



SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423
Office of Environmental Analysis

December 18, 2013

Judith Bittner
Alaska State Historic Preservation Office
Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Office of History and Archaeology
550 West 7th Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501-3561

Re: **Finance Docket No. 35095, STB Determination of Effect for
2013 Archaeological Surveys – Segment 2, Port MacKenzie Rail 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 *PMRE Project 2013 Survey Report Segment 2* dated November 2013. That report was prepared by the ARRC, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB), and the Knik Tribal Council (KTC), collectively referred to as the Working Group. Based on our review of that document and consultation with your office, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) has determined that there would be no direct effect to National Register of Historic Places (National Register) properties within the Segment 2 areas discussed in the report.

Background

ARRC, in partnership with the MSB, has undertaken planning for construction of the PMRE project. In 2011, the STB approved a license allowing 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 Area of Potential Effects (APE) was identified. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), developed by the Working Group with input from the STB and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), details the approach for the additional cultural resources investigations and reporting activities.

Documentation of the cultural resource work conducted thus far has been reported in five reports. The first report addressed Segment 1, the Alsop Haul Road, and the Section 6 Borrow Area, and was completed in February 2012. The second report, completed in August 2012, addressed Segment 6. The third report, completed in November 2012, summarized work conducted within Segments 3 and 4. The fourth report, an addendum to the first report detailing the results of additional archaeological surveys

conducted within Segment 1, was completed in October 2013. This fifth report summarizes the results of Segment 2 archaeological surveys conducted in June and September 2013.

June and September 2013 Archaeological Surveys, PMRE Segment 2 Report Summary

Cultural resources staff completed a cultural resource survey within portions of the Segment 2 APE for direct effects. Both moderate and selected low probability areas were surveyed. The level of effort and methodology were based on the MOU developed in consultation with the SHPO and STB. The survey did not result in the identification of cultural resources in the APE.

STB Determinations of Effect

Based on our review of the Segment 2 Survey Report and consultations with your office, the STB provides the following findings and determination of effect:

- The 2013 surveys of Segment 2 did not identify any National Register eligible or listed cultural resources that could be directly adversely affected by construction and operation of the PMRE rail line.
- Consequently, we find that no historic properties will be directly affected in the surveyed portions of Segment 2.

Please provide us with your opinion regarding our determinations within 30 days of 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 Nadals
Office of Environmental Analysis

cc:

Barbara Hotchkin, ARRC
Fran Seager-Boss, MSB
Richard Porter, KTC