



NEWS RELEASE

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Wasilla open house starts off series of meetings

WASILLA – Some 70 residents and landowners attended the first Open House for the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project Monday night in Wasilla at the Lake Lucille/Best Western Inn. Participants looked over exhibit posters, asked questions, and wrote concerns on large aerial maps. They came from beyond Wasilla, from Point MacKenzie, from Horseshoe Lake, from Willow, as well as landowners from Cow Lake, among others.

The public comments at the Open Houses will help in finding the best corridor for the new rail link.

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. The three 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.

Connecting Port MacKenzie by rail will help diversify the State and Borough economy, Borough Manager John Duffy told the crowd. "Our country is a net importer of cement," Duffy said. "If this rail link is built we could end up being the supplier for five percent of our nation's cement," he said, referring to the new minerals markets that would develop because of the cheaper transportation costs on the new rail line to the Port.

Project Manager Brian Lindamood, with the Alaska Railroad, reminded the audience that the corridors are highly conceptual. The project will try to avoid or minimize direct impacts to property.

Lindamood said he expects to submit a final alternatives analysis to the federal Surface Transportation Board at the end of December. The STB ultimately determines where the

route will go. The STB will hold its own public process as part of the environmental evaluation under the National Environmental Policy Act. He said the Surface Transportation Board could make its decision in mid 2009.

Among the questions Monday night:

Q: How will my property values be affected if a rail line goes in nearby?

A: It's not clear and will be specific to individual properties. Rail has the potential to increase access and economic development. Construction would require gravel pit development and other impacts. Rail operations would generate some noise, but would also boost employment and general economic developments.

Q: Will public comment be a consideration?

A: Yes. Public comments will help in the evaluation process and will be carefully considered. Public comments that give specific knowledge of the region and/or concerns on proposed routes will help make a better route.

Meetings are every night this week. Tuesday night is at Big Lake Elementary from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday night: Willow; Thursday night: Knik Elementary; Friday night: Houston. More information is on the project Web site 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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