

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

SECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

PORT MACKENZIE RAIL EXTENSION PROJECT

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

Knik, Alaska

April 14, 2010

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Knik, Alaska - April 14, 2010)

(On record - 1:10 p.m.)

MR. NAVECKY: Good evening and thank you for attending this public comment meeting on the draft environmental impact statement for the proposed Port MacKenzie rail line. I would like to officially call this meeting to order. I am Dave Navecky of the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis, otherwise known as SEA. The Surface Transportation Board is the federal agency responsible for authorizing the construction and operation of new rail lines and associated facilities. In December of 2008, the Alaska Railroad Corporation filed a request for authority to construct and operate approximately 30 to 45 miles of rail line and related support facilities from the Port MacKenzie district to a point on the existing Alaska Railroad mainline between Wasilla and just north of Willow. The Mat-Su Borough is working with the railroad as a sponsor of the proposed rail line and was responsible for obtaining state funds to conduct environmental reviews and preliminary engineering for the proposed rail line. The Surface Transportation Board is the lead federal agency responsible for preparing the EIS which is intended to identify and evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed rail line. We also have three cooperating agencies assisting in preparation of the EIS. They are the US Army Corp of Engineers,

the Federal Railroad Administration and the US Coast Guard. With us this evening we Ben Soiseth of the Corp of Engineers over here to my left. A team of consultants led by ICF International also assisted SEA in preparing the EIS. At the table with me is Alan Summerville, project manager for ICF's EIS activities.

If you have not already done so, I'd please ask to sign in at the front table and indicate whether you are interested in providing oral comments on the draft EIS at tonight's meeting. This meeting is part of the draft EIS stage of the board's environmental review process. The draft EIS was issued last month and we are now accepting comments on the document. Prior to preparing the draft EIS we conducted agency and public scoping meetings to listen to your questions and concerns. The information you provided helped us frame our analysis, understand your concerns about the project and finalize a scope of study for the EIS which we issued in 2009. This final scope of study served as our guide concerning what issues to address in the draft EIS.

After the draft EIS comment period closes on May 10th we will review all the hearing transcripts and written comments and we'll prepare written responses to all substantive comments. All of your oral and written comments and our comment responses will be published in the final EIS. The Surface Transportation Board will then issue a final decision based on the transportation merits of the proposed rail line, the draft and

the final EISs and all public and agency comments in the public record. This final decision will take one of three actions; approve the rail line, deny it or approve it with mitigating conditions including environmental conditions.

Construction, if approved by the board, could not begin unless and until the cooperating agencies issue final decisions approving or permitting the proposed rail line. The environmental review process sheet in your handout contains additional information on our environmental review process. Whether you speak tonight or not you can also provide us with handwritten comments this evening by filling out the last page of your handout and turning it in at the sign in table. There are also blank comment forms at the sign in table. Oral and written comments are given equal weight and consideration, so if you choose not to speak this evening, your written comments will be fully considered.

This evening is just one option for you to provide comments. We are accepting written comments until May 10th and you may use the comment forms provided tonight or your own handwritten or typed comment letters. Your handout provides the information you need to submit your written comments to the Surface Transportation Board either by mail or electronically through our website. In preparing your comments, we encourage you to be as detailed as possible in describing your concerns. We are also interested in receiving comments on the purpose and

need for the proposed rail line, potential impacts, opinions on a preferred alternative, adequacy of the preliminary mitigation in the draft EIS and the need for any additional mitigation.

In a minute, I will begin calling on those individuals who would like to speak. Your oral comments will be documented by the court reporter located to my right. When I call your name, please approach the microphone then state and spell your first and last name for the benefit of the audience and our court reporter. Since we have such a small crowd this evening, we were generally giving five minutes for people, but we'll go to 10 minutes or whatever seems reasonable this evening.

And let's see, so I think we're ready to go. The first person I had that had a yes that wanted to speak on the record is Richard Gattis.

MR. GATTIS: Hello, my name is Richard Gattis, spelled G-A-T-T-I-S. I have three farms in the Point MacKenzie Ag Project. The -- my concern is which route through the ag district the rail is going to take. It will impact me in any case. I own tracks three and five, which if the Mac East route is taken I -- it'll impact my track three to a small amount. Track -- if it takes the westerly route, I'll lose about a mile of track 17, 200 foot wide by a mile long. My personal preference in my basic understanding, I am for -- I am pro the railroad. I think it'll be good for the community and the state in general. And so I am supportive of the project. I think that

the Mac East route would have the less amount of impact on both the amount of farm land taken as well as the area on my property, track 17, would be a mile of wetlands. The area on the west side of my property that borders the Susitna Flats Game Refuge as pretty much wetlands. So they'll be several miles I know of, wetlands, that will have to be filled in and mitigated.

Track -- the easterly route following the highway essentially just goes on the corner of one of my track three property along the ridge and would have the least amount of impact, I believe, on the farm project in general. The westerly route would bisect several of the farms and take away potentially several hundred acres of farmable land and make it difficult to access that property.

The area to the north of that and how it connects, either whether it goes to Houston or Willow or Big Lake, has less of a direct impact on me, so I'm not quite as much concerned. I think that'll work out to the best of the community -- for the best of the community. But I'd like to go on the record of saying that I believe from everything that I know and my experience out of Point MacKenzie in the last 10 years of farming out there that the Mac East route would be the most favorable for the farmers.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Okay. We had a couple of people put question marks on whether or not they wanted to speak so I'm just going to see if there's another

individual that would like to come up and speak for the record with the court reporter. Anyone else want to come up? And please and spell your name for us, please.

MS. HIRSCHMANN: Randi Hirschmann, H-I-R-S-C-H-M-A-N-N, and with an I. Just looking at this briefly, my comment is if we're going to have the railroad built to put it in the routes that are going to least impact the most pristine areas in this area along with the routes that would least impact farmland which, you know, we are losing in the Valley.

So for me personally the worst route would be the Houston route going through the Crooked Lake, Papoose, Twin Lakes area. We do own property on East Papoose and it's an incredibly pristine area back in there. And it appears that the route would interfere with wetlands as well as just the recreational value of the land and use of the land. It's just an incredible area. I think that less impact if the railroad is to be build would be the Big Lake area first and then the Willow route second. I think the Houston route would be least favorable to the environment and the impact on the wonderful area that we are talking about here. And I am not familiar with the Willow routes, but I do concur that the least impact on farmland and wetland would be my preference on the lower part of the route.

I do personally -- I'm not convinced that the port, you know, Anchorage port, just in the newspaper, I forget how many million dollars are being put into the Anchorage port for

expansion, so I'm still trying to think how will Port MacKenzie be profitable. You know, they're talking about coal and, you know, what kind of things are going to be coming down the rail line and can Port MacKenzie actually be profitable with Anchorage port and the huge expansion that's taking place there. So I think we need to look at, you know, is this a viable thing to do, to be extending the railroad to Port MacKenzie at this time and how profitable is the port. And it still has not been proven that the port can operate in the winter with the ice pack safely. So that's my comment.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Sir, would you like to come up?

MR. BRAUTIGAN: Yeah, hello. My name is Jon Brautigan, J-O-N B-R-A-U-T-I-G-A-N, and I'd like to comment on mostly the Big Lake route. I didn't see it on any of these maps here, but part of that route borders or is actually in the western end of a special land use district and it's the Knik sled dog and recreation district. And a bunch of people in our area worked on that for several years and it was passed in December of '08. And the -- it cuts across the Iditarod National Historic Trail and cuts right through a -- the Aurora dog mushing trails. You show it on there. And I don't see how this is compatible with our SpUD at all, that this area was set aside as a recreational district and them trails, the mushing trails and whatever are a big part of that. So you would have to -- I don't know how you

would do it through that area, you know, to make trails under them or over them or whatever.

Also, no matter where you go on this you're going to cross the Iditarod National Historic Trail and I know from talking with you a few years ago that there's already something in there to put some sort of culvert in or some overpass, however it would be. I'd like to see something on your maps about the sled dog district on there. You know, it just don't seem fair that you don't have it on there.

Anyways, I wish there was more people here to talk on this. It seems like I'm the only one. Well, thank you.

MR. NAVECKY: Thank you for your comments. Did anyone else want to speak on the record?

(No audible responses)

MR. NAVECKY: Okay. Then I guess we'll adjourn the formal portion of the meeting and be happy to speak with you one-on-one back by the maps or wherever like we were prior to bringing the meeting to order. And I want to thank you for coming tonight. It's the hearty souls made it tonight and I appreciate your interest and in coming out this evening. Thank you.

(Off record - 1:25 p.m.)

(END OF PROCEEDINGS)

TRANSCRIBER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Salena A. Hile, hereby certify that the foregoing pages numbered 2 through 10 are a true, accurate, and complete transcript of proceedings, transcribed under my direction from a copy of the electronic sound recording to the best of our knowledge and ability.

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Date

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Salena A. Hile