



NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: PATTY SULLIVAN, (907) 745-9577

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Public invited to 5 Open House events to review and comment on Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project

MAT-SU BOROUGH, Alaska – The Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) and the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) will host five Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project public open house events during the first week of October in Wasilla, Big Lake, Houston, Willow and Knik. The purpose is to inform citizens about the joint effort to plan, engineer, design and construct a 30- to 45-mile rail line from Port Mackenzie, connecting to the existing rail system at a point between Meadow Lakes and north of Willow. Project team members will be on-hand to discuss route proposals and to answer questions from interested citizens.

All events are 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., and open-house style to facilitate one-on-one discussion with project team members. Each event will also include a project overview presentation beginning at 7:00 p.m. The schedule of project open houses is:

- **WASILLA, OCTOBER 1** Lake Lucille Inn, 1300 W. Lake Lucille Drive
- **BIG LAKE, OCTOBER 2** Big Lake Elementary School, 3808 S. Big Lake Road
- **WILLOW, OCTOBER 3** Willow Area Community Center, Mile 69.5 Parks Hwy
- **KNIK, OCTOBER 4** Knik Elementary School, 6350 W. Hollywood Drive
- **HOUSTON, OCTOBER 5** Houston Middle School, 12801 W. Hawk Lane

In June 2007, MSB and ARRC signed a Memorandum of Agreement to jointly pursue the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project. Meanwhile, the State of Alaska appropriated \$10 million to fund an environmental study. Construction of a new rail line requires federal approval. The Surface Transportation Board (STB) is the federal agency responsible for completing the environmental document and approving a new route.

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After nearly three decades of study, the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension project is now poised to move into the environmental documentation phase that precedes final design and construction. The most recent rail route study was commissioned by the Mat-Su Borough in 2003, and it recommended connecting to the Alaska Railroad near Willow.

The Borough has been the state's fastest growing community for the past 16 years. This growth, along with new technical data, warrant a fresh look at the strongest alignment options. As a progression of the preliminary engineering effort, the project team is considering the 2003 recommended route, as well as two to three additional routes.

Between now and December 2007, the project team will gather public comment, and conduct fact-finding and preliminary engineering activities prior to submitting a project application to the STB in January 2008. While conducting the environmental study process, the STB may modify and/or eliminate routes and could possibly select a route not yet considered. The STB will host public scoping meetings and accept public comment throughout the process, providing additional opportunity for public input. Ultimately, the final route will be selected at the STB's discretion at the completion of the environmental study and document process.

The final design and construction of a rail extension to Port MacKenzie is estimated to cost \$300 million (2007 dollars). The Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Alaska Railroad will jointly conduct a financing study to assess options for funding the project.

For more information, the public can visit the project web site at www.portmacrail.com; or contact Borough Public Affairs Director Patty Sullivan at 745-9577 and Patty.Sullivan@matsugov.us; or contact Railroad Public Involvement Officer Stephenie Wheeler at 265-2671 and wheelers@akrr.com.

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