



Commuter Opportunities

PARTNERSHIPS

Alaska Railroad Projects in Support of Commuter Rail

Southcentral Commuter Rail Study and Operations Plan

Initiated in 2000 and completed in early 2002, the Alaska Railroad (ARRC)-commissioned study offers a blueprint for further action to establish a commuter rail system between the Anchorage Bowl and Mat-Su Valley. \$200,000 funded by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and ARRC.

Anchorage-to-Wasilla Track Realignment

Initiated in 1999, and primarily completed in 2007, this \$78 million effort straightens the track between Anchorage and Wasilla, thereby cutting train travel time between communities by 30 minutes, which is critical to commuter rail viability. Funded by the Department of Defense (DOD), FTA and ARRC.

Bill Sheffield Alaska Railroad Depot at the Anchorage International Airport

Initiated in 2000 and completed in May 2003, the rail facility at Ted Stevens International Airport is a visionary hub offering travelers an intermodal terminal and daily commuters a connection to a major employment center. Cost of \$28 million funded by Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). In 2008, \$2.162 million was spent to re-establish bus and truck access after construction of a new airport rental car garage blocked access. Funding 91% FTA and 9% ARRC.



Palmer Park-and-Ride Rail Station

Constructed 2002-2004 as a collaboration between ARRC and the Palmer Alaska State Fair, the \$2.3 million project features a passenger shelter, restrooms, ample parking and drop-off lanes to facilitate commuting. Administered by ARRC; funded by FTA, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the State Fair.



Ship Creek Intermodal Transportation Center

Initiated in 1999, this is a phased \$60 million project to facilitate inter-community connections with enhanced depot facilities and accommodations for all modes of transit. Construction on Phase I — additional track — began in 2007. Funded by FTA and ARRC.



Self-propelled "DMU" Rail Car Purchase

In conjunction with a joint U.S. Forest Service and Railroad whistle stop project, a self-propelled rail car is under construction and due for delivery by the end of 2008. The DMU could be available for commuter service from October through April. The \$5.3 million rail equipment cost is funded primarily by the Forest Service.

Next Steps

Regional Transportation Authority

ARRC's 2002 *Southcentral Commuter Rail Study & Operations Plan* recommends formation of a regional transit authority (RTA) as the first critical step to establishing commuter rail as a component of integrated commuter services. In order for regional commuter systems to be effective, links between communities must be planned and implemented with close coordination between local governments and their community transit systems, such as Anchorage's People Mover and the Mat-Su Community Transit (MASCOT) city bus systems. A joint RTA can make such coordination possible, along with coordinated support from state, federal, and private sector partners.

On June 13, 2008, then Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich and Mat-Su Borough Mayor Curt Menard signed an agreement to improve mass transit in Southcentral Alaska, beginning with RTA formation. This move acknowledges the RTA's critical role in developing a regional commuter strategy to better serve thousands of people who regularly commute between Mat-Su and Anchorage bowl communities.

Thanks to the agreement, local transportation officials are beginning to investigate ways to improve commuting opportunities. New options could include additional bus and van capacity, Glenn Highway improvements, commuter rail development and exploration of other transportation modes such as the Mat-Su Ferry. This detailed analysis will be considered by the RTA.

Local governments have each appointed project managers who are working together on a draft RTA formation agreement. Once operating ground rules are established, the RTA agreement can be finalized and the authority can be formed.

Funding Mechanisms

The RTA's first order of business will be to identify and develop funding mechanisms to cover operating expenses and capital investments. Most RTAs fund operations with a combination of ticket fares, state and local taxes, and federal funding. This mix must be decided. Capital funding is also needed to purchase road and rail transit equipment, improve road and track infrastructure, design and construct additional depot and other intermodal facilities.

ARRC Identifies Future Capital Expenditures to Support Commuter Rail

Specific capital investments must be identified for each commuter enhancement option. ARRC has identified the following capital expenditures needed to support the commuter rail option.

- *Purchase sufficient self-propelled rail cars.* Successful commuter rail service is dependent upon fast, flexible passenger transportation equipment, such as the Colorado Rail Car DMU scheduled for delivery at the end of 2008. This rail car will only be available during winter months (it is dedicated to Chugach Forest Whistle Stop Service in summer). Additional capacity is needed through purchase of more equipment.
- *Straighten remaining track curves.*
 - *Beach Lake Park:* Straighten three curves currently on hold due to an underground ice lens making work complex and costly.
 - *Birchwood:* Overcome complications posed by constructing additional sidings.
 - *Eklutna:* Following a recent land swap between Eklutna, Inc. and the Alaska Railroad, land development plans are still pending. Once settled, track straightening decisions can be made.
 - *South Wasilla (Fairview Loop):* The land acquisition for Phase 1 (first two miles) is nearly done for this four-mile track realignment project.
- *Construct Rail Stations and Depots*
 - *Ship Creek ITC:* Complete the intermodal transportation center (ITC) that includes the Historic Ship Creek Depot. Phase 1, track and utility upgrades, is underway on this major inter-city transit hub.
 - *Potential Depots:* Additional depots for pick up and drop off in Wasilla, the Glenn/Parks highway intersection, and Dimond Mall in south Anchorage.

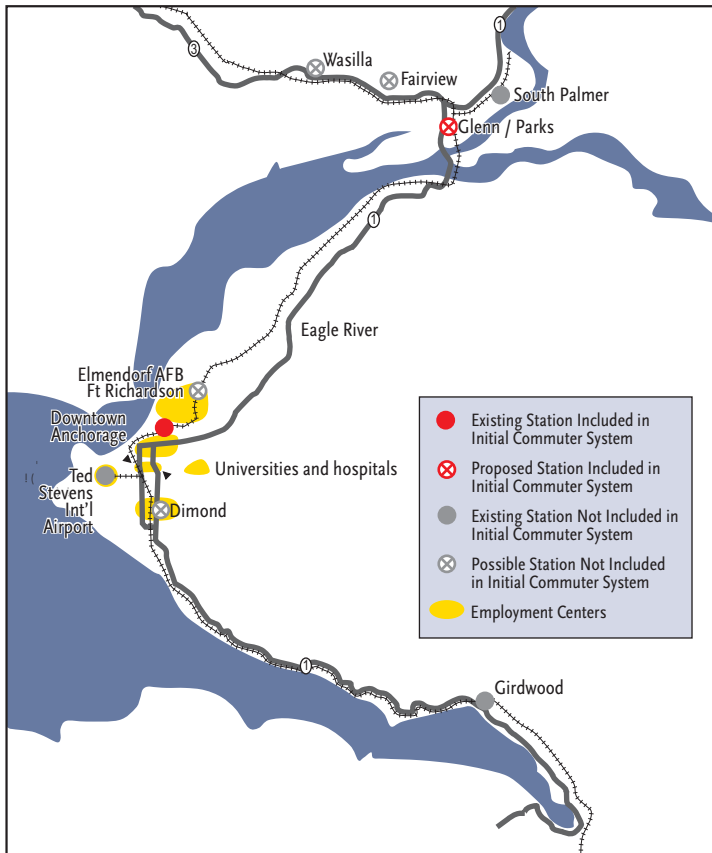
A potential plan for a *Commuter Rail System* and a *Sample Initial Commuter Rail Service Schedule* are illustrated on the following pages. These models are drawn from information gathered and analyzed as part of the 2002 *Southcentral Commuter Rail Study & Operations Plan*.



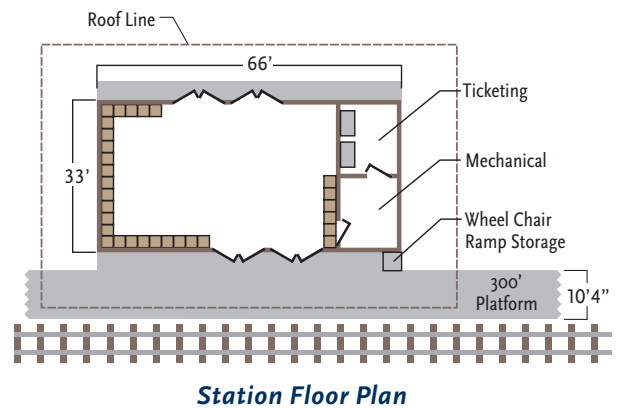
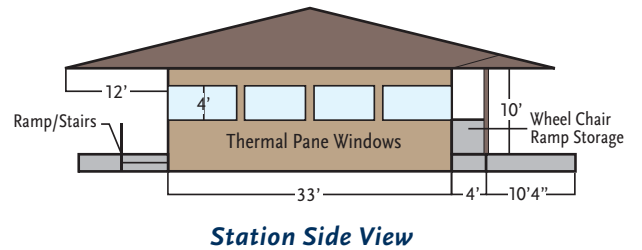
Potential Commuter Rail System Infrastructure

Based on recommendations from the 2002 *Southcentral Commuter Rail Study & Operations Plan*, along with updates on depot development, design and construction since 2002.

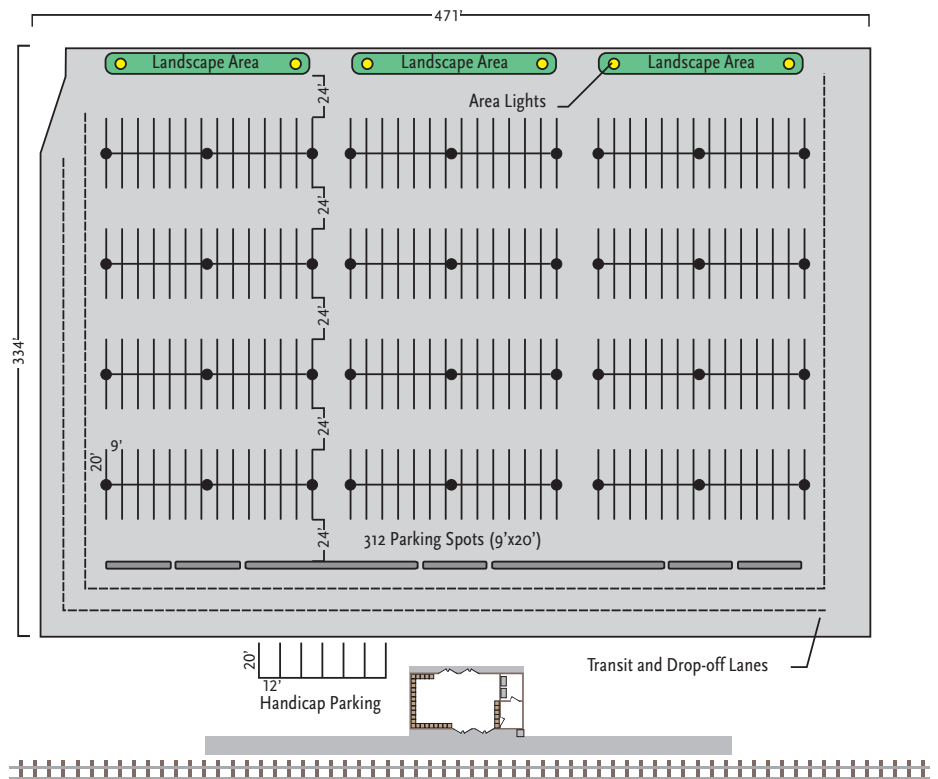
Commuter Rail System Plan



150-person Station Facility Layout



150-person Capacity Station Site Plan



Sample Initial Commuter Rail Service Schedule

Weekday Schedule: Monday - Friday

MORNING

Depart From	Depart Time	Arriving At	Arrival Time
Glenn/Parks	04:45 AM	Anchorage	05:37 AM
Anchorage	05:45 AM	Glenn/Parks	06:37 AM
Glenn/Parks	06:45 AM	Anchorage	07:37 AM

MID-DAY

Depart From	Depart Time	Arriving At	Arrival Time
Glenn/Parks	09:00 AM	Anchorage	09:52 AM
Anchorage	01:00 PM	Glenn/Parks	01:52 PM

EVENING

Depart From	Depart Time	Arriving At	Arrival Time
Anchorage	03:30 PM	Glenn/Parks	04:22 PM
Glenn/Parks	04:30 PM	Anchorage	05:22 PM
Anchorage	05:30 PM	Glenn/Parks	06:22 PM

- Before 1999, train traveling time between the Ship Creek Historic Depot in Anchorage to the Glenn Highway and Parks Highway intersection was approximately 78 minutes. After an extensive multi-year track-straightening effort aimed at shaving time, passenger trains can now travel between the two points in approximately 52 minutes – nearly a half-hour faster.
- The sample commuter train service schedules make use of the 52-minute travel factor, along with input derived from the *2002 Southcentral Commuter Rail Study & Operating Plan*.
- An exact actual schedule would be formulated with close coordination from the Anchorage People Mover and Mat-Su Community Transit and other major commuter shuttle systems. The schedules of these city bus and van providers and a commuter rail service would need to offer seamless intra-city and inter-city mass transit.

Weekend Schedule: Saturday-Sunday

MORNING

Depart From	Depart Time	Arriving At	Arrival Time
Glenn/Parks	08:00 AM	Anchorage	08:52 AM
Anchorage	09:00 AM	Glenn/Parks	09:52 AM

MID-DAY

Depart From	Depart Time	Arriving At	Arrival Time
Glenn/Parks	10:00 AM	Anchorage	10:52 AM
Anchorage	04:00 PM	Glenn/Parks	04:52 PM

EVENING

Depart From	Depart Time	Arriving At	Arrival Time
Glenn/Parks	05:00 PM	Anchorage	05:52 PM
Anchorage	10:00 PM	Glenn/Parks	10:52 PM

