

April 7, 2010

David Navecky
STB Finance Docket No. 35095
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20423-0001



Re: Port MacKenzie Rail Line Extension through Big Lake, Alaska

Dear Mr. Navecky,

Trails are 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 our local economy, provide valued recreational opportunities for our residents and provide required transportation links to cabins, settlements and other communities. The rail extension through Big Lake is of grave concern to trail users because it threatens to permanently divide, damage or destroy the tapestry of this community that so many of us have so carefully woven.

The attached map shows the impact that the proposed rail alignments will have on the Big Lake trail system. See the orange arrows for intersecting rail and trail points. The proposed rail extensions will impact Big Lake recreational trails, as follows:

- Big Lake Route - Currently intersects and conflicts with trails in two locations. Not shown is a conflict with a multi-million dollar proposed Wasilla to Big Lake Trail which is currently under study to provide both motorized and non-motorized trails linking these two communities. This proposed trail, when developed, will be of economic importance to the whole Matanuska-Susitna Borough
- Willow Route - Intersects and conflicts with trails in three locations.
- Houston Routes (North and South) - Intersects and conflicts with trails in seven locations.

Because trails are so important to Big Lake, many residents and non-residents joined together as guardians of current trails and as developers of future trails to form Big Lake Trails. Big Lake Trails, Inc. is a non-profit 501c3 organization representing over 100 trail user members. Many more citizens rely on this organization to protect area trails. The members and Board of Big Lake Trails have unanimously approved the following position as it applies to the rail extension through Big Lake:

- 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 that will allow use by 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 allowing for growth of the Borough tax base and allowing the future westward expansion of our road system. This would be viewed as a positive benefit of the rail extension versus a negative.

- If the Willow route were to be removed from consideration, the Big Lake route to the south would be a 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.
- The two Houston routes are totally unacceptable to our trail users because of the very high impact on trails and on private property owners. It would be better for the STB to take the “no action” alternative rather than to consider either the North or South Houston route. These routes would completely destroy winter recreational trail opportunities, and would create a high noise and safety issue for property owners.

Our position is further supported by many residents of the community, the current Big Lake Comprehensive Plan, the Big Lake Community Council and the Big Lake Chamber of Commerce. It is our hope that the STB recognizes the right of this community to manage change in a way that fits our life style and our vision for the future. Any funding concerns or politics that have come into play regarding choosing either of the Houston routes need to take a back seat to the destruction of our quality of life.

The additional rail options for consideration in the draft EIS located to the south of the routes discussed above, namely Conn 1, Conn 2, Conn 3, Mac East and Mac West, do not present conflicts with our existing trail system and therefore, we have no stated position or preference as to these routes.

Big Lake Trails stands ready and willing to work with engineers who will insure adequate design work on the future trail crossings needed for this project. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Best Regards,

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MSB Endorsed Big Lake Trails – Railroad Routes Intersect Analysis

