



On Board!

SEPTEMBER 1, 2005

Alaska Railroad Corporation Seeks Rail Extension

Rapid deployment and tactical mobility are the hallmarks of the Army's Stryker Brigades. The transformation from infantry units to Stryker Brigade Combat Teams has vastly improved the Army's ability to respond quickly to locations across the Globe.

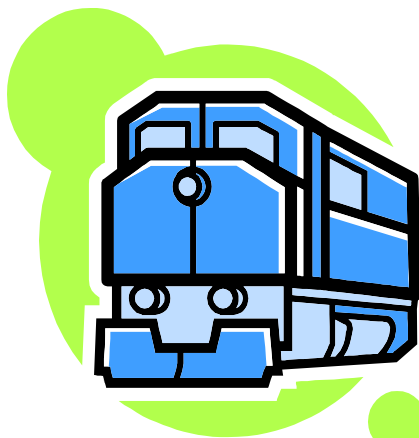
With over 1,500 pieces of equipment per brigade, Stryker teams need room to maneuver during readiness training. And, with more than one million acres of maneuver space, the Tanana Flats Training Area and Donnelly Training Area in Interior Alaska are the premier military training facilities.

The Army is faced with

an unusual challenge, however. Access to the training areas from Ft. Wainwright requires crossing the Tanana River, a feat which can only be accomplished currently by using winter ice roads.

In 2003, the Army asked the University of Alaska Fairbanks to evaluate potential crossings of the Tanana River and suggest the best means for linking Ft. Wainwright with the training areas. Their response: rail.

The Alaska Railroad Corporation launched the



Northern Rail Extension project in 2004 to meet the U.S. Military's access needs. An 80 mile extension from the current terminus in Fairbanks/North Pole to Delta Junction—still in the planning stages—would link the strategic military bases of Interior Alaska and connect communities.

Benefiting Interior Alaska

While the Northern Rail Extension Project's primary purpose is to improve military access to the Tanana Flats and Donnelly Training Areas, ARRC anticipates many other benefits for communities along the proposed route.

Mass transit passenger service is planned for the new route. The track de-

sign would accommodate 79 mile-per-hour passenger train speeds on relatively flat grades and relatively straight track. This would provide a year-round, safe alternative to driving the Richardson Highway, particularly during the icy winter months.

The Delta Junction area provides spectacular views of the Alaska Range and

attracts a significant number of tourists to the area. Big Delta State Historical Park, Quartz Lake, Donnelly Dome, Healy Lake, and other state recreational areas are nearby. The extension to Delta Junction would provide an alternative travel experience and reinforce Delta

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WHAT IS...?

NEPA: The National Environmental Policy Act requires federal agencies to consider potential environmental impacts before approving major projects that are subject to federal control and responsibility. If significant impacts are likely, the agency may decide to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

EIS: An EIS is prepared by a lead federal agency when there may or will be significant environmental impacts. An EIS describes the impacts; the purpose of, and need for, the action; alternatives (including "no action"); and the potential environmental consequences.



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Project Corridor and Proposed Routes

The route to be constructed for the Northern Rail Extension will be studied through the National Environmental Policy Act’s Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process—a process expected to take up to two years. A number of possible routes and crossing locations will be evaluated. In the meantime, ARRC has identified a broad project corridor with several potential routes as a starting point. It is expected that the route to be constructed would be approximately 80 miles long, occupying a 200 foot wide right-of-way.

The study location is within the general area between Eielson Air Force Base and Delta Junction. Lying within the Tanana River Valley, the area is bound by rugged terrain immediately to the north and

east side of the Tanana River, and by a broad plain ending at the Alaska Range to the south and west of the river.

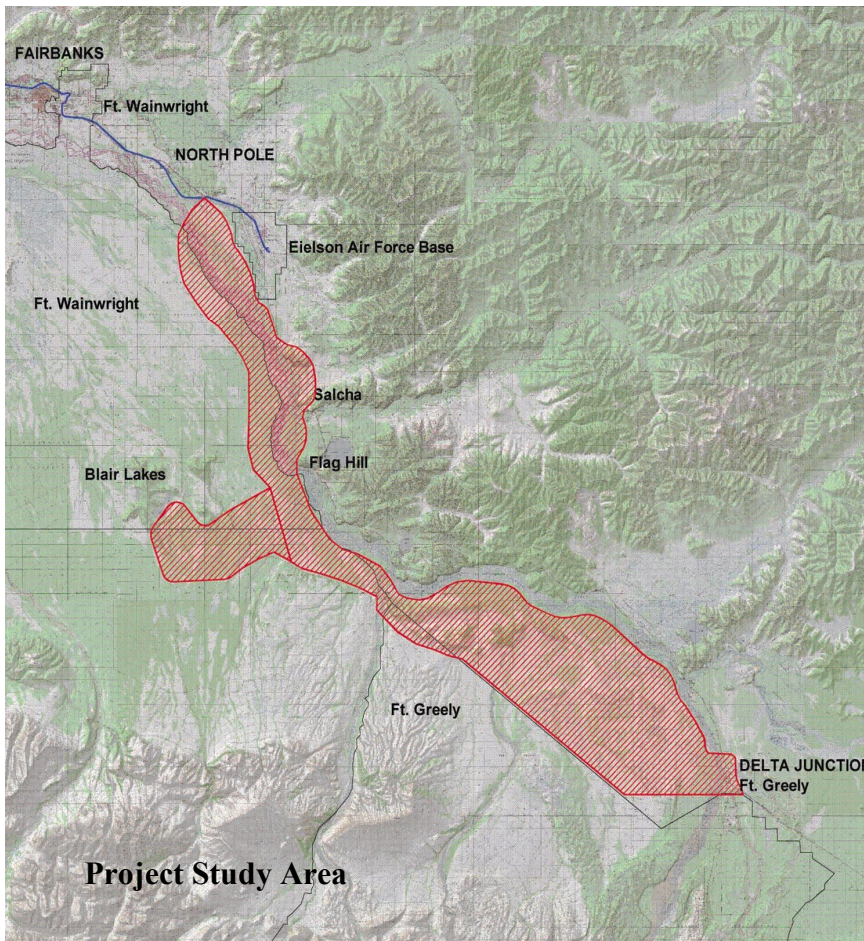
As envisioned, the project starts near North Pole at the Chena River overflow structure (MP 20.18) on the existing Eielson branch and terminates in the vicinity of Ft. Greely in Delta Junction. The project may also include a 19-mile rail spur to the Blair Lakes Range, providing direct access to the Tanana Flats Training Area and Air Force training facilities at Blair Lakes.

Trains require relatively low grades (preferably one percent) and enough space for wide curves in the tracks. The terrain on the north and east side of the Tanana River creates a natural constraint, as does the

Richardson Highway. The first 15 miles of one potential route generally parallels the highway and is flanked by the Tanana River and the Richardson Highway. The first 15 miles of another potential route diverges from the river, crosses the Richardson Highway, and passes to the east of Salcha.

A recent study by the University of Alaska Fairbanks, as well as a number of previous studies, recommended constructing a bridge across the Tanana River in the vicinity of Flag Hill. Alignments south of Flag Hill run along the floodplain on the west side of the Tanana River, crossing the Delta River near Delta Junction.

ARRC anticipates alternative routes will be considered during the EIS process. Detailed maps, and information on how to submit comments on the routes, will be posted on ARRC’s project website, www.northernrailextension.com, as soon as public meeting dates have been announced by the Surface Transportation Board, the lead federal agency for the project.



Railroad History

- 1914, Congress approved construction of a railroad from Seward to Fairbanks
- 1984, Alaska Railroad Corporation established to operate and maintain the Alaska Railroad
- 1985, rail line ownership transferred from the federal government to the State of Alaska



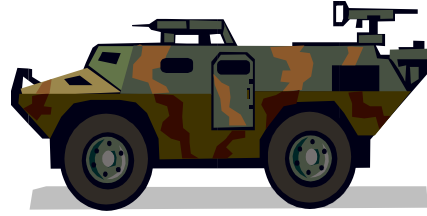
Field Notes

Field work is an important part of any development project—it helps identify constraints and opportunities.

To explore possible routes, mapping crews used data from the U.S. Geologic Survey and Alaska Department of Natural Resources to identify a broad corridor that could be considered for the project. During the summer of 2005, ARRC field teams traveled to the project corridor collecting samples and identifying geological and environmental conditions to assist in the

project's engineering. Specific areas for data collection and analysis for the project included potential impacts to birds and wildlife, water and fish resources, habitat, air quality, land use and right-of-way needs, noise, permafrost and geologic setting, and road crossing and safety issues. ARRC expects that cultural resources and subsistence use will be examined as part of the environmental study.

During Fall 2005 and Spring 2006, ARRC field teams will be



working in various locations throughout the corridor to collect additional data and to consult with landowners and residents about potential areas of concern. ARRC anticipates this information will be incorporated into the draft Environmental Impact Statement and will be made available for public review.

Who's Who

There are a number of players involved with the Northern Rail Extension Project and its environmental study phase. The **Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC)**, a state-owned corporation, is responsible for operating and maintaining the Alaska Railroad. ARRC currently operates 611 total miles of track and provides both freight and passenger service. ARRC hired **HDR Alaska** to coordinate preliminary engineering and design for the Northern Rail Extension Project.

While the extension is an ARRC project, it requires federal approval because it involves new rail line construction. The **Surface Trans-**

portation Board (STB), through its **Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA)**, will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) with the assistance of an independent, third-party contractor, **ICF Consulting, Inc.**

ICF Consulting, partnering with several Alaska-based firms, is responsible for EIS tasks. ARRC expects public meetings will be held by SEA. Public comments are part of the environmental review process.

The **Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)** is the agency providing funding for the pro-

ject. The FRA is responsible for rail safety regulations. It administers financial programs available to railroads and conducts research and development for improving railroad safety.



Fact: *The Alaska Railroad is the only railroad in the United States that offers both freight and passenger service.*

*Benefiting Interior Alaska
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Junction's position as a tourism destination.

Freight would continue to be an important component of ARRC operations on the new line, bring-

ing specialized freight, fuel, and equipment to the Delta Junction area. Improved connections to sea-ports would offer a combination rail-water-rail service to transport products from Delta Junction to the Lower 48 at a rate comparable to truck transport. The new line also has the potential to support existing development in the region.

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



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*ARRC—Building a
Great Railroad
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We're on the web!

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Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need an extension?

The extension will provide support for moving military equipment and supplies to the Tanana Flats and Donnelly Training Areas, as well as provide freight and passenger service between Fairbanks and Ft. Greely/Delta Junction.

Who is responsible for the project?

The Northern Rail Extension Project is a Department of Defense-supported Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) project. Because it involves construction of new rail line, the extension will require federal approval. The

Surface Transportation Board is the agency responsible for conducting the environmental review for the project.

Send your questions to public_comment@akrr.com for possible inclusion in the next edition of On Board!

Get Involved!

ARRC anticipates that public scoping meetings will be held by the Surface Transportation Board and ICF Consulting as part of the National Environmental Policy

Act/Environmental Impact Statement process. Meeting dates, if held, will be posted on the ARRC Northern Rail Extension Project web site as soon as they are organized.

In the meantime, general project questions or comments can be sent via e-mail to: public_comment@akrr.com. We look forward to hearing from you!



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.