

COMMUNITY

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Alaska Railroad Corporation
3rd Quarter, 2004

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The Spirit of Palmer locomotive breaks through the ribbon on the track next to the new Alaska State Fair Intermodal Commuter center during a ceremony August 26, the first day of the fair.

ARRC TESTS NEW SAFETY TECHNOLOGY

Alaska Railroad demonstrates system to detect broken rail

The Alaska Railroad (ARRC) is testing a system for detecting broken rail along track that is not equipped with automatic signals. The \$410,000 Track Integrity System test is a Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) technology demonstration project funded 93% by FRA and 7% by ARRC.

Along the railroad's "signalized" territory, a low voltage current runs through the rails so that they function as wires in a signal circuit. In the uncommon event that a rail breaks, the circuit's electrical current is disrupted and the railroad is alerted to the break. However, about 85% of ARRC's track corridor is not equipped with signals. In these "dark" areas, rail defects are discovered by frequent track inspections, as well as ongoing rail and roadbed maintenance.

Once installed, the Track Integrity System will apply electricity to the track to create circuits similar to those in signalized territory. When a train approaches, the locomotive's on-board system activates and checks the track circuits. If there is a problem, the on-board computer console displays a warning. If the crew does not stop the train, the on-board system will.

The track integrity test bed will consist of three five-mile sections of track north and south of Anchorage, and one locomotive equipped with an on-board computer and system software. System installation is taking place this summer and testing will be complete by summer 2005. If all goes well, the Alaska Railroad will have created an industry prototype that will contribute to the safety and cost-effectiveness of railroads across the country. ●

Alaska Railroad
Ongoing Projects:

Fairbanks Intermodal Facility

Anchorage Operations Center

Anchorage-to-Wasilla
Track Realignment

Ship Creek Intermodal Center

Whittier Passenger Access

Improved Sidings & Signals

Track Integrity Detection

Fish Passage Improvements

Palmer Park-and-Ride Center

Anchorage Rail Capacity Study

Whistle Noise Reduction System

Seward Loading Facility

For updates or comments on
these projects, visit the Alaska
Railroad web site at
www.AlaskaRailroad.com

LOCAL LAND USE JURISDICTION IN QUESTION

Legislature forms task force to mull if, how local zoning applies to Railroad

A group of railbelt municipal officials will help clarify whether, and to what extent, city and borough land use regulations should apply to land owned by the Alaska Railroad (ARRC). The Alaska Railroad Planning, Platting and Land Use Regulation Task Force was established in May by Senate Bill 395. The bill arose from a recent Alaska Supreme Court decision that called into question the Alaska Railroad's long-standing exemption from local planning and zoning ordinances.

The Railroad's mainline track passes through 13 recognized city and borough governments between Seward and North Pole. Representatives from these communities, seated on the task force, will consider planning and zoning issues and make recommendations to the legislature to clarify law during the 2005 session.

When the state purchased the Railroad from the federal government in 1985, the Transfer Act designated ARRC as a rail carrier engaged in interstate and foreign commerce. This subjected ARRC to regulation by the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), now known as the Surface Transportation Board. The ICC was formed following an 1886 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that held that states could not regulate interstate railroads through their patchwork of state laws. The court determined

that such local non-uniform and conflicting regulations would greatly impede interstate commerce by hindering the efficient transportation of goods between states and local jurisdictions.

Although the Railroad is now owned by the state, the federal Surface Transportation Board has exclusive jurisdiction over its operations and facilities and the Alaska Railroad shares the same interstate commerce protection from local regulation as every other railroad in the United States (see 49 U.S.C. 10501(b)). In addition to federal protections, ARRC interpreted its state statutes as explicitly exempting the Railroad from local planning and zoning for the 18 years following transfer. However, a March 2004 Alaska Supreme Court opinion held that "the legislature did not clearly express its intent to exempt the railroad from local zoning laws."

To address the ambiguity in the state law, SB 395 was initially drafted with provisions to make clear the statutory language exempting the Railroad from local land use jurisdiction. The exemption would have applied to railroad lands along the rail corridor, unless leased to third-parties. Leaseholders would, and currently do, comply with local planning and zoning laws. However, these provisions in the bill were replaced with a requirement to establish a land use task force to review the issues. ●

MOMENT IN HISTORY

RAILBELT REPO



When AMTRAK took over operation of inter-city passenger train routes by May of 1971, most of the private railroads in the United States had discontinued passenger service. Bucking that trend, the Alaska Railroad began adding passenger equipment to accommodate a growing number of visitors and residents wanting to ride the train. Much of this equipment had become surplus for the freight-only railroads. Pictured at left, in the ARRC Employee newspaper's January-February 1972 edition, is a "new" vistadome coach. This car was purchased, along with 30 other cars of various types, from Union Pacific Railroad in 1971. The passenger coach went into service in May 1972 and remains in service today. ●

REGIONAL ROUND-UP

Alaska Railroad activity from Seward to Fairbanks, and beyond

Seward: The Railroad is nearing completion on an Environmental Assessment (EA) of proposed improvements to the Seward Loading Facility that ARRC purchased last year with a federal grant. The goal is to continue to enhance efficiency so that Alaska coal (and potentially other resources) remains competitive in the global market. The EA is analyzing upgrades that would expedite the transfer of coal to and from the stockpile as well as accelerate loading coal on to ships. Comments from local officials and residents are being incorporated into the EA.

Anchorage: In late August, the Railroad began testing a new Train Whistle Noise Reduction System at the Klatt Road rail crossing in Anchorage. When a train approaches, automated wayside horns installed at the site will direct a whistle warning toward road traffic. This takes the place of the train-mounted horn, which radiates noise over a greater area. The intent of the wayside horn is to focus the noise, so that it impacts a smaller area. A different whistle noise reduction system will be installed at another crossing in Anchorage later this year.

Palmer: The Alaska State Fair Intermodal Commuter Center in Palmer (also known as the South Palmer Station) officially opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony August 26, the first day of the fair. The new facility offers ample parking, rider drop-off areas and efficient one-way traffic flow, along with a rail passenger shelter and roomy restrooms. Its completion adds another piece of infrastructure to support increased rail service between Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley. In the meantime, Mat-Su Community Transit (MASCOT) has already established the station as a flag stop, with commuter bus service Monday through Friday. The commuter bus will pick up at 6:18 a.m., arriving at the People Mover Transit Center (6th & H) at 7:20 a.m. The bus will leave Anchorage at 4:18, arriving at the Palmer Station around 5:20 p.m. For details, visit MASCOT's web site at www.matsutransit.com.



A wayside horn is mounted at Klatt Rd. crossing.

Wasilla: An Alternatives Assessment (AA) was recently completed to examine potential intermodal facilities and locations in the Wasilla area. An Alternatives Assessment is a pre-cursor to environmental studies (such as an EA) required for federally-funded projects. Similar assessments are underway for an underpass or overpass at the Knik-Goose Bay crossing and realignment of the track outside of downtown Wasilla. Once all three AA draft documents are complete, the Railroad will conduct a public meeting in fall / winter 2004.

Nenana: The Railroad is nearing completion on another EA initiated in 2003 to investigate a proposal to realign the track around downtown Nenana. The proposed alignment would reduce track length by nearly 2 miles, straighten a large sharp curve, and eliminate or significantly reduce rail traffic at six at-grade crossings. Rail service to Nenana's port would be maintained, and a potential spur could serve the Nenana airport. The document will be available for public review this fall.

Rail Extension to Fort Greely: Military members who commute between Fairbanks and Fort Greely may someday benefit from an idea that is quickly gaining momentum. The Railroad is working with the military to pursue extension of the track from Eielson AFB to Fort Greeley, near Delta Junction. The 80-mile extension could provide passenger and freight services needed in connection with a growing Defense presence in Interior Alaska. The Railroad can help buy down the cost of the project by issuing tax-exempt bonds backed by guaranteed military contracts. ●



ARRC Chairman John Binkley and Governor Frank Murkowski ride the train to a bill-signing event for legislation encouraging rail extensions to Ft. Greely and Canada.

ARRC TO REVAMP CORPORATE WEB SITE

Alaska Railroad requests public feedback on www.alaskarailroad.com

The Alaska Railroad is taking initial steps to revamp its corporate web site to make it more user-friendly and efficient. Please consider completing the survey below and faxing it back to (907) 265-2365 or mailing it back to PO Box 107500, Anchorage, AK 99510-7500 (Attention: Wendy Lindskoog). To thank you for your time, we'll put all survey respondent names into a drawing for four round-trip rail tickets valid for travel on the Alaska Railroad during summer 2005. ●

- 1** How often do you visit our web site? (check only one)
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Every day | <input type="checkbox"/> Several times a week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> About once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> Several times a month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> About once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> This is my first visit | |
- 2** Which sections did / do you visit? (check all that apply)
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scenic Rail Tours | <input type="checkbox"/> Freight Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate | <input type="checkbox"/> Real Estate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Projects | <input type="checkbox"/> Community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employment | <input type="checkbox"/> Suppliers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gift Shop | <input type="checkbox"/> Contact Information Page |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employee Resources | |

- 3** Did the menu item and navigation make sense to you?
 Yes No
- 4** How likely are you to return to the site? (on a scale of 1-5)
 1 - unlikely 2 3 4 5 - very likely
- 5** How likely are you to recommend this site? (scale of 1-5)
 1 - unlikely 2 3 4 5 - very likely
- 6** What features influence this decision?
- 7** What changes or additional features would you like to see?
- 8** How did you hear about the site? (check only one)
- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online or link from another site | <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper or magazine |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online news service | <input type="checkbox"/> Search engine |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Word of mouth | <input type="checkbox"/> This survey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Email | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): | |

Please fill in your name and phone number, and return with your survey by September 30, so that we can enter you into the prize drawing. Alternatively, you can complete the survey and enter to win a prize online at www.alaskarailroad.com.

Name _____ Phone # _____

We need your help to update our newsletter mailing list. Please let us know if you wish to be removed from our list. Also please make any corrections needed to your contact information. Send changes via fax to (907) 265-2365 or email to whelers@akrr.com.

Name misspelled Address wrong
 Contact person changed Remove me from the mailing list
 Yes, I want *Community Ties* via email to the email address below:

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