

January 15, 2009

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

Dear Mr. Navecky,

The Whitestone Community Association (WCA) has received the recent Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) published by your department on the Alaska Railroad Corporation's (ARRC) proposed Northern Rail Extension (NRE) project. WCA has been following the progress of this proposed project since late 2005. After review of the Draft EIS, WCA still supports it.

Whitestone Community Association represents the rural community of Whitestone which is comprised of roughly 200 individuals and located on the south-western corner where the Delta River joins the Tanana. As depicted on Map Area 5 (Figure S-6 in the Draft EIS) the South Common Segment passes directly through the corner of WCA's territory and across land owned by Whitestone Farms, a local business. Whitestone Community Association has always been isolated from the current highway system by two rivers, and would stand to reap considerable benefits from an accessible year-round transportation system. Regardless of the obvious advantages to the community, members have given considerable thought to all the potential ramifications of this project and are still in favor of it.

WCA members developed the following non-exhaustive listing of materials that they routinely have to transport to and from the community.

- Feeds and fertilizers
- Heavy equipment
- Small vehicles
- Perishables/food stuffs
- Cattle for slaughter
- Fuels and lubricants
- Fabrication materials: aluminum and steel
- Hardwoods
- Building supplies for use in both the private and public sectors
- Road construction materials
- Recreational vehicles: ATVs, snow machines and boats

Currently these materials are hauled to and from the community in boats (summertime) and on ice bridges across the Delta River (wintertime). WCA and its members are committed to protecting the environment at all times including during material transport. However, certain aspects of the current modes of transportation elevate the potential for damage to the environment. WCA believes that if these same materials could be moved via rail on more permanent infrastructure, the potential for environmental damage could be mitigated.

Comment has been presented about civilian travel to and from Fairbanks and Anchorage as a way to reduce travel expenses. The local school has inquired about commuter service to and from Anchorage in order to compete in forensics tournaments held in Anchorage several times during the school season, as well as field trips to Fairbanks and Anchorage.

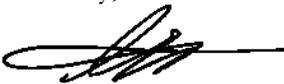
The area around WCA has always been a prime subsistence hunting destination. There is some concern within the community that the rail bridge across the Delta River will make access to this region easier and potentially overwhelm the area with more hunters than there is game to support. However, since there are no current plans for a vehicle-accessible bridge over the Delta River, we believe that there will not be a large enough increase in hunting to warrant concern.

The beef and dairy farmers in the WCA area commented on the need for transporting cattle by rail to and from slaughter houses. In the last three years, Whitestone Farms has constructed for and completed a herd expansion from roughly 30 head of cattle to the present 150 head. Since local slaughter facilities are not capable of handling the current load, they would benefit from a reliable mode of transporting cattle to and from slaughter houses.

Local crops of hay and haylage are currently trucked between November and March across the Delta River on the ice road. The farmers selling these crops commented that they are excluded from important sales opportunities in Fairbanks, Palmer, Wasilla, Seward and Anchorage between the months of April and September because there is no safe, economical way to transport them over the rivers during this period.

In conclusion, local community leaders and business people have stated their support for the NRE and share the common view that rail hauling and transportation would have a positive impact on the economic status and environmental friendliness of our community. The NRE could have a favorable environmental impact on WCA and the surrounding communities as fewer hazardous products would need to be transported on the Tanana and Delta Rivers.

Sincerely,



Steve Selvaggio  
President, WCA