



Anchorage Rail Capacity Improvements MP110-114

Project Scope

The Alaska Railroad (ARRC) is investigating alternatives to improve operating efficiencies and enhance safety along the mainline track from the Anchorage International Airport Spur (near MP 110) to the Anchorage Rail Yard (MP 114). The capacity improvement alternatives initially considered additional sidings (passing lanes), installing automated signals and switches, and/or extending the double track that was previously constructed in south Anchorage. The second track would be located parallel to the existing mainline between 120th Avenue (MP 105) and the Minnesota Drive overpass (MP 110, near the airport spur). ARRC is pursuing preliminary engineering, environmental studies required for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation, and public involvement activities. As preliminary design activities have progressed, the alternatives have been refined such that the two alternatives that are fully analyzed in the Environmental Assessment (EA) include “No Build” and “Double Track.”

Benefits

The four-mile stretch from the Anchorage Yard to South Anchorage is the busiest on the Alaska Railroad. In summer, as many as 20 trains per day use the corridor. Typical summer train traffic includes passenger trains traveling to/from Seward, Portage, Grandview, and Whittier; and numerous trains hauling gravel, coal and general freight. The railroad also operates fuel trains running from Anchorage to Whittier and Seward. A number of work trains and special charters frequently may add to the overall train activity. Projections call for rail passenger traffic to increase significantly, while the forecast for freight operations growth along this corridor is more modest.

Interest is growing in a commuter rail service connecting Anchorage and Girdwood (as well as

Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley). This would also increase passenger train activity along the corridor. The railroad started construction in 2007 on a multi-year project to build an intermodal facility in Ship Creek, which may also lead to additional charter and commuter train traffic.

Capacity improvements will alleviate congestion and enhance safety for the railroad and the community. Improvements would also increase operational efficiency and prepare ARRC to better handle future passenger and freight train demands.

Status

ARRC initiated the following activities in 2002, with efforts continuing to the present:

- Compiled and evaluated information on existing rail use (type, number, daily and seasonal schedules), projected rail traffic increases, existing constraints (speeds, communication, grades, delays), existing and projected maintenance issues.
- Initiated a public and agency involvement program, including presentations at community council meetings, public and agency scoping meetings, and other meetings to solicit input from the affected community on its concerns about the project.
- Identified issues of community concern.
- Conducted a winter, spring and summer noise and vibration analysis, including identification of sensitive receptors, measuring ambient noise levels and train-induced noise and vibration at selected locations, projecting noise and vibration levels associated with future build conditions, and developing initial noise and/or vibration mitigation options to address potential impacts. The purpose was to determine existing conditions, seasonal variations, impacts at various speeds, and the differences between

freight trains and lighter passenger trains. Study measurements help predict future noise and vibration levels given various alternatives for increasing capacity (i.e., modeling for single and double track).

- Conducted a grade-separation (overpass/underpass) feasibility analysis, field studies of potentially sensitive areas (Fish Creek crossings), aerial survey work and dispatch modeling analysis.
- Based on studies and data analysis, ARRC initiated an Environmental Assessment (EA) of two options: a) no action and b) extension of the double track from its existing termination near 44th Avenue to the Anchorage Yard. Alternatives that were considered but dismissed include construction of a siding and construction of double track between Westchester Lagoon and the Anchorage Yard. These measures would not accomplish the necessary capacity improvements.
- A draft EA is expected to be sent to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for consideration in 2009. Once the FTA approves the EA, it will be made available for public review and comment.

Project Costs

- Budget for preliminary engineering, environmental studies and public involvement is \$1 million, funded 80% by FTA and 20% by ARRC.
- Design and construction costs will depend on the option selected; however, the full double track option is expected to cost approximately \$40 million (2005 estimate). There is currently no funding for construction. Funding sources may include the FTA, Federal Railroad Administration and ARRC.

