



Whistle Stop Service in Chugach National Forest

PROJECT FACTS

Project Scope

The USDA Forest Service (USFS) and Alaska Railroad (ARRC) are partners in developing a new whistle stop service that will provide a variety of world-class recreation and transportation opportunities for users of the Chugach National Forest.

The project includes development of five sites between Portage and Moose Pass that will be accessible by rail and interconnected by trail (see Figure 1). Development at each site will vary, depending on the terrain and potential recreational opportunities.

All sites would include an Americans with Disability Act (ADA)-compliant boarding/unboarding platform, passenger shelter, toilets and interpretive signage (see Figure 2). Other possible features include picnic facilities, camping facilities, wildlife viewing facilities and expanded trails.

The project trail system consists of approximately 35 miles of trail between the proposed whistle stop locations. One new trail would interconnect Luebner Lake, Spencer, Bartlett Glacier and Grandview. Plans for Spencer, Bartlett Glacier and Grandview include spur trails leading to viewing platforms, natural features and camping facilities.

A successful whistle stop experience requires that the rail passenger equipment be independent of other railroad operations. The original project scope calls for acquisition of two self-propelled railcars.

Benefits

This project offers a number of benefits to visitors and residents of Alaska. The project:

- Provides an opportunity for people to connect with nature in a unique, safe, world class and memorable setting.
- Provides controlled access to the Chugach National Forest backcountry while protecting

the resources. Currently, access to the forest's backcountry in this area is extremely limited.

- Provides a variety of activities for people with varying degrees of skill.
- Supports the Alaska Railroad's Anchorage-Seward operations with increased ridership.
- Development of the rail route offers new opportunities to disperse recreational activities from the congested highway, thereby reducing heavy summer traffic.

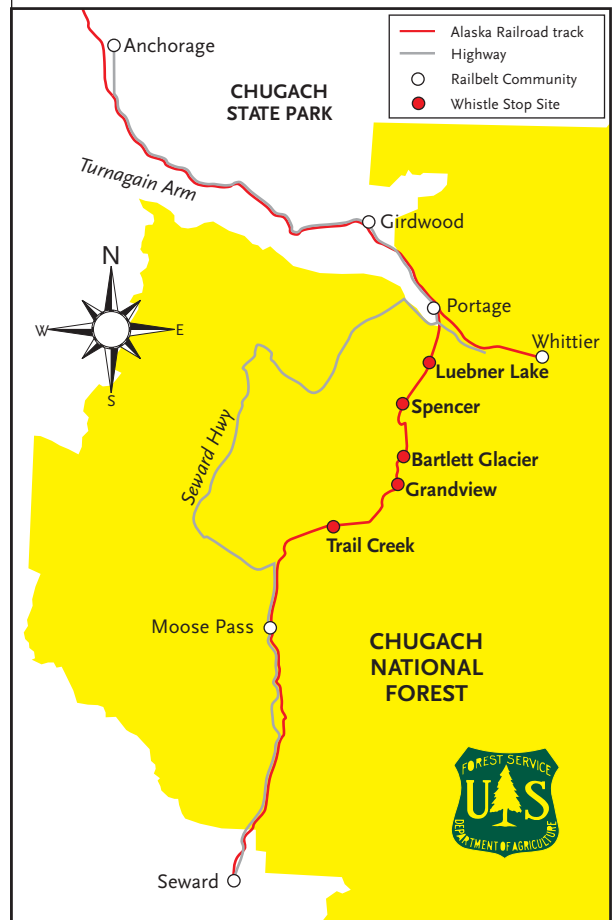


Figure 1. Proposed Whistle Stop Locations

Project Status

- In 2003, the Alaska Railroad and Forest Service entered into a partnership with a Memorandum of Understanding.
- A business plan was initiated in 2004 and completed in 2005. ARRC and USFS entered into a Challenge Cost-Share Agreement (recognizing workforce contributions from both entities), and further developed an Annual Operating Plan.
- As the lead agency, the Forest Service began the environmental analysis and documentation process as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in spring 2005.
- During summer 2005, field work identified the location of use areas, future trails, campsites, and cabins throughout the project area. The NEPA process concluded in August 2006.
- Construction will occur in phases and will be dictated by available funding.
 - Phase I: Spencer.
 - Phase II: Grandview
 - Phase III: Luebner Lake & Bartlett Glacier
 - Phase IV: Trail Creek
- **Spencer:** Construction began in fall 2006 and was complete in July 2007 (*see page 3*).
- **Grandview:** Facilities will be similar to Spencer. The site is on land belonging to the State of Alaska, so the project will be a collaborative effort between the State, ARRC and Forest Service. Land and cultural/archaeological surveys, and conceptual design work, began in 2007 and were complete in 2008. The Forest Service accomplished preliminary design and engineering in 2009. Construction is a possibility in 2010, subject to funding availability.
- **Railcar:** A bi-level self-propelled commuter railcar was ordered to include special features (i.e., a control cab at either end and a wheelchair lift on either side) to facilitate whistle stop service. Colorado Railcar began design and manufacture of the diesel multiple unit (DMU) in late 2007. The DMU was delivered to Alaska April 29, 2009, and was put into service in May.



The DMU operates on ARRC's track in early May 2009.

Project Cost and Funding

- Chugach National Forest received an initial \$1.8 million, spent as follows:
 - » \$600,000 for Forest Service plans, survey and design of Whistle Stop infrastructure
 - » \$1.2 million for Alaska Railroad planning, design and construction of whistle stop station infrastructure.
- \$4.7 million Forest Service grant, administered by the Federal Transit Administration in 2007, to purchase a double-deck self-propelled DMU. An additional \$648,000 is budgeted in 2009, funded by FTA and ARRC, for a total of \$5.35 million.
- Additional funding from the Forest Service, Federal Highway funds, Alaska Railroad and other partners will be necessary to complete the project. Initial conceptual planning estimates indicate that construction of infrastructure and recreational facilities at all the sites would cost more than \$14 million.

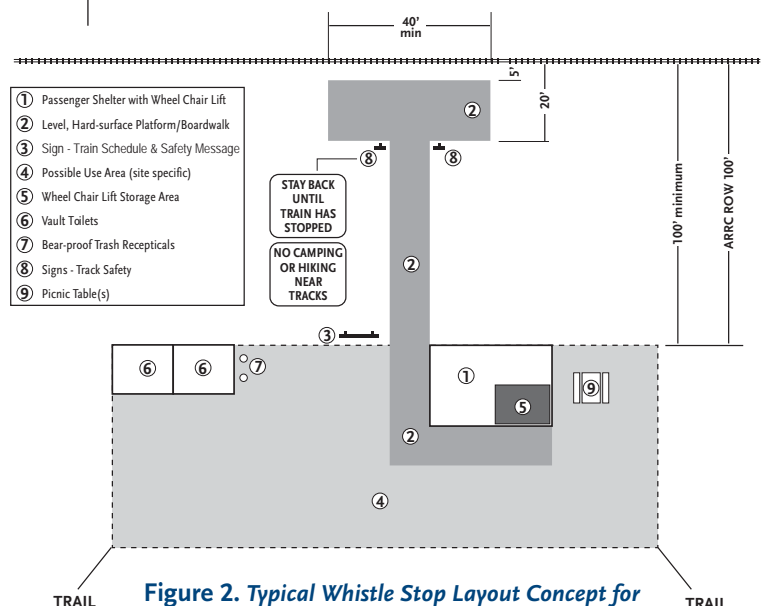


Figure 2. Typical Whistle Stop Layout Concept for Bartlett, Luebner Lake and Trail Creek sites

Spencer Whistle Stop

Design for whistle stop facilities was approved by the Forest Service and State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in December 2006. Pavilions and toilet facilities are representative of a historic railroad camp. Photos of the Dead Horse Creek (Curry) Railroad Construction Camp served as models for the board-and-batten theme for facility construction. All wood is white cedar, with boards 6 to 10 inches and randomly interspersed to provide an irregular appearance. Battens (narrow strips of lumber used to seal or reinforce a joint) are a uniform 1-by-2-inches.

All site pavilions have the same 16-by-20-foot footprint, but differ depending on sides left open, with board-and-batten siding or multi-pane window(s).

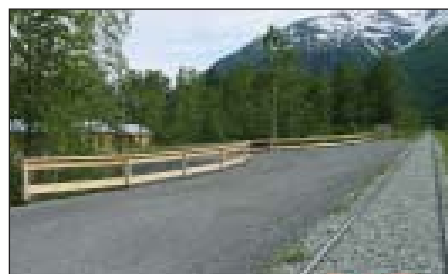
Facility construction began in May 2007 and was completed in July. Completion of the first site at Spencer made it possible to begin the whistle stop service in August 2007. U.S. Senators Ted Stevens (Alaska) and Daniel Inouye (Hawaii) attended a formal grand opening on August 16, 2007. This project milestone coincided with the Chugach National Forest's centennial celebration.



Toilets and trash receptacles.



Facilities are not far from the track.



Passenger platform beside the track.

A two-sided kiosk inbetween shelters offers interesting insight into the area. Shelter interiors feature interpretive items as well.



During Spencer's grand opening, a trailhead leading from the site featured a banner heralding the Chugach Forest's 100-year tenure.

Spencer Site Plan

The Grandview site plan will be similar to Spencer. Due to the larger size of these areas and anticipated use, Spencer and Grandview site layout and facilities differs somewhat from the remaining three sites.

