

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
STB Finance Docket No. 34658
Alaska Railroad Corporation Construction and Operation of
a Rail Line between North Pole and Delta Junction, Alaska

Lead Agency: Surface Transportation Board; **Cooperating Agencies:** U.S. Department of Defense, Alaskan Command (ALCOM); Bureau of Land Management, Alaska State Office (BLM); Federal Transit Administration (FTA); Federal Railroad Administration (FRA); U.S. Air Force 354th Fighter Wing Command, Eielson Air Force Base (354th); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District (USACE); U.S. Coast Guard, Seventeenth Coast Guard District (USCG); and Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR)

Proposed Action: Construction and operation of approximately 80 miles of new rail line from North Pole, Alaska to Delta Junction, Alaska and related support and passenger transport facilities.

Location: The proposed rail line would be located in Interior Alaska, southeast of the City of Fairbanks, Alaska. The proposed rail line would be constructed between North Pole, Alaska and Delta Junction, Alaska, and would extend the existing Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC, or the Applicant) rail line that currently ends at Eielson Air Force Base.

Abstract: On July 6, 2007, ARRC filed a petition with the Surface Transportation Board (STB or the Board) pursuant to 49 United States Code (U.S.C.) 10502 for the authority to construct and operate approximately 80 miles of new rail line from North Pole, Alaska to Delta Junction, Alaska. Referred to as the Northern Rail Extension (NRE), the proposed rail line would extend ARRC's existing freight and passenger rail service to the region south of North Pole. The rail extension would begin at the east end of the Chena River Overflow Bridge—north of Eielson Air Force Base (AFB)—and end at the south side of Delta Junction. The Applicant has stated that the purpose of the project is to provide freight and passenger rail service to the region, provide a transportation alternative to Richardson Highway for individuals traveling between Fairbanks and Delta Junction, and allow year-round ground access to the Tanana Flats and Donnelly training areas for the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force. The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) and the cooperating agencies have prepared this Draft EIS, which identifies and evaluates the potential environmental impacts associated with the Proposed Action and Alternatives, including the No-Action Alternative. The Proposed Action and Alternatives, with the exception of the No-Action Alternative, could have adverse noise impacts and could adversely affect wetland, surface water, biological, land use, visual, and cultural resources. SEA has included recommended preliminary mitigation measures in this Draft EIS. The mitigation measures will be considered by the Board as potential conditions if the Board decides to grant ARRC authority to construct and operate the rail line. The Proposed Action and Alternatives would cause negligible impacts on all other resource areas. The cooperating agencies' Federal actions include the USCG's decision on issuing bridge permits under Section 9 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) and the General Bridge Act of 1946 (33 U.S.C. 525 et seq.), the decision by the BLM to issue a linear right-of-way grant under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) to pass through BLM-managed lands, the decision of ALCOM and the 354th to grant permission for construction in areas under their control, and the decision of the USACE to issue a discharge permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977 (33 U.S.C. 1251-1376) and a permit to perform work or place a structure in navigable waters under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 U.S.C. 403).

Comment Period: The public and any interested parties are encouraged to make written comments on all aspects of this Draft EIS. All comments must be submitted within the comment period, which will close February 2, 2009.

Contacts: Written comments on the Draft EIS may be submitted to:

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Further information about the project can be obtained by calling SEA's toll-free number at 1-800-359-5142 (TDD for the hearing impaired 1-800-877-8339). This Draft EIS is also available at the Board's website at: www.stb.dot.gov.

Public Meetings: In addition to receiving written comments, SEA and the cooperating agencies will host public meetings on the Draft EIS at the following locations, dates and times. Interested parties may submit written comments or make oral comments at these meetings.

Pike's Waterfront Lodge, 1850 Hoselton Road, Fairbanks, Alaska: 5-8 PM, Monday, January 12, 2009
City Council Chambers, 125 Snowman Lane, North Pole, Alaska: 5-8 PM, Tuesday, January 13, 2009
Salcha Senior Center, 6062 Johnson Road, Salcha, Alaska: 5-8 PM, Wednesday, January 14, 2009
Jarvis West Building, Milepost 1420.5 Alaska Highway, Delta Junction, Alaska: 5-8 PM, Thursday, January 15, 2009