

EL- 16337

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RAILROAD SAFETY AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP

P.O. Box 71114 Fairbanks, AK. 99707

January 12, 2009

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

ATTN: Victoria Rutson Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis

Dear Ms Rutson:

The Railroad Safety and Development Group strongly support extending the Alaska Railroad to Delta, and beyond. It is a first step of extending it to the lower 48 States which we believe is necessary to achieve Alaska's logical role as a world transportation hub.

Our review of the project's environmental document did not reveal any substantial environmental issues. However we did note that the report contained some information regarding impacts to communities outside the limits of the study but within the Fairbanks North Star Borough – namely Fairbanks and North Pole. We agree that these communities be included in your analysis. And we offer comments pertaining to them.

First of all, it was our understanding that the project limits would include the community of North Pole thus allowing timely relocation of the track between Moose Creek to approximately 9 mile on the Richardson Highway. It appears not to be the case. This is somewhat disappointing since the track is now causing concern for the safety of our children, especially near the schools adjacent to the track. Could this be addressed in the Final EIS?

Second, information regarding the existing alignment through Fort Wainwright and Fairbanks suggests the anticipated added railroad traffic will exacerbate existing air quality, noise, traffic problems, and of utmost importance, more safety concerns. The documented impacts make it clear that continuing routing rail traffic through these communities is highly undesirable.

We noted from the report, that while the number of trains will increase, the average lengths will decrease. This may be misleading to reviewers, as well as introduce analytical errors if only average lengths are considered. Passenger service will be limited to very short trains – perhaps as short as one motorized car. Would it be more accurate to say that freight trains, especially fuel trains will remain at current lengths and be more frequent? It is these long trains that cause serious air quality, noise, and traffic impacts.

The report mentions the most recent EPA particulate limits which these communities are now subjected to, but did not analytically address them.

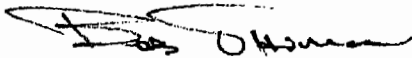
The report also noted that crossings on Fort Wainwright, Richardson Highway, and the Old and New Steese Highways would be impacted. We urge you to include College Road and to a lesser degree, University Avenue.

Fully and accurately including this information in the EIS is justified because the Fairbanks North Star Borough air quality issues are so serious that they put local use of Federal Highway Funds in jeopardy.

Including them in this EIS will document the urgency to address track realignment through Fairbanks and North Pole.

Thank you for this opportunity to express project support and call your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Thomas", is written over a horizontal line.

Bob Thomas, P.E.
Railroad Safety and Development Group
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