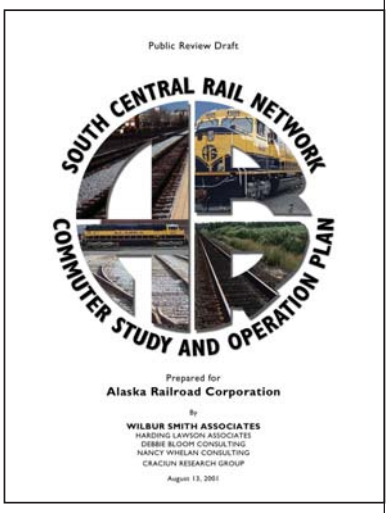
Commuter Rail Study and Operations Plan

PROJECT FACTS

Project Scope

Who would use a commuter rail service? Where should passenger facilities be located? What kind of mass transit would be used to transport commuters from the train depot to the workplace? How much would tickets cost? How often would trains run? What kind of facilities would be needed and what type of equipment would be used? Who would manage and operate the service? Is public funding required? What would Alaskans support?



To answer those questions, the Alaska Railroad (ARRC) commissioned the *Southcentral Rail Network Commuter Study and Operation Plan*. The study provides a blueprint for potential further actions taken by local and state officials to establish a viable and operational comuter rail system.

- Contract awarded to Wilbur Smith Associates in June 2000, with supporting work by Harding Lawson Associates, Debbie Bloom Consulting, Nancy Whelan Consulting, and Craciun Research Group.
- The analysis included contacts and visits with officials from the Alaska Railroad, Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB), City of Wasilla and Municipality of Anchorage (MOA). Public involvement activities included a survey of commuters in the Mat-Su Valley and forming commuter focus groups in January 2001.
- A draft study was released Sept. 10, 2001, and public meetings were held in Anchorage and Wasilla. Due by October 2001, public comment were incorporated into the final report.
- The ARRC Board of Directors approved the final report in February 2002 and a copy was forwarded to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).
- In May 2009, ARRC commissioned a phased update to the plan. Phase One tasks include updating ridership estimates and recommending appropriate service levels. Completed in October 2009, Phase One indicates initial ridership for a start-up commuter rail service meets original expectations.
- Phase Two is far more detailed, with tasks that include updating an operating schedule, recommendations for equipment, equipment maintenance plan, safety plan and regulatory requirements, ticketing and fare collection, customer service modifications, station locations, station designs, capital costs, financial evaluation and transit integration.
- Phase Two will be implemented in support of a Regional Transit Authority (RTA), which is an essential component to coordinating commuter rail and other commuter options. The State Legislature is currently considering legislation to authorize RTA formation. Subsequently, if the Municipality of Anchorage, Mat-Su Borough and other local governments establish and fund an RTA, the Alaska Railroad is committed to supporting the RTA by completing the second phase of the study.

Project Cost

- **2000-2002 Effort:** $200,000 funded 80% by the FTA, with 20% matching funds by the Alaska Railroad.
- **2009-2010 Update:** The $225,000 budget is funded by the FTA and Alaska Railroad.