



## ***NEWS RELEASE***

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### **Rail report filed, independent contractor ID'd Environmental study contractor draws heavily from Alaska firms**

PALMER – Two key steps were taken recently with the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension project. A preliminary report was submitted to the authorizing federal board, and an independent contractor has been identified to produce the project's environmental study.

On Monday, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Alaska Railroad Corporation jointly submitted the background information, which will be considered in the preparation of the project's environmental impact statement, EIS. The preliminary environmental and alternatives report, or PEAR, was submitted to the Surface Transportation Board (STB), the federal board that approves new rail lines in the country.

Recently, the STB identified an independent contractor, ICF International, to conduct an EIS on the rail project. The EIS will be the study that recommends a particular route. The environmental study will begin soon and is likely to continue for 18 months or more.

The rail extension project is a joint effort between the Mat-Su Borough and the Alaska Railroad Corporation. In 2007, the state of Alaska directed \$10 million to the project's environmental document and related studies. The new rail from the Port will connect to the Alaska mainline somewhere between Meadow Lakes and north of Willow. The route has not been chosen yet.

“We are taking another big step toward constructing one of the most significant rail extensions since the Alaska Railroad finished the tunnels and rail extension to Whittier in 1943 and one of the first major transportation projects in the state since the George Parks and Dalton Highways were constructed some 30 or more years ago,” Borough Manager John Duffy said. “This rail extension has significant statewide benefits and is necessary if we, as a state, are to create new business and employment opportunities

for the next generation and beyond; especially now when the Prudhoe Bay Oil fields are in decline.”

The Alaska Railroad Corp. is pursuing contract negotiations with the company ICF International to do the EIS. ICF is a multi-disciplined firm headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia, and is comprised of nearly 2,500 employees throughout the US. The ICF staff has extensive experience in the preparation of EIS documents on behalf of the STB, and is conveniently located close to the STB offices in Washington, DC.

This is not the first rail extension project in Alaska for ICF. The company is also working on an extension near North Pole. “We feel they have a good balance in working closely with the STB in Washington, DC, and in working through local people here,” said Project Manager Brian Lindamood with the Alaska Railroad.

ICF will be drawing extensively from local Alaska-based firms in the coordination, gathering, assembly, and interpretation of information used in the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension EIS.

“The number of Alaska subcontractors taking part in the EIS preparation is tremendous news,” said Joe Perkins, the executive project manager for the Borough as well as a former State Dept. of Transportation Commissioner. “We're very happy with the Alaska presence.”

These subcontractor firms include:

- *ENTRIX, Inc.*, a full-service environmental consulting firm with 39 offices in 21 states nationwide. ENTRIX will be serving the project from its Anchorage office and be substantially supporting the EIS administration and coordination effort, as well as analyzing water resources, biological resources, land use, recreation, trails, and other key areas.
- *Steve Braund and Associates (SBA)* will be leading the analysis of cultural resources for the EIS team and coordinating the government-to-government consultation. Located in Anchorage, Alaska, Mr. Braund, has conducted sociocultural and socioeconomic research in more than 125 rural Alaska villages since 1973, participating in more than 100 research projects throughout rural Alaska, Canada, and Japan. SBA most recently completed a similar role on KABATA.
- Supporting SBA will be *Northern Land Use Research, Inc (NLUR)*. Northern Land Use Research is the largest cultural research consulting firm in the state, and is headquartered in Fairbanks, Alaska.
- *USKH, Inc.* is a full-service, multi-disciplined design and consulting firm with offices in Anchorage and Wasilla. USKH will lead the public involvement efforts, fisheries, wetlands, and geology/soils portions of the EIS.

The PEAR report will be posted on the project Web site, [www.portmacrail.com](http://www.portmacrail.com) on Thurs. Jan. 17. At more than 500MB, it includes all the public comment received through December, as well as environmental and engineering research. The information was developed over five months by the engineering and environmental consultants under the guidance of the Borough/Railroad project team. Former studies were incorporated into this study. To date, the amount spent on the environmental and engineering studies as well as for the public involvement process is about \$1 million.

Throughout the fact-finding stage, the project team has tried to avoid or minimize direct impacts to property when considering proposed corridors.

The STB will hold its own public process as part of the environmental evaluation under the National Environmental Policy Act. The Surface Transportation Board could reach a decision by mid 2009.

CDs of the PEAR report will be given to the communities of Point MacKenzie, Big Lake, Houston, Wasilla, Willow and Palmer.

A binder of all public comments and agency comments is at Patty Sullivan's desk, please call ahead. For more information call Patty Sullivan, Mat-Su Borough Public Affairs Director at (907) 745-9577 or 355-0103. Or Project Manager for the Borough, Brad Sworts, at 746-7430. Or Railroad Public Involvement Officer Stephenie Wheeler at (907) 265-2671, or Tim Thompson, Railroad Manager of External Affairs (907) 265-2695.

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