



## ***NEWS RELEASE***

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MAT-SU BOROUGH—Hundreds of landowners in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough have attended meetings this week on the proposed Port MacKenzie Rail Extension project. At Wasilla Monday night some 70 people attended. At Big Lake Tuesday night 120 attended. In Willow Wednesday night 83 signed in. At Knik Elementary last night 50 attended.

Tonight (Friday) is the last open house on the rail project. The open house begins at Houston Middle School off Hawk Lane at 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. with a presentation at 7 p.m.

The approximately \$300 million rail extension project is a joint effort between the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Alaska Railroad Corporation. Three proposed corridors are on the table.

Participants at meetings have provided written comments on aerial maps, marking their concerns. Among the concerns are: maintaining trail connectivity, as well as protecting private property, parks, water crossings, wildlife habitat, and a tranquil quality of life for lakeside cabin owners.

The public comments at the Open Houses will help in finding the best corridor for the new rail link. The Borough and the Alaska Railroad Corporation are holding the five open houses to gain more local knowledge of the proposed corridors. Many comments will be incorporated and used to help refine the proposed corridors.

“The public comments from these meetings really help in refining our engineering work on all the proposed corridors,” said Brian Lindamood, the Railroad's project manager. Hundreds of comments are being gathered at the meetings, on the Web site, through mail, email, and fax, as well as through a court reporter at each meeting.

Last night Joe Perkins, the project executive for the Borough, told the audience at Knik Elementary about the next stage of the project. A federal board, the Surface Transportation Board, ultimately determines the final rail alignment. The STB will hold its own public process as part of the environmental evaluation under the National

Environmental Policy Act. The Borough and Railroad will hire a contractor from a list of approved contractors, which may or may not be from Alaska.

“These folks are going to put the final blessing on the preferred route,” Perkins said. “The information we're gathering now reflects the uniqueness of Alaska and our lifestyle. The work we're doing now is to provide them more information so we can have a better application.”

The three corridors begin in the Point MacKenzie area and run between 28 miles and 45 miles to different locations, where they connect with the Railroad's mainline. From East to West, the proposed corridors names are Big Lake, Houston, and Willow. The corridors drawn on the map at this stage are highly conceptual and could swing up to a half mile from the depicted line. There is no preferred corridor at this stage.

Among the questions this week were:

Q: If in the end, the chosen alignment affects my private property what are the steps taken?

A: First, these meetings are helping avoid and mitigate impacts to landowners. When possible the proposed alignment will be moved away from private property. If that's not possible, negotiations would take place starting with the fair market value. The Railroad would mutually agree with the landowner on an independent third party appraiser.

Q: What happens to all the trails criss-crossing the area?

A: We will maintain the connectivity of all legally dedicated trails as negotiated with the trail administrators. All trails will be analyzed on a case by case basis. Trail plans are being incorporated into the project map. An additional meeting with trail supporters in Willow will be Oct. 24 at 7 p.m. at the Willow Community Center.

More information is on the project Web site [www.portmacrail.com](http://www.portmacrail.com)

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

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