Rail Extension project manager.

ARRC’s Chris Anderson and HDR’s Vivian Dietz-Clark, the project’s right-of-way specialists, also attended the meeting. “Possible route locations are the most important issue for many people. ARRC is actively seeking feedback about the routes, where concerns might exist, and about the potential impacts to residents and businesses,” said Ms. Anderson.

Many landowners comments concerned the possibility of modifying the potential alignments to reduce specific impacts to



Residents examine a land ownership map on September 19th.

private property. ARRC is in the process of evaluating potential refinements to the alternative alignments, which take landowner comments and concerns into account.

## Scoping Meetings Announced

On November 1, 2005, the Surface Transportation Board (STB), the federal agency responsible for approving new rail lines, published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This announcement included a draft scope of the EIS (see *EIS Draft Scope of Study Announced*, Page 3).

The STB’s Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) will meet with state and

federal agency representatives and the public to learn about issues that should be considered as part of the EIS. Workshop-style public scoping meetings will be held the first week of December. Comments can also be filed electronically at [www.stb.dot.gov/stb/efilings.nsf](http://www.stb.dot.gov/stb/efilings.nsf). Please reference Finance Docket No. 34658 on all correspondence. Comments are due to the STB by January 13, 2006.

### Public Meeting Schedule

#### North Pole

December 6, 4-8 p.m.  
City Council Chambers  
125 Snowman Lane

#### Delta Junction

December 7, 4-8 p.m.  
Jarvis West Building  
MP 1420.5 Alaska Hwy.

#### Anchorage

December 8, 4-8 p.m.  
Lousaac Library  
3600 Denali Street

ISSUE 2

NOVEMBER 15, 2005

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### WHAT IS...?

**NOTICE OF INTENT:** An NOI is an announcement published in the Federal Register, a daily publication of federal agency announcements. The Surface Transportation Board published the NOI to begin formally the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) review and to start the public scoping process.

**SCOPING:** Scoping is a process that helps determine the issues that should be evaluated in the EIS. Scoping activities include public meetings and an opportunity to provide public comments.



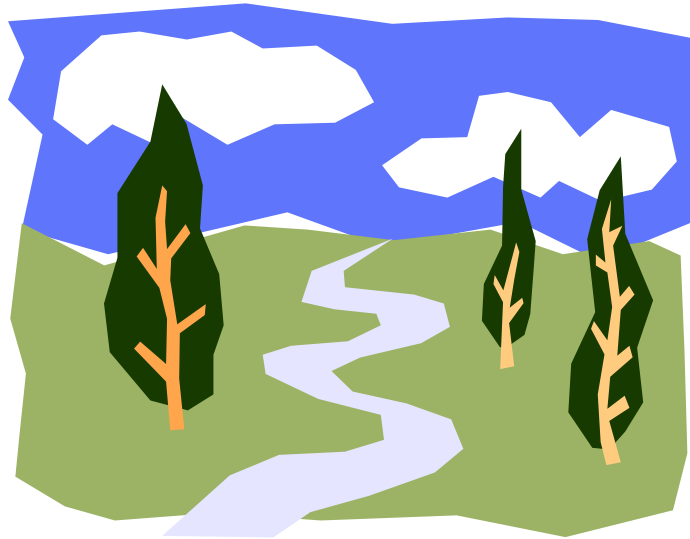
## Right-of-Way

The Northern Rail Extension Project's preliminary alignment options traverse both developed and undeveloped terrain. There are a number of roads, military installations, private property, and communities within the project corridor.

Identifying the preliminary alignments involved evaluating and balancing a variety of factors. Environmental planners identified a number of geological and environmental constraints to construction, such as steep hills or wetlands. Mapping and right-of-way specialists used existing public records to identify land ownership interests within a broad project corridor, with publicly owned lands being identified as generally preferable over privately owned parcels. Engineers used this information to develop potential corridors, each 200-feet wide, the width of ARRC right-of-way used elsewhere in the state. While the preliminary alignments avoid privately owned land wherever possible, engineers could not avoid private property completely. The ARRC may need to acquire some right-of-way from private landowners.

Homes and properties are the single biggest investment for many Alaskans. Recognizing that landowners needed upfront information about the project and its potential impacts to private property, the ARRC hosted a series of landowner meetings in September 2005 (see *Alaska Railroad Corporation Hears from Landowners* on Page 1).

A number of potential routes will be considered during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Landowners will have an opportunity to comment on the various routes at the Surface Transportation Board's public scoping meetings (see *NEPA Scoping Meetings Announced* on Page 1). ARRC's right-of-way team will



continue to meet with potentially impacted landowners to gain feedback on property issues.

The ARRC anticipates the NEPA process will take at least two years to complete. Only at the conclusion of the NEPA process would the ARRC formally discuss specific right-of-way required to construct the project. Actual right-of-way acquisition would be achieved through a series of steps, including good faith negotiations with the property owners. At that stage, ARRC's right-of-way team would contract with an independent and impartial qualified appraiser to conduct appraisals.

Property owners are entitled to receive just compensation for any property rights acquired. By definition, just compensation may not be less than the amount established as the property's

fair market value. Eligible displaced owners and tenants may also be entitled to displacement or relocation benefits.

The ARRC's right-of-way acquisition process would be conducted in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Act—a federal law that requires the equitable treatment of persons displaced from their homes, businesses, or farms by Federal and federally assisted programs. (To see the Act's language in its entirety, go to [www.fhwa.dot.gov/realestate/act.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/realestate/act.htm).)

The ARRC is committed to working with each property owner on a case-by-case basis. Landowners who may be impacted by the project are encouraged to contact ARRC's dedicated project e-mail address: [public\\_comment@akrr.com](mailto:public_comment@akrr.com).

**Fact:** In 2004, the Alaska Railroad moved more than 7.5 million tons of freight over 525 miles of track



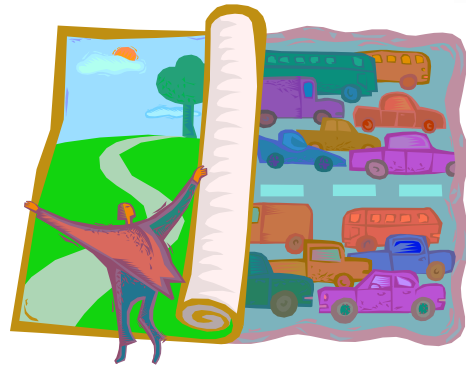
## Field Notes

ARRC anticipates a number of environmental issues will be addressed as part of the EIS and permitting processes. Among these are potential impacts to land use, habitat, waterways, and wildlife.

The 80-mile long project area falls within the Tanana River Valley, an area bound by rugged terrain, major rivers, and a broad, rolling plain. The corridor hosts a variety of habitats, including forests, grasslands, shrub thickets, open bogs, and alpine tundra, as well as extensive aquatic systems. Much of the habitat in the corridor is wetlands, which is influenced by fluctuations in stream flows. Vegetation within these areas typically consists of black and white spruce and open areas consisting of alder and willow.

There are a number of major rivers within the project study corridor: the Salcha, Tanana, Delta, Little Delta rivers and Delta Creek. The Tanana River, in particular, is a wide, semi-braided stream channel with an active flood plain. Flood flows are caused by snow and ice melting, but the controlling flood levels are generally caused by backwater from ice dams that develop during the spring break-up. Bridge clearance needs to consider the unique character of the Tanana River.

Freshwater and anadromous fish (which travel between fresh and salt water), approximately 100 species of birds, and a variety of mammals live in the project area. Mammal species include black



and brown bear, moose, and caribou.

ARRC recognizes that the project area is important for hunting and other subsistence uses. ARRC anticipates that access issues and train/wildlife conflicts would be considered in the EIS. The project area also hosts a variety of agricultural uses, and impacts to this type of land use would also be addressed during the EIS review.

## EIS Draft Scope of Study Announced

On November 1, 2005, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) announced the draft scope of study for the Northern Rail Extension Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This draft scope will be used as a starting point in conversations with agency representatives and the public about what issues should be examined in the EIS. Individuals can comment on the draft scope in person at the December public scoping meetings or by submitting written comments to the STB. Based on the comments received, STB will develop a final scope of study that will then be used to prepare the EIS.

As explained on the STB's web site, the reasonable and feasible alternatives that will be evaluated in the EIS are (1) the construction and operation of the proposed project along the proposed alignment, (2) other alternatives that might be identified during the scoping process, and (3) the no-action alternative. Specific topic areas may include land use, biological and water resources, geology and soil composition, air quality, noise, socioeconomic impacts, safety, and subsistence, as well as other issues.

Individuals unable to attend the public meetings may also file comments electronically at [www.stb.dot.gov/stb/efilings.nsf](http://www.stb.dot.gov/stb/efilings.nsf). Please reference Finance Docket No. 34658 on all correspondence. Comments are due to the STB by January 13, 2006.



## Thank You!

The ARRC wishes to thank the following organizations and businesses for providing meeting space for the September landowner open houses: The Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, Salcha Elementary School, the North Pole Grange, and the Alaskan Steakhouse in Delta Junction. Thank you, too, to all who participated!

**The Newsletter of the  
Northern Rail Extension  
Project**



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*ARRC—Building a  
Great Railroad  
Across the Great  
Land*



We're on the web!  
[www.northernrailextension.com](http://www.northernrailextension.com)

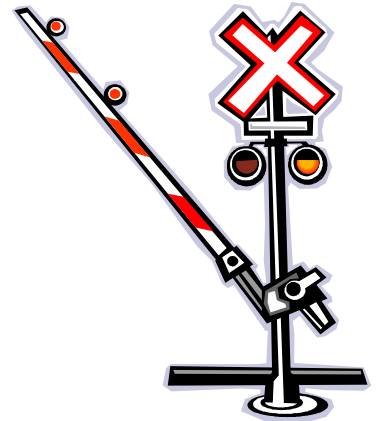


## Frequently Asked Question

### Who would benefit from the project?

ARRC is a common carrier. This means that ARRC transports the public (through mass transit) or commodities (such as coal) for a fee, over a definite route, and on a regular schedule. Common carrier services are available to all who choose to employ them, not just a single entity. While the primary purpose of the

Northern Rail Extension Project is to provide the military with reliable access to the Tanana Flats and Donnelly training areas, ARRC anticipates that the rail line would transport military personnel and equipment, petroleum products, building materials, natural resources and farm products, and local passengers.



## Get Involved!

The Surface Transportation Board has announced formal NEPA scoping meetings for the Northern Rail Extension Project. All meetings will be held between 4 and 8 p.m.

- December 6—North Pole, City Council Chambers
- December 7—Delta Junction, Jarvis West Building
- December 8—Anchorage, Lousaac Library

Meeting dates and locations are also posted on the Northern Rail Extension Project web site.

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On Board! is a quarterly publication of ARRC and HDR Alaska.

For up-to-date information about the project, visit ARRC's project web site at [www.northernrailextension.com](http://www.northernrailextension.com).