



Fort Wainwright Rail Realignment

PROJECT FACTS

Project Scope

The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) proposes to improve and/or realign approximately five (5) miles of railroad track that runs through Fort Wainwright. Located along the ARRC Eielson Branch, the project segment begins at approximately Branch Milepost G3.0 (Trainer Gate Road) and ends at approximately MP G8.0 (Badger Road). The project is entirely on Fort Wainwright.

This realignment was originally included as part of the Eielson Branch Rail Realignment (EBRR) Environmental Assessment (EA), which was initiated in early 2006. As the EBRR EA progressed in 2006 it became clear, through public involvement, that portions of the EBRR project would be better addressed in a broader study. This broader effort is now known as the Fairbanks-North Pole Realignment (F-NPR) project.

Realignment on Fort Wainwright has immediate need, given existing negative impacts to the installation's operations. It also has independent utility, meaning it is required regardless of the outcome of any larger project.

Purpose and Need

The Fort Wainwright Rail Realignment purpose is to:

- 1 Improve safety by eliminating or reducing hazards at highway-railroad grade (same level) crossings in the cantonment area;
- 2 Reduce rail-related traffic congestion, noise and interference with Fort Wainwright's operational activities in its main cantonment area;
- 3 Enhance security and provide force protection

by moving tracks closer to the post boundary, away from post infrastructure and personnel;

- 4 Enhance safety by relocating the railroad tracks and train traffic away from the Ladd Field immediate runway protection zone;
- 5 Provide better rail service to Fort Wainwright's proposed loading facility; and
- 6 Reduce travel times through Fort Wainwright and improve ARRC's operational efficiency in the Fort Wainwright area.

Enhance Safety: There are 10 at-grade crossings on Fort Wainwright. Eliminating or relocating at-grade crossings would decrease the inherent safety concerns, including the potential for accidents between trains and vehicular traffic. It would also avoid roadway traffic delays.

Sharp curves on the track increase the likelihood of train derailments, while straighter track reduces the risk. On the installation, there are a series of 11 curves ranging from 2° to 14°. The desired degree of curvature is between 1° to 3°, preferably less than 2°. The proposed project would straighten sharp curves reducing track curvature to 3° or less in most areas on Fort Wainwright.



Operational Efficiency: Existing track curvature limits train speed to 10 mph, resulting in long travel times. It takes trains about 30 minutes to traverse Fort Wainwright. As longer freight trains travel through the area, the installation is effectively cut in half with street access blocked by the at-grade crossings. Curve straightening, track rehabilitation and modern track design would allow for train speeds of at least 35 mph, cutting travel time significantly. Reduced travel time would lower fuel and labor costs, thus improving ARRC's operating efficiency.

Sharp curves translate to substantially higher maintenance costs due to accelerated wear in railcar wheels, the rail, and the ties, and a breakdown of the track ballast. As a public corporation, ARRC has a fiduciary responsibility to spend wisely and efficiently. As operating and maintenance costs decrease, more funds are available to address the railroad's other critical infrastructure needs and provide better services to its customers.

Improved operating efficiency and reduced travel times would benefit ARRC's freight customers, including the ongoing transformation of U.S. Army infantry brigade at Fort Wainwright to a Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT). The SBCT moves equipment and personnel between the Port of Anchorage and Fort Wainwright for deployment throughout the Pacific. Rail transportation is an efficient means to accomplish the deployments. The proposed project would reduce traffic delays caused by long military convoy transport on the highway, improve mobilization times, and reduce wear and tear on both military equipment and the highway.

Reduce Military Interference: The existing alignment extends through the cantonment area of Fort Wainwright. Trains slowed by curvature and at-grade crossings interfere with traffic movements and disrupt other Fort Wainwright operational activities for nearly 30 minutes, up to eight times per day. Such disruptions affect routine military activities, emergency response and mobilization activities. Fort Wainwright has seen an increase in personnel and expects further increases as new units are added and the SCBT returns from duty abroad. Personnel growth will increase vehicular traffic on post roads and the need for housing and medical services rise. The project would move the railroad out of the main cantonment area, and away from planned housing areas and the new post hospital.

Status

- Reconnaissance level engineering and phasing studies were completed in 2001 and 2002. These studies considered the feasibility of realignment around Fairbanks and North Pole, and considered options and impacts on Fort Wainwright.
- ARRC began work on preliminary design and planning for an Eielson Branch Rail Realignment Environmental Assessment (EA) in May 2005. EA scoping (fact-gathering) meetings and dialogue with agencies and the public were pursued through 2006. Through the public process, residents and local government leaders of Fairbanks, North Pole and the Fairbanks North Star Borough expressed the desire to see realignment of the Eielson Branch combined with efforts to realign the track around Fairbanks.
- By the end of 2006, ARRC requested permission from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to pursue the Fort Wainwright Rail Realignment as a separate EA. The federal funding agencies agreed and FRA has become the lead federal agency for the project.
- The Fort Wainwright EA was put on hold in 2008 due to military priority changes.

Project Costs

- Environmental analysis and preliminary engineering for the EBRR EA was originally estimated to cost approximately \$1.5 million. The EBRR EA was funded through a U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) appropriation being administered as a grant through the FRA. \$2 million in additional DOD funding was appropriated in 2006. DOD funding was granted to support the Stryker Brigade at Fort Wainwright.
- In 2007, DOD appropriated an additional \$12 million. Funding may transfer to the Northern Rail Extension project in 2009.
- It will cost an estimated \$36 million to complete design and construction of the Fort Wainwright segment. Funding has not yet been identified, although funding will likely come from DOD.