

EI-18566

Patrick L. Sharrock
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907-345-5353

July 2, 2010

Mr. David Novecky
STB Finance Docket No. 35095
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Dear Mr. Novecky,

This is an informational letter concerning developments with the Port Mac Rail Project.

First, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Commission and the Borough Assembly have chosen not to address the issue of a proposed rail route, and, the Borough manager, John Duffy, has resigned.

Second, I am enclosing a copy of a letter I sent to the Assembly and Planning Commission reflecting what I thought was appropriate action for them to consider.

Third, I am enclosing newspaper articles about both ports – Anchorage and MacKenzie.

Sincerely,



Patrick L. Sharrock

Enclosures

May 13, 2010

To: **Members of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly
And MSB Planning Commission
By e-mail**

From: Patrick L. Sharrock 
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Subject: Resolution No. 10-19 for public hearing on May 17, 2010

The Port Mac Rail Extension Project is a huge project for the borough and that state. Selection of a recommended route is serious business. Selection is not about the port or about cost. It is about what is in the best interest of the public, the borough, and the state.

The route selected by the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) is the "Mac East/ Houston South" route. (Note: this is very misleading because it does not recognize the "Houston" segment which covers the greatest distance and impacts the greatest wetland and recreation area.) I was told by the representative from the railroad at the TAB meeting on May 12 that the word Houston was not necessary because it is a foregone conclusion that that segment is included. All through the EIS when a route is mentioned it is named to include all the pertinent segments. I asked the chairman of TAB: "What was the objection to the "Willow Route?" His response was "it is 4(f)". (That reminds me of a classification for the draft.) The three segments have always been referred to as the "Houston Route".

The resolution before you supposedly is TAB Resolution No.10-07. Six times it makes reference to US DOT regulation 4(f).

I think reference to 4(f) scares people into making illogical and uninformed decisions. Just because a route may pass through Section 4(f) property, that does not foreclose further consideration of the route.

I was stunned by the Transportation Advisory Board selection of the Mac East/Houston South route. Their selection name leaves out the longest and primary segment, Houston. A simple look at the proposed routes map easily shows that the Houston route bisects a massive recreation area.

The Houston Route without any doubt will severely deprive thousands of recreation snowmachiners from traveling east/west and west/east through a huge eastern area I call the Big Lake Horseshoe Lake Recreation Area. This deprivation in turn diminishes winter tourism in the valley. This recreation area bounded by the Willow Route and Big Lake Route is the largest and easily accessible snowmachine area in close proximity to Anchorage and Valley residents. It is approximately 25 times larger than the Willow recreation area.

Additionally, this route can likely sever, disrupt and eliminate a drainage/watershed system that serves Little Horseshoe Lake and Horseshoe Lake.

This can occur because the route passes between two lakes (Muleshoe and an unnamed lake) that are 20 feet higher than Little Horseshoe and Horseshoe Lakes. Under EIS guidelines for wetland analysis, 500 feet on each side is used. This analysis area therefore expands 200 feet into each of those lakes. This height appears to provide sufficient elevation to hold and drain surface and ground water to service both of the Horseshoe Lakes.

From my review of the EIS the Willow Route is subject to three use areas subject to section 4(f):

1. It passes through the Willow Creek Recreation Area
2. It passes through a "small corner" of the Nancy Lake Recreation Area
3. It has possible impact to historical cultural locations.

I contend in the same order that mitigation of these items can be summarized as follows:

1. On a smaller scale the Parks Highway and the railroad mainline already pass through this recreation area (according to maps in the EIS that I have reviewed). I believe that another ROW/rail line through the western portion of the area would be less disruptive than areas crossed by other alignments.
2. This passage is hardly worth mentioning. The ROW just touches a "small corner" of the recreation area along its farthest south boundary.
3. From my review of Appendix B in the EIS, generally speaking, the cultural sites noted are depressions in the ground and/or very old possible cache locations that are covered with moss, trees and shrubs. I am the last person who would suggest or consider disruption of historical faculties or sites. However, at Appendix J the EIS goes to great length to show how the ARR will proceed if historical sites are encountered during construction.

At page two of Appendix M in the STB Draft Environmental Impact Statement it states:

"Transportation project use of a park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge that qualifies for Section 4(f) protection may be determined to be *de minimis* if the following criteria are met:

- * The transportation use of the Section 4(f) resource, together with any avoidance, minimization, and mitigation or enhancement measures incorporated in the project, does not adversely affect the activities, features, and attributes that qualify the resource for protection under Section 4(f).
- * The official(s) with jurisdiction over the property are informed of the lead agency's intent to make the *de minimis* finding based on their written concurrence that the project will not adversely affect the activities, features,

and attributes that qualify the property for protection under Section 4(f).

- * The public has been afforded an opportunity to review and comment on the impacts of the project on the protected activities, features, and attributes of the Section 4(f) resource."

Additionally:

"Section 6009(a) of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), amended existing Section 4(f) legislation to simplify the processing and approval of projects that have only *de minimis* impacts on resources protected by Section 4(f). A *de minimis* finding refers to a finding that a project would have little or no influence to the activities, features, and/or attributes of the Section 4(f) resource. This revision provides that once USDOT determines that the transportation use of any Section 4(f) property would result in a *de minimis* impact on that property, after consideration of any impact avoidance, minimization and mitigation or enhancement measures, an analysis of avoidance alternatives is not required and the Section 4(f) evaluation process is complete for that resource.

A finding of *de minimis* impact on a historic site may be made when:

- * The process required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 results in the determination of "no adverse affect" or "no historic properties affected" with the concurrence of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) if participating in the Section 106 consultation.
- * SHPO is informed of the lead agency's intent to make a *de minimis* impact finding based on their written concurrence in the Section 106 determination.
- * The lead agency has considered the view of any consulting parties' participation in the Section 106 consultation. "

Therefore, I propose the following change to the "NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED" section in the resolution (WHEREAS sections would have to modified to conform to the resolve):

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the information contained within the STB EIS demonstrates that the Mac East/Conn 3/Willow alignment is the preferred alternative because its impact on property under U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) regulation known as "Section 4(f) is *de minimis*, and with this finding.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Federal Surface Transportation Board make a similar finding and “the official(s) with jurisdiction over the property are informed of the lead agency’s intent to make the *de minimis* finding based on their written concurrence that the project will not adversely affect the activities, features, and attributes that qualify the property for protection under Section 4(f), and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the same de minimis finding is made as applies to section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act based on concurrence of the State of Alaska Historic Preservation Office, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly selects the Mac East/Conn 3/Willow alignment for the Port Mackenzie Rail Extension to the Alaska Railroad mainline, which is in the best interest of the public, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and the State of Alaska.

I believe the Willow Route is in the best interest of the public and the state. I am convinced that “officials with jurisdiction over the property” would concur that the impacts are “*de minimis*”.

Thank you for your courtesy and consideration.

Growing shoal near port narrowing navigation channel

POINT MACKENZIE: Cargo ships pile up beneath upper Cook Inlet's waterway, their cause for concern is a shoal on the west side of the inlet.

They don't want to run aground, Smith said. Anchorage port officials are worried about the shoal, too. That's because most of the goods Alaskans consume enter the port on four to six sailings per week.

Smith said, "You don't want to go anywhere near it," said Frank Smith, a pilot for Totem Ocean Trailers Express Inc. thing else sold in stores.

For now, Cook Inlet pilots say they are able to navigate around the Point MacKenzie Shoal. What bothers them is that the shoal is eroding their margin of safety in an already treacherous navigation channel.

The inlet's dramatic tidal fluctuations require precise timing for cargo deliveries. Sometimes, the pilots said, winter ice, winds and swirling currents can make turning a big ship into the port a harrowing experience.

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INSIDE

HEADACHE: Port expansion may be causing shifts in situation patterns and affecting ship's ability to use berths.

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Secondary shoaling forces TOTE ship into evasive move

BERTH: Silt building under ship creates the danger of grounding in Inlet "muck."

By LISA DEMER
ldemer@adn.com

The Port MacKenzie Shoal isn't the only siltation problem involving the Port of Anchorage.

George Lowery, Alaska director of Totem Ocean Trailers Express Inc., told the Anchorage Assembly last week that a new area of the expand-

ing port now juts into the inlet, interfering with what used to be a natural scouring from tides that cleared away some of the silt. TOTE's berth is next to that jetty, he said.

"What we've seen is the silting in of our berth. So in the last six weeks, we've had to get our ship off the dock four times for risk of being on muck. That's not a little thing," Lowery said. He was speaking at an Assembly work session on the port.

During critical low tides, the TOTE cargo ship must leave the

berth hours earlier than normal then "loiter" in Knik Arm until the tide rises and it can head to sea, he said.

"That's a very risky maneuver to do with a ship that's 860 feet long," Lowery said. The ship is essentially dead in the water, and if it's windy, the maneuver can't be done at all, he said.

Assembly member Patrick Flynn, whose district includes the port, said he asked new Assembly Chairman Dick Traut to call a special work session on the port after seeing the very maneuver Lowery described.

"Last month I looked out my window and saw George's ship turning away in the middle of a channel at low tide and thought it was so odd," Flynn said.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers tried to dredge the silt using a crane and bucket, but couldn't keep up, Lowery said.

Port Director Bill Sheffield said that in the past there was no need to dredge deeply in the winter, only in warmer months.

The Corps recently agreed to use

its "hopper dredge" — a boat that sucks up the silt from underneath and dumps it in deep water — when needed in the winter, he told the Assembly. It will park the dredging unit in ice-free Homer, and bring it to Anchorage when needed, Sheffield said.

Once the port expansion is complete and it has just one long dock face, natural scouring may prevent the winter silting, Lowery said.

Find Lisa Demer online at adn.com/contact/ldemer or call 257-4390.

SHOAL: Point MacKenzie development, increased siltation blamed

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"We just want to keep a safe, navigable waterway," said George Lowery, Tacoma-based TOTE's Alaska director.

Pilots and other mariners have been discussing the shoal with Anchorage port officials for almost two years now but they are having a tough time getting anything done about it.

Port of Anchorage Director Bill Sheffield tried but failed this year to get a \$1 million appropriation put into the \$3 billion capital budget that the Legislature approved in mid-April. The money was targeted to help pay for a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers feasibility study needed before dredging or any other federal action involving the shoal can occur. Excavating even just a portion of the shoal could cost tens of millions of dollars.

Sheffield petitioned two Mat-Su Republican lawmakers — Sen. Charlie Huggins and Rep. Bill Stoltze. Huggins rejected the request. Stoltze could not be reached for comment on whether or not he tried to get the money.

A Huggins staffer said recently that Mat-Su borough officials told the senator the study was unnecessary. Anchorage port officials said they aren't giving up.

"It's just a matter of cobbling together the financing to make it happen," said Anchorage Port Deputy Director Steve Ribuffo.

THE SHOAL

Cook Inlet pilots said the Point MacKenzie Shoal's growth spurt began about 10 years ago.

Two years later, big ships had to begin detouring around the shoal to make their approach to the Port of Anchorage, said Smith, the TOTE pilot.

The shoal is cutting into the ships' safety margin by reducing the amount of space they have to turn. Big ships need a large amount of room, so for safety, mariners prefer to be on the west side of the shipping channel before turning toward the port, said Steve Honoycutt, president of the Southwest Alaska Pilots' Association. But the shoal is growing on the west side of the shipping channel, forcing them to turn closer to the east side of the channel, he said.

"There's a delicate balance of avoiding the shoal and having enough room to turn" into the port, he said.

The association, which dispatches experi-

enced pilots to the majority of the large ships that travel through Cook Inlet, and other mariners began warning Anchorage port officials about the shoal's growth in early 2008. At that point, the shoal was sticking out like a giant tongue into the channel.

"It's pushed the ships over a half-mile now," said Brad Kroon, a tugboat captain for Cook Inlet Tug & Barge Co.

Kroon and other mariners interviewed for this story said they are concerned about the future of the shoal and favor a Corps study.

The pilot association, TOTE and a second cargo shipper, Horizon Lines, have sent letters to the Corps of Engineers asking it to do something.

DEADLOCK

For now, the Corps of Engineers is tracking the shoal but says it can't do anything about it until a local entity — most likely the state, Anchorage or Mat-Su — pitches in on the cost.

The Corps is no stranger to Knik Arm's silt. Every year, it spends millions of dollars removing it from the Anchorage port.

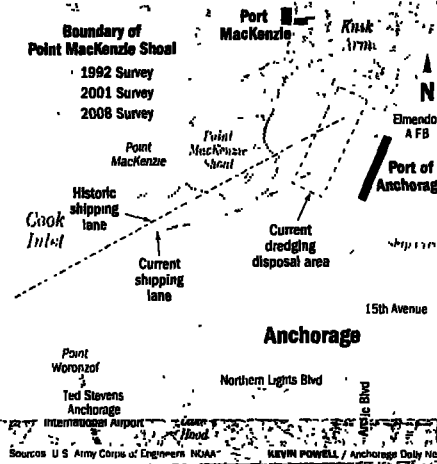
But the MacKenzie Shoal is a different deal. Congress authorized the Corps to deepen the Upper Cook Inlet shipping lane in 2005. But before launching a dredging barge, the Corps must first study the problem, and funding for that study must be provided equally by the Corps and state or local entities. If the study concludes dredging is needed, the Corps will need state or local officials to help fund that work, too.

This year Anchorage port officials sent letters to Stoltze and Huggins requesting a \$1 million state appropriation to the Mat-Su Borough toward a Corps study, estimated to cost \$2 million.

Why go to Mat-Su legislators when some Anchorage lawmakers hold seats on the budget-writing finance committees? For one thing, Anchorage port officials and many Cook Inlet pilots suspect the construction that began about a decade ago on the Mat-Su Borough's Port MacKenzie triggered the shoal's growth.

Also, Sheffield, the Anchorage port director, said he thought it would be easier for the Mat-Su lawmakers to get the money because Anchorage "always" has so many projects in the budget.

Growing shoal shifts shipping lane



His idea backfired. Mat-Su Borough officials disagree that their dock is to blame and they argue that the shoal is not a serious obstacle for ships.

Huggins' side, Jody Simpson, said the Wasilla senator did not request funding for the Corps study after receiving a letter from John Duffy, the Mat-Su borough manager, stating that the ships "simply need to maneuver their vessels into deeper water."

In interviews, Mat-Su officials said that if it's true that the shoal is growing, it's probably because the Corps dumps the millions of cubic yards of sediment that it dredges at the Anchorage port and puts into the deep waters of the shipping lane.

"The dumping 'has a much higher potential' for adding to the shoal than anything else out there," said Port MacKenzie director Marc Van Dongen.

A couple of pilots said they are skeptical of that claim because the Corps dumped dredge spoils in the shipping channel decades before the shoal became a problem.

Steve Boardman, the Corps' district chief,

for civil construction, said it's possible that both the Port MacKenzie dock and the dumping of dredge spoils are enlarging the shoal.

Another potential factor is glacial melt-off from Southcentral Alaska rivers that is unloading silt into Knik Arm, he said.

"The question should be what can and should we do to lessen those impacts and keep navigation safe," he said.

"To date, we don't have any local cost-sharing partner saying they'd like to participate," he said.

A SILTIER FUTURE?

It's no secret that siltation is a big headache for the Port of Anchorage — dredging the silt is a never-ending battle against Mother Nature the Corps has waged for at least 40 years.

That battle has intensified in the last 10 to 15 years, Boardman said.

It's possible that, 50 to 100 years from now, that Cook Inlet siltation could get so severe that it could become too costly to maintain the shipping channel in Upper Cook Inlet, he said.

In the past decade, the Corps' dredging at the port of Anchorage has increased significantly.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the average annual excavation at the port was between 250,000 and 500,000 cubic yards of sediment. Starting about a decade ago, the excavation shot up to 800,000 to 1.4 million cubic yards annually, Boardman said.

The dredging at the port now costs about \$12 million per year; all paid with federal dollars because the port and navigation channel are used to support military operations.

Sheffield, the port director, said he doesn't have any druthers on whether the MacKenzie Shoal is removed or if it is dredged every year like the port of Anchorage.

"The shoal has got to be dredged. Either I'm going to pay for it or the Mat-Su and I might share it, or the Corps might have to do it all by themselves," he said.

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The Difference Between Punishment and Consequences

There are differences between punishment and consequences. Though the differences may not always be clear, it is helpful to know some things about each in mind.

Simply put, punishment is a penalty for wrongdoing that is experienced as suffering, pain, or loss. Most of us naturally avoid punishment. If a child knows that his or her parent will exact something painful because of some bad behavior, he or she might think twice about behaving badly.

As a way of comparison, consequences are defined by something that logically or naturally follows an action or condition, not necessarily negative or punitive. A parent can emphasize that consequences are part of the cause and effect reality in our world. With bad behavior, we can use the behavior as the "bad guy" and be the more neutral person to calmly highlight what happens in an educational way. We allow what occurs normally to teach our child. Though it may be counter to our impulse to rescue our child from discomfort, we try to let circumstances have their effect.

The main thing is to be thoughtful whether we choose punishment or consequences. It is usually far better to not punish or educate with consequences when we're emotionally charged. By not reacting negatively, we model healthy responding to life's circumstances that we all experience. We might also invite our developing child to figure out consequences to his or her own behavior. After all, we want to train our children to eventually make good choices independent from our involvement.

Ron Miller, LPA
 Clinical Director,
 Palmer Residential Psychiatric Treatment Program

North Star

Behavioral Health

To submit questions to our experts on behavioral health, please e-mail:

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For more information, please call our Intake Department 258-7575 or toll free in Alaska, 800-478-7575.

Which port serves Alaska best? No one knows

By SEN. FRED DYSON

Southcentral Alaska has several ports all serving local and important needs. These communities and ports individually petition the state and federal governments for very significant grants to maintain and expand their facilities for the benefit of the local political and geographical concerns.

Currently, there is no in-depth analysis of which port is the most effective at serving the interests of Alaskans at large, and no process of evaluating the best place for public moneys to be invested. The decisions are politically made based on the local political power to influence the public process.

Realizing this deficit in our public process, then state Rep. Larry Baker shepherded a bill through the Legislature in 1992 to create the legal foundation for municipal port authorities in Alaska. This far seeing effort was modeled after the very successful models of regional port authorities in Puget Sound (Seattle/Tacoma), the San Francisco Bay and several East coast port communities.

Regional port authorities have been quite successful at minimizing local political influence and building interlocking infrastructure that serves the region and the general public good.

Anchorage's magnificent port handles



the vast bulk of Alaska's container cargo but has the problems of significant amounts of dredging at federal expense, challenging winter sea ice conditions, limited "lay down space" for cargo handling and significant tidal-induced currents at the dock face. All of these problems are less than ideal for the state's major freight port.

The Mat-Su's Port Mackenzie presently does not have the roads and rail infrastructure that is needed, has the same sea ice challenges and may have dredging issues as cargo ships keep getting bigger with deeper drafts. Seward is a marvelous port that is deep water without the sea ice problems, but it is a longer rail link and has issues with coal dust and perceived conflicts with the cruise ship/tourism industry.

Whittier is also deep water and ice free but presently has limited cargo ship handling capacity. Nikiski largely handles oil offloading for crude from Cook In-

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let as well as LNG export, but has problems with extreme tidal velocities at the dock face. Valdez is an excellent port and the processes are in place to avoid the navigational and sea ice problems of the past, but it is far from the main concentrations of Alaska people. It can be a major port servicing the Alaska gas line when it gets built.

In addition there are the recreational boating issues of access to saltwater fishing and sightseeing for the vast majority of Southcentral boating enthusiasts.

The question before us is simple. Is it time for Alaska to move beyond local interests and have a rational planning mechanism for building and improving our major ports? If the answer is in the affirmative, it is time to get after it.

Sen. Fred Dyson is an Eagle River Republican first elected to the Legislature in 1996.

CLIMATE CHANGE: Arctic ice cellars are thawing, Alaska A-3

NBA FINALS: Celtics beat Lakers, take 3-2 lead, Sports B-1

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Final Edition

Anchorage Daily News

Monday, June 14, 2010

BREAKING NEWS AT ADN.COM

Alaska's Newspaper

Former mayor hypes railroad line to Port Mackenzie

MAT-SU: Port suited to handling large ships, store and move big loads; some oppose the project.

By LISA DEMER
ldemer@adn.com

For months now, former Mayor Rick Mystrom has been pushing a huge railroad project — in the Mat-Su.

It's one of the projects the Matanuska-Susitna Borough is banking on to make its

11-year-old Port Mackenzie viable.

The effort has escalated tensions between the Mat-Su and Anchorage ports, though both sides insist they aren't competitors for most goods.

"I wouldn't do it unless I thought it was going to be good for Anchorage," Mystrom said. "The business and the jobs that it's going to create in Anchorage are going to be huge."

Just 2½ miles across Knik Arm from Anchorage, Port Mackenzie includes a deep

water dock, a barge dock and a fancy ferry terminal building completed a few years back for a ferry that hasn't yet arrived. The M/V Susitna was christened Friday in Ketikikan, where it was built. It still needs to be outfitted and undergo sea trials.

As it stands, the port doesn't get much ship traffic. So far this year, one ship has docked there — a test earlier this month to see if a supersized ship could be loaded with coal. It could. Borough officials

crowded that the ship, the biggest ever to

dock in Upper Cook Inlet, was too big for the Port of Anchorage.

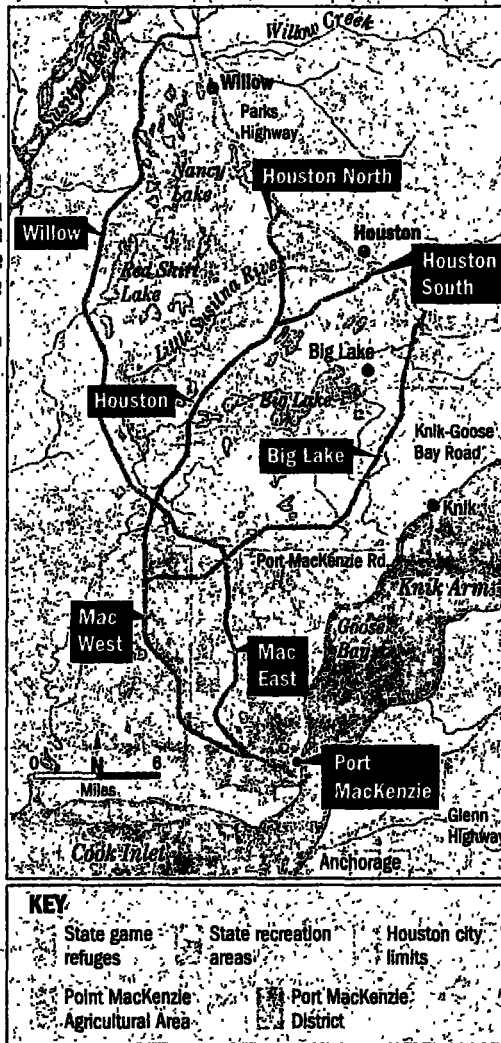
Mat-Su's port would get a dramatic boost if a rail line is built connecting it with the main line of the Alaska Railroad farther north in a spot yet to be selected, Mystrom told a business group in Anchorage Friday. The state, with billions in savings, needs to invest in new transportation infrastructure to develop Alaska's abundance of natural

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Mystrom

Proposed rail routes to Port MacKenzie



Daily News archive

MAT-SU: City's port chief unsure

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resources and create jobs, Mystrom said.

"The last big infrastructure project the state did was the Parks Highway, and it was finished in 1974," he told the Anchorage Building Owners & Managers Association at their monthly meeting.

The Port Mac rail extension is poised to be the next big thing, he said. Coal, limestone, lead, zinc, copper and other minerals could be mined and then hauled by rail to Port MacKenzie, where it would be loaded on ships. That would cut 147 miles off the existing rail route to the port in Seward, he said.

It's not just a shorter route — the 30- to 40-mile extension is virtually downhill and more efficient for the trains, borough officials say. And Mystrom said that neither Anchorage nor Seward can offer the staging area of Port MacKenzie — 14 square miles of industrially zoned land, with no homes on it.

The Port of Anchorage, which is in the midst of its own huge expansion, is the primary Alaska port for consumer goods coming in on container

drive comes through it. Mat-Su wants to become a regional port for mineral exports and also is interested in fuel storage and in receiving materials such as the steel for the state's long-dreamed about natural gas pipeline, Mystrom said.

But the Port of Anchorage wants the steel pipe to come its way, and it already has huge fuel tanks.

Mystrom, a part-time Valley resident with a home on Finger Lake and a former advertising executive, wrapped up his role as a paid promoter of the rail project in April. He said he continues to talk it up because he believes in the merits. He made \$85,000 for six months' work with the borough.

Mystrom rallied support for the project from "communities and leaders across Alaska," said Mat-Su Borough Mayor Talis Colberg.

The state this year put \$35 million toward the rail expansion, expected to cost up to \$250 million when it's all complete. Gov. Sean Parnell recently vetoed another \$22 million that had been approved by the Legislature but says he supports the expansion.

The project now is before a federal entity called the Surface Transportation Board. The Alaska Railroad has applied to the board for a license to build the rail line. A draft environmental impact statement analyzed the need as well as three possible routes connecting to the main line near Willow, Houston or east of Big Lake.

Last month in written comments to the board, Anchorage Port Director Bill Sheffield challenged some of the assertions put forth by backers of the rail project and raised concerns about Port MacKenzie as a year-round port.

In one example, the backers contended it would be cheaper to ship bulk materials like wood chips, gravel or cement by rail to Port MacKenzie than to Anchorage and that Anchorage doesn't have space to store or handle big quantities.

Sheffield, the former head of the Alaska Railroad, said that was a "significant misrepresentation." He said there likely wouldn't be enough business at Port MacKenzie to justify permanent rail crews, so locomotives and rail cars would have to be serviced in Anchorage or Fairbanks. And since 2003, his port has added 60 acres of land by filling in Knik Arm and a mile of rail. It's already received drill pipe headed to the North Slope.

When Mat-Su officials saw his six-page letter on file with the federal government, they were livid.

"I wish to express my deep concern over Port Director Bill Sheffield's recent wayward actions toward the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension," Colberg wrote to Anchorage Mayor Dan Sullivan.

Sullivan assured Mat-Su officials he supported the rail project. Still, a growing shoal near Port MacKenzie is causing problems for Anchorage-bound ships and he wants Mat-Su's help in finding a solution.

Mystrom said he only recently learned that Sheffield had concerns about the rail project.

"Anchorage is the most important port in Alaska and always will be," he said.

But the Mat-Su rail project, he said, could boost the whole region.