

APPENDIX Q
ORAL COMMENTS ON THE
DRAFT EIS

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

SECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

PORT MACKENZIE RAIL EXTENSION PROJECT

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

Anchorage, Alaska

April 6, 2010

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Anchorage, Alaska - April 6, 2010)

(On record - 6:30 p.m.)

MR. NAVECKY: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. And thank you for attending this public comment meeting on the draft environmental statement or EIS for the proposed Port MacKenzie rail extension. And before I go any further, can everyone hear me okay? No? Okay. Again, welcome. I am Dave Navecky of the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis, otherwise known as SEA. The board is the federal agency responsible for authorizing the construction and operation of new rail lines and associated facilities. In December 2008 the Alaska Railroad filed a request for authority to construct and operate approximately 30 to 45 miles of rail line and related support facilities from the Port MacKenzie district to a point on the existing Alaska Railroad mainline between Wasilla and just north of Willow. The Mat-Su Borough is working with the railroad as a sponsor for the proposed rail line and was responsible for obtaining funds to conduct environmental reviews and preliminary engineering for the proposed rail line. The Surface Transportation Board is the lead federal agency responsible for preparing this EIS which is intended to identify and evaluate potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed rail line.

We also have three cooperating agencies assisting in

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

the preparation of this EIS. They are the US Army Corp of Engineers, the Federal Railroad Administration and the US Coast Guard. Sitting in the audience this morning is Ben Soiseth with the US Army Corp of Engineers, one of our cooperating agencies. Ben is sitting here to my left. A team of consultants lead by ICF International also assisted SEA in preparing the EIS. At the table with me is Alan Summerville, project manager for ICS EIS activities.

If you have not already done so, please sign in at the front table just outside the entrance to the theater and indicate whether or not you are interested in providing oral comments on the draft EIS at tonight's meeting. This meeting is part of the draft EIS stage of the environmental review process for the STB. As you know, the draft EIS was issued last month and we are now accepting comments on the document. Prior to preparing the draft EIS, we conducted agency and public scoping meetings to listen to your questions and concerns. The information you provided helped us frame our analysis, understand your concerns about the project and finalize the scope for the EIS which we issued in July of 2009. This final scope of studies served as our guide in addressing -- guide concerning what to address in the draft EIS.

After the draft EIS comment period closes on May 10th, we will review all the hearing transcripts from tonight's hearing and the five following hearings from this week and next week and all written comments and we will prepare written responses for

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

all substantive comments. All comments and comment responses including from the transcripts will be published in the final EIS. The board will then issue a final decision based on the merits of the proposed rail line, the draft and final EIS and all public and agency comments in the public record. This final decision will take one of three actions. Approve the proposed rail line, deny it or approve it with mitigating conditions including environmental conditions. Construction, if approved by the board, could not begin unless and until the cooperating agencies issue their final decisions approving or permitting the proposed rail line. The environmental review process is further explained in the handout that we provided to you at the table at the front of the room.

Whether you speak tonight or not, you can also provide us with handwritten comments this evening by filling out the last page of your handout and turning it in at the table at the rear of the theater. There are also blank comment forms at the sign in table. Oral and written comments are given equal weight and consideration, so if you choose not speak this evening, your written comments will be fully considered. In addition, this evening is just one option for you to provide comments. We are accepting written comments until May 10th and you may use the comment forms provided tonight or your own handwritten or typed comment letters. Your handout provides the information you need to submit these written comments to the board either by mail or

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

electronically using our website. In preparing your written comments, we encourage you to be as detailed as possible describing your concerns. We are also interesting in receiving comments on the purpose and need for the proposed rail line, potential impacts, opinions, your opinions on a preferred alternative, adequacy of the preliminary mitigation and draft EIS, and the need for any additional mitigation.

In a minute I will begin calling on those individuals who would like to speak. Your oral comments will be documented by our court reporter located to my right. When I call your name, please approach the microphone, also to my right, and then state and spell your first and last name for the benefit of the audience and our court reporter. In order to insure that everyone has an opportunity to speak, each person will be limited to approximately five minutes. When you have approximately one minute left within your allotted time, I will politely let you -- give you notice that your time is almost up. If we have some time left at the end of the two hours and anyone who is not signed up to speak wishes to speak or a person that has previously spoken, we will give them an opportunity to speak for five minutes or as time allows at the end. We appreciate everyone's cooperation and the courteousness towards those who are speaking.

At this time, I would like to invite our first commenter to the microphone and that is Ed McCain. Again, please

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

state and spell your first name and last name once you reach the microphone. Thank you, Ed.

Comment
Number: 94

MR. MCCAIN: Edward McCain, E-D-W-A-R-D M-C-C-A-I-N.

I'm from Willow. And I received your CD in the mail and I've reviewed it and I've got these concerns. It says that that site for the dock was picked because there's no need for dredging. Why? Because it's self-scouring, meaning the current through there is so fast that it can't silt in like it does everywhere else. There's already been one incidence where one of the pulp ships had to untie because of heavy ice conditions in the current. There's already been several incidences at Kenai, the Nikiski dock, where ships have been tore lose from the dock oil tankers. And the current and ice conditions down there are a fraction of what they are at Point MacKenzie.

Another one of my concerns is the crossings. You have almost 10 miles there where there's no crossings other than a few dog sled trails. It says you will honor all recorded right-of-ways and easements. Are you aware of what a protracted township is, protracted section line? Even those these things aren't surveyed, every mile square has a 50 foot easement on either side of the section line. And there's a rural procedure that you have to go through with the State of Alaska or the Mat-Su Borough to vacate these section lines. And the term they use or what they like to say is you have to provide them with equal or better access or they won't vacate it. Is the railroad going to honor

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

that? And I would like to see the railroad pay for these crossings rather than try to dump it on local government or the private developer.

Are you aware that State Fish and Game says there's a 50 foot pedestrian easement for mean high water upland for pedestrians to fish and whatnot? Are we going to be able to walk under the railroad tracks to go fishing or are they going to block it? And I would like you to ask somebody from the railroad what happens at Ferry every Fourth of July.

It says you're going to have a access road along the edge of the tracks. Is that going to be available for the public to use or is that going to be private and are private individuals or the local government going to have to build another road parallel to it for their use? The trails in this -- these trails go through my place in Willow and they're wintertime trails. They're in the swamps, the crick drainages. Unless you build the railroad up, right now your plan and profile says it's only going to be four feet above existing ground, these things are going to glacier up, fill up with water if you just try to put a culvert in and they're not going to be usable. You're going to have to think about that.

Another one of my concerns is what's happening with the Glenn Highway there across the Eklutna Flats. The road is acting as a dike and you will see that the water on the mountainsides to the east is building up and killing all the trees, where on the

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

south side of the road it's drying up and the trees are starting to grow. Is this going to be what's happened with the railroad where it goes out for this 10 miles with only half a dozen culverts?

Another one of my concerns is I think you need to pick the shortest possible route, because if there's any freight ever going to be going from Anchorage to Point MacKenzie, if you pick the Willow route, it's going to be 64.2 miles longer than the Big Lake route for a round trip train. And I think you got to take a look at some of that stuff, because the Willow route is 44.9 miles, the Big Lake route 31.4. That's 13 and a half miles round trip is 27. The Big Lake route starts off at mile 70.3. The Willow route at -- excuse me, 170.3. The Willow route starts off at 188.9. So that's 18.6 miles for 37.2 when you make it round trip for a total of 64.2 miles that that train is going to have to make. Your statement says that the bridge across -- the railroad bridge across the inlet isn't feasible or practical.

MR. NAVECKY: One more minute, Mr. McCain.

MR. MCCAIN: Okay. The other thing is EIS state appears to take a negative look at the Big Lake route, thoroughly covered, but not the Willow or Houston routes in the same light. This gives the impression that the Big Lake route is being viewed differently and being removed from consideration on the offset. And you're moving a crick, 2440 feet of creek, a thousand feet of Hawk Lane. You're closing 865 feet of Cheri Lake Road even

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

though it's a mile away from where this railroad Y is going to be. You're closing -- or removing 1405 feet of Loon Street. Why not just move the railroad over a few hundred feet to miss the creek and all this other stuff?

And I did some math there on your Big Lake route for 31.4 miles, 200 foot of right-of-way. That comes up to 761 acres, and yet in your statements there you say you're losing 930 acres in one place, 1056 in another place of environment, whatever. And I think your noise study is a little ridiculous for Alaska too, because you said that the 10 to 1 factor between day to night trains, there's going to be 10 trains in day from one at night. Well, the Alaska Railroad runs their freight train, it's night, not during the day. So the noise impact is going to be a lot more. You said one of your microphone stations for the noise was at the end of my driveway and I don't recall anybody being there for 24 hours. You can't see my house in any of your drawings, because it's under your big black dots.

MR. NAVECKY: Can you wrap it up, please?

MR. MCCAIN: Yes, that's pretty much it right there.

All right. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. Thank you for your comments. Next is Brenda McCain.

MS. MCCAIN: I'll pass.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you. Next is Joe Wilson.

MR. WILSON: I'd like to know more about an issue of Mac

**Comment
Number: 99**

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

East route, particularly in the area of the intersection of Port MacKenzie Road, Burma Road and Ayrshire. South west of that intersection, there's three sections of land owned by a Native regional corporation and a Native tribal organization. And you've got Mac East going diagonally through their land which, you know, you would think would cut down the development potential of that land and reduce its value. So I'm wondering, you know, have you determined that they're willing to sell you land for that easement, or if they're not willing, are you going to try to get it by eminent domain or reroute the Mac East? Or if the reg -- if the owners refute your ability to use state eminent domain laws and are willing to contest it in court, what's your port then? Are you going to reroute the line then or -- I wonder how much analysis you did on this issue.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Next up is Mike Whedbee, please.

MR. WHEDBEE: My name is Mike Whedbee. It's M-I-K-E W-H-E-D-B-E-E. And I would like to address Mr. Summerville and Mr. Navecky. My address is 450 Brazil (ph) Circle, Big Lake, Alaska. The purpose for me being here is I'm representing the friends of the lake. And I did submit a petition back when we did the initial -- started the studies -- with 1150 names. And when I talked to Mr. Navecky a week ago he said that everything we submitted at that time we had to resubmit again for this

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

study; is that correct? Any comments or.....

MR. NAVECKY: Any comments on the draft EIS. That's correct.

Comment
Number: 98

MR. WHEDBEE: Okay. Well, I do have a revised list of names that was just updated as of today. But seems like that, you know, this spur has been studied multiple times over the years at a cost of millions of dollars to taxpayers and it seems like they're doing the same study expecting different results. You know, if we get different results than we've got in the past, it may be of a direct result of special interest or borough management. It's not the will of the taxpayers and the people that live in the Big Lake area that this spur to be put in to any of the Big Lake connections. And that's -- that goes with the 1172 names that I have here on this petition.

In 1994 a study was done and it concluded the Willow route was the best route. In 2003 the study was done, it concluded the Willow route was the only route that they would accept. The Big Lake comprehensive plan supports a route that is west of Papoose Lake. The Big Lake Council supports a Willow route. The Big Lake Chamber of Commerce supports a Willow route. I'm submitting a petition with 1172 names of voting people that either are property owners, recreators that live or recreate out in the Big Lake area that all support the Willow route.

In short, the three Big Lake routes are not acceptable to the people that live out there. And if that's the only choice

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

and you can't mitigate the Willow route, then the fifth alternative would have to be a no build option. And that's not something that we prefer. We'd like to see something built, but if no build is -- you know, if we can't get the Willow route, then we're going to push for a no build option. Yeah, we're looking at a cost of around \$300,000, was the figure that we had originally to build this. And cost should not be a factor, because 270 to 300 million is that -- not that much difference. And if we're looking to transport gold or ore from the north, it only makes sense that we would come through the Willow route rather than coming through a bunch of towns and then end up 30, 40 years down the road having to move this railroad like they're doing right now in Wasilla and like they're doing in Fairbanks. And that concludes what I've got to say tonight, but I want to submit this petition to you.

MR. NAVECKY: That's fine. Thank you, Mr. Whedbee.

MR. WHEDBEE: Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Next up we have Robert Gilliland. I hope I pronounced that properly.

Comment
Number: 93

MR. GILLILAND: I'll spell it for you. My name is Robert Gilliland, R-O-B-E-R-T G-I-L-L-I-L-A-N-D. I live here in Anchorage and I don't care which route they're talking about. My concern here, and I was hoping to get some answers to questions. So I get my concern is about the port itself. The previous information of public by the EIS indicates that the Port

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

MacKenzie is described as a deep water, deep draft dock with 60 feet of water on mean lower low tide. Now anyone who has access to maritime engineering information understands what 60 feet at a dockside -- this is -- the dock up there is sheet pile and 60 feet at mean lower low tide is a lot of water. And that's why it had been previously published in the EIS, in the initial draft. It's my -- and we all know that or Anchorage or this Knik information has about a 30 foot tide twice a day. It -- my understanding that the port of Anchorage has been authorized for a 35 foot mean lower low tide dredging operation which goes on annually. They are seeking to lower that to 45 feet to take it to an additional 10 feet draft. I have no reason to believe that the tidal action at Port MacKenzie is appreciably different than the tidal action at Anchorage and yet you previously are saying that is 60 feet without dredging at Port MacKenzie. My purpose here is to -- I would like to have to my availability the engineering information that resulted in that conclusion. And that's the purpose -- I assume that that -- you're not going to be able to give it to me here. Can you furnish with a dot com or some sort of an engineering reference that will give me some understanding as to why they had to dredge to 45 feet in Anchorage and across Knik Arm they say they have already without dredging a 60 foot mean lower low tide. Is my informa -- my search for information clear? Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Yes, I understand your question. Thank

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

you, sir. Next, please, is Jim Woelfel.

Comment
Number: 101

MR. WOELFEL: My name is Jim, J-I-M, Woelfel, spelled W-O-E-L-F-E-L. I'm approximately a 30-year property owner on South Point MacKenzie. Around there they call me the newcomer because it's deserved. I have a few concerns, all arise out of the -- the simple problem of access to Point MacKenzie. Access to South Point MacKenzie is difficult to say the least at any time winter or summer and the railroad proposes to bisect our current accesses to our property. I believe I can safely say that I speak for all property owners on South Point MacKenzie that we object to closing of any access that we currently have without being provided other adequate access.

Over the course of my 30 years of property ownership I've probably used at least four different accesses to my property at different times. That arises because conditions change every year. There are many different reasons to need different places to access our property depending on the conditions. Overall I would say that I object to the closing of any section lying easements without substantial discussions being held with property owners south of the railroad. Not that I'm against it, but we need to have extremely well thought out decisions before this happens and I hope that will happen.

The marshaling yards that are located in a couple of different options on South Point MacKenzie appear to probably interrupt at least three different access points that I've used

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

for years including the current trail head that's down there. I --
again, I would object to closing any of those accesses without
further discussion. I am sure that if the railroad discusses
with us we can come up with some solutions that probably most of
us can live with, but somebody has to talk to us first and that
certainly hasn't occurred yet. I believe we need some further
discussions to be held. The last thing I would like to comment
on is that where the railroad is proposed to run is through a
relatively windy spot. It's in the flat land area that
unprotected. And I think there will be significant snow drifting
on the south side of that railroad. And wherever crossings are
made we need to account for that and at least get far enough
beyond that drifting area so that any access that is made will be
usable to us. If you build it down in the swamp or don't do
anything, it'll be closed any way. And I object to closing any
unofficial trails without further discussion with the railroad.
Thank you very much.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments, Mr. Woelfel.
Next is Patrick Sharrock.

MR. SHARROCK: My name is Pat Sharrock. Patrick
Sharrock, P-A-T-R-I-C-K S-H-A-R-R-O-C-K. And good evening, Dave.
Welcome back to Alaska.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you.

Comment
Number: 97

MR. SHARROCK: I've lived in Anchorage for over 63 years
and owned recreational cabin property near the Houston

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

alternative route for over 40 years. I'm not an environmentalist, hydrologist or geologist, but my comments are based on observation. Just wanted to say my remarks are about six or seven minutes long. If you have to cut me off I'll finish off tomorrow.

I reviewed the draft EIS and it appears fairly -- to fairly represent the issues at hand, however I'm still seriously bothered by two concerns that I have raised in earlier comments during the last two and a half years. The first one is recreation. I'm referring to -- to the map here. First I want to bring to your attention the map titled road and recreation map of the Matanuska Valley. The map has a 1972 copyright and clearly includes the area bounded by the Willow alternative and Big Lake alternative. The only trail shown on the map are the historic Iditarod trail and some trails south of Willow along Long Lake or near Long Lake. I now -- you don't have it, but I'm going to refer to you figure 13.2-5, Page 13.2-10 in the draft EIS. Please note on that there are -- well, I'll just read what I had. Please note the multitude of trails all over the place and particularly look at the area west of the Houston route. Very important is that those trails will not be accessible from the Big Lake Horseshoe Lake area without illegal crossing of the Houston north routes. Likewise, snow machiners traveling within an area west of the Little Susitna River would not have access to the eastern area without illegally crossing the Houston

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

alternative.

Additionally, these are not official trails listed in tables 13.2-2 and 3 on Page 13.2. The second paragraph states, quote, blockage of unofficial trails would be considered a permanent adverse impact to recreational trails, trail use and recreational access, unquote, and the public could not cross the right-of-way without approval from the railroad. Lastly, unofficial trails are those trails created anywhere when snow depth allows. I, along with family members, neighbors near Horseshoe Lake and probably thousands of other snow machiners cross the Houston alternative every winter. The Houston alternative clearly bisects a large recreational area that is used by residents in the Mat-Su Valley and Anchorage and encourages illegal crossings.

The next issue is wetlands. I refer back to the maps I've already noted. Please observe the two distinct water areas when in the -- within the alternative route areas. In the northwestern area west of the Little Susitna River we have a large number of unusually formed lakes. In the eastern area we have lakes similar in configuration until you reach the latitude above Big Lake. I certainly cannot give a reason for the huge contrast, but the areas are separated by the Little Susitna River. As a mixed up river as -- as that river is, I would not be as surprised to learn that at some time the river drained through the eastern area. Maybe the layout could be from glacier

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

activity. I have no idea. In any event, it is now void of distinct -- a distinct drainage system. My observation is that drainage could be similar to a mini Everglades, water moving imperceptively (ph) slow but affecting a large area. The following approximated value elevations manifest the slow southerly flow of water in the area starting with Seymour Lake which is up on the right hand area of the longer lakes. Seymour Lake is approximately 300 feet. Beaver Lake is 190 feet. Muleshoe Lake 175 feet. West Lake, or Little Horseshoe Lake I think is -- that's the way you referred to it in the EIS, is 160 feet. Horseshoe Lake is 160 feet. Hourglass Lake is 155 feet. And Big Lake is 145 feet. These changes in elevation were magnified by the range in 2006. Overflow of water from the area around Muleshoe Lake flooded into West Lake. Our -- West Lake rose by approximately 16 inches and I think Horseshoe Lake did the same thing.

MR. NAVECKY: About one more minute, please.

MR. SHARROCK: The rise was from the rain itself and the overflow stream. So where did the water go? I can only conclude that some became part of the ground water system that feeds lakes and some migrated south as service water until normal drainage level was reached.

One point before I close. And this has been some concern to me. The distance between Muleshoe Lake and the unnamed lake to its east is approximately 600 feet. The 200 foot

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

on either side of the segment for purposes of the wetlands evaluation within the thousand feet figure that's in the EIS noted in Appendix C lies within each lake. What impact that has related to that, I don't know.

In my opinion, and I expect the opinion of many others, my conclusion is if the Houston route is built it bisects a large recreation area and produces a disservice to the recreation population in the Cook Inlet area. Additionally, it constricts the natural southerly flow or migration of water east of the Little Susitna River. Even though this area is not named a recreation area like the Little Susitna River and Nancy Lake and Willow areas, I would name it the Big Lake/Horseshoe Lake public use recreation areas subject to FR -- FRA funding limitations. Impact from the project on the issues I raise I don't believe are de minimis at all. The Willow route is the most logical route for this project and was recommended in 2003 study and supported by the railroad. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for you comments. Next, Jim Sealy, please.

MR. SEALY: I'll pass.

MR. NAVECKY: Pass. Cam Rader.

Comment
Number: 95

MR. RADER: Yeah. Thank you. My name is Cam, C-A-M, Rader, R-A-D-E-R. My address is 3313 Peace Court, Anchorage, 99508. I primarily want to address two comments. One is a human impact and the other is on wildlife. My family's property is a

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

little farther down the trail than Jim Woelfel's. You know, the -- sort of the history is when the Ag Project went in the state interrupted our use of the size line that we had been using. Eventually the borough extended the port access road so we could use the inter tide coming from the other direction. When the borough paved the road last year they occupied our parking lot and rendered the grade such that it's difficult to get a vehicle off the road down the trail during the winter. Chugach apparently put in access which basically parallels what looks to me like the right-of-way that he test holes on last fall. So I guess my initial comment is that there's private property all along the bluff from the port all the way around to the size line that runs out of the back of the project. All those people need access. Chugach needs access at least during the winter. They use fairly heavy equipment, big loads. So whatever crossing is placed at that end needs to allow for crossing with vehicles from, you know, wheelers and snow machines to the equipment that Chugach uses, which sometimes is fairly substantial. As Jim said, I don't care where the access is as long as I don't have to go back up to Burma Road someplace to get across the railroad.

I guess the other concern I have is the way the borough works they don't apparently express too much concern about whether a crossing, a parking lot, actually has access to where you need to go. So I'm hoping that some thought will be given to how Chugach -- how the property owners are going to have access

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

going west and south.

My other concern is that at least prior to development of the Ag Project there was a huge winter trail, mainly winter trail, that moves from as far away as Mt. Susitna, used to communicate [sic] with Point MacKenzie and probably the Palmer Hay Flats. There are a substantial number of moose that either use south Point MacKenzie or travel through south Point MacKenzie. As I'm sure you're aware, moose tend to travel the right-of-way, the railway right-of-way in the winter if there's deep snow and I think there has to be some thought given to overpasses, underpasses to allow those moose to travel through there or we're to end up with signs that are talking about 500,000 moose killed this winter instead of only a couple hundred thousand. So thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Next is Lois Epstein, please.

Comment
Number: 92

MS. EPSTEIN: Hi, my name is Lois Epstein and I'm an engineer and director of the Alaska Transportation Priorities Project, which is a nonprofit promoting sensible transportation systems and policies in Alaska. We represent conservation organizations, other nonprofits, individuals and businesses. And I have very brief comments today. I apologize for not having had the opportunity to go over the draft EIS, but one thing I am not certain and I've asked around and no one seems to be certain whether it's included, is the right-of-way going to be usable as

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

a bike path or other recreational type of trail, maybe even commuting for some folks. That's -- active railroad right-of-ways are sort of the future for Rails-to-Trails. I've talked to the folks in DC about that and I want to be sure that that option is available. I understand the right-of-way is going to be fairly large, 200 feet, which is generally going to be enough to have some separation distance. And I understand there are some engineering issues to make sure that safety is assured, but I just want to be sure that that's part of the final decision making. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Oh, Lois, could you spell your name for us, please, for the court reporter?

MS. EPSTEIN: Yes, I apologize. Lois is L-O-I-S and Epstein is E-P-S-T-E-I-N.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you. That is the extent of the individuals that said a definitive yes that they would like to speak. There were four people that were uncertain whether or not they wanted to speak when they signed in. I'm going to run down their names and see if they've decided whether or not to speak. The first is Bret Dittlinger.

MR. DITTLINGER: Pass.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you. Andrew Rexford (ph).

MR. REXFORD: I'll pass too.

MR. NAVECKY: Daniel Smith.

MR. SMITH: I'll pass.

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

Comment
Number: 96

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you. John Russell.

MR. RUSSELL: John with an H, Russell, R-U-S-S-E-L-L.

Resident of South Anchorage here and basically my interest, and fairly short, is that as I've heard earlier tonight there is ample and plenty of access across any of these routes. Certainly the Houston route is a recreational area and even so is the Willow route, because not only for the Iditarod trail historically, all of your snow machine or four-wheeler routes to the Susitna, Mt. Susitna all the way to Skwentna, many of them come through that area. Cowal Lake, Red Shirt Lake, Rolly Creek up to Willow. And I have not been able to look at the EIS or if you've designed it yet for snow machine access and personal recreation access. And that's one of my concerns here, because this is the one area other than Turnagain Pass that is accessible and close to Anchorage. This is where my kids learned how to play. I have friends with cabins from Burma Road to Willow and friends who live out in Long Lake. And again, safe access, safe crossing and corridors. Even the Willow route on the west side of the hill from Red Shirt is certainly, you know, the Big Willow swamp. That's a corridor north-south as well as corridors east to west and crossing is certainly my concern and then what's designed into that for someone who I've already heard tonight.

One question I might have is the overall plan of right-of-ways through any of these routes, inclusive down the road of any highway right-of-ways, because that's still a long

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

term question of both for if there is a bridge from Point MacKenzie tying in, in other words, a bypass around Wasilla or the Houston-Anchorage highway access and whether or not that that's part of this right-of-way acquisition.

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. Thank you very much. Is there anyone that has not spoken that would like to speak? Yes, sir. Please come down. And please state and spell your name for us, please.

Comment
Number: 102

MR. WOLFE: Hi, my name is John Wolfe, W-O-L-F-E, and I had signed up as no comment and I went back and changed it because I thought it was going to be more of a presentation. You're looking more for comments. I have two concerns. Environmentally they, I guess, fall in two categories, people and noise. You're putting your railroad, no matter which one of these various routes you select -- will eventually select, you're putting it through the prime recreational area for all of Southcentral Alaska. And everybody in that area has recreational property up there. They sail the lakes, they swim, they do whatever. There has got to be a better solution by going farther and farther to the west and get away from as many people who have property up there as you can.

My other concern is noise and that just basically concerns a railroad in general. Your report speaks in terms of, I believe, 80, 90, hundred decibel noise levels for a train going by. And in that area up there, that carries for miles. And it's

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

one thing if you're in an urban area. You've got cars and trucks and other urban traffic running around. It kind of muffles or at least joins the noise level of trains, trucks and whatnot. But out there in that area in the Mat-Su Valley, that noise is just unbearable and it travels for miles and miles as I say. And when you have a lake lot up there that is out in the middle of basically nowhere and it's quiet, your railroad is going to destroy the values all through that area. The other thing I would question, I guess, is year round I'm looking at your Mac West Connector 1 to Houston, but joining it to Mac East Connector 3 to Willow and that doesn't seem to be provided for. In other words, it's a dog leg off farther to the west. And my question that I'm raising is why not take your route still farther west, as far west as you can get, way over on the edge of the Susitna River. I don't see that addressed as to why you're not going farther and farther west rather than up through the middle of the recreation area. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Does anyone else that has not spoken would like to speak? Anyone that has spoken that would like to have an additional five minutes to speak? Is there anyone in the room? Sure. Come on. Please state your name again for us.

Comment
Number: 100

MR. WILSON: It's Joe Wilson, W-I-L-S-O-N. I'm just wondering if it's possible that you guys could just address some of these issues and just, you know, not an official response, but

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

just kind of, you know, talk about them and just give an idea what's going on. That would be good if you could.

MR. NAVECKY: Well, once we close the formal commentary -- comment portion of tonight's meeting, I will be available to speak with individuals to hear their comments and to potentially answer general questions. I don't have all the answers into my head and I'm not the decision maker in this case. I'm working on the environmental impact statement which will be used by the Surface Transportation Board to make a decision and the board is a three member panel of -- they're nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Those are the decision makers and they will use the draft EIS and the final EIS and your written comments, including your questions on tonight's project as well as the transcripts from tonight's meeting, they will review those materials in making their decision. So if you have questions that you -- are important to you that you want answered in the document, in the final EIS, that you want considered when the final decision is issued, it's important that we go through this process as we've done tonight to get them on the record, in the transcripts, and then we will address those individually in the final EIS.

But once I close the formal portion of tonight's meeting I can answer some general questions for you if you would like to come up and speak with me. I would be happy to answer what I can. I may not have answers for all your questions, but

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

I'll do the best I can. Is there anyone else that would like to speak?

Comment
Number: 91

MR. DITTLINGER: My name is Bret, B-R-E-T, Dittlinger, D-I-T-T-L-I-N-G-E-R, and I have a cabin out at West Papoose Lake as do some of the other people here. One of the questions I have and I've been thinking about is what's wrong with the current rail system that we have? We have the Whittier Port where I know they have ships that pull up that have railcars actually on the barges or ships and they come off of the rail -- off the barge right onto the rail and they go where they need to go. And the other quest -- the other port is Anchorage. It's probably a mile away from Point MacKenzie and I don't know if the borough is trying to push this for, you know, the economics of it, but as far as impact, why not use the existing ports? And there's two there. And from my observations it sure doesn't seem like when I drive down the Glenn Highway that the rail tracks are being used that much, that they could sure put some more trains on it without doing any of this, because I don't want it -- it's going to go within a mile of my cabin and Big Lake's three miles from my house and I could hear the speedboats from my cabin. So a train being a mile away is definitely going to be disruptive. And that's pretty much what I have to say.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Anyone else, please? Last call. Okay. Well, thank you very much for attending tonight's meeting and I appreciate your time and coming

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

tonight and providing us with your comments and questions. It is really an important component in our environmental review process and we will consider all your comments and questions and they will be addressed in the final EIS. With that, I will close tonight's public comment meeting and thank you again for attending.

(Off record - 7:26 p.m.)

(END OF PROCEEDINGS)

April 6, 2010

Anchorage Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

TRANSCRIBER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Salena A. Hile, hereby certify that the foregoing pages numbered 2 through 29 are a true, accurate, and complete transcript of proceedings, transcribed under my direction from a copy of the electronic sound recording to the best of our knowledge and ability.

Date

Salena A. Hile

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
SECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

PORT MACKENZIE RAIL EXTENSION PROJECT
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

Big Lake, Alaska

April 7, 2010

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Big Lake, Alaska - April 7, 2010)

(On record - 6:30 p.m.)

MR. NAVECKY: Okay, folks. I think we're about ready to begin if you could please have your seats. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for attending this public comment meeting on the draft environmental impact statement or EIS for the proposed Port MacKenzie rail extension. I would like to officially call this meeting to order. I am Dave Navecky of the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis otherwise known as SEA. The board is the federal agency responsible for constructing and operating -- for authorizing the construction and operation of new rail lines and associated facilities. In December 2008 the Alaska Railroad Corporation filed a request for authority to construct and operate approximately 30 to 45 miles of new rail line and related support facilities from the Port MacKenzie district to a point on the existing Alaska Railroad mainline between Wasilla and just north of Willow. The Mat-Su Borough is working with the railroad as a sponsor to the proposed rail line and is responsible for obtaining funds to conduct environmental reviews and preliminary engineering for the proposed rail line. The Surface Transportation Board is the lead federal agency responsible for preparing the CIS which is intended to identify and evaluate potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed rail

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

line. We also have three cooperating agencies assisting in the preparation of the EIS. They are the US Army Corp of Engineers, the Federal Railroad Administration and the US Coast Guard. Sitting in the audience this evening with us is Ben Soiseth, to my left, of the US Army Corp of Engineers. Tonight, we do not have representatives from the other two agencies. A team of consultants led by ICF International assisted my office, SEA, in preparing the EIS. At the table with me is Alan Summerville, project manager for ICF EIS activities.

If you have not already done so, please sign in at the table to my right and indicate whether you are interested in providing oral comments on the draft EIS at tonight's meeting. This meeting is part of the draft EIS stage of the environmental review process conducted by the board and the cooperating agencies. As you know, the draft EIS was issued last month and we are now accepting comments on the document. Prior to preparing the draft EIS we conducted agency and public scoping meetings to listen to your questions and concerns. The information you provided helped us frame our analysis and understand your concerns about the project and helped us finalize the scope of study for the EIS which was issued in July of 2009. This final scope of studies served as our guide concerning what to address in the draft EIS.

After the draft EIS comment closes on May 10th, we will review all of the hearing transcripts from tonight's meeting,

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

last night's meeting and the four additional meetings we will be convening and all written comments and we will prepare written responses to all substantive comments. All comments, the hearing transcripts and all comment responses that we prepare will be published in the final EIS. The Surface Transportation Board will then issue a final decision on the proposed project based on the transportation merits of the proposed rail line, the contents of the draft and final EISs and all public and agency comments in the public record. This final decision will take one of three actions; approve the proposed rail line, deny it or approve it with mitigating conditions including environmental conditions. Construction, if approved by the board could not begin unless and until the cooperating agencies issue their final decisions approving or permitting the proposed rail line. The handout that we provided with you this evening contains additional information about this environmental review process.

Whether you speak tonight or not, you can also provide us with handwritten comments this evening by filling out the last page of your handout and turning it in at the sign in table. We also have blank comment forms at the sign in table if you like. Oral and written comments are given equal consideration and weight so if you choose not to speak this evening, your written comments will be fully considered. In addition, this evening is just one option for you to provide comments. We are accepting written comments until May 10th. And then you may use the

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

comment forms provided to you this evening or your own handwritten or typed comment letters. Your handout provides the information you need to submit your written comments either by mail or electronically via our website. In preparing your written comments, we encourage you to be as detailed as possible in describing your concerns. We are also interested in receiving comments on the potential project impacts, your opinions on the preferred alternative, adequacy of the preliminary mitigation and draft EIS, the purpose and need for the project and the need for additional mitigation. We also encourage you to provide us with questions you may have about the EIS or the impacts that are contained in the EIS or the mitigation or whatever your concerns are. By providing us those comments in writing we will then be obligated to answer those questions in writing in the final EIS.

In a minute I will begin calling on those individuals who would like to speak. Your oral comments will be documented by the court reporter located to my right. When I call your name, please approach the microphone then state and spell your first and last name for the benefit of the audience and for our court reporter. To ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak, each person will be limited to approximately five minutes. If we do not have enough individuals, if we have extra time at the end, that everyone has spoken that has signed up, I will then poll the audience for anyone that would like to speak that has

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

not yet signed up. And then once everyone has had an opportunity to speak, if anyone that has already spoken would like to come back up to the microphone, they will be given an additional five minutes until the end of the meeting at 8:30.

At this time, I would like to invite Dan Kruse, our first commentor, to the microphone. Again, if you could state and spell your first and last name for the court reporter.

Comment
Number: 112

MR. KRUSE: Okay. Dan, D-A-N, Kruse, K-R-U-S-E. I'm here to speak on behalf of the Big Lake Trails Organization, a nonprofit organization responsible for managing the 130 miles of Mat-Su Borough endorsed trails that are under ordinance in the greater Big Lake area. I have provided a map of these trails to you to help you follow along. And what I am going to read into the record is the feedback from our organization, after looking at these trails, their potential impact and then our preferred recommendation. Okay.

First, who am I. I am the vice president of Big Lake Trails. I'm also a member of Mat-Su Trails. I was a member of the Big Lake Comprehensive Planning Team. I am also a member -- a steering member of the multimillion dollar Wasilla to Big Lake Trail Committee that is currently looking at trails coming into Big Lake. I'm also the project manager of the project we just installed nine miles down the Iron Dog to remove a property -- private property conflict. And that's my night job. My day job for the last seven years, I have been the manager of the larger

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

North American oilfield, Prudhoe Bay. So that's where I'm coming from. Okay.

Trails are a vital part of the environmental, social, historical and economic fabric of Big Lake. Both secured and non-secured trails provide a critically important stimulus to the Big Lake economy. They provide value, recreational opportunities for residents, and provide required transportation links to cabins, settlements and other communities. The rail extension through Big Lake is of grave concern to all trail users, because it threatens to permanently divide, damage or destroy the tapestry of the community that so many of us have so carefully woven with these trails. The attached map that you have in front of you shows the impact of the proposed rail alignments it will have on the Big Lake trail system. Those are the orange arrows intersecting rail and trail points.

The proposed rail extensions will impact Big Lake recreational trails as follows. The Big Lake route currently intersects and conflicts with trails in two locations. Not shown of course is the conflict that we believe will occur with the proposed Wasilla to Big Lake trail currently under study. This proposed trail, when developed, will be of economic importance to the whole Mat-Su Borough. The Willow route, it intersects and conflicts with trails in three locations as shown on the map. The Houston routes, both north and south, they intersect and conflict with trails in seven locations. By the way, we have 15

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

trails in Big Lake spanning 130 miles.

Now the trails are important to Big Lake. Many residents and non-residents joined together a couple of years ago as guardians of these current trails and essentially formed Big Lake Trails, a nonprofit, and we have 100 members in our organization today, one of the largest trail organizations in the state. Many of our citizens rely on this organization to protect the area trails and the members in the board of Big Lake Trails have unanimously approved the following position as it applies to the rail extension through Big Lake. Real quickly.

The Willow route provides the best alternative for the community because it provides the least conflict with private property owners and will minimally impact legally protected trails. It is our understanding that these legally protected trails will be provided with adequate crossings and they will allow us -- allow use of the general public as well as grooming access for large groomers that will enable us to maintain these trails. Choosing this route may have the unintended benefit of opening up land to the west of Big Lake, we understand that, allowing for the growth of the borough tax base and allowing for future westward expansion of our road system. This would be viewed as a positive benefit of the rail extension versus a negative.

Secondly, the if the Willow route were to be removed from consideration, the Big Lake route to the south would be our

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

second, but poor choice. Clearly, the Big Lake route has the least impact to recognized trails. Unfortunately it does have a high impact on private property owners and property ownership.

Lastly, the two Houston routes are totally unacceptable to our trail users because of the very high impact on our existing trails under ordinance and to private property owners. It would be better for the STB, Service Transportation Board, to take the no action alternative rather than to consider either the north or south Houston routes. These routes would completely destroy winter recreational trail opportunities and would create high noise and safety issues for property owners. Our position is supported by many residents of the community, the current Big Lake Comprehensive Planning Team, the Big Lake Community Council, the Big Lake Chamber of Commerce. It is our hope that the Surface Transportation Board recognizes the right of this community to manage change in a way that fits our lifestyle, our vision for the future. Any funding concerns or politics that have to come into play regarding choosing either of the Houston routes needs to take a backseat to the destruction of the quality of our life. The additional rail options for consideration in your draft EIS located to the south of the routes I just discussed namely Conn 1, Conn 2, Conn 3, Mac West, Mac East do not present conflicts with our existing trail system. Therefore, we have no state of position or preference. Big Lake stands ready to work with your engineers to help ensure that adequate

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

design working on our future trail crossings with whatever rail option is selected. It goes through to the best that we can do. So please feel free to contact us. I've got, of course, this letter submitted into the record.

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. Thank you very much. Before we.....

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Before we go onto the next speaker, I just wanted to mention a couple housekeeping things or one housekeeping thing. The women's restroom is located right here to my right. The men's restroom is a little more difficult to find. It's back behind the curtain also on the right side wall. And also I wanted to add that after this formal component of tonight's meeting where we are receiving your comments and questions on the record through the court reporter, I will adjourn the meeting and -- but myself and the members of the ICF team will be available to discuss with you one-on-one any general questions you might have about the -- our environmental review process, where we go from here or anything of that nature. Next I would like to call Grace Whedbee, please.

Comment
Number: 124

MS. WHEDBEE: Good afternoon, my name is Grace Whedbee, G-R-A-C-E W-H-E-D-B-E-E, and my topic tonight is is the rail extension necessary. Is the port a viable port or is it just a build it and they will come pie in the sky dream? Is Port MacKenzie is not a good business deal, then the rail extension is

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

not necessary and a huge waste of the taxpayer's dollars. Proper demographics have never been done on the port, just maybes. Shipping customers nor shipping mines have ever been committed to any type of contract. There are a few customers -- or a few companies that are leasing space at the port. And this is probably hindered because the roads are atrocious and the commute to the port takes an hour. They are -- there's no areas anywhere out there for employees in the industrial commercial complex or is there anyplace to build anything in this protected agricultural area.

The port of Anchorage on the other hand started their expansion in 2004 and they are planning to complete it in 2014. And due to their expansion, the only item that is still vital in the purpose statement made by the borough is the fact that they can accommodate ships that have a deeper draw. All the other points in there are now void. However, at this time they only have one deep draft dock, 1200 feet, with one conveyor belt for dry goods. The borough brags about the money that they made from the dockage of one ship in their financial report; however, we have to question whether the exorbitant cost that was incurred to the customer due to the extreme time frame they had to sit there waiting to be loaded or unloaded was due because the port does not have adequate equipment that contributes to the lack of current or future customers. At this time the port has no equipment for loading or unloading anything other than the dry

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

goods. The port's ability to expand beyond their current condition is extremely questionable. Port MacKenzie is at the narrowest point in the Knik Arms and it has a 41 foot tidal action of the area, which is one of the greatest actions anywhere in the North American continent. The water goes from a large body of water into a very small canal. And by the way, the port was not this deep until the earthquake of 1964 which rendered the Knik Arms unnavigable and made this port a lot deeper. Now we are in -- we're sitting right in the middle of an earthquake fault in an earthquake belt. If these other earthquake area could have made this fall, what happens if we have an earthquake right here in this area? And by the way it's very important to point out we had four earthquakes today on the Castle Mountain fault and no one seems to think that is a problem. We are destined for a much larger quake.

The port of Anchorage's protection for all of their ships -- and this is pointed out by the fact that they do have to dredge every year -- they're in a protected area. And where the water has the least flow is where the sediment is going to happen. The port on -- Port MacKenzie on the other hand has rapidly moving water and they don't have any sediment that goes there. But by the same token, the speed of the water, the amount of riptides that they have, the tremendous amount of ice flow, breakage off of the glaciers that comes through there puts any ship that is in that port in a very perious [sic] condition and

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

it makes it a dangerous situation for a ship to use that port.
It is totally exposed.

They have used a tremendous amount of riffraff to build our bulkheads. In fact, some of the largest riffraff they had to import as far away as the Pebble Mines, because there was not that large of rocks in this area to put in there as riffraff. This large amount of riffraff has totally helped to plug off, close off and narrow the Knik arms making the water run faster at a much more dangerous situation than it ever has been in the past.

MR. NAVECKY: One more minute, please.

MS. WHEDBEE: Okay. Any further expansion on this port will make this much more dangerous. The effects of this narrowing effects our salmon. They migrate through this area. But more importantly than that, these salmon are the food to the beluga whale. This is the number one area for beluga whale in this -- the whole area. Beluga whale went on the endangered species list in 2008, in October, because we went from 5,000 in 1970 down to only 300 today. In fact, NOAA clearly states that they will not approve our bridge across Knik Arms because of the damage it could do to the whales. The Corp of Engineers states that this bridge itself could change the currents and cause more sediment to the port of Anchorage, which is a federally funded project. And as I am sure you are well aware, federal money can not be made available to anything that interferes with a

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

federally funded project. So this money can -- no money can come from the federal government if it's going to interfere with Anchorage. If the bridge pier can do this, what will having all of this riffraff do? So therefore I have to say -- state that the port of Anchorage is considered to be a strategic national security and defense port. It only makes sense that this riffraff is going to cause more problems.

Another area to ponder is why would a state this small in population need two ports within two nautical miles of each other? And why would a rail line that will save only 35 miles be necessary if the freight is being shipped from the interior averaging 1000 miles? Does 35 additional miles really make a significant difference at five cents a ton mile? Please give the no action item great thought at this time. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next I'd like to call in Mike Whedbee, please.

Comment
Number: 125

MR. WHEDBEE: My name is Mike Whedbee, that's M-I-K-E, last name Whedbee, W-H-E-D-B-E-E. And I just had a couple of things I wanted to address tonight and I'll submit this one -- what is is, I've got pictures of an eagle's nest, just a brand new eagle's nest in the adjoining property to me right in the sound area of the railroad. The nest is three years old. They nested last year and had little ones for the first time and then

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

I'm sure they'll be returning this year. That was item one I wanted to submit for your review.

The second one I wanted to address was dealing specifically with my runway. I have a runaway, it's a private runway. It's Kucera Airport and it was addressed in the first EIS saying that if the Houston south route was chosen, that that runway would have to be closed. It wasn't addressed in the second EIS anywhere that I found in it. I haven't gone through all the -- the whole -- I haven't gone through the whole EIS, but I didn't see anywhere that it was addressed. A little bit of history about the Kucera Airport. I don't know if it's on the historical register, but it was put in by the late Herb Brazil (ph), as I understand it, so it's 50, 60 years old -- or 40 or 50 years old probably. It was the primary access to the property that he acquired. And the person that I acquired the property from was the Kuceras and they had heired the property from Brazil. I purchased the property as an airport development three years ago and it's divided into four parcels. If this runway -- or this runway is our commuter runway for work in Anchorage. If this runway is used -- this runway was used to evacuate people during the Miller's Reach fire as well as other rescue operations. Losing this runway would be financially devastating to our family as well as changing our entire lifestyle. We currently have three families that live in the development and we plan on developing it further. Thank you.

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next I like to call Doug Smole, please.

MR. SMOLE: Thank you and good evening. I'm a 40 year resident in Alaska and 10 year resident.....

MR. NAVECKY: Could you spell your last name for the court reporter.....

MR. SMOLE: Smole.....

MR. NAVECKY:please?

Comment
Number: 119

MR. SMOLE: S-pO-L-E. Really, my name is Harry Douglas Smole. I'm a retired dentist. And I'm one of many people that built a future retirement home in the Big Lake community and I'm speaking on behalf of myself and other friends of the lake -- of the lakes in general. Excuse me. The need for improved infrastructure to allow for the prudent use of Alaska's vast natural resources is important. Equally important is the necessity for Alaskans and visitors to safely gain access to the lands for recreation and development. Less than two percent of Alaska's 572,000 square miles of land in Alaska is under private ownership. Prudence and logic dictates that constructions of projects such as this railroad spur should avoid adverse impact on that paucity of privately held land and should avoid adverse impact on the quality of human life.

The greater Big Lake community has been on record as early in my time in Big Lake as 1992, 2003, 2007 in opposition to

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

various proposed railroad routings that would seriously impact the essential features that enhance this major recreational area. The area is growing in population with a greater number of full time residents. The 2000 -- 10 years ago I think the population was in the range of 2600 residents. We're 10 years later had a census and it's much larger. And I don't believe that that figure includes those people that have a stake in this area that have recreational interests and property with an eye toward future retirement here. So this is essentially one of the larger communities being considered for these various routes.

Many homes are constructed, as I said, for future retirement. So Little Horseshoe Lake in the northwest corner of Horseshoe Lake where I live has had more than 20 new homes, good quality homes constructed since the Big Lake fire. As we all know, there was a study in 2003 commissioned by the borough and conducted by Tryck Nyman and Hayes that rejected what is now known as the Houston South route referred to as Route 4 in that study because it appeared to have the largest level of impact on wetlands and did not receive public support. The same study indicated that the Willow route was the best route and was strongly supported by the strategic planner for the Alaska Railroad, Mr. Bruce Carr. Appendix M to that study has his comments in which he expresses his relief that the railroad spur in the Willow area was to be away from a population area thereby avoiding the need to relocate railroads as now is happening in

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

Wasilla and in Fairbanks.

Additionally in the area of the Houston South route, there's a very unique hydrological drainage system that needs consideration and I'll address that in the interest of time in another comment, but it's quite unique and it's separate from the Big Lake drainage and I'm not sure that everyone here knows that it is different and it affects the overflow of the Little Su and the water levels in our area.

MR. NAVECKY: One more minute, please.

MR. SMOLE: And then one of my frustrations. I came across a fact book, a nice, glossy brochure from the borough, and it's called the fact book. In that book they talked about the formation of a regional transportation organization wherein the borough, Anchorage Municipality, legislative committees, the military and the railroad would coordinate their transportation activities. That was a great concept, but it is now defunct. It's obvious that coordination is not occurring. Examples of that, we have seemingly competitive port activities going on. We have a ferry under construction that doesn't have a place to dock in Anchorage. And so we don't have the coordination of the various stakeholders in these projects. And unless this kind of coordination can really happen, I would suggest a no build until the various entities can talk to one another, coordinate and plan for the long term. Too many projects in this state have been supported with government money that have been failures because

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

the money was made available before the plan. And there are many examples of that and we all know what they are. And I urge you to consider the no build unless there's clear evidence that all entities are working together on a plan.

And our Senator Huggins told me in this very room about three weeks ago, that's one of his dreams before he leaves the legislature is to have a strategic plan for the state of Alaska. It seems like common sense to me. Let's get the plan first and then the money. But that isn't the way it happens in this state and I hope that changes. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next I'd like to call Cathi Kramer, please.

MS. KRAMER: I will be brief. It angers me that we have to come and.....

MR. NAVECKY: Could you spell your name.....

MS. KRAMER: Oh, I'm sorry.

MR. NAVECKY:please for.....

MS. KRAMER: Cathi, C-A-T-H-I, Kramer, K-R-A-M-E-R.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you.

MS. KRAMER: And I represent Horseshoe Lake Firewise Community. And I just want to voice my opinion. It angers me that we have to keep coming to these meetings and saying the same thing over again and over again and over again. I feel like

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

we're not being heard. We live in.....

(Applause)

Comment
Number: 111

MS. KRAMER: Horseshoe Lake is going to be affected by the Houston route greatly. We lost 26 homes in the Miller's Reach fire in our area alone. That railroad is coming right through our neighborhood. We are the only Firewise Community in the whole Mat-Su Borough. My -- the members of my community spend thousands of hours volunteering their time trying to rebuild and improve the area as well as going out into the bigger Greater Big Lake and trying to teach people about Firewise. You folks are trying to put a railroad in an area that is a very high fire risk area. This is a borough map. High fire risk. Both Big Lake routes, Houston and Big Lake routes, run right through high fire risk. You guys start another fire with that railroad and you're going to destroy our homes again. This is not a good idea. You folks need to listen to what people have been saying, go back to what we said before and read it. I do not support this and I think you guys need to vote for a no approval of this. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Next I'd like to call Greg Strong, please.

Comment
Number: 121

MR. STRONG: My name is Gregory Strong, S-T-R-O-N-G, and I want to echo what Mrs. Whedbee pointed out to you a little bit ago and that was that 20 years ago there were 1300 beluga

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

whales in the Cook Inlet. Today there's 300. Now I'm not an environmentalist. I'm a pro-development fellow. I develop real estate for a living, so I like to have people living where there's a possibility of getting jobs. But I'm also the kind of guy that likes planning and I'm like the kind of guy that doesn't like to see residential neighborhoods and subsequent property values destroyed for the luxury of a legacy project that bureaucrats are trying to install upon us.

Now the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, also known as NOAA, and their fishery service, which is their administrative arm, has worked with the Alaska Fisheries Science Center and published a report. And the name of that report that they published was the Status Review and Extinction of the Cook Inlet Belugas. This parallels another report entitled a Final Environment Impact Statement issued under the auspices of the Marine Mammal Protection Act through their operational arm known as the Conservation Plan. On Page 71 of that plan it says, under habitat alteration, number 2, which is a priority, that action must be taken to foster salmon recovery and conserve salmon habitat so that this food is available for these beluga whales. Taking away the food source for any mammal is obviously going to result in extinction.

Now you'll notice that paper that I gave you has a tab. And that tab shows you what Mr. Smole was referring to and that is that there is a watershed that's unique to this place and

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

there's a watershed that's 20 miles long and it runs just west of Horseshoe Lake and it goes into the Little Su. Now that's different than the Big Lake watershed that goes into Cook Inlet. Now if you divide that watershed with a earthen dam to support a rail line and a 200 foot wide right-of-way to support an access road -- and in addition now apparently there's discussion in the legislature to add to that phenomenon a bullet line for gas -- you are going to effectively bisect and destroy a watershed that produces salmon that feeds the beluga whales. Now again, not being an environmentalist, I can only speculate that the environmental community is going to tie this thing up for years. And in so doing, this project will in fact become cost ineffective. This project will under its own weight, because the federal government has basically said you're going to not take away the food source for the beluga whales. This plan clearly does that and I'm afraid that there are a number of environmental organizations in this state when they get into this that are going to stop this project in its tracks. And I think most of us in this room are going to become an environmentalist for a moment to see that happen. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next I would like to call Robert DeLoach.

I don't know if I pronounced that correctly.

Comment
Number: 109

MR. DELOACH: My name is Robert DeLoach, R-O-B-E-R-T

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

D-E-L-O-A-C-H. I'm here tonight representing the Big Lake Chamber of Commerce as a president for the Chamber of Commerce for 2008-2009. Our current president, Margaret Billinger is here, but she was a little late. One of the things that I want to say, first of all, is that the chamber is very much in favor of the port project and also in favor of its tie-in to the existing rail lines that exist in the primary state rail system in the state.

We are very concerned on several areas about some factors that involve the routes that you're considering. The Houston route, for example, as has been pointed out already here tonight, not only it impacts the trail system of the Big Lake area, which we -- the Big Lake Chamber of Commerce has been very active in trail preservations over the last several years, but it very much impacts the trail system that is in the Big Lake area.

In addition, it's also been pointed out that the watershed system -- I'm also a real estate broker and a construction company owner, and the -- as a real estate broker I have seen the watershed programs. I've got a big book that's about this thick with all the maps and so forth of the drainages in this particular area. And should you build a levy that was -- talking about a little bit earlier on which to build the railroad tracks and all of its supporting area, you're going to transact that area and have a major change on the inflow of the water

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

systems in the Big Lake drainage area.

Additionally, it is my opinion that the Willow route, the north route, is the one that's going to obviously impact very much less any of the residential areas. I also have property in the Horseshoe Lake area, but I live in beautiful downtown Big Lake right now. But it's going to very much impact the Horseshoe Lake area because there is some -- a lot of very nice residences in that area and this proposed -- the Houston route proposes to cut right through it.

The Willow route would not only open up additional area for people to expand into trail areas and to have access to a greater portion of our continent, our area that we have here, and it would less impact because of that particular route covers a lot more of state owned and borough owned land whereas doesn't involve private properties. So I don't want to belabor this and take up a lot of your time, but Big Lake Chamber of Commerce would like to come out in favor of the port and specifically in the Willow route. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: And next I would like to call Ken Walsh, please.

Comment
Number: 123

MR. WALSH: My name is Ken Walsh, W-A-L-S-H, first name Ken, K-E-N. First suggestion, I'd recommend that in your next meetings you have a podium or a table or something where people

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

can lay their materials. I think it would really help out the people that are trying to give you information.

I'm a resident of Big Lake. I'm a civil engineer by profession. I lived in Alaska for 40-some years, in the Big Lake area for about five years. I am the chair of the Big Lake Community Council Transportation Committee but I'm here tonight speaking as an individual. The handout that I gave you is primarily to show the residential lot development within the community council area. I had hoped to expand that map to take it on up to Willow, and if it would be helpful I can do that for you and submit it before your May deadline. But I didn't see anything in the EIS report that really addressed the density of residential development and this is an attempt to try to fill that gap.

I need to compliment you on the effort you made on the EIS report. For a technical person, it's probably pretty good. It has a lot of good and informative maps, but I got to tell you for a public group the information that you can get out of the report is very difficult to come by. It is technically written. It is not easy to pull together and I don't know if there is some way to develop some better matrixes for bringing that information to the attention to the public or not, but it really is difficult for us to digest a document like that, 500 and some pages, in the very short time that you've given us to look it over.

I do want to say that I do speak in favor of the rail

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

extension and of the port. I, like many others, have some very deep concerns over the Houston route. And I'm going to get into those in a little bit, but I'm speaking primarily from the community's quality of life viewpoints. The Big Lake area, if you have had a chance to review our comprehensive plan, you see that our goal is for kind of a laid back, quiet, rural, quiet community with recreational development as being probably our core sustaining industry. The area of the Houston route runs right through that core development area, both the Houston South and the Houston North. They go through valuable lake front property, they go through the area that is the primary winter recreational area for both dog mushers and snow machiners and it is probably the -- well, it is the least attractive area for a rail development of any of the area that you have considered. So I very much am opposed to the Houston route.

I do favor as the most favorable route the Willow route to the west. This provides a corridor that sort of encompasses what we consider are valuable recreational lands. With the railroad is going to come further development. That is far enough from the Parks Highway development that it probably provides a reasonable alternative for industry and businesses and development, far enough away from the Parks Highway route that it makes some sense logistically speaking.

I am concerned with some of the information in the study that you've done with the EIS. There is some

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

misinformation. Some of it's been already been talked about. I think there's some concern about the seismic fault areas that as been already brought up. There is some concern about some of the watershed areas. I noticed that on your project development plan at least one of the routes for road development, the Burma Road, is shown on the wrong locations. There seem to be some substantial errors in that report and I'm hoping that during this process of public input some of those can be addressed or at least noticed and in the final report. Perhaps some of those areas can be corrected.

There is a no alternative option that you talk about obviously with each of the considerations and I'm not sure what your criteria is for determining that the no action alternative has no impact. If you look at impact caused by railroad construction, that's obviously true. If you look at impacts caused by what it's going to do for highway traffic, heavy truck traffic, the impacts are tremendous. And I think the rail alternative, particularly with the Willow route, reduces the load, traffic load that would otherwise be picked up by surface transportation trucks. And we've got some very serious problems, all the same problems you talk about with the rail extension except with the highway transportation mode with a much more severe impact I believe than what the rail option is. So if you can re-look at your evaluation of the no impact status of the no build option, I would certainly like to see that addressed.

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

MR. NAVECKY: One more minute, please.

MR. DELOACH: Pardon?

MR. NAVECKY: One more minute, please.

MR. DELOACH: I'll think cut it short. Thank you for letting us have this opportunity. I appreciate your work. I wouldn't want your job for all the money in the world and good luck.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next is Noreen Austermuhl.

MS. AUSTERMUHL: Good evening.

MR. NAVECKY: Could you, again.....

MS. AUSTERMUHL: Yeah, it's N-O-R-E-E-N A-U-S-T-E-R --
Noreen Austermuhl.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you.

Comment
Number: 104

MS. AUSTERMUHL: The biggest concern I have is the Houston route. That is the one that should not be used at all. I understand the problems with the Willow route and with the South Big Lake route and the impact that they will have is nothing compared to what the Houston route would do to the community, the watershed, the fish, anything. That one should just be crossed off and not even used. That's all I have to say.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: That represents the end of the

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

individuals who indicated that they definitely wanted to speak this evening. Now I'm going to run through a handful of names of people who put question marks next to their names. And apparently they weren't certain when they came in. I'll see if they made up their mind at this point. The first is Kelly -- yes.

Comment
Number: 115

MS. MAIXNER: All right. My name is Kelly Maixner M-A-I-X-N-E-R, first name Kelly. I am actually a property owner. And for some reason I didn't even get any notification of this and it's proposed to go basically right on my property if not right on the side of it. And I just bought my property in November, so there should be a record of that. So I'm very surprised I didn't get any notification at all. Found out from my neighbor, which is kind of disappointing. And I'm speaking against the Big Lake route, the south route. There's many private property owners on that system and there's also -- it runs right through a swamp that all our dog trails are on and also crosses a salmon spawning stream that I know of. So I just like to speak against that. Since there's plenty of public property or state owned land on the Willow route, I would go that way. All right.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Mary Crowley, would you like to speak?

MS. CROWLEY: No, thank you.

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you. Jesse -- is that a Jesse?

Post Office Box 520029?

(Laughter)

MS. SCHUPE: That's June Schupe.

MR. NAVECKY: I'm sorry.

Comment
Number: 118

MS. SCHUPE: J-U-N-E S-C-H-U-P-E. Well, obviously I'm

not prepared or I would have known if I wanted to speak or not. I've only been in Alaska for two and a half years. I moved 5,000 miles to what I thought I had found heaven. And for these two and a half years I have. I'm actually a neighbor of Kelly's. There's a small area maybe 12, 14 families, it was a homestead area. Many of the people in that area were the original homesteaders. And I have to say along with Kelly that we've had a tremendous time getting information. I've been to other meetings, I've signed up, I haven't received things in the mail. I have been on the internet and did not realize exactly how close this was coming to my property until today. And I'm really disappointed in my total inability to get information. This will totally change my lifestyle and I guess they're not enough of us, maybe we're not significant at all, but this will totally change our little neighborhood. And we take care of our own roads. We're out grading our roads, we take care of our roads. We've got a delightful little area there and it's -- this will just totally destroy it. Thank you.

(Applause)

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Margaret Billings [sic].

MS. BILLINGER: It's Billinger, B-I-L-L-I-N-G-E-R.

MR. NAVECKY: Oh, I apologize.

Comment
Number: 105

MS. BILLINGER: That's okay. Bob pretty much said it for the chamber. I'm the chamber president here in Big Lake. We do support the development of the port and we do see why the trains do need a B route through Wasilla there. You know, we've been to all the train meetings, but we are -- do favor the west Willow route more than the other two routes because of the impacts to the lakes, to the environment, to our neighborhoods. So please consider the west route. We do have trails, some in there, but that's the least invasive. I think we have about three trails that it effects versus the other seven or more trails if we go the other two routes. Just consider the western route if you have to do it. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: That is all of the individuals that had given us a yes and a question mark that they would like to speak. Is there anyone else that would like to speak that did not -- okay, I think we will have time to get to everyone. We'll just start in the front row here.

Comment
Number: 107

MR. CROWLEY: Hello. My name is Marcus Crowley, M-A-R-C-U-S C-R-O-W-L-E-Y. I'm a land owner that's in --

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

probably in the high impact area, because it goes right beside my piece of property, that if you plan to go through the Big Lake area, the South Big Lake area, as far as for that. Reading down through this big wad of documents that I got off the internet on the whole proposal for this whole thing, you know, you're taking a look at the amount of private property that you got to impact alone just to go through the Big Lake area. You're looking at 307 pieces of private property alone. If you take the Willow area, you're down to 187 pieces of private property. And, you know, you got less state land, less borough land, you know, in the Big Lake and the Houston area versus the more state and borough land that you got to go through with the Willow area. You know, it's kind of a no-brainer there as far as for going through and doing that.

And, you know, you look at just the other pieces of property that you got impact, you know, you look at the intersection of where this Big Lake route's going to come in. I -- if I'm not mistaken, looking at the map, it's going to go right through the senior center that we have there. So you're going to look at displacing a whole bunch of people that their livelihood alone was this state and here they are, they're retired in a place and now you're going to move them out of the area in itself. You know, that's uprooting people in a lot of areas.

You know -- and I -- you know, and I have questions too. Even if you're going to go through and do the Big Lake or

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

Houston area, how are you planning on acquiring the property? Are you going to do it reasonably, if you're going to go that route, or are you just going to, you know, condemn it in that aspect there? As far as for the Willow route that's the most feasible. You know, I'm not against the port and I'm not against the railroad. You know, there's a lot of good that's going to come to this as far as for the railroad itself. You know, I can see them taking everything up the railroad and making a commuter train out of that whole area that goes into Anchorage through the Wasilla area now where the railroad is. I don't see why that -- that would be a better feasible impact by doing that, but you're looking at a whole bunch of swamp and uprooting some people if you come through the Houston/Big Lake area there. I think the Willow area is probably a better choice out of anything. And the amount of the streams that you have to cross. You're going to cross what, the Little Sue twice, maybe Willow Creek. You look at the amount of smaller creeks. You know, you got Fish Creek and some of these other ones that maybe are not so big as far as for salmon spawning, but they have just as much impact as these other ones do. That's the biggest concern, is the impact on fish, you know, as far as for fish habitat and the streams. There's a lot more in this area along with the lakes and stuff there. Granted I gather that the Army Corp of Engineers has done their impact statements on what the feasibility of covering up swamp and everything else is. You're trying to build the roads

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

on that stuff as the land owners as we do now, it takes a lot of dirt and a lot of preparation to go through and do it. Granted, the government seems to have endless pockets to where they can go through and do stuff like that and it can happen. Why we don't take for a higher ground to cut down the amount of costs it's going to cost to go through and do it that way. Granted, I know the Willow route is longer versus the shorter route that goes through Big Lake, but I think the impact would be much, much greater if you go through the Big Lake and Houston area than it would be as far as for the Willow area. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: There will be time for your both. Don't worry.

Comment
Number: 113

MS. LADD: Hi, my name is Laurie (ph) Ladd, L-A-D-D, and we live -- have property, we don't live there yet. We're going to be moving back out to -- off of Echo Lake Road, which is out across Fish Creek, which is actually almost only on this side of Knik Arm major salmon stream. And I was just wondering, I haven't seen any reports on the impact this would have for the salmon stream in our properties. All our properties -- there's a bunch of us here that live back there -- it's going to be like right in our backyard. And the noise -- I don't like the idea of having two trains a day coming, you know, within what 25 miles of my house because they're very loud. And I was just wondering

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

what -- I didn't see any comments in here on that for the noise impact. And that's all I have to say. I'm really against the idea for Big Lake -- actually for all three. I don't think it's necessary. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

Comment
Number: 108

MS. CROWLEY: Thank you. My name is Mary Crowley,
M-A-R-Y C-R-O-W-L-E-Y. I'd like to speak on behalf of the trail use. The basin where the Big Lake route would go is rather unique. We've spent quite a few years, almost 20 in fact, involved with dog mushing and primarily and junior dog mushers. And the Aurora Dog Mushers have a lease agreement with the borough where we have close to a hundred miles of trails back there and it is not heavily trafficked at all by motorized. So in that basin that stretches from the Big Lake route proposed all the way across the Houston routes that had been mentioned for the recreational snow machine trails, we basically coexist very well there. Our kids can run dogs in there and not have to worry for the most part of having the, you know, conflict with snow machines as we take them further out or they explore further. We know we're getting into area where there's motorized traffic.

I am very concerned about the watershed issues. I'm very concerned that the issues with the port. I can see it getting basically hamstrung by environmental issues, by the different things. And I think it's an idea that needs to be

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

addressed, but not -- I feel like this is a hasty situation.

I am also property owner in that area. And my concern is a 200 foot right-of-way. This right-of-way touches the edge of our property and there are no sanctioned crossings. Like my -- the road to my house is not on there as a trail that would have a culvert, a crossing. How do I get home? What is going to be permitted there and then will I be able to walk off my property and hike my property line or hike through the woods? I mean, I can't cross the right-of-way, you know, until I get down in the swamp on Iditarod what, five miles away. And so I think the trails, the local trails, there's just -- there's so many to count that feasibility-wise there's no way you can make crossings for all of them. And so I'm concerned about the access. But I'm more concerned that perhaps the whole rail extension is a concept that is -- has come too early for the development of the port in our general area. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: There was somebody in the back. Yes, sir.

Comment
Number: 103

MR. AMIDON: Hi, my name is Steve Amidon. That's S-T-E-V-E A-M-I-D-O-N. I am a property owner and my property butts up to where the Big Lake extension for the railroad supposedly might be going. I too have not been informed by mail, by anything of this. I only got informed the last couple of days by

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

word of mouth. I do have a post office box in Big Lake and I have a mail box and I do get mail and I have not been informed. I am very worried about it going that way. It's going to affect a lot of us property owners back there. There is dog mushing, sledding a lot of stuff that people use plus several of the people that have spoke tonight are my neighbors in there and there is a big concern to us going that way. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Yes, ma'am.

Comment
Number: 120

MS. SMOLE: I'm Sharon Smole, S-M-O-L-E. You sent us a disc to our Big Lake library even though it wasn't listed originally. And since this community is the largest that is impacted by the three Big Lake routes, could you please send a hard copy to our Big Lake library? We also have very few computers at our library. That would be very appreciated if it could be done before the final May 10th when they have to give their opinions. We would appreciate that. Thank you. And I also am not in favor at all of any of the three that goes through Big Lake.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Anyone else like to speak? Yes, sir.

Comment
Number: 117

MR. ROWE: My name is Jim Rowe, Jim, J-I-M, R-O-W-E.

And I live in Big Lake. I've lived up here for quite a few

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

years. I have a piece of property on Hollywood Road. And the way it looks to me, I think that railroad's going to run right through my living room going by the Horseshoe Lake. So I just have a problem with the two routes that go through Big Lake, seems like they'd displace more residences than any of the other ones and there's more private land being displaced, you know, taken away to develop. And I just, you know, I hate to see it go through there. I'm very opposed to it. You know, I've spent quite a few years developing the property and that's where I want to retire and want to live there and I don't really want a railroad running through my living room. So that's all I have to say.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Anyone else that would like to speak? Yes, sir.

MR. CHERNESKI: My name is Cherneski, C-H-E-R-N-E-S-K-I. I guess that's part of your protocol. I would like to know if either one of you gentlemen were present at Houston High School when they first presented this.

MR. NAVECKY: I'm not -- I don't believe I was. No, I was -- if it was a railroad sponsored meeting I was not there.

Comment
Number: 106

MR. CHERNESKI: Okay. I don't mean to be belligerent, but whoever the representative was -- first of all, he shoved it down our throat that the railroad was going to come through here, it was going to be preceded along the same route by the road.

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

Originally he told us it was going to come out at Nancy Lake. I have been a member of the Aurora Dog Musers for almost 50 years. We were told two weekends ago when we had a dog race -- it wasn't a race, it was a weekend for kids for autism. We were informed that the railroad would move our clubhouse. We don't know where, and who knows, it could have been downtown Big Lake, but who wants all this traffic in back of us? There's got to be something. Maybe you ought to figure on hovercrafts or something else. It's not right and you should -- ought to think of something else. You've embarrassed and you've done a lot of things that [sic] people have live here. You ought to think this thing over and that's the end I'm -- I'm going to say. I've got more, but I'll stop. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for coming up.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Yes, ma'am.

Comment
Number: 110

MS. HOLLINGER: Judy Hollinger, H-O-L-L-I-N-G-E-R. I wasn't going to say anything, but is this -- are these meetings just to placate all of us? Is this a done deal and like this -- the man said, it's going to happen and you're just -- when I say you, I don't mean you, but you. Are you just doing it so that we'll think we had some input, because I mean I've only heard maybe two, maybe three people that were in favor of any of them. And, I mean, all of us, you know, we pay a high price to live in Big Lake, especially if we live on the lake and I just wonder if

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

it's a done deal. I know the railroad's a big place, a big thing, you know. It would be good to know if we're wasting our time and you're just trying to make us feel better.

MR. NAVECKY: I'll address your question in my closing comments. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Yes, sir.

Comment
Number: 116

MR. MAYFIELD: My name is James Mayfield. I go by Dan.

J-A-M-E-S M-A-Y-F-I-E-L-D. I am a board member of the Chamber of Commerce, also president of Big Lake Trails. Dan spoke on behalf of Big Lake Trails so -- excuse me, Cham -- I said Chamber of Commerce. I meant Big Lake Community Council. Dan spoke on behalf of Big Lake Trails so I really won't repeat any of that information, but I did do a lot of research prior to polling -- prior to writing the letter that you have in front of you in regards to Big Lake Trails. And it seemed to me as I was polling my members that they were pretty certain that if the railroad were to come through Big Lake we would choose the Willow route. There really wasn't a good choice other than the Willow route for us.

I'm kind of reminded that, from a historical perspective that, you know, the railroad really united the nation in years past. Well, it's dividing this community and I'm concerned about that. So if you are to push through the railroad through this area, it should be through the Willow area. It

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

shouldn't be any other route. I appreciate that. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Anyone else like to speak this evening?

Comment
Number: 114

MS. LIPSE: My name is Linda Lipse, L-I-P-S-E. And I was wondering on the railroads and stuff, if you're on a snow machine you have to stop and go across there, otherwise you get tickets. And there's trails all over the place and they were -- originally were saying, oh well, they're not going to have tickets for just having your -- not having your seatbelt on. Well, now they are. But now they're giving tickets on Big Lake. You give them an inch, they take a mile. And it's just more and more regulations that they're going to be passing on everybody here in Big Lake. And I'm against all the trails.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Anyone else? You sure? Okay. Thank you. I'll just add some closing comments and address the one question about the -- whether or not this is a done deal. I want to -- first of all, this is an important component of my agency's environmental review process for this project and I want -- need to stress that this is a review process of the Surface Transportation Board. It is not related to or is it being conducted by the railroad. We're doing this independently of what the railroad has done in the past. And yes, your comments

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

do have an impact. My office, the Section of Environmental Analysis, will take your comments at the end of the comment period and they are fully considered and they often influence the content of the final EIS and that might be -- it goes to issues of what -- the final EIS will contain a recommendation from our office, the Section of Environmental Analysis, on a preferred route if the board elects to authorize construction and operation of the railroad. And your comments this evening will be considered in what alternative that my office recommends to the board, but if they choose the license the rail line, which alternative we recommend to them as being preferred, considering your concerns on property impacts and trails as well as balancing all the other impacts related to water crossings and wetlands and the taking of people's property.

Your comments also influence the mitigation measures that we recommend in the final EIS regarding, for example, the number of crossings for trails and how those crossings are constructed, for example. It is those type of inputs that we receive from you folks that help us identify and refine the mitigation that we think is warranted for the project and that we recommend to the board. The board then -- the board is a three member panel. Those are the decision makers for my agency. They will consider the economic merits of the project. They will consider the contents of the draft and final EIS. And again, the draft -- I mean, the final EIS will contain all of your written

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

comments, it will contain all the transcripts from tonight's meeting and our responses to all those comments. And they will consider any other letters or comments that come into our agency after the close of our comment period in May. They will then take all that information and they will make their decision. And how they decide, that's -- I can't tell you how they will decide. It's a majority decision that requires two of the three board members to either deny or approve the project. If they approve the project they typically will implement all if not most of the mitigation measures that we recommend to them. So it's important for you to provide input to us on those mitigation measures. And I think that's all I have to say on the process and just to continue that it's not a done deal and this -- these meetings we have this week and next week are very important in our process and they do have an influence and play a major role in the content of the final EIS that we'll issue.

Going on, for those of you who did not speak this evening and you have comments or questions, I would encourage you to provide your comments in writing and submit those to us either by mail or through our website. For those of you who spoke this evening, you can -- if you have additional comments that you would like to convey to us or questions you would like answered in the final EIS that you do not believe are answered currently, you're more than welcome to provide written comments to us as well even though you spoke this evening. And let me stop right

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

there. I think one person wanted to speak.

Comment
Number: 122

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I had a question regarding the closing comments. Does the final board (indiscernible - away from microphone)?

MR. NAVECKY: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible).

MR. NAVECKY: I'm sorry?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Which meeting will the final board members (indiscernible) panel? Which meeting will (indiscernible)?

MR. NAVECKY: The -- those -- the board members do not attend these meetings. This is a -- the -- my office, the Section of Environmental Analysis, is the office within our agency responsible for ensuring that the board complies with federal environmental laws, and we're the office within the agency that conducts the environment review process, and we're the ones that conduct these hearings. But they will have -- yes, sir.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible - away from microphone).

MR. NAVECKY: All the board members' names, addresses are available on our website for -- if you would wish to contact them directly.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You never did address how you (indiscernible - away from microphone).

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

MR. NAVECKY: The process for acquiring the property, I believe the railroad's intent, if the project were authorized, the railroad's intent would be to attempt to negotiate a sales price with the property owners of the right-of-way that they owned. If the property owner and the railroad could not come to terms on the price, the railroad would then have the authority to acquire the property through condemnation, but it would still be required to pay fair market value for that property. So I'm going to -- one last question.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible - away from microphone).

MR. NAVECKY: We don't have -- it's not a mathematical formula, for example, that we use. We need to -- we try to balance all of the issues and each project is unique. And we can't say that, you know, that impacting a stand of a true forest in one project is more important than impacting a wetland versus impacting large number of private property owners. I think it all needs to -- it needs to be balanced and considered as a whole when we make our recommendation to -- as the preferred alternative. And we encourage you to, in your comments, to make suggestions to us as you have tonight, obviously, which you feel the preferred alternative should be and not only identify what the preferred alternative to be, and many of you spoke this evening in favor of Willow, but what is useful for us is to also know why you feel which alternative is the preferred. It's -- it

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

helps us understand your concerns and it enables us to make a more educated decision -- or recommendation to the board.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible - away from microphone).

MR. NAVECKY: I wouldn't say it's arbitrary. I mean, the reasons that we will make a recommendation for a preferred alternative in the final EIS and it's not just a simple blanket statement that we recommend to the board that this alternative be preferred. We discuss -- my office, SEA, discusses why we're making that recommendation, that alternative A is preferred over alternative B or C. And we identify -- we try -- we go through all the different topical areas, the wetlands, threatened or endangered species, properties, socioeconomics, soils, water quality, wildlife. We run through all of those and explain why we're recommending to the board that one alternative over another is preferred. So the board understands why we came to that decision and if they disagree with us, then they will be free to -- and if they choose to authorize the project, they will choose the alternative they think would be best. Yes?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Dave, when do you anticipate issuing your final EIS?

MR. NAVECKY: It would be -- I can just say I would hope it would be later this year sometime. I can't say whether it would be this summer or the fall. It all depends on the nature and the extent of comments that we receive during the

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

comment period.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And also what is the time frame for borough government to inject its recommendations (indiscernible)?

MR. NAVECKY: They don't have any special role in this project. They would have to comment just as you would and they would have to provide us comments by May 10th just as any other interested party would.....

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: On the draft EIS?

MR. NAVECKY:on the draft EIS, yes. Okay. I want to thank you for coming this evening and I would just like to add that I've been working on this project since January of 2008 and I was up here once before for the scoping meetings and I've spoken with a number of you over the phone during the past year and a half, two years. And I understand that many of you have major concerns about this project and many of them are emotional concerns and issues to you. Notwithstanding that, I found that you have always been polite and courteous and I just wanted to thank you for that and recognize that. Thank you for coming this evening.

(Applause)

(Off record - 8:03 p.m.)

(END OF PROCEEDINGS)

April 7, 2010

Big Lake Surface Transportation Board
Transcript Proceedings

TRANSCRIBER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Salena A. Hile, hereby certify that the foregoing pages numbered 2 through 49 are a true, accurate, and complete transcript of proceedings, transcribed under my direction from a copy of the electronic sound recording to the best of our knowledge and ability.

Date

Salena A. Hile

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

SECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

PORT MACKENZIE RAIL EXTENSION PROJECT

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

Houston, Alaska

April 12, 2010

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Houston, Alaska - April 12, 2010)

(On record - 6:30 p.m.)

MR. NAVECKY: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I think we're ready to start if you could have a seat, please. Good evening and thank you for attending this public comment meeting on the draft environmental impact statement for the proposed Port MacKenzie rail extension. I would like to officially call this meeting to order. I am Dave Navecky of the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis, otherwise known as SEA. The Surface Transportation Board is the federal agency responsible for authorizing the construction and operation of new rail lines and associated facilities. In December 2008, the Alaska Railroad Corporation filed a request for authority to construct and operate approximately 30 to 45 miles of rail line and related support facilities from the Port MacKenzie district to a point on the existing Alaska Railroad mainline between Wasilla and just north of Willow. The Mat-Su Borough is working with the Railroad as a sponsor of the proposed rail line and was responsible for obtaining funds to conduct environmental reviews and preliminary engineering for the proposed rail line. The Surface Transportation Board is lead -- is the lead federal agency responsible for preparing the CIS which is intended to identify and evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed rail line. We

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

also have three cooperating agencies assisting us in preparing the EIS. They are the US Army Corp of Engineers, the Federal Railroad Administration and the US Coast Guard. A team of consultants led by ICF International also assisted SEA in preparing the EIS. At the table with me is Alan Summerville, project manager of ICF's EIS activities.

If you've not already done so, please sign in at the front table located in the back of the room and indicate whether you are interested in providing oral comments on the draft EIS at this evening's meeting. This meeting is part of the draft EIS stage of the environmental review process. As you know, the draft EIS was issued last month and we are now accepting comments on the document. Prior to preparing the draft EIS we conducted agency and public scoping meetings to listen to your questions and concerns including a meeting in this very same room. The information you provided helped us frame our analysis, understand your concerns about the project and finalize the scope of the EIS. We've finalized the scope and issued the document, the scope document in July of 2009. This final scope of studies served as our guide concerning what to address in the draft EIS.

After the draft EIS comment period closes on May 10th we will review all the hearing transcripts and written comments and we will prepare written responses for all substantive comments. All of your comments and all of our comment responses

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

will be published in the final EIS. The board will then issue a final decision based on the transportation merits of the proposed rail line, the contents of the draft and the final EISs and all public and agency comments. This final decision will take one of three actions; approve the proposed rail line, deny it or approve it with mitigating conditions including environmental conditions. Construction, if approved by the board, could not begin unless and until the cooperating agencies issue final decisions approving or permitting the proposed rail line. The handout you were provided or picked up at the front table includes additional information on our environmental review process.

Whether you speak tonight or not you can also provide us with handwritten comments this evening by filling out the last page of your handout and turning it in at the sign in table. We also have blank comment forms at the sign in table. Oral and written comments are given equal weight and consideration, so if you choose not to speak this evening, your written comments will be fully addressed. In consideration -- in addition, this meeting is just one option for you to provide comments. We are accepting written comments until May 10th and you may use the comment form provided this evening or your own handwritten or typewritten letters. Your handout provides the information you need to submit your written comments to the Surface Transportation Board either by mail or electronically through our website.

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

In preparing your comments, we encourage you to be as detailed as possible in describing your concerns. We are also interested in receiving your comments on the purpose and need of the proposed rail line, potential project impacts including access at trail issues, opinions on a potential preferred alternative, adequacy of the preliminary mitigation in the draft EIS and the need for any additional mitigation.

In a minute, I will begin calling on those individuals who would like to speak. Your oral comments will be documented by the court reporter located to my left. When I call your name, please approach the microphone to my left as well and then state and spell your first and last name for the benefit of the audience and our court reporter. To ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak, each person will be limited to approximately five minutes. I anticipate that once we run through the list of individuals who would like to speak we will have the time for anyone else who would like to come back up and speak for an additional five minutes. Let's see.

At this time, I would like to invite the first commentor to the microphone. Again, if you could state your first and last name and spell it for the court reporter. The first person is John.....

MR. HIMMELRIGHT: Himmelright.

MR. NAVECKY: Himmelright. Exactly. Thank you.

MR. HIMMELRIGHT: Hi, I'm John Himmelright,

Comment
Number: 127

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

J-O-H-N H-I-M-M-E-L-R-I-G-H-T. I'm a home owner on West Lake which the Houston route would be affecting right behind me. Also affecting my neighbor Woodby's (ph) runway, which would probably hinder it too short to use it. We have an active eagle's nesting pair, that I show you those pictures right there, on the property and they've been there about three years and they nest most of the summer and they come back in the spring.

Snow machine trails would be affected which pretty much would cut us off the peace and quiet and the quality of life in which is the reason most of us by lake property in the first place would be greatly affected. In my opinion, if you have to build it, Willow would be the best option affecting the least amount of people. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: The next commentor, Dan Mayfield, please.

Comment
Number: 128

MR. MAYFIELD: Hi, my name is actually James Mayfield.

I go by Dan. J-A-M-E-S M-A-Y-F-I-E-L-D. I am president of Big Lake Trails, but tonight I'm actually here as a board member of the Big Lake Community Council. The community council asked me to speak for them. Our original position on the rail was established in 2007. Our position has remained consistent since then. I will read you this evening a communication that Bill O'Hara, who was a past president of the community council, had sent to the Surface Transportation Board. Our -- as I say, our

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

position remains the same to this date under the present president Seth Kelley. Dear board members, Big Lake Community Counsel carefully considered the proposed rail spur routes being studied to connect Port MacKenzie to the existing railroad. We would like to share with you our concerns and suggestions for the route we support. The west route is the one favored by our council -- the west route being the Willow route -- as it has the least impact to our area. This route is mostly on borough, state or federal land and has minimal private property along the right-of-way. It would cross a number of our recreational trails, but with crossings incorporated into the design of the route we feel it's a workable route. The route's mostly on a natural moraine and would minimize wetland crossings. From the borough's perspective, this route would open up a large area of inaccessible land for sale and development, increasing the tax base. Finally, the noise pollution caused by rail traffic would be great -- generally far away from existing dwellings.

The central route, which is the Houston route, is the least desirable route of the options presented. This route would impact a tremendous amount of private property owners and the proximity to existing dwellings would create a noise pollution nightmare. Much of the route is wetlands and is in the Big Lake watershed area. The construction of a raised rail bed crossing to the west and north of Big Lake would essentially create an earthen dam across a large part of the watershed. This would

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

create havoc with the existing drainage pattern and would have unknown consequences. The route would cross virtually every trail in and around Big Lake resulting in many crossings to accommodate trail users. We are also concerned about the negative impact on the borough from devaluing our property as a result of the rail line, potentially reducing tax revenues.

The eastern route, known as the Big Lake route, is also not recommended due to the route crossing many private property land. Noise pollution would be another issue due to the proximity to dwellings. The route would also require a road crossing at Hollywood and at Big Lake Road. It also crosses many wetlands and the Iditarod Trail. The main rail line across the Parks Highway -- Parks north of the highway requiring an over or underpass to reach the main line.

The council is not opposed to the development of the port and supports the rail spur to service it. We are concerned about the character of the lake and its surrounding areas. This is one of the most prized recreational areas in the state and supports robust summer and winter recreational activities. It is also becoming increasingly popular with year round residents. The recreational trail system in this area is extensive with thousand miles -- with thousands of miles in and around Big Lake. It's often called the gateway to the Western Susitna Valley and is extensively used by snowmobilers and dog mushers in the winter.

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

At the Big Lake meeting we supplied you with a trail map. I believe, Alan, you have that. That map shows the approximation of crossings that would occur if the Houston route were chosen. You'll note that the central route crosses and recrosses many of the main trails in the area and many more that are not indicated. The western route has the least impact on the trail system. Please consider our input during this decision making process and thank you for your attention of the matter.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Jill Parson, please.

Comment
Number: 129

MS. PARSON: My name is Jill Parson, J-I-L-L

P-A-R-S-O-N, and I just got my CD about three weeks ago, so I haven't really gone through all of the information that's in there, but my initial take is that I have three concerns. My first concern is that there is no clear choice. It looks like there are many, many all -- many, many cons for virtually every choice and so there is no single alternative that does not have significant impacts to our areas. And so it looks like to make a choice, if a choice is made and the no choice alternative is not selected, that it's just going to be a matter of what is the least onerous alternative or the lesser of evils. And that's a concern to me.

A second concern that I have is what I think the analysis did not do and that's -- I think -- it appears to me it

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

looked at each route individually but it didn't look at the overall area, because there's some things that are of serious concern to me about the overall area. The eagle nest is one thing. One little eagle nest can significantly impact what a route is. And I don't know that anyone really did a survey. There are a lot of eagles around here. There may be a lot of nests and the eagle nests are federally protected. So that's just a small thing.

I think what is even more significant is the watersheds. There are two separate watersheds. Those areas impact the salmon streams which in turn affect Cook Inlet. They affect the fishing in Cook Inlet, both private parties, fish -- sports fishermen and also they impact our commercial fisheries. And the impact, what now is an issue, the beluga whales who feed on them. So I haven't seen anything that says what the overall impact if we have a railroad, which theoretically is going to bring more traffic to the port and therefore more traffic in the inlet. Has that even been addressed? So that is my second concern.

My third concern, and at the open house we were told that this is not an issue raised by your evaluation, but that's the whole economics of this railroad. And we were told that that was not a part of what you are looking at, but I think that that cannot be separated from this issue at all. In this report, they make two little statements. One that says we're only talking

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

about two trains daily, one going this way and one going that way. Do we really want to impact as many people by two trains a day and impact our lives and our lifestyles?

Secondly, the report also says that for a railroad, for every gallon of diesel you get 156 to 520 ton miles. For a truck, you only get 68 to 133 truck -- ton miles for a truck per gallon of diesel. That's really wonderful, but what's not shown in here is the roads already exist. Trucks can haul now. And railroad exists with ports both in Anchorage and in Seward. So what is this railroad in this alternative going to bring and what will it cost? And if you build in that cost, are we really talking about numbers that are tucked in this one little corner of the report? I think that economics is very, very serious consideration and does need to be addressed before any kind of a decision is made. So how would this railroad traffic to the port benefit us, because the whole orientation is this is going to bring more business to the port. It's the old what will come down the railroad. It's if we build it, it will come. And we don't have any indication whatsoever what they expect to get to come down the railroad and what the cost it is going to put that railroad in and what therefore the impact is and offset it with what is going to be inconveniences to us.

So in short, those are my three things that I would like to bring up here. The first is that there's not really a clear choice that is the best alternative other than a no choice.

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

And secondly, I think the scope of this report needs to address more overall the overall impact, because there are things that may impact one area and be addressed on that one area, but they can also expand, like salmon streams being disturbed, they could affect other areas. And of course the last and I think very significant is the economics. Why are we talking about this? What is the benefit economically to us? Those of us who live on that side of the tracks that will be impacted by even if it's two railroad tracks, two trains a day coming through, we will be impacted by this. And supposedly it's the port that's going to receive the benefits. How will I benefit this? I don't see that at all. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Grace Whedbee.

Comment
Number: 131

MS. WHEDBEE: I started looking at the Port MacKenzie

Port Master Plan that was written in 1998 and amended in 1999 and on Page 3.7 in early 1999 the borough received the state and the federal agency approval to construct a multipurpose deepwater port facility, access road and transit storage area. And it goes onto describe four different variations of this dock that they might be building. And it says that no further permits are necessary and they -- unless they increase in size and then the modifications of the permit may be required.

In section 4.1, it also goes on to say that marine and

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

navigation status, it says that they have done no studies on what -- how it's going to affect the marine section or the Knik Arms. And my question is how can this be? There's no indication that any study was done before the permits was issued on the effects of a virtual dam that is being placed in the extremely fast moving water. No study on the effects of the fish when you make the drastic change to their migration and their critical habitat. In 2002, the port was shut down because 700 70-foot pilings housing -- holding 350,000 cubic yards of gravel was found to have two out of the three pilings that were inspected that was defective and because there was no data on the silt that was underlying the docks.

You know, it's very interesting that if I wanted to do the same thing I'd have to tell them exactly how I'm going to do it. I have to know the construction methods and everything else and nothing seems to have been done here. It looks like they got carte blanche to do this entire development without any permits and without any study. This is something we really need to look into in light of the following information that I'm going to give you that I don't believe has ever been looked at at all. Exhibit A that I've given you is taken from a Google Earth map that was dated September the 4th, 1996 and it shows the area prior to Port MacKenzie being built. And you'll notice that there is a very small amount of mud along the shoreline. There is nothing in the vicinity of Port MacKenzie. Exhibit B was taken on July 17th in

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

2002 and you're going to notice that the loading area around where they have built this dock, you'll notice that the mud flats have now been extended to the -- to where they go halfway out. And I believe this dock is over 800 linear feet into the water. If you'll then go to Exhibit C, you will -- this picture was taken on July -- I'm sorry, June 6th, 2004 and you'll notice that now the mud flats are extending the full length of the port and extending thousands and thousands of feet down into the stream, upstream and downstream of this port. This clearly shows that Port MacKenzie has changed the current flow of the entire Knik area and the habitat of our whales and our fish and everything else. And this change have been made and I can't find any indications of any reports that was ever done or any studies that was ever done prior to it being built.

The Knik Arm shoal is what we're going to discuss next and this shoal has required that we dredge it since the very beginning. With the dredging, a ship with a 40 to 43 foot depth can be accommodated. No ship deeper than 40 to 43 feet can ever come up the Knik Arms because everything has to pass over this shoal. So the very idea that we have a dock that can handle a 60 foot ship is a lie. It can't be done. You cannot get in there due to these shoals. So everything that we've been told up til now is based on false information. Exhibit D is the Alaska Journal of Commerce done on July 19th, 2005 where they say that the sediment in 1980 and 1990 averaged 250,000 cubic yards that

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

we had to remove. After this port was put into place from May 15th to June 1st of 2004, two million cubic yards had accumulated in six months, where for the last -- what is that, 20 years, we only had 250,000 cubic yards of accumulation. The cost went from three million dollars to dredge to 12 million dollars to dredge the other area.

But even more important than that, I'm going to talk to you about -- okay. One of the things this report said is that they don't know why this extra accumulation of silt, and they're still investigating it. But they -- one of the items that they said it could be Port MacKenzie or it could be the -- it's things that were happening at the port of Anchorage since they had been expanding and they had been doing things. However, I want to point out to you that when the port of Anchorage went in, they did millions and millions of dollars worth of study and reports that are this high. They even went to the extent with the bridge people to build a model that is in a huge warehouse of the entire Knik area. Computer generations and dyes help them to see what happens to anything that you do into that bay. Every single item that is done can be looked at and found out what happens. And until that was approved and they were making no major impact on the bay, they never got any permits. So that's very interesting to think about.

If you'll look at what I have listed as Exhibit E, you'll see a circle around the area that we're going to discuss

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

now, and again, this is brand new information that I don't know that anyone else has ever brought out. This area is between -- this is almost directly across from the port of Anchorage but downstream of Port MacKenzie.

Exhibit F and G show a shoal that is growing across from the port of Anchorage. This map was not done by me or someone local, it was done by NOAA. And they're actually showing at the 15 meter on the first one and at the 20 meter on the second one how big this thing is happening and what is going on. Tugboat captain said that when they used to run along the beach prior to Port MacKenzie they could actually run all the way to the beach on the other side. And now that is all blocked off and it is becoming a very dangerous situation. All the federal agencies have continued to study why this shoal has happened. The model of Knik Arms in Vicksburg, Mississippi will be used in May to do further studies and at that time all of the agencies in Alaska, being our national defense as this port of Anchorage is a defense port, will going be back, the Corp of Engineers and all of the others to test and see if they can figure out exactly what's causing this to happen.

It is vital that you understand that the port of Anchorage moves 90 percent of all goods in and out of Alaska and it is a strategic port for both national and military defense. The port of Anchorage is funded 50 percent by federal dollars. I highly recommend that the board, this board, either consider

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

tabling all proceeds or all proceedings until such time that Port MacKenzie can prove that they are not responsible for the adverse effects of the shipping lanes and this federally funded port or that you make a no bill recommendation. We need to stop throwing hundreds of millions of taxpayer's dollars at this ill-conceived port that has shown over the past 20 years is not viable. I should also point out that the Corp of Engineer has requested one million dollars as a 50 percent cost share to look into what it's going to cost to dredge this brand new shoal that is now called MacKenzie shoal. To look at just a cost of dredging, which is going to be many, many times more than what we paid in the past for any other dredging. The Mat-Su Borough is aware of this, the port of Anchorage when they receive the information that they have to do a million dollars as support to also participate in paying for the study. So this is not something small.

At this time, we really need to table this until we find out whether this port is responsible for cutting off the shipping lanes and possibly impacting the entire economy of the state of Alaska and our national defense. Remember how many ships are going to all the hot spots in the world including our fighting men and all the equipment that goes to them through this vital port. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next we have Mike Whedbee.

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

Comment
Number: 132

MR. WHEDBEE: My name is Mike Whedbee, pI-K-E

W-H-E-D-B-E-E. Since Grace didn't spell her name, it's the same last name as mine. You know, it's kind of hard to follow her, but what I'm going to be talking about tonight is basically the information and the purpose and need of Port MacKenzie. And when going through this -- the EIS in section S-1, the environmental people that did that was real careful to say the applicant has stated that. So what that tells me is that they didn't verify what the applicant told them. It goes on to say that the applicant has stated the purpose of building this rail line is to provide rail service to Port MacKenzie and connect the port with the existing ARRC rail system and provide Port MacKenzie customers with real transportation between Port MacKenzie and the interior of Alaska. According to the applicant, Port MacKenzie is the closest deepwater port to the interior of Alaska and capable of handling bulk commodities. The port market includes bulk commodities, wood chips, saw logs, sand, gravel and cement, iron steel and scrap metals, vehicles, heavy equipment, mobile and modular buildings. And it goes on to say the nearest port is the port of Anchorage which is 35 miles away and the applicant notes that the port of Anchorage currently has no capabilities for dry good material for export. Well, we checked on that very subject and they've always handled dry goods and commodities. So that's not really an issue. You know, they're handling everything that they say that this port is strategically located

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

and able to handle that no other port can handle.

And they go on to say that, you know, this is a 60 foot deep port that can handle a 60 foot draft ship, but what they don't say is that they have to cross that Knik shoal, which is 40 to 43 feet of high tide. So it doesn't matter how deep the port is, if you can't get across the shoal, the ship that's going to cross is no deeper than the one that goes into Anchorage.

So basically what I'm saying is that what is the need for this port? You know, we're throwing dollars after dollars after dollars, we're not talking little dollars, we're talking big dollars, when the return has been minimal. They've had seven ships in here in eight years and they talk about -- you know, if I was a banker, before I would loan anybody money, I would want a business plan of some kind. Where is the revenue coming from? You know, they claim that there's mountains of bentonite, they claim there's mountains of limestone, they claim all kinds of other ores that they can be shipping through this port. Well, we checked on that. If I owned a mountain of limestone and I owned ore that was in northern part of Alaska, I would definitely have checked with other sources to get that ore and commodities out of here. I would have checked with the port of Anchorage. To date, none of these people have even inquired to the port of Anchorage about shipping their commodities. So this is another pie in the sky that we're being sold. So basically I'm the banker and I'm the one paying the bill and I'm saying shut it down. We don't

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

need it, we're tired of paying the millions of dollars into it and that's all I've got to say. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Tina Dobson, you had a maybe. Would you like to speak?

**Comment
Number: 126**

MS. DOBSON: Hello, my name is Tina Dobson, T-I-N-A D-O-B-S-O-N. I just wanted to make a few comments. I don't believe I'm the only one here who feels that we've been deceived on many aspects of this project. There's been a lot of information we haven't been -- had access to, for example, what Grace Whedbee just brought up and the whole depth of the port. And we've never seen a cost benefit analysis, like what Jill brought up. Who's actually going to benefit from this? I believe that we've been held in the dark as to who's behind the whole push for this project. And maybe whoever that is hasn't wanted anyone to know the truth about what's going on.

I also wanted to put in that I've been in a number of these kind of situations where the community has had to fight back or give their say about what the bigger picture is. And I think one of the cost benefits -- or the costs that you need to add to the project are the lawsuits that are going to come out of this, because they will. No matter what route gets chosen, the port is a huge issue. It's going to affect the whole city of Anchorage and who knows how big that's going to get. So I think you need to include lawsuits and the cost of having everything

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

held up in court for this whole project to take place.

Also, I think the people of this community will not roll over and accept the project, because people who's told us they are professionals have done the proper studies to get this approved. We will not back down.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Well, that represents everyone who initially signed up and said they wanted to speak this evening and next I'll ask to see if there's anyone that has changed their mind and would like to speak. Please come up.

Comment
Number: 130

MR. STRONG: Good evening. My name is Greg Strong, G-R-E-G-O-R-Y S-T-R-O-N-G. I'm here tonight because I think what you're seeing happen tonight is democracy amongst the people here and certainly with the 1200 other people that signed the petition that you received has been basically dealt a fatal blow. There have been a lot of comments from a lot of people over the last two or three years and there's a feeling amongst the community that they've been given short shrift by a lot of organizations, not to mention yourselves. For example, the issue of the Castle Mountain fault from Houston down to the river and then the issue of bisecting a watershed that is the Little Susitna watershed has basically been discarded. And I think that a lot of people understand, even though they may not be experts in the field of seismic activity or geology, they understand that these things

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

are not the kinds of things that are given short shrift. So as a result, I think you're finding yourself to begin looking at a very slippery slope, and that is we're not just talking now about one route versus another route, we're talking about the future of the port of Anchorage. What Grace is pointing out to you is that the building of these shoals is going to be significant to homeland security because all those ships with troops and with helicopters and tanks going to different spots around the world, we're looking at the issue of homeland security, the Department of Defense, the Department of the Army, the Army Corp of Engineers with changing the whole navigational structure of Cook Inlet. And you've got NOAA that's also going to have some concern about the conditions affecting the beluga whales, not only the food source, but the very whales themselves.

You'll note that the year that they started building this addition to the port with their dock going out into the water was the year that they began finding there were 1370 beluga whales in the inlet. And subsequently in 207 -- or 2007, they discovered we're down to 300 plus whales. So it's clear that changing the navigational structure of Cook Inlet not only affects the Department of Defense, but it also affects the atmospheric conditions set by NOAA and the whales. So we're at a point now where, okay, if we can't logically have our arguments heard as they affect the routes, then maybe we need to go to the next step and that is do we really need this port. And I suspect

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

that when we talk to the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of the Army and the Army Corp of Engineers and NOAA not to mention the 27 in-state conservation groups that are going to take some concern regarding the kinds of things that you've heard discussed this evening. And that will make this project stagnant and when it becomes stagnant it will eventually become cost prohibitive.

So I think maybe we need to get a little democracy back in here and understand that there is a sentiment here and the sentiment is only two percent of this state is in private land holdings, two percent. The rest is owned by the federal and state and borough governments. We'd like to say that your putting a railroad in the backyard of that two percent is probably something that doesn't make a lot of legitimate sense. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Is there anyone else that would like to come to the microphone and provide formal comments for the record?

(No audible responses)

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. I'd like to thank everyone for coming out this evening and expressing your concerns and your interest just by showing up and especially to those who chose to come to the microphone and provide your oral comments. I know for many of us it's not an easy thing to do. And again, I

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

encourage you to provide us written comments on the draft EIS if you have concerns or questions. Even questions are legitimate comments for us. We will then address those questions in the final EIS. In a moment I'll adjourn the formal component to this meeting however we'll be around for awhile this evening to talk with you one-on-one if you have any questions that we might be able to answer generally regarding our process and any other comments or concerns you may want to provide to us. But I need to stress that in order for your comments or questions to play a role in the actual EIS process, we need to either have received them as oral comments and then transcripts at tonight's meeting or as written comments applied to us either by mail or through our website.

Again, thanks for coming and I adjourn -- I now adjourn the formal component of this evening's meeting.

(Off record - 7:10 p.m.)

(END OF PROCEEDINGS)

April 12, 2010

Houston Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

TRANSCRIBER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Salena A. Hile, hereby certify that the foregoing pages numbered 2 through 25 are a true, accurate, and complete transcript of proceedings, transcribed under my direction from a copy of the electronic sound recording to the best of our knowledge and ability.

Date

Salena A. Hile

April 14, 2010

Knik Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

SECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

PORT MACKENZIE RAIL EXTENSION PROJECT

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

Knik, Alaska

April 14, 2010

April 14, 2010

Knik Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Knik, Alaska - April 14, 2010)

(On record - 1:10 p.m.)

MR. NAVECKY: Good evening and thank you for attending this public comment meeting on the draft environmental impact statement for the proposed Port MacKenzie rail line. I would like to officially call this meeting to order. I am Dave Navecky of the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis, otherwise known as SEA. The Surface Transportation Board is the federal agency responsible for authorizing the construction and operation of new rail lines and associated facilities. In December of 2008, the Alaska Railroad Corporation filed a request for authority to construct and operate approximately 30 to 45 miles of rail line and related support facilities from the Port MacKenzie district to a point on the existing Alaska Railroad mainline between Wasilla and just north of Willow. The Mat-Su Borough is working with the railroad as a sponsor of the proposed rail line and was responsible for obtaining state funds to conduct environmental reviews and preliminary engineering for the proposed rail line. The Surface Transportation Board is the lead federal agency responsible for preparing the EIS which is intended to identify and evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed rail line. We also have three cooperating agencies assisting in preparation of the EIS. They are the US Army Corp of Engineers,

April 14, 2010

Knik Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

the Federal Railroad Administration and the US Coast Guard. With us this evening we Ben Soiseth of the Corp of Engineers over here to my left. A team of consultants led by ICF International also assisted SEA in preparing the EIS. At the table with me is Alan Summerville, project manager for ICF's EIS activities.

If you have not already done so, I'd please ask to sign in at the front table and indicate whether you are interested in providing oral comments on the draft EIS at tonight's meeting. This meeting is part of the draft EIS stage of the board's environmental review process. The draft EIS was issued last month and we are now accepting comments on the document. Prior to preparing the draft EIS we conducted agency and public scoping meetings to listen to your questions and concerns. The information you provided helped us frame our analysis, understand your concerns about the project and finalize a scope of study for the EIS which we issued in 2009. This final scope of study served as our guide concerning what issues to address in the draft EIS.

After the draft EIS comment period closes on May 10th we will review all the hearing transcripts and written comments and we'll prepare written responses to all substantive comments. All of your oral and written comments and our comment responses will be published in the final EIS. The Surface Transportation Board will then issue a final decision based on the transportation merits of the proposed rail line, the draft and

April 14, 2010

Knik Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

the final EISs and all public and agency comments in the public record. This final decision will take one of three actions; approve the rail line, deny it or approve it with mitigating conditions including environmental conditions.

Construction, if approved by the board, could not begin unless and until the cooperating agencies issue final decisions approving or permitting the proposed rail line. The environmental review process sheet in your handout contains additional information on our environmental review process. Whether you speak tonight or not you can also provide us with handwritten comments this evening by filling out the last page of your handout and turning it in at the sign in table. There are also blank comment forms at the sign in table. Oral and written comments are given equal weight and consideration, so if you choose not to speak this evening, your written comments will be fully considered.

This evening is just one option for you to provide comments. We are accepting written comments until May 10th and you may use the comment forms provided tonight or your own handwritten or typed comment letters. Your handout provides the information you need to submit your written comments to the Surface Transportation Board either by mail or electronically through our website. In preparing your comments, we encourage you to be as detailed as possible in describing your concerns. We are also interested in receiving comments on the purpose and

April 14, 2010

Knik Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

need for the proposed rail line, potential impacts, opinions on a preferred alternative, adequacy of the preliminary mitigation in the draft EIS and the need for any additional mitigation.

In a minute, I will begin calling on those individuals who would like to speak. Your oral comments will be documented by the court reporter located to my right. When I call your name, please approach the microphone then state and spell your first and last name for the benefit of the audience and our court reporter. Since we have such a small crowd this evening, we were generally giving five minutes for people, but we'll go to 10 minutes or whatever seems reasonable this evening.

And let's see, so I think we're ready to go. The first person I had that had a yes that wanted to speak on the record is Richard Gattis.

Comment
Number: 134

MR. GATTIS: Hello, my name is Richard Gattis, spelled G-A-T-T-I-S. I have three farms in the Point MacKenzie Ag Project. The -- my concern is which route through the ag district the rail is going to take. It will impact me in any case. I own tracks three and five, which if the Mac East route is taken I -- it'll impact my track three to a small amount. Track -- if it takes the westerly route, I'll lose about a mile of track 17, 200 foot wide by a mile long. My personal preference in my basic understanding, I am for -- I am pro the railroad. I think it'll be good for the community and the state in general. And so I am supportive of the project. I think that

April 14, 2010

Knik Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

the Mac East route would have the less amount of impact on both the amount of farm land taken as well as the area on my property, track 17, would be a mile of wetlands. The area on the west side of my property that borders the Susitna Flats Game Refuge as pretty much wetlands. So they'll be several miles I know of, wetlands, that will have to be filled in and mitigated.

Track -- the easterly route following the highway essentially just goes on the corner of one of my track three property along the ridge and would have the least amount of impact, I believe, on the farm project in general. The westerly route would bisect several of the farms and take away potentially several hundred acres of farmable land and make it difficult to access that property.

The area to the north of that and how it connects, either whether it goes to Houston or Willow or Big Lake, has less of a direct impact on me, so I'm not quite as much concerned. I think that'll work out to the best of the community -- for the best of the community. But I'd like to go on the record of saying that I believe from everything that I know and my experience out of Point MacKenzie in the last 10 years of farming out there that the Mac East route would be the most favorable for the farmers.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Okay. We had a couple of people put question marks on whether or not they wanted to speak so I'm just going to see if there's another

April 14, 2010

Knik Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

individual that would like to come up and speak for the record with the court reporter. Anyone else want to come up? And please and spell your name for us, please.

Comment
Number: 135

MS. HIRSCHMANN: Randi Hirschmann, H-I-R-S-C-H-M-A-N-N, and with an I. Just looking at this briefly, my comment is if we're going to have the railroad built to put it in the routes that are going to least impact the most pristine areas in this area along with the routes that would least impact farmland which, you know, we are losing in the Valley.

So for me personally the worst route would be the Houston route going through the Crooked Lake, Papoose, Twin Lakes area. We do own property on East Papoose and it's an incredibly pristine area back in there. And it appears that the route would interfere with wetlands as well as just the recreational value of the land and use of the land. It's just an incredible area. I think that less impact if the railroad is to be build would be the Big Lake area first and then the Willow route second. I think the Houston route would be least favorable to the environment and the impact on the wonderful area that we are talking about here. And I am not familiar with the Willow routes, but I do concur that the least impact on farmland and wetland would be my preference on the lower part of the route.

I do personally -- I'm not convinced that the port, you know, Anchorage port, just in the newspaper, I forget how many million dollars are being put into the Anchorage port for

April 14, 2010

Knik Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

expansion, so I'm still trying to think how will Port MacKenzie be profitable. You know, they're talking about coal and, you know, what kind of things are going to be coming down the rail line and can Port MacKenzie actually be profitable with Anchorage port and the huge expansion that's taking place there. So I think we need to look at, you know, is this a viable thing to do, to be extending the railroad to Port MacKenzie at this time and how profitable is the port. And it still has not been proven that the port can operate in the winter with the ice pack safely. So that's my comment.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Sir, would you like to come up?

Comment
Number: 133

MR. BRAUTIGAN: Yeah, hello. My name is Jon Brautigan, J-O-N B-R-A-U-T-I-G-A-N, and I'd like to comment on mostly the Big Lake route. I didn't see it on any of these maps here, but part of that route borders or is actually in the western end of a special land use district and it's the Knik sled dog and recreation district. And a bunch of people in our area worked on that for several years and it was passed in December of '08. And the -- it cuts across the Iditarod National Historic Trail and cuts right through a -- the Aurora dog mushing trails. You show it on there. And I don't see how this is compatible with our SpUD at all, that this area was set aside as a recreational district and them trails, the mushing trails and whatever are a big part of that. So you would have to -- I don't know how you

April 14, 2010

Knik Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

would do it through that area, you know, to make trails under them or over them or whatever.

Also, no matter where you go on this you're going to cross the Iditarod National Historic Trail and I know from talking with you a few years ago that there's already something in there to put some sort of culvert in or some overpass, however it would be. I'd like to see something on your maps about the sled dog district on there. You know, it just don't seem fair that you don't have it on there.

Anyways, I wish there was more people here to talk on this. It seems like I'm the only one. Well, thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Did anyone else want to speak on the record?

(No audible responses)

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. Then I guess we'll adjourn the formal portion of the meeting and be happy to speak with you one-on-one back by the maps or wherever like we were prior to bringing the meeting to order. And I want to thank you for coming tonight. It's the hearty souls made it tonight and I appreciate your interest and in coming out this evening. Thank you.

(Off record - 1:25 p.m.)

(END OF PROCEEDINGS)

April 14, 2010

Knik Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

TRANSCRIBER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Salena A. Hile, hereby certify that the foregoing pages numbered 2 through 10 are a true, accurate, and complete transcript of proceedings, transcribed under my direction from a copy of the electronic sound recording to the best of our knowledge and ability.

Date

Salena A. Hile

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

SECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

PORT MACKENZIE RAIL EXTENSION PROJECT

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

Wasilla, Alaska

April 8, 2010

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Wasilla, Alaska - April 8, 2010)

(On record - 6:30 p.m)

MR. NAVECKY: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for attending this public comment meeting on the draft environmental impact statement or EIS for the proposed Port MacKenzie Rail Extension. I would like to officially call this meeting to order. I am Dave Navecky of the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis, otherwise known as SEA. The board is the federal agency responsible for authorizing the construction and operation of new rail lines and associated facilities. In December 2008, the Alaska Railroad Corporation filed a request for authority to construct and operate approximately 30 to 45 miles of rail line and related support facilities from the Port MacKenzie district to a point on the existing Alaska Railroad mainline between Wasilla and just north of Willow. The Mat-Su Borough is working with the Railroad as a sponsor of the proposed rail line and was responsible for obtaining state funds to conduct environment reviews and preliminary engineering for the proposed rail line. The board is the lead federal agency responsible for preparing the CIS which is intended to identify and evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed rail line. We also have three cooperating agencies assisting in the preparation of the EIS. They are the US Army Corp of Engineers, Federal

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

Railroad Administration and US Coast Guard. With us this evening is Ben Soiseth with the Corp of Engineers. Ben is over here on my left. A team of consultants led by ICF International also assisted SEA in preparing this EIS. At the table is -- with me is Alan Summerville, project manager for ICF's EIS activities.

If you have not already done so, please sign at -- in at the front table located out in the hallway and indicate whether you are interested in providing oral comments on the draft EIS at tonight's meeting. The meeting is part of the draft EIS stage of our environmental review process. As you know, the draft EIS was issued last month and we're now accepting comments on the document. Prior to preparing the draft EIS we conducted agency and public scoping meetings to listen to your questions and concerns. The information you provided helped us frame our analysis, understand your concerns about the project and finalize the scope of study for the EIS which was issued in July of 2009. This final scope of study served as our guide concerning what to address in the draft EIS. After the draft EIS comment period closes on May 10th, we will review all the hearing transcripts and all the written comments and we will prepare written responses for all substantive comments. All of your comments and all of our comment responses will be published in the final EIS for all to see. The board will then issue a final decision based on the transportation merits of the proposed rail line, the conclusions of -- and contents of the draft and final EISs and

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

all public and agency comments in the public record. This final decision will take one of three actions; approve the proposed rail line, deny it or approve it with mitigating conditions including environmental conditions. Construction, if approved by the board, could not begin unless and until the cooperating agencies issue final decisions approving or permitting the proposed rail line. The environmental review process sheet in your handout provides additional detail on each stage of our environmental review process.

Whether you speak tonight or not you can also provide us with handwritten comments this evening by filling out the last page of your handout and turning it in at the sign in table. There are also blank comment forms at the sign in table and oral and written comment -- excuse me, oral and written comments are given equal weight and consideration. So if you choose not to speak this evening, your written comments will be fully considered. In addition to this evening, which is just one option for providing your comments, we will be accepting written comments until May 10th and you may use the comment forms provided this evening or your own handwritten or typed comment letters. Your handout provides the information you need to submit your written comments to us by mail or electronically through our website. When you're preparing your comments we encourage you to be as detailed as possible in describing your concerns. We are also interested in receiving comments on the

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

purpose need of the proposed rail line, potential project impacts, opinions on a preferred alternative, adequacy of the preliminary mitigation of the draft EIS and the need for additional mitigation. As an example of the detail we're looking for, in some of the meetings over the last couple of nights some folks have expressed comments that they did not feel there were sufficient number of proposed trail crossings along the alternative rail lines. What we would be interested in hearing from you is where you would like the trail crossings to occur and if you could identify those specific trail crossings. Or if you don't have a specific trail crossing by name or location, at what frequency you would like to see the trail crossings occur whether at -- what interval, whether it's every mile or every half mile, every quarter mile. That is the type of detailed information we would be interested in receiving from you.

In a minute, I will begin calling on those individuals who would like to speak. Your oral comments will be documented by the court reporter located to my left. When I call your name, please approach the microphone then state and spell your first and last name for the benefit of the audience and our court reporter. In order to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak, each person will be limited to five minutes; however, since we don't have a long -- a lengthy list of people that would like to speak, once we run through the initial list of folks, providing them five minutes, I will go back to those individuals

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

and anyone else in the audience that would like to speak and allow them either an additional five minutes or their five minutes they would like to speak.

Your comments can be either comments specifically on the draft EIS and the project or they can also be in the form of questions that you would like us to answer directly in the final EIS. After everyone has spoken and provided their oral comments I will then adjourn the formal component of this public meeting and we'll be available to talk with you one-on-one in a more informal setting after the adjournment and answer general questions you may have or anything more specific you have regarding your concerns. But then I would also encourage you that the best way to participate in our process, to ensure your comments and concerns and questions are addressed, is provide those to us in writing or orally this evening.

At this time, I would like to call our first commentor to the microphone, Grace Whedbee. And again, once you reach the microphone, if you could spell your first and last name for the benefit of the audience and our court reporter. Thank you.

Comment
Number: 142

MS. WHEDBEE: Okay. My name is Grace Whedbee, G-R-A-C-E W-H-E-D-B-E-E. I'm wondering why we're not looking long term for the best location to build a railroad. Are we looking for the best location or are we just looking for the cheapest and most convenient? The Alaska Railroad was built in 1915 and 95 years later we're still living with the decision of

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

where to put that railroad. Our great grandchildren are going to have to live with the decision that you make today or on this particular issue. This is not the Lower 48 and decisions should be based on the unique conditions that we have in Alaska where only one percent of all land is in private property hands. All the rest is owned by government entities or Native corporations. 84 percent of the Anchorage borough is parks. 84 percent. Of the one percent of privately owned land in Alaska, 23 percent is located in the Mat-Su Borough. The greatest concentration of private land in the entire state, even at this minimum, most of the land, 77 percent is still owned by the government entities or the Native corporations.

The Big Lake area where the Houston route and the Big Lake route runs has 26 percent private ownership. Again, that is a very small amount. This -- there's a lot of private land by Alaskan's standards, because we have the largest percentage of it, but when we compare it to the area where the people who are going to be making the decisions that can ruin the quality of life of most of the people in the Big Lake area, we find that they have an overwhelming majority of their land in private hands and a minority in government lands. It is imperative that they remember that we have enough parks, but not enough private land.

The parks account for the majority of the land available. These parks have a master plan. Most of them plan --

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

will release one-third of all of their land back into settlements eventually. In other words, it's going to be come private property. Instead of issuing a 4(f) statement of impact on the parks, why did they not look out for the future of Alaska and say let's put the railroads through the park and establish planned communities for Alaska's future? In this way we can have communities that had been laid out and not the mishmash mess that we find in most of our communities. Where are the forward thinking people? It looks like they are totally influenced by how much this line is going to cost. After reading the EIS, it appears that it was written with the idea of giving the borough what they want even though it is apparent that it is not the best route for the people or the economy of the state of Alaska. A line to the west would open up land that would increase the tax base and the economy of Alaska via shorter route from the interior as you must measure the distance from the furthest [sic] point north down the port. Anything else is false figures. Train energy would be less, safety factor would be best, the environment would be less impacted.

And in addition, why are the people given so much -- or so little attention in your report? Big Lake is a retirement community. Just look at our comp plan. Most of us have given 40 to 60 hours a week for 40 or 50 years in order to buy our dream retirement homes. The government took about 40 percent of our hard earnings, so we worked harder. And now you're using our

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

taxpayer's money to try to take away what our blood, sweat and tears have achieved. After spending seven years looking for the perfect retirement property, I look forward to my rocking chair looking at the longer -- the no longer endangered but still watched swans, grebes and loons that are swimming 200 feet away in multiple numbers. And I'm watching a new family of eagles 500 foot away from my door and just 1,000 foot away from where you're proposing to put a train track, a track that will go down the middle between two lakes that are breeding grounds for three watched breeds of birds. And it will cut through the breeding grounds of hundreds of sandhill cranes, to say nothing of the total destruction of their food source if you choose either of the Houston routes.

And remember, the watershed is the area that feeds Knik Arms which is the most vital habitat of the 300 remaining endangered beluga whales. What happens to our expectations of quiet enjoyment when we purchase some of the most expensive and the quietest property anywhere in your survey? The 4(f) impact on the parks should carry little consideration in light of the total disruption to the way of life of over 3,000 residents of the Big Lake area. 4(f) funding of -- or findings of de minimis impact does not mean that we can't build that route. It means we must evaluate other routes in light of prudent and feasible. Would a prudent person take a private property when there's 99 times more public property than private property in the state?

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

Would a prudent person run a railroad line through one of the most populated areas, the most expensive land valued property in the largest residential borough in the state, an area that uses almost all of the land, including its private property as recreational property for the use of the public? You must remember that the Big Lake area has as much recreational use on a daily basis as the entire park systems in your study. To disrupt this usage would have a greater impact on the recreational use in Alaska than if you were to go through these parks that you are trying so hard to protect.

To choose any other path in the Willow path is not feasible, is not prudent if you give people any type of consideration. Add to that the future growth of the Valley, the shortest route, the best use of the land, the safety factor, the train energy and the overall best interest to the future of the Alaskan people and you cannot find any other route but Willow is reasonable, prudent or feasible. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Next I'd like to call Ray Debenham. Is that correct?

MR. DEBENHAM: That's correct.

MR. NAVECKY: And please again spell your name for the court reporter.

MR. DEBENHAM: I'm Ray Debenham, R-A-Y D-E-B-E-N-H-A-M.

Comment
Number: 137

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

I first entered the Crooked Lake area in 1958 when I purchased the land from the federal government there. Since that time I've walked most of those areas in the summer or driven most of the areas extensively in the winter. I'm very, very concerned about the effects of a railroad would have through that area. Number one is the effects on the people who live in that area. It's a very highly recreational area, probably the highest recreational area in the state of Alaska, any place, with more snow machinings in the winter, more trails, more people in the summer waterskiing or hiking or going on their four-wheelers or their motorcycles out through that area. There's literally thousands of trails out in that area that we use weekends or daily or whatever we want on the thing.

But I'm also concerned about the environmental of it. This is swamp areas with lakes, rivers and you basically can't ride in the summertime through there because it's all swampy. But I know you've done some testing on it and I know what you think you know is there, but you have to physically look at it to see where the water is running and where -- and a dam and basically what you're building in the railroad is a dam with a few culverts underneath it to let the water get through. But it's basically a dam. It's going to effect the water quality throughout that area. And we've got loons on Crooked Lake. The trains going by, the noise would stop their -- their nesting areas on Crooked Lake. We found out that even the boats going by

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

during their nesting time will affect whether they have chicks that year or not. The boat -- the railroad that you got set up isn't too far away from their nesting area. The way I see it through here is, probably be about a block away. And it would affect it. We also got a lot of other water and places through there, but the main thing is people live there. They use it daily. The railroad extremely effect our lives there.

I also own a farm out there at MacKenzie Point, 320 acres out there. Mac West or Mac East, either one of those, would affect somewhat the farming area. Mac West goes through Susitna Flat's state game refuge, or along the edge of it. Unless you put it in the farm you're going to be in the refuge, one or the other. You can't be -- it can't affect that. If you look -- just have to look at the map and see on Mac West how many of the watershed areas you go through down there, where the birds are. One time I saw 50,000, and I literally mean 50,000 geese on my property eating the wheat and the corn -- or I mean, the oats that I had on the property. Will they come when the railroad goes by there every two hours through there? I doubt it. The reasonable thing, the way to look at this map if you have to pick one of your things, is the Willow map. It's out of the way of the recreational people. It's out of the way most of the places with a few crossings of the trails that go into the Big Su and the Little Susitna River and it does not affect the water areas as much, although it might be a little lower, but it doesn't have

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

the lakes and the rivers and the recreational areas that you have through the Houston map. And I strongly feel that we've got a real serious environmental problem if we take the Houston route.

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. Thank you for your comments. Next is Kit Roberts, please.

Comment
Number: 139

MR. ROBERTS: My name is Kit Roberts. First name K-I-T, last name R-O-B-E-R-T-S. And I am a land owner out in the Point MacKenzie area. I have 14 acres out of Ayrshire/Burma Road area, which the Big Lake route touches one corner of it. I do support more of the Willow than Mac West routes due to the less residential impact and less trail user impact out there. I do recreate out in that area and there is some trails that I'm aware of out there that I would like to talk, you know, show later in the evening with whoever is in charge of that, you know, of marking trails and stuff.

Along with railroads always brings people with it along the rail lines, and so I feel the Willow and the Mac West would be less impact on this residence and use of that area, of the Big Lake area, is highly usable and it would be more costly to go that way just for the number of trail accesses that would have to be provided by the railroad. So I would -- that's why I'd encourage the Willow Mac West for the easier of interacting with the railroad.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Those were the only three individuals that had -- that marked in yes that

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

they wanted to speak. Now I'm going to run down the sheets. There are a few people who had question marks and were uncertain whether they wanted to speak. I'll give them an opportunity first. First is Mike Whedbee.

MR. WHEDBEE: I'll pass.

MR. NAVECKY: Pass? Okay. Next is Chris Alford (ph). Next is Yvonne Sumner. And please spell your name for us, please, for the court reporter.

Comment
Number: 141

MS. SUMNER: My number -- my name is Yvonne Sumner Y-V-O-N-N-E, Sumner, S-U-M-N-E-R. And I actually think this is one of the best projects that I've seen and one of the best -- I guess it's quasi-public works projects that I've ever seen -- I've seen done. It's going to really help interior Alaska and I just want to give kudos to the railroad for getting this going as quickly as you have.

I personally think that the Houston route is a good route. I think Houston is a community that's going to welcome the potential development and I think they have historically in Houston have wanted that kind of development and I think that it's going to be a good thing for the community. I know there's a lot of trails in that area, but I think this is going to make -- because you guys are talking about giving access to those trails, again, I think it's something that you should be commended on. And I'm just really, really happy to see this. I hope it's going to lower the cost for the people in interior

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

Alaska, that they'll be able to get a lot of the heavy materials and resources down to Southcentral and to our port, a port that we've built and we need to build up and help improve. The state of Alaska is constricting around Southcentral and the people in the interior are really struggling with costs and this is going to help them. And this is one of the best things that has come along in a long time and that the state needs these kinds of projects or else there will be no population in the bush.

And I think that -- I've lived near trains ever since I moved to Alaska in 1975 and they don't bother me. I used to put my children to bed by the time the train came by and I give them their nap by the time it came by in the morning and it never bothered anybody in my family or any of the wildlife around my house. So thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Next is Rick, had a maybe. And I can't read your last name, Rick. It begins with an S.

MR. SUMNER: Can you go to the next person? I'm still writing my response.

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. Is that -- that is the extent of the folks that had yes or maybe. Do we have some more folks? Okay. Sir, would you like to come up please?

Comment
Number: 138

MR. DEMBOSKI: Hi, my name is Ben Demboski, D-E-M-B-O-S-K-I. I'm a land owner in Willow. I own 26 acres on Boot Lake. My parents own property on that lake as well and my

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

father-in-law. This proposed Willow route will come within a mile of my property that I own there. We have cabins. We don't live there full -- my father lives full time in the area, I do not. Obviously because I live in Willow I'm not a fan of this Willow route and I have a few reasons why. I'm not just a I don't want it in my backyard kind of person. My family and I have recreated in the area and we've hunted the Big Darryl/Little Darryl (ph) area near Deshka Landing for moose for over 20 years. This proposed route as it comes through through the Rolly Lakes area and it skirts through the big swamp near Deshka, it crosses right between Big Darryl and Little Darryl on the outskirts of Nancy Lake state recreation area. Right there for 20 years we've watched every year that the moose herd towards the end of hunting season. If you're familiar with moose at all you know they get their harem going and they have -- I've counted -- probably the best time I've ever seen it, I've seen five bulls with probably 30 cows all in that one area right where you're coming through. And as I can -- best I can tell by your map, you're not cutting through the nasty swamp here, you're cutting through the timber right on the edges of the swamp and that's where I've seen it. It's right next to your line. It goes right through Little Darryl Lakes area. I think it's going to negatively affect that area.

I would also like to make the point that there is a lot of recreation that goes on in the Willow area with the Deshka

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

Landing, all the lakes in the area. There are some very expensive properties in that area, but the access is a big problem for me and, you know, everybody puts in there to hit the Susitna River to get to their remote cabins in the winter. There's a lot of fishing in the area. You got Red Shirt Lake. I mean, there's -- it's skirting just the outsides of areas where you're not even allowed to shoot a firearm at certain times, but we're going to go ahead and run a train through some of these areas. I guess that's probably my biggest concern here, is those trains coming through and limiting access.

The point has already been made that over half the state is not accessible for me to use. I mean, there's -- a lot of the state is closed down. This is a very accessible area. A lot of people use it and I would hate to see this road accessible area for hunting and fishing be negatively affected by this train. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

Comment
Number: 140

MR. SUMNER: Hello, I'm Rick Sumner. That's -- I guess you know how to spell Rick, but Sumner is S-U-M-N-E-R. This rail spur represents the single best economic engine proposed for Southcentral in years. I've lived most of my years here within sight and sound of the railroad. These homes I owned were some very expensive properties that were not detrimentally affected during my years of ownership nor when I sold it to others. Let's get this project done, not for the piece of mind of myself or

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

others in our retirement, but for our children's future. This project will reduce train traffic through Wasilla directly relieving congestion. This project will greatly reduce freight cost into and out of the interior. This project will help provide jobs for our children and grandchildren's future. Let's do the Houston North or South and put in crossroads every mile. And the main thing, let's quit studying and get going and get this thing done. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Yes, sir.

Please come up.

Comment
Number: 136

MR. CHARLES: Hello, my name is Steve Charles. I'm -- I lived near Willow for 30 years. I'm also the chair of Willow Trail Committee and on the citizen's advisory board for State Parks of Mat-Su. And I would like to address the Willow corridor route in particular and the incompatibility that the corridor has with state parks. And specifically, in the draft environmental impact statement it refers to the 4(f) lands, which as I understand it restricts federal funds from -- transportation funds for -- transportation corridors within state managed -- or actually public managed lands. And not only is that specific to 4(f) but there's a reason behind that statute and that's because it's supposed to be protecting state parks and public parks, whether it's star parks or local parks. Within that Willow corridor there's Willow segment and the connectors to it. There's four state managed areas, Willow Creek State Recreation

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

Area, Nancy Lake State Recreation Area, the Little Susitna recreational rivers and the Susitna Flats Game Refuge. And there's also other recreational areas that Ben just talked about in Willow with the West Gateway Trail System, which is not state managed lands, but it uses state's funding for winter trail maintenance. And all those trails have easements and/or are managed throughout the winter by the Willow trail community.

The draft environmental impact statement went -- on the summary it went through lots of different segments which all addressed to me the reason why 4(f) is important. It talked about the Willow segments in these issues and the Willow segment was the worst route according to noise levels. It's the only area -- only 4(f) lands within the study area that noise levels would be detrimental to the 4(f) lands. They addressed -- it said the Willow route would be the worst as far as soils and vegetation in regards to agriculture. It also talk about flood plains that Willow route would have the most lands under FEMA flood plains categories. The Willow routes would have the greatest loss of vegetation with forestry and with forest and wetlands and the impact or the mitigation would be -- and the regrowth would be very slow, if at all. The Willow area would have the most loss of wildlife habitat. And I would like to emphasize the moose habitat, like Ben did. And I think throughout the EIS it -- when they talk about moose habitat they under recognize the value that Willow has as far as winter

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

habitat, moose habitat. It's -- the Susitna Valley and within a few miles of the river there's lots of moose there in the wintertime. In the summer they spread out. In the wintertime it's very dense.

Also the Willow corridor has -- impacts the most fish habitat that was included in the summary. And also was the -- impacted the most of all the corridor routes, alternative routes, it -- the cultural and historical aspects were the -- impacted the most in the Willow route. Also subsistence and there's just -- goes on and on. So I guess my -- what I'm saying is I would really promote the Houston, route which in many categories, and I won't go in detail here, the Houston South route circumvents a lot of these issues and the Houston Community Council -- or the Houston Comprehensive Plan endorses infrastructure like this and the Willow area community organization came out against -- our community council came out against the Willow route and I think the 4(f) -- like I said, the 4(f) is a statute which may limit feasibility of the Willow route, but there's a reason behind it and that's because of all these reasons I listed here. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Is there anyone else in the audience that has not spoken that would like to come to the microphone?

(No audible responses)

MR. NAVECKY: Is there anyone that has spoken already

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

that would like to come up for an additional five minutes?

Comment
Number: 143

MS. WHEDBEE: Again, I want to emphasize -- my name is Grace Whedbee, G-R-A-C-E W-H-E-D-B-E-E, and, you know, we get to talking about a lot of things. And I sometimes wonder how much emphasis we give to the quality of what we're talking about. We talk about the number of moose that are found. You've got to remember the entire Matanuska Valley is home to moose. We're not talking about one area. They travel. They don't live in one place. They don't put down roots and stay there. They travel all over. I can still remember the morning I got up and looked out and looked down my runway and had 47 moose on less than 20 acres of land because the wolves had herded them in. So I can tell you that moose are everywhere in this valley and if we're going to look at where we're going to have the most impact on the moose, then we need to look at the game areas that we talked about earlier, but again, 4(f) is written to protect parks, mainly where -- areas where parks are a rare thing, where they've got one park in the whole state and it covers one percent of the land.

In Alaska our parks are covering an average of over 60 percent of every acre of land. That is not something that we have to protect as strongly as we do in the states. We need to protect our homes. That is the thing that we don't have very many of. I hear the people in Houston that are talking about the economic benefits to their area and I have a major problem

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

understanding, because right now the city of Houston has a side rail and that side rail is where you would take off any type of a spur in order to put in to their industrial commercial area. that spur is totally -- or that side rail is located perfectly for a spur to come off of. And I know they have financial problems that make it hard for them to put that spur in, but what I think that most of these people are not aware of or have not studied adequately is that if the Houston South route is chosen, the Railroad has state that they are going to move that spur, that they are going -- or not spur, the side rail, that they are going to cross the Little Susitna River again and put that side rail on the other side. When that happens, the Alaska Railroad will no longer make that available for them to come off of. It's not in the right location. You cannot take a spur line for industrial use off of a high speed area of a railroad. It must come off of a side rail where the speed can be gathered up in order for them to get on. And the people of Houston think they're gaining and they're going to be losing. And I hate to see that happen to people because someone has given them this information and I wish that they would study this before they go in any further with their support of a route that is actually going to hurt their economy where they have the perfect thing now. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Is there anyone in the audience that would like to speak?

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

(No audible responses)

MR. NAVECKY: That's it? Okay. Well, if you have not spoken and you do have comments I would encourage you to send those to us in writing. Again, your handout explains how you may send those to us either by mail or through our website. If you go through our website you can attach any type -- most type of documents, either a Microsoft Word file, WordPerfect file, an Excel spreadsheet or a PDF file you can attach to your comments. With that, I will adjourn the formal component of tonight's meeting and we'll be available to speak with you one-on-one and answer questions and hear some of your comments. Thank you.

(Off record - 7:08 p.m.)

(END OF PROCEEDINGS)

April 8, 2010

Wasilla Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

TRANSCRIBER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Salena A. Hile, hereby certify that the foregoing pages numbered 2 through 24 are a true, accurate, and complete transcript of proceedings, transcribed under my direction from a copy of the electronic sound recording to the best of our knowledge and ability.

Date

Salena A. Hile

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

SECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

PORT MACKENZIE RAIL EXTENSION PROJECT

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

Willow, Alaska

April 13, 2010

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Willow, Alaska - April 13, 2010)

(On record - 6:30 p.m.)

MR. NAVECKY: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I think we're ready to begin, if you'd like to take a seat. Good evening and thank you for attending this public comment meeting on the draft environmental impact statement for the proposed Port MacKenzie rail extension. I would like to officially call this meeting to order. I am Dave Navecky of the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis, otherwise known as SEA. The board is the federal agency responsible for authorizing the construction and operation of new rail lines and associated facilities. In December 2008, the Alaska Railroad Corporation filed a request for authority to construct and operate approximately 30 to 45 miles of rail line and related support facilities from the Point MacKenzie --Port MacKenzie district to a point on the existing Alaska Railroad mainline between Wasilla and just north of Willow. The Mat-Su Borough is working with the Railroad as a sponsor of the proposed rail line and was responsible for obtaining state funds to conduct environmental reviews and preliminary engineering for the proposed rail line.

The Surface Transportation Board is the lead federal agency responsible for preparing this EIS which is intended to identify and evaluate the potential environmental impacts

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

associated with the proposed rail line. We also have three cooperating agencies assisting in preparation of the EIS. They are the US Army Corp of Engineers, the Federal Railroad Administration and the United States Coast Guard. Sitting in the audience this evening is Ben Soiseth of the Corp of Engineers. And where is Ben? Oh, he's over here on the right -- my right. A team of consultants led by ICF International also assisted SEA in preparing the EIS. At the table with me is Alan Summerville, project manager for ICF's activities on the EIS.

If you've not already done so, please sign in at the front table located at the entrance to the auditorium and indicate whether you are interested in providing oral comments on the draft EIS at tonight's meeting. This meeting is part of the draft EIS stage of the environmental review process. The draft EIS was issued last month and we are now accepting comments on the document. Prior to preparing the draft EIS we conducted agency and public scoping meetings to listen to your questions and concerns. The information you provided helped us frame our analysis, understand your concerns about the project and finalize the scope of study for the EIS which we issued in July of 2009. This final scope of study served as our guide concerning what to address in the draft EIS we are here to discuss this evening.

After the draft EIS comment period closes on May 10th the Surface Transportation Board will review all the hearing transcripts and written comments and SEA will prepare written

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

responses to all substantive comments. All of your comments, whether written or oral, and our comment responses will be published in the final EIS. The board will then issue a final decision based on the merit transportation -- merits of the proposed rail line, the draft and the final EISs and all public and agency comments in the public record. This final decision by the Surface Transportation Board will take one of three actions; approve the proposed rail line, deny it or approve it with mitigating conditions including environmental conditions.

Construction, if approved by the board, could not begin unless and until the cooperating agencies issue final decisions approving and permitting the proposed rail line. The handout that you picked up at the entrance to the room contains additional information on our entire environmental review process. Whether you speak tonight or not you can also provide us with handwritten comments this evening by filling out the last page of your handout and turning it in at the sign in table. There are also blank comment forms at the sign in table. Oral and written comments are given equal weight in consideration, so if you choose not to speak this evening, your written comments will be fully considered.

In addition, this evening is just one option for you to provide written comments. We are accepting written comments until May 10th and you may use the comment forms provided tonight or your own handwritten or typed comment letters. Your handout

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

provides the information you need to submit these written comments to the Surface Transportation Board and that may occur either by mail or electronically through our website. In preparing your written comments, we encourage you to be as detailed as possible in describing your concerns. We are also interested in receiving comments on the purpose and need for the proposed rail line, potential project impacts, opinions on preferred alternatives, adequacy of the preliminary mitigation in the draft EIS including trail crossings and the need for any additional mitigation.

In a minute, I will begin calling on those individuals who would like to speak. Your oral comments will be documented by the court reporter located to my left. When I call your name, please approach the microphone then state and spell your first and last name for the benefit of the audience and the court reporter. To ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak, each person will be limited to approximately five minutes, although I suspect that we will have plenty of time this evening and if someone wants to come back and speak an additional five minutes, we'll -- I will give everyone that opportunity.

Also, at the end of the formal comment session this evening I will adjourn the meeting and we will be available to talk about the project with you one-on-one and answer any questions you might have or at least attempt to answer your questions; however, I must stress that the best way for you to

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

participate in our EIS process, to convey your questions and comments, is to provide them in writing. That ensures that we will address them in writing in the final EIS.

I would like to ask the first person to come up to the microphone. That is Dale Evans, please.

MR. EVANS: Pass.

MR. NAVECKY: Ed McCain.

**Comment
Number: 150**

MR. MCCAIN: Edward McCain, E-D-W-A-R-D M-C-C-A-I-N.

And I received a CD in the mail of your environmental impact statement and I reviewed and have the following concerns. The first thing I came across was the dock, the fact that there's no need for dredging. There's no need for dredging because it's self-scouring there, meaning the current is so fast that it's not going to silt up. And we've already had a pulp ship that's had to disconnect from the dock due to ice in the inlet. And there's already been an incident at Nikiski where an oil tanker was tore loose from the dock from this moorings because of the current from the tides and the ice conditions. And the dock at Nikiski is a fraction of the current that it is at Point MacKenzie. You got to remember that Knik In -- Arm there is the second highest tides in the world and I think that's something that you guys need to look into.

Then I have another concern with your grade crossings in the section line easements. The Organic Act of 1866 provided for section line easements on every mile square. And even though

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

these townships haven't been surveyed, they're protracted townships and protracted sections. And I know the Willow Trail Committee has had to honor that. Every time they've had to pay for a survey, a survey of one of their trails, they're had to monument these section lines and show these easements.

Another concern is the 50 foot pedestrian easement around all streams and major lakes that Fish and Game has made us honor for close to 30 years, some even before that. And are you going to be able to continuously walk down the edge of these streams or when you come to the railroad are you going to be blocked and arrested for trespassing like happens on most of them right now?

You had asked once before about how often the railroad needs to provide crossings. I don't think every mile is too ridiculous, because at the cost of building roads in this borough right now between 50 and a hundred dollars a foot, we're talking between 150,000 and 260,000 for a half of mile of road and that isn't practical for most subdivisions.

Another thing it says you'll be building a road along the railroad to build it and then you're going to tear it up. And I question that our tax money is going to build this road, our tax money is going to tear it up, and then our local tax money is going to have to build another one. And I think if you build a road it needs to be turned over to the local people for use.

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

Another concern I have is what's happening at the Glenn Highway at the flats and this is for the Corp of Engineers. When you leave here tonight if it's still light enough, when you go onto the Glenn Highway there's a big long straight stretch there. Take a look at it. The road is acting as a dike and on your left hand side you'll see all the trees are dying out because the water table is raising, where on the right hand side of the road to the west the trees are gaining more of a foothold because it's drying out. This railroad plan that we've got right now has got almost 10 miles of railroad out south of the Deshka Landing Road with about half a dozen culverts. And all that land is draining from east to west to the Big Su. I think it's something you need to take a look at.

Another one of my concerns is if the Willow route is picked, it's going to be a round trip of 64.2 miles longer to Anchorage, because the Willow route is 13.5 miles longer than the Big Lake route. That's a total of 27 miles round trip. The Big Lake route starts at Mile 70.3. The Willow route at Mile 88.9, which is 18.6 miles for a total of 37.2. When you add you two together it's 64.2 miles that that train is going to have to travel if you have cargo going from Anchorage to Point MacKenzie. And I think it's -- and that's that many more miles of track that's going have to be maintained too and built.

Another one of my problems is the way the Big Lake route was handled. It appears that the negatives of the Big Lake

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

route were thoroughly covered in your statement but not the Houston or Willow routes. And it says they need a 430 foot bridge. Is that any different than the one that's going to be required at Willow? I don't think so. It says you'll have to move 2,440 feet of an unnamed stream. It says you'll have to move or close a thousand feet -- or you have to move a thousand feet of Hawk Lane, you'll have to close 865 feet of Cheri Lake Road. That's almost a mile away from your intersection. What's happening that you'd have to close that road? You'll have to do 1405 feet of Loon Street. And as far as this stream, it seems like it's the worst possible choice to make the Big Lake route not feasible. Why can't you just move the railroad over a few hundred feet here and there? Did you guys review these plans, did you guys come up with these plans or did somebody else design them and you get stuck with them and how can they be changed?

Another problem I have is with your noise study. It's very apparent whoever did that didn't talk to the Alaska Railroad, because it says there's going to be 10 trains in the day for every one at night, that's in your opening statement there on noise, yet the Alaska Railroad does that just backwards. They run their freight trains at night and the passenger trains run during the day, because -- so they can work on the tracks during the day and not have to run their people off the tracks every five minutes for a train. So there is going to be a lot more noise and stuff like that at night because that's when the

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

freight trains run.

The other problem I had is the Willow 2 site appears to be at my driveway and this same thing happened seven years ago where they completely blocked out my whole house, barn, corrals, everything under your big dock there showing where the area is going to be affected by the noise. And you're making people think that there's nobody in that area. And I did real battle with the borough a few years ago on this when they said nobody was -- house was going to be on the route when mine was completely covered up under their big black line. And I think next time you might want to show that as shading or something like that. It's an aerial photograph and if it wasn't for that big dot you could easily see my operation there.

MR. NAVECKY: Are you near the end of your comments, Mr. McCain or.....

MR. MCCAIN: Yes.

MR. NAVECKY: Okay.

MR. MCCAIN: Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you. The next is Jim Huston, is that correct?

Comment
Number: 147

MR. HUSTON: Yes. My name is Jim Huston, that's H-U-S-T-O-N, and I'm the president of the Willow Chamber of Commerce. And I just real quickly before I came tonight checked back in my records and back in October 4th -- prior to October 4th, 2007 the Willow Chamber of Commerce voted to support the

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

Willow West route out west of Red Shirt Lake and we considered a lot of the different factors about it. And one of the early things that came up was that the railroad increased traffic through by Nancy Lake. There's 700 homeowners on -- in that lake association. And the increased noise that would be going by through there and also the on-grade crossings that go to Nancy Lake are safety issues and noise issues with increased freight traffic at night. And any of the routes other than the Willow West route will not alleviate any of those problems for noise or safety.

It would be difficult to put an overpass at the Nancy Lake site, so the best answer is to keep down the number of trips by that area. And we look at the chance of having the railroad going west of Red Shirt Lake to be an opportunity for trails that would accommodate north and south trails from Big Lake and going north and hooking up to the Big Susitna. And we are very proud of our trails here in Willow and there is a lot of objections about the impact of the trails, but we see with good planning and consideration that the impact would be minimized to east-west trails and that the addition of better north-south trails would be a benefit to the community.

We, as a chamber of commerce, look at the economic benefits to an area and feel that if the railroad was to tie in here at Willow that there would be more job opportunities, maybe a maintenance station here. And we've worked for some length of

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

time wishing to see a train stop here in Willow again. And if there's economic development connected with the railroad that we would hope that that may be able piggyback into having a train stop and a station here in Willow again to accommodate the tourism traffic and even local traffic in and out of Willow.

A lot of the other considerations that people bring up about earthquake zones in, you know, the Houston area and things like that. We've considered all of those things. We've been to many of the meetings here and our stand was initially unanimous so that we were in support of the westerly route and we submitted letters and I'll give you another copy of the letter that we wrote in the very beginning. And our stand still is to that effect. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. And now I'm going to run through some names of people that had question marks. They were uncertain whether they wanted to speak when they signed in and I'll give them the opportunity to do so if they'd like. First is Dean Halstead.

Comment
Number: 146

MR. HALSTEAD: My name is Dean Halstead. I live out on Vera Lake. Across the lake from me I would be able to see the railroad bed and hear it. And since my family is from Montana, back there there was a lot of trains developed and the railways developed to support the coal mines. And it's a big bunch of bullshit. In listening to this last fellow that talked, I know everyone is entitled to their opinion no matter how wrong it is,

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

but everyone I talked to here in Willow they say take that railroad and put it somewhere where the sun doesn't shine.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Okay. The next one -- I apologize if I don't get the name correctly, Charlie Wood or Wode [sic]? Is -- am I close? Don't recognize it. I could give you your post office box. Post Office Box 830.

MR. WADE: Not even close.

MR. NAVECKY: Not even close. Sorry.

Comment
Number: 156

MR. WADE: My name is Charles Wade and I would not be able to see the Willow West route, but I would certainly hear it. And I moved to this area as a retirement area and I didn't move here to listen to trains. I can hear the one at Willow sometimes, you know, in the morning, but I would -- so that would be an issue for me. And an issue as far as property values, which aren't doing so well now, but I think that would hurt us. And there is a school right there. I don't know if anyone -- if that's been noticed -- noted by anybody....

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible) the mic (indiscernible).

MR. WADE: Oh, I'm sorry. There is a school, I'm sure that's been noted, but I haven't heard it or read it anywhere, that is very near that site too, that -- you know, that may have some impact there. But I know that -- I'm sure the people of the trails, I know that will limit my access to that big swamp area that -- there and so I'm not certainly not in favor of it. And

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

so the Chamber of Commerce doesn't represent me. Okay. I'll be submitting written comments again.

REPORTER: Charles, can you just -- Charles, could you spell your name for me, please?

MR. WADE: W-A-D-E.

REPORTER: W-A-E?

MR. WADE: W-A-D-E.

REPORTER: Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Ted Berry, am I getting closer this time?

MR. BERRY: (Indiscernible).

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. Thank you. Dave Demboski?

MR. DEMBOSKI: (Indiscernible).

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. Thank you. Diane Hutchison?

MS. HUTCHISON: I'll pass (indiscernible).

MR. NAVECKY: Robert?

Comment
Number: 148

MR. HUTCHISON: My name is Robert Hutchison,

H-U-T-C-H-I-S-O-N. I am a resident of Willow. One major consideration is one of Willow's primary incomes is tourism in the winter, winter sports. And if we put that rail line through the Willow area it will definitely the decrease the attractiveness of this area for winter sports. Snow machining particularly is a big issue out there in the Willow swamp and the big swamp. And those trails run east and west. They don't -- it will not accommodate the snow machiners by just simply running

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

north and south.

The other is that's a very productive moose area through there and that's an issue that we will definitely sacrifice moose if a train area is put through there. Third is a tremendous tourism attraction here is Willow Creek. And if we put a bridge and all the accouterments that go along with it, that's definitely going to detract from Willow Creek as a tourist attraction. I think those economic benefits way outweigh the few jobs that would be had here from the railroad putting a yard or spur or anything in this area. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Linda Oxley?

MS. OXLEY: I'll pass, thanks.

MR. NAVECKY: Jason Votruba?

**Comment
Number: 155**

MR. VOTRUBA: Jason Votruba, V-O-T-R-U-B-A. I'm speaking personally here. This north-south route through Willow here is going to cut off probably about six east-west trails for mushing and snow machining, cross country skiing, and like previously stated, that's a pretty major part of what goes in Willow here in the wintertime. The fact that we already have north-south trails that run through the big swamp, it's not really that big of an advantage to have the railroad come through for the fact that we'll add another one there. It's more about you can't take the dogs over the rails, you can't snow machine over the trails, you can't cross country ski over the rails.

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

It's really going to have a huge impact on the user groups. I know many people moved here for that aspect and many, many people recreate here for that aspect.

I don't have the specific here, but I think that there's an issue with the federal spending of dollars when it comes to projects that go over state land and in this case it crosses the state property I think five times. And so that's something that when it looks to be how much it's going to cost, where is all that money coming from. That needs to be looked into.

Let's see. The -- probably one of the major aspects that's maybe underrated right now, which has been already stated, is the blocking of the east-west drainage to the swamps, because that's where all the runoff and all the water is going from east to west into the Big Su. Once you put that rail line bed down, that's pretty much putting a dam in there.

Building a bridge across Willow Creek and at the extent of how long it would be and where the supports would be and all that construction around there is definitely something that we want to avoid and that's why finding a better route not through Willow is -- would be highly appreciated.

One of the concerns that needs to be addressed is the amount of coal, coal dust, gravel, gravel dust, whatever flying out of the train cars as they come by. I grew up near train tracks and played with a lot of coal growing up. So I know it

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

does happen and spilling into Willow Creek in the swamps the -- all the streams that this is going to cross is going to have a huge negative impact. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Dan Russell.

Comment
Number: 153

MR. RUSSELL: Well, thank you very much. I'm looking at this map and it seems to me the most logical route would be the most direct route, the Houston North going from Mac East and then Connection 3 there and then up to Houston North. You might be able to cut off a few miles between where it intersects Connection 2 and -- anyway, that would be my idea.

And then also I would like to propose that you incorporate a commuter rail along that route to access the new ferry boat that's coming in at Port MacKenzie. And it seems that that would give access to all the people from Talkeetna all the way to Wasilla to access the ferry boat with a commuter rail. That was -- thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Did you get the spelling? Mark Lind.

Comment
Number: 149

MR. LIND: Mark Lind, L-I-N-D. I know everybody's against this rail no matter where it goes, if it's Houston, wherever. I'm against the one up here in the Willow area. It crosses four salmon streams. There's a lot wetlands it crosses where you have your swans, loons and everything out there. One of the highest populations of the moose in this area winter where that rail will be going through. Plus putting a rail in up here,

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

definitely another bridge across the road. They're just putting a new road in up there, so they probably have to tear it up again. That's it.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Okay. I'm going to apologize before I even say the name. Cathy or Carrie, Post Office Box 1218? The last name starts with an F I believe. Okay. Next is Matthew Wagner, if you'd like to speak.

Comment
Number: 157

MR. WAGNER: Yeah, pretty much like anyone else from here, outdoorsy. I like to snowmobile and dog mush in the outdoors, so I'm really worried about trails and swamps, the habitat. Our tourism depends on good fishing and good winter access and all that. Also there's a little community known as Rekierville (ph) and many people from Willow don't even know about it, because it's kind of like a sort of diminished homestead community, but that's where I live and I got a few neighbors. And we have to contend with the railroad without proper crossing and it's bad enough as it is now. If they increase traffic it's going to make it really hard for us to get into our property and it's going to make it more dangerous.

As well as what they did in the 80s with the rail line. It used to be a trestle going over the swamp that I cross in the wintertime to get to my cabin. And when they graveled that, it was like a -- kind of an Armageddon for that little ecosystem there. There used to be great little grayling streams and stuff and now it's kind of a stinky orange funky thing. I'm not sure

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

what to call it.

And I'm not sure what the unnamed tributary is to Little Willow Creek. I know one that's in Rekierville that I'm guessing that's the one. But there is a decent salmon run that goes into that, but I doubt if there would be in the future if this rail line goes through. And that's all I got.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Did you get the spelling?

MR. WAGNER: You need the spelling?

REPORTER: Yes.

MR. WAGNER: W-A-G-N-E-R.

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. That -- those rep -- that represents all the yeses and the questions marks and undecided. There are a few people that didn't indicate either way, so I'm going to just give people the opportunity to come up now if you haven't spoken or even if you have spoken if you'd like to come up to the microphone. And is there anyone that like to come up? Yes, sir. And please state and spell your name for us, please.

Comment
Number: 152

MR. PALMATIER: My name is Dick Palmatier. You spell it P-A-L-M-A-T-I-E-R. The last time this came up I voiced my dissent for this Willow Trail. It was a Willow cutoff for the railroad and someone said, well, it's a lot easier to get right-of-ways here, because it's to go down Big Lake, down to Houston, there's a lot of private property. So it seemed to me that the push was to put the Willow through for one reason only,

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

that was because the right-of-way system was -- the right-of-ways were easier to get.

And I'm with other people here. The trail system will be destroyed out there. Everybody goes across the Susitna River here, the Iditarod, and it's blocking it off. And I don't know about the drainage, but it sure looks like it would affect the drainage. When you put the railroad going down Willow Creek and crossing you're to have a trespass problem, especially if you tear up the roads that you're going to put along with it, because people will follow the railroad tracks to go down there and go fishing. They don't want to buck the woods. It's quite a ways down there. People walk down the creek now, during the king season particularly, and do a lot of fishing. So you will have all that trespass problem -- in fact, you'll have trespass problems all along through there. It seems to me that the ideal way is to take the shortest route. It looks like the Big Lake route to me is the shortest, going straight down there. And so you've got to get some right-of-ways. Do it. And the least amount of construction, as far as I'm concerned, the less damage that is done.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Anyone else like to speak at the mic? Yes, sir.

Comment
Number: 144

MR. EVANS: My name is Dale Evans, E-V-A-N-S, and I just have one document here that I got off line about the city of Houston's resolution voting with the -- a resolution of the

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

Willow area community organization and the council for the city of Houston jointly proposed the Houston sale -- South rail spur location for joining a mainline and to ask the borough assembly and the borough staff to support this decision. So they voted on selecting the Houston South. It seems to me that's what everybody wants, Houston South. Why do you want it to come out of Willow whereas it's the cost out of Willow is a hundred million dollars more than if you take it out of Houston?

Another thing I'm against it, is because where it comes off up here Mile 72.5, because it goes right through my house. So I'm kind of against that myself. But to go through all the wetlands out here and the state recreation areas has a lot to do with Section 4(f) of the US Department of Transportation of 1966. Affects the -- the Section 4(f), which I don't know a lot about, I'm reading what I printed off line about it, and it affects more of that lands coming from Willow than it does from Houston. So it would be unwise to go through Willow.

If they say, well, they can move the Nancy Lake state recreation area a line over, well, that has a lot of mitigations to go through. It has to go through the state, you know, to get to change things like that, to go right through the middle of the Willow Creek State Recreation Area. And this section -- it affects this Section 4(f) of the funding. So I'd have to, you know, I think you know more about that than I do, but what's -- when I have this right here that Houston wants it, let's send it

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

to Houston.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments, Mr. Evans.

Is there anyone else that has not spoken that would like to speak? Yes, sir.

MR. GLASER: Well, my name is Don Glaser and I live out.....

MR. NAVECKY: Can you spell your last name for us, please?

Comment
Number: 145

MR. GLASER: G-L-A-S-E-R. And we live out by Vera Lake. And you've heard all the reasons. I can repeat them all. I won't have to because of the trails out there, but the land -- the lakes area this close to a large city like Anchorage, there's no more beautiful area than that. And to block all that access where all the snow machines go out that way and they have to cross the railroad track, that would be a large mistake. Of course, I'm a hundred percent against it. I don't think it should be there. It's too costly. You can run down the road or wherever, wherever there's already a right-a-way, but that lake area is the one that we want to protect and that's why people have moved up here. They've come up here and the -- whether it's the boating, the canoeing, the snow machine, it'll ruin all of that. And besides you'll need about two or three troopers out there to keep them all off of that railroad, because everybody's going to run up and down it anyway and it's just another reason for -- it's a place for an accident to happen. That's all. It's

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

a bad idea, very bad. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Anyone else that has not commented like to come up?

(No audible responses)

MR. NAVECKY: Anyone that has already been up who would like to have additional few minutes to comment? Yes. Please come up.

Comment
Number: 158

MR. WAGNER: Again, my name is Matthew Wagner, W-A-G-N-E-R. I forgot to mention that I was out on Little Willow Creek when their enviro -- or excuse me, the crew came out to see what environmental impacts might -- there might be and they flew out a nice big fancy helicopter and played around in the creek for awhile and kind of ignored us locals and then they left. And they did that a few times and it didn't seem like they were doing a whole lot of hardcore research to me. They didn't seek local knowledge. They stopped there by the railroad bridge. I -- you know, I talked to my neighbors about it and what they saw and it was pretty much like kind of a dog and pony show. So that's my take. So that's all I wanted to say.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Anyone else like to come up and comment?

Comment
Number: 154

MR. SMOLE: My name is Doug Smole and I live in the Horseshoe Lake area which is a part of the greater Big Lake community and I just want to say I think we agree with all of you for many of the same reasons. We have the trails. It's a

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

recreational area. It's one of the largest communities population wise. We've moved there for retirement. We have new homes being built there. We're concerned about the noise. We're concerned about salmon streams, the effect on numerous lakes on our area. Martin Buser is a neighbor of mine. I hear his dogs. I'd much rather listen to his dogs that run across his trails out west of where I live than listen to the train and have to cross the trestle or hope that if they choose our route that they would build a way for us to get out to the west and the places where we play just as all of you do. So it's nice to hear that we're really on much the same wavelength. Thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Anyone else? Okay. I want to -- oh, sorry.

Comment
Number: 151

MS. OWEN: Christina Owen, O-W-E-N. And I think from what I've been following this railroad going out to Point MacKenzie is basically to follow up on Point MacKenzie being built, the port, which basically from what I can see is a boondoggle. It was a poor thing to build the port there in the first place and that putting this railroad out there is to try to show that Point MacKenzie wasn't so much of a boondoggle. And so as much as I live here in Willow and I do not want the trails coming through the salmon bearing streams, through the Nancy Lake Rec Area, through Willow Creek Recreational Area, I wouldn't want to force it on another community either. So I don't want to say go to Houston, even though Houston says that they want it, and I

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

think that's great for them to want it, but that means it goes through Big Lake and a lot of people that I know from Big Lake they don't want it. So I'd love to give it to Houston, but I don't know how to get it to Houston without going through Big Lake. So my point is I don't think we need it at all. It's to feed a boondoggle to begin with. And down from the Lower 48, which is where a lot of us come from, the railroad is being reverted back to trails, rails-to-trails. But up here unfortunately with the swamp conditions that you by putting a railroad in damage the ecosystem so much that I don't think it's going to necessarily be really easy to go back to rails. And so I think we need to learn from the Lower 48, the mistakes that were done there, and not to bring them up here.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments.

(Applause)

MR. NAVECKY: Anyone else? Last call.

(No audible responses)

MR. NAVECKY: Well, I want to thank you all for coming out this evening and expressing an interest in the project. I know many of you feel strongly about it. And also thank those who came up to speak. I know for many people it's not easy to speak publicly. And of course I would encourage all of you to send in written comments regarding your concerns about the project, the preferred alternative, the impacts, the trail issues, recreational impacts, anything that is on your mind and

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

to be as detailed as possible so that we understand what your concerns really are.

So what I'll do now is adjourn the formal component of this meeting and we'll be available to speak with you one-on-one to discuss the project or answer some questions you may have. Thank you for coming.

(Off record)

(On record)

(The following testimony was given to the court reporter only and not part of the public testimony:)

Comment
Number: 161

MR. STANCULESCU: This is Victor Stanculescu, last name S-T-A-N-C-U-L-E-S-C-U, speaking as a resident of Willow, Alaska. And I'd like to express my opposition to the Willow North rail selection route mainly due to the impacts that I believe it will have on the salmon fisheries that occur in several of the creeks that would have to be bridged for the route to go through. That includes Fish Creek, Rolly Creek, Willow Creek and Little Willow Creek, all of which would be heavily impacted. They're very important and anadromous salmon fisheries.

Also I'm concerned of the impact to the state recreational areas on the western route. That would be the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge, the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area, the Little Su Recreation River and the Willow Creek State Recreation Area. Those areas are important recreational areas and they're key to the trail system which is a very important

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

asset to the Willow area. The winter recreation from the Willow area to the west is dependant on trails that many of them would be cut by the rail selection of the Willow route and that would have a large impact on the availability of people to be able to travel to the west out to the Susitna River and to access areas out with dog mushing, snow machining and other winter uses. Which has been mentioned before, a dog team has a very tough time getting over and across a railroad intersection safely.

In sum I'd like to say that I support the Houston North route or the Houston South route by far over the choice of the Willow route as a choice for the rail corridor. Thank you.

REPORTER: Thank you.

(Off record - 7:19 p.m.)

(END OF PROCEEDINGS)

April 13, 2010

Willow Surface Transportation Meeting
Transcript Proceedings

TRANSCRIBER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Salena A. Hile, hereby certify that the foregoing pages numbered 2 through 28 are a true, accurate, and complete transcript of proceedings, transcribed under my direction from a copy of the electronic sound recording to the best of our knowledge and ability.

Date

Salena A. Hile