

# Final Environmental Impact Statement

STB Finance Docket No. 34658

## Alaska Railroad Corporation Construction and Operation of a Rail Line between North Pole and Delta Junction, Alaska



### Lead Agency:

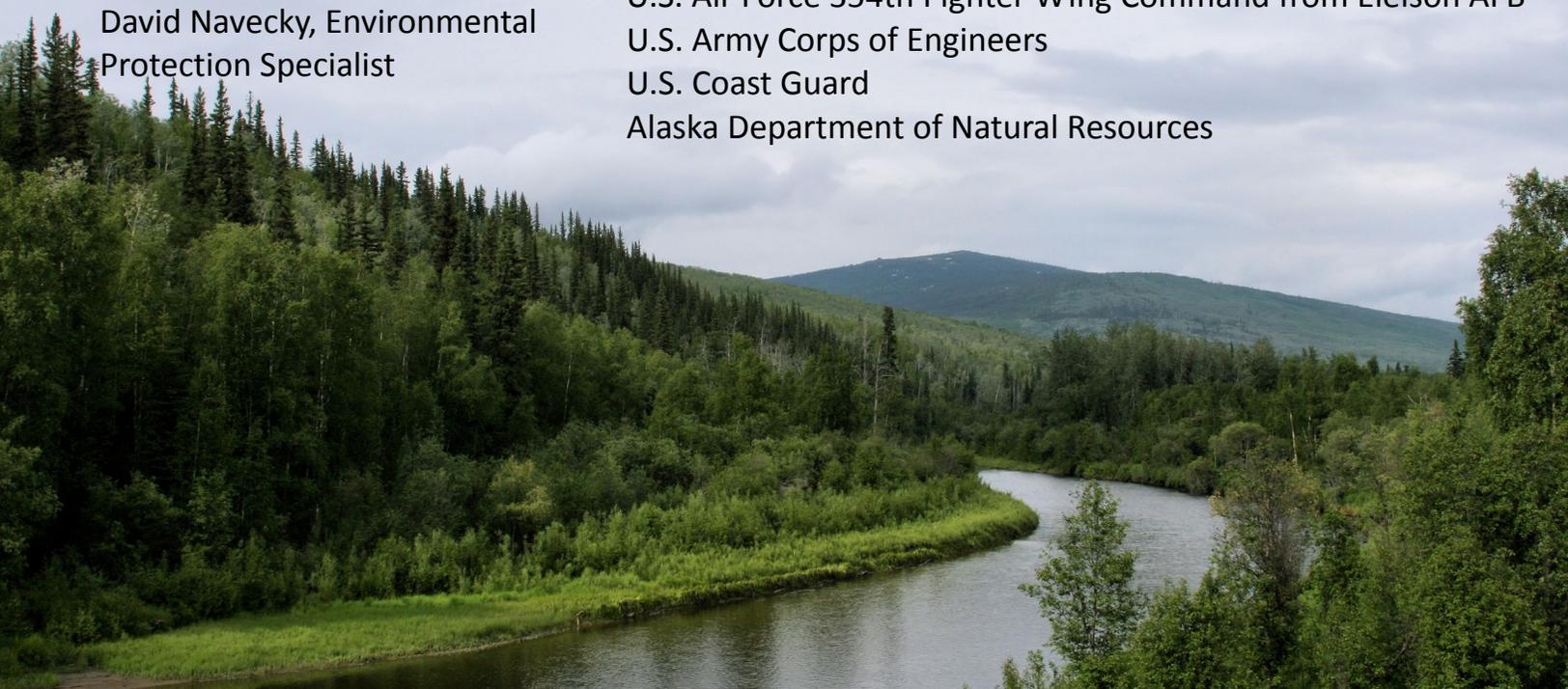
Surface Transportation Board

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### Cooperating Agencies:

U.S. Department of Defense Alaskan Command  
Bureau of Land Management  
Federal Transit Administration  
Federal Railroad Administration  
U.S. Air Force 354th Fighter Wing Command from Eielson AFB  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
U.S. Coast Guard  
Alaska Department of Natural Resources







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

*Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis and Administration*

September 18, 2009

RE: STB Finance Docket No. 34658, Alaska Railroad Corporation – Petition to Construct and Operate a Rail Line Extension Between North Pole and Delta Junction, Alaska; **Issuance of Final Environmental Impact Statement**

To All Interested Parties:

On July 6, 2007, the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC or the Applicant) filed a petition with the Surface Transportation Board (STB or the Board) pursuant to 49 United States Code (U.S.C.) 10502 for the authority to construct and operate a new rail line between North Pole, Alaska, and Delta Junction, Alaska. In the petition, the Applicant proposed the construction of approximately 80 miles of new rail line, known as the Northern Rail Extension.

The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) announces the availability of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Northern Rail Extension. SEA prepared the Final EIS in cooperation with eight agencies – the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Alaska State Office; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District; the U.S. Department of Defense, Alaskan Command; the U.S. Air Force 354<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, Eielson Air Force Base; the Federal Transit Administration; the Federal Railroad Administration; the U.S. Coast Guard, Seventeenth District; and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

The Final EIS is based on SEA's independent analyses; consultations with agencies, elected officials, organizations, and members of the public; and careful consideration of all comments on the Draft EIS. This document contains detailed responses to comments received on the Draft EIS, and SEA's recommendations for alternatives that should be constructed and operated should the Board grant final approval for the project. SEA's recommendations for alternatives include the North Common Segment, any one of three Eielson alternative segments, Salcha Alternative Segment 1, Connector Segment B, Central Alternative Segment 2, Connector Segment E (as needed), either of the Donnelly alternative segments, South Common Segment, and Delta Alternative Segment 1.

Last, this document sets forth SEA's final recommendations for mitigating potential environmental impacts. SEA recommends that the Board impose the 51 voluntary mitigation measures the Applicant developed and the 71 additional mitigation measures SEA developed (see Chapter 2 of the Final EIS).

The Final EIS is organized consistent with Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and is intended to be read in conjunction with the Draft EIS, which provides more detailed information on the Proposed Action and alternatives to agency decisionmakers and the public. The Draft EIS describes the project's purpose and need, the Proposed Action and alternatives, existing environmental conditions, the potential environmental impacts associated with the Proposed Action and alternatives, and mitigation. The Final EIS reflects additional consultation and

coordination activities and revisions to the document's content since publication of the Draft EIS.

## Next Steps

Issuance of this Final EIS completes the Board's environmental review process. The Board now will make a final decision on the proposed project. In accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA, no agency decision on the proposed action may be made until 30 days after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) publishes its Notice of Availability for the Final EIS. (Note: SEA anticipates that EPA will publish a notice of availability of the Final EIS in the Federal Register on September 25, 2009.) Congress has not established a statutory time frame within which the Board must issue its final decision, and the Board has not announced a date for issuance of the final decision. However, in the interest of bringing this matter to closure, the Board will act as promptly as possible.

In making its final decision on the proposed project, the Board will consider the entire environmental record, including all public comments, the Draft EIS, the Final EIS, and SEA's final recommended environmental mitigation. No project-related construction may begin until the Board's final decision has been issued and has become effective. Parties who wish to file an administrative appeal of the Board's final decision may do so within 20 days of that decision, as provided in the Board's rules. The Board will consider any administrative appeals in a subsequent decision. The cooperating agencies will also issue decisions, as needed, under their own governing statutes.

SEA has mailed the entire Final EIS to Federal, state, and local agencies, elected officials, organizations, and other interested parties. The Final EIS is also available to all interested persons for review in the reference section of three public libraries in the project area, listed below. To receive a hard copy of the Final EIS, call SEA's toll-free Environmental Hotline at 1-800-359-5142. The entire document is also available on the Board's website (<http://www.stb.dot.gov>), under "Environmental Issues," then under "Key Cases."

Delta Community Library  
2288 Deborah Street  
Delta Junction, AK 99737  
(907) 895-4656

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

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

SEA appreciates the efforts of all interested parties who reviewed and commented on the Draft EIS. Thank you for your interest and participation in the Board's environmental review process.

Sincerely,



Victoria Rutson  
Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis  
Surface Transportation Board

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

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

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

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

**Abstract:** On July 6, 2007, ARRC filed a petition with the STB pursuant to 49 United States Code (U.S.C.) 10502 for the authority to construct and operate approximately 80 miles of new rail line from North Pole, Alaska, to Delta Junction, Alaska. Referred to as the Northern Rail Extension, the proposed rail line would extend ARRC's existing freight and passenger rail service to the region south of North Pole, including the Tanana Flats and Donnelly training areas and the Delta Junction, Alaska area. The rail extension would begin at the east end of the Chena River Overflow Bridge—north of Eielson Air Force Base—and end at the south side of Delta Junction. The Applicant has stated that the purpose of the project is to provide freight and passenger rail service to the region, provide a transportation alternative to Richardson Highway for individuals traveling between Fairbanks and Delta Junction, and allow the Army and the Air Force dependable year-round ground access to the training areas.

The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) and the cooperating agencies have prepared this Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which identifies and evaluates the potential environmental impacts associated with the Proposed Action and alternatives, including the No-Action Alternative. The Proposed Action and alternatives, with the exception of the No-Action Alternative, could result in adverse noise impacts and could adversely affect wetland, surface water, biological, land use, visual, and cultural resources. This Final EIS includes SEA's recommended measures to mitigate those potential impacts. The Board will consider the environmental mitigation measures as potential conditions in any decision granting ARRC authority to construct and operate the rail line. The Proposed Action and alternatives would result in negligible impacts to all other resource areas.

The cooperating agencies' Federal actions include the U.S. Coast Guard's decision on issuing bridge permits under Section 9 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 U.S.C. 401 *et seq.*) and the General Bridge Act of 1946 (33 U.S.C. 525 *et seq.*); the BLM decision to issue a linear right-of-way grant under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (43 U.S.C. 1701 *et seq.*) to pass through BLM-managed lands; the decision of ALCOM and the Air Force 354<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing Command to grant permission for construction in areas under their control; the FRA decision to issue a grant of construction funding; and the decision of the Army Corps of Engineers to issue a discharge permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977 (33 U.S.C. 1251-1376) and a permit to perform work or place a structure in navigable waters under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 U.S.C. 403).

The Applicant's preferred alternative is North Common Segment, Eielson Alternative Segment 3, Salcha Alternative Segment 1, Connector Segment B, Central Alternative Segment 2, Connector Segment E, Donnelly Alternative Segment 1, South Common Segment, and Delta Alternative Segment 1.

If the Board decides to grant final approval for this project, SEA's recommendations for alternatives include the North Common Segment, any one of the Eielson alternative segments, Salcha Alternative Segment 1, Connector Segment B, Central Alternative Segment 2, Connector Segment E (as needed), either Donnelly alternative segment 1 or 2, the South Common Segment, and Delta Alternative Segment 1. These segments were analyzed in detail, and SEA recommends that the Board impose the 51 voluntary mitigation measures the Applicant developed and the 71 additional mitigation measures SEA developed in any decision granting the Applicant authority to construct and operate the rail line.

SEA anticipates that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will publish a notice of availability of the Final EIS in the Federal Register on September 25, 2009.



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