



El- 16326
Redd 10/29/08

October 16, 2008

Irene Mead
P.O. Box 186
Delta Junction, AK 99737

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

TEL 907.265.2671
FAX 907.265.2365

Dear Ms. Mead:

Thank you for providing written comment regarding a railroad track extension from Eielson Air Force Base to the Fort Greely/Delta Junction area, and then on to Canada. The Alaska Railroad Corporation's (ARRC) Northern Rail Extension (NRE) project only encompasses the 80-mile stretch between Eielson and Delta Junction. The NRE does not include an extension to the Canadian border, and these are completely separate issues. However, if the NRE is constructed, it would essentially provide a first leg to any project seeking to extend the tracks to meet with the Canadian rail system.

Given your interest, I wanted to confirm receipt of your letter dated October 7, 2008, and update you on the status of the NRE project. The project is still in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) phase. The federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) has the authority to approve any rail construction by common carriers in the United States, and therefore the EIS is being conducted by the STB.

Part of the NRE project entails a bridge crossing over the Tanana River. As you surmised, the Department of Defense (DoD) is willing to help with the cost of building such a bridge due to the access it provides to military training grounds. Currently, project planners are looking at a river crossing site in the Salcha area, though a second crossing near Flag Hill is still under review by the STB. Congress approved \$44 million to design, permit, buy land and materials, and prepare for bridge construction. Preliminary engineering is currently underway for the bridge. It is being considered along with the rest of the NRE project through the EIS process.

The draft EIS document is expected in the very near future, and the public will have an opportunity to provide input regarding this environmental document. The ARRC anticipates the STB will hold public hearings on the draft EIS in 2009, and one of those meetings will likely be held in Delta Junction. In the meantime, I will forward your recent comments to the STB for consideration. Future correspondence regarding the project and EIS can be directed to:

STB Finance Docket No. 34658
Attention: David Navecky • Environmental Filing
1925 K Street, N.W. • Washington, DC 20423-0001

I have enclosed fact sheets with more detail about the NRE and the Tanana River access project. For additional details, please visit http://www.stb.dot.gov/stb/environment/key_cases_alaska.html, the STB's web site page that offers NRE project status and other information.

Again, thank you for your interest and input.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephenie Wheeler".

Stephenie Wheeler
Public Involvement Officer
(907) 265-2671

cc: Dave Navecki, Surface Transportation Board

Enclosures:

1. Northern Rail Extension fact sheet
2. Access to Joint Tanana Military Training Complex fact sheet