



***SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD***  
***Washington, DC 20423***

*Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis and Administration*

December 12, 2008

Re: STB Finance Docket No. 35468, Alaska Railroad Corporation – Petition for Exemption – To Construct and Operate a Rail Line Between North Pole, Alaska and Delta Junction, Alaska; Issuance of Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Reader:

The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is pleased to provide you with your copy of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) for the proposed construction and operation of the Northern Rail Extension by the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC). This Draft EIS analyzes the environmental impacts that might occur if ARRC were to construct and operate the proposed action, an approximately 80-mile long rail line from North Pole, Alaska to Delta Junction, Alaska. The Draft EIS analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives, including the no-action alternative.

Eight cooperating agencies assisted SEA in the preparation of the Draft EIS. The cooperating agencies include the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Alaska State Office; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District; U.S. Department of Defense, Alaskan Command; U.S. Air Force 354<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, Eielson Air Force Base; Federal Transit Administration; Federal Railroad Administration; U.S. Coast Guard, Seventeenth District; and Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

In addition to analyzing the proposed action and alternatives, the Draft EIS sets forth SEA's preliminary recommended mitigation, ARRC's voluntary mitigation measures, and encourages mutually acceptable negotiated agreements to mitigate adverse environmental impacts should the Board approve the project.

SEA and the cooperating agencies invite public comment on all aspects of the Draft EIS and are providing a 45-day public comment period, which begins upon the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's issuance of a notice of availability in the *Federal Register* on December 19, 2008. Comments on the Draft EIS must be received or postmarked by February 2, 2009. Instructions on how to submit comments, and a list of the locations, dates, and times of public meetings are attached to this letter in a separate Fact Sheet. After your review of the Draft EIS, we appreciate your comments on ways to improve our analyses, make corrections, compliment what we have done well, and supplement what you feel needs further work. The more specific your comments are, the better we will be able to respond to them.

After the close of the public comment period on the Draft EIS, SEA and the cooperating agencies will prepare a Final EIS in response to comments on the Draft EIS. The Board will then issue a final decision, based on the entire environmental record, including the record on the transportation merits, the Draft EIS, the Final EIS, and all public and agency comments received. The Board then will decide whether to approve the proposed project, deny it, or approve it with mitigating conditions, including environmental conditions. The cooperating agencies may also issue separate decisions, approvals or denials related to the proposed project.

The Draft EIS is also available for viewing and downloading via the Board's website at <http://www.stb.dot.gov>, under "E-Library," then under "Decisions & Notices," beneath the date "12/12/08." You may also visit the Board's website ([www.stb.dot.gov](http://www.stb.dot.gov)) and look for Key Cases under Environmental Matters.

SEA has distributed the Draft EIS widely for public review and comment. Approximately 1,700 copies of the Draft EIS have been distributed to parties on SEA's environmental distribution list, which includes interested Federally recognized tribes, key governmental agencies, and persons expressing an interest in receiving a copy of the Draft EIS or participating in the environmental review process for this proceeding. SEA has also distributed the Draft EIS to all parties of record (official participants), as well as making additional print copies of the Draft EIS available for review in three public libraries in the project area.

SEA appreciates the efforts of all interested parties who have participated in this environmental review to date. We look forward to receiving your comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Rutson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Victoria Rutson  
Chief,  
Section of Environmental Analysis

## FACT SHEET

The Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is implementing a public and agency outreach effort to ensure that the public, agencies, and communities have the opportunity to actively participate and comment on the Draft EIS and the Board's environmental review process. Comments on the Draft EIS must be received or postmarked by **February 2, 2009**.

Beginning on January 12, 2009, SEA and the cooperating agencies will host four public meetings in the project area to receive public comments on the Draft EIS. At the beginning of each meeting, SEA will give a brief overview of the environmental review process and will invite interested parties to make oral comments in an orderly fashion before meeting participants. SEA will have a transcriber present to record these oral comments. Written comments can also be submitted during the meeting. The dates, locations and times of the meetings are shown below:

- January 12, 2009, 5:00-8:00 PM, Pike's Waterfront Lodge, 1850 Hoselton Road, Fairbanks, AK
- January 13, 2009, 5:00-8:00 PM, City Council Chambers, 125 Snowman Lane, North Pole, AK
- January 14, 2009, 5:00-8:00 PM, Salcha Senior Center, 6062 Johnson Road, Salcha, AK
- January 15, 2009, 5:00-8:00 PM, Jarvis West Building, Milepost 1420.5 Alaska Highway, Delta Junction, AK

**Written Comments:** Comment forms will be provided at the public meetings and will be accepted at the meetings or the forms can be submitted later by mail. Comment forms or written letters may be mailed to:

David Navecky  
STB Finance Docket No. 34658  
Surface Transportation Board  
395 E Street S.W.  
Washington, DC 20423-0001

**Recorded Comments:** A court reporter will be at the public meetings to transcribe the oral comments.

**Electronic Comments:** Comments may be filed electronically on the Board's web site, [www.stb.dot.gov](http://www.stb.dot.gov), by clicking on the E-FILING link. Then select "Environmental Comments," which does not require a Login Account. Please refer to STB Finance Docket No. 34658 when filing.

**Library Distribution:** SEA has also distributed the Draft EIS to the repositories listed below and requested that the entire Draft EIS be made publicly available in their reference sections.

Delta Community Library  
Delta Junction, AK 99737  
(907) 895-4656

Noel Wein Public Library  
1215 Cowles Street  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
(907) 459-1020

North Pole Branch Library  
601 Snowman Lane  
North Pole, AK 99705  
(907) 488-6101

**Deadline:** All electronic and written comments must be received or postmarked **February 2, 2009**.

All comments received – written, e-filed, or transcribed – will carry equal weight in helping to complete the EIS process and guide the Board in its decision-making on this matter.

**Additional Information:** For lands under state ownership that are crossed by the proposed Northern Rail Extension, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR) would consult with ARRC and potentially affected parties to determine whether the location of the rail line would minimize adverse effects on existing and potential rights-of-way and land uses associated with the location, construction, and operation of a gas pipeline in a manner that is in the best interest of the state, pursuant to Alaska Statute (AS) 42.40.460, Extension of the Alaska Railroad (2005). ADNR will be present at STB's public meetings for the proposed NRE, to hear comments about the project, and, in particular, how the proposed location of the project may affect public access to state lands along and adjacent to the proposed transportation corridor. ADNR will provide additional opportunities for potentially affected parties to comment on its process for meeting the obligations under AS 42.40.460. For additional information, please contact ADNR Division of Mining, Land and Water at 907-451-2740.