



NEWS RELEASE

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Houston to explore rail opportunity

HOUSTON – Some members of the Houston City Council see opportunity in a proposed rail corridor connecting Houston to the Alaska Railroad and to Port MacKenzie. The proposed Houston alignment is one of three under consideration.

More than 50 residents and landowners attended the final open house Friday night (Oct. 5) in Houston at Houston Middle School. Participants looked over exhibit posters, asked questions, and wrote concerns on large aerial maps.

Public comments from the open houses will help in finding the best corridor for the new rail link.

Newly-elected Houston Councilmember Roger Purcell said the city has been approached by constituents and a manufacturing company interested in a loading dock. Purcell said the City is interested in exploring the opportunity of a rail connection for Houston if a loading facility and depot were included.

Joe Perkins, a project executive for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, reminded open house participants of the transformation in economic development that came with the last significant infrastructure project nearly 40 years ago, namely, the George Parks Highway. This rail connection to the Port will dramatically contribute to the economy of the Borough and to the state of Alaska, he said. When the proposed natural gas pipeline for the North Slope gets underway, it will be cheaper to transport the construction materials through Port MacKenzie than through other ports, Perkins said.

The rail extension, approximately a \$300 million project, is a partnership between the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Alaska Railroad Corporation. Project managers and others will meet with the Houston City Council on Oct. 25 at 7 p.m. in Houston to answer questions.

Another meeting open to the public is with the Willow Dog Musers Association on Oct. 24, Wed. at 7 p.m. at the Willow Community Center. Snowmobile clubs are welcome and have been invited.

Anchorage residents who own property in the Mat-Su and could not attend any of the five meetings last week can submit comment through the Web site www.portmacrail.com Large aerial maps of proposed corridors are available at:

- HDR Alaska, project consultant, 2525 C Street 3rd floor, contact Donna Robertson or Leslie Robbins at 644-2000 to make an appointment.
- Railroad Headquarters building, 327 W. Ship Creek Ave., contact Stephenie Wheeler at (907) 265-2671 to make an appointment.

Three proposed corridors are under final consideration for an application before a federal agency. The three begin in the Point MacKenzie area and range between 28 miles and 45 miles in length, connecting with the Railroad's mainline at different locations. From east to west, the proposed corridor names are Big Lake, Houston, and Willow. The corridors drawn on the map at this stage are highly conceptual and are expected to be refined as the process continues.

A table of the strengths and weaknesses of the three proposed corridors will be presented to the Borough Planning Commission and Borough Assembly in November for comment and inquiries. Ultimately a federal agency called the Surface Transportation Board approves the final alignment.

Project Manager Brian Lindamood, of the Alaska Railroad, said he expects to submit a final alternatives analysis to the federal Surface Transportation Board by the end of December. The STB will hold its own public review process as part of the environmental evaluation conducted to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act. Construction of the project is anticipated in 2012.

More information is on the project Web site www.portmacrail.com

Or call Patty Sullivan, Mat-Su Borough Public Affairs Director at (907) 745-9577 or Stephenie Wheeler, Public Involvement Officer with the Alaska Railroad (907) 265-2671.