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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis and Administration

August 28, 2012

Ms. Judith Bittner
State Historic Preservation Officer
Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Office of History and Archaeology
550 W. 7th Avenue, Suite 1310
Anchorage, AK 99501-3565

Re: **Finance Docket No. 35095: STB Determinations of Eligibility and Effect for
Segment 6, Port MacKenzie Railroad Extension Project**

Dear Ms. Bittner:

The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) recently provided your office with a copy of the final Port MacKenzie Railroad Extension (PMRE) Project *2012 Survey Report: Segment 6* dated August 2012. The report was prepared by ARRC, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB), and the Knik Tribal Council (KTC). Based on our review of the report and consultations with your office, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) has determined that the proposed PMRE project would have no effect to National Register of Historic Places (National Register) properties identified within Segment 6 of the project Area of Potential Effect (APE).

Background

ARRC, in partnership with the MSB, has undertaken planning for construction of the PMRE project. In 2011, STB provided approval for ARRC to construct and operate approximately 35 miles of new rail line connecting the Port MacKenzie District to a point on ARRC's existing main line near Houston, Alaska using the Mac East Variant-Connector 3 Variant-Houston-Houston South alignment. That authorization was issued after completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and is subject to environmental mitigation conditions including a Programmatic Agreement (PA), which required additional investigations once the final APE was identified. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), developed by the Working Group with input from the STB and SHPO, details the approach for the additional cultural resources investigations and reporting activities. The first report, addressed Segment 1, the Alsop Haul Road, and the Section 6 Borrow Area, and was completed in February 2012. This report details the result of the Segment 6 archaeological survey.

May 2012 Archaeological Surveys, PMRE Segment 6 Report Summary

Most cultural resources documented within the APE for Segment 6 are modern in age (less than 50 years old), do not meet the criteria for listing on the National Register and do not require recording in the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRs).

However, the Segment 6 report confirms the location of the Little Susitna River Railroad Bridge (ANC-00085) within the Segment 6 APE. The Working Group has assumed the bridge eligible for listing on the National Register.

The report also states that the survey identified an area of scattered surface historic material remains (ANC-03741) that includes rusted metal bed springs, metal trunk latching, a cook stove, cans, a metal lamp base, and rectangular boxes; glass jars and bottles; a section of dimensional lumber with rusted nails; a rectangular depression possibly left from a removed building; and a smaller depression that may represent a privy pit. However, the site lacks any depositional context and consists of a scattering of unassociated artifacts. The report recommends that the site is not eligible for listing on the National Register as it lacks context and does not appear associated with any specific significant historical event.

According to the Segment 6 report, the survey crew attempted to relocate the Houston R.R. Station, ANC-00086, a site formally located within the Segment 6 APE, but noted that all materials associated with the former siding along the rail embankment (e.g., rails and ties) are no longer present. The report provides the recommendation that the site is therefore not eligible for listing on the National Register.

STB Determinations of Eligibility and Effect

We have made the following determinations for the two sites identified in Segment 6 of the project area:

- ANC-03741 is not eligible for listing on the National Register as the site has no documented association with important historic events and has lost its depositional context; only scattered surface materials remain. No effect would occur to the site since it is not National Register-eligible.
- The Little Susitna Bridge (ANC-00085) is assumed eligible for listing on the National Register. However, the bridge will not be subject to direct impacts from the PMRE project as it will remain in place and will continue to be used by ARRC. A new railroad bridge constructed adjacent to the bridge will likely cause a minor visual impact but will not result in adverse effects. No mitigation is therefore required.

To summarize, the STB has determined that there would be no adverse effects from the proposed action to historic properties documented in the PMRE Segment 6 survey report.

Please provide us with your opinion regarding our determinations within 30 days receipt of this letter. If you have any questions about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 245-0293.

Sincerely,



Catherine Glidden
Office of Environmental Analysis