

News Release

**Alaska Railroad Corporation
U.S. Forest Service**



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Rail Car Propels Visitors to Alaska's Wild Backcountry

*Alaska Railroad and U.S. Forest Service dedicate new DMU Service to the
Chugach National Forest*

ANCHORAGE, Alaska –The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) will hold a dedication ceremony at the Ship Creek Intermodal Facility on June 30 for a new self propelled rail car the, “Chugach Explorer.” The Chugach Explorer is a Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) offering the traveling public a distinctive travel experience into the Chugach National Forest Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop, a recreational area like no other in the United States.

U.S. Senator Mark Begich, Anchorage Mayor-Elect Sullivan and a number of dignitaries, agency officials, and community partners will be in attendance for the dedication ceremony and will then take a tour on the DMU to Spencer Glacier and Grandview.

The new self propelled passenger coach was acquired with a federal agency grant in partnership with the United States Forest Service and the Federal Transit Administration. The coach will transport passengers from Anchorage to the Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop during the summer.

Passengers can board the new DMU train in Anchorage, Girdwood or Portage and travel deep into the Chugach National Forest to remote areas of Alaska that can only be accessed by train. This all-in-one unit is suited for the whistle-stop service because it can stop and start in a short distance, is fuel efficient and remarkably quiet. It has the power to pull two additional railcars.

The bi-level car includes 90 seats upstairs and 20 seats downstairs and also features a galley to support onboard food service. Two additional seats are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant, and the exits on either side of the car are both equipped with a wheelchair lift. The bi-level DMU is one of about a dozen such railcars in the United States that meet the more stringent federal crash worthiness design standards required of passenger cars that also operate in concert with freight cars.

The USFS has applied for an additional grant to secure a second required DMU to service the Chugach National Forest. A second DMU is essential to the Chugach National Forest and Alaska Railroad's shared public / private partnership and will serve as a vital safety back-up, ensuring a responsive redundancy while operating in the remote wilderness backcountry operation that makes up the whistle-stop corridor.

The DMU is being used on the Chugach National Forest Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop, the first of 5 Whistle Stop Stations. Currently, passengers may opt for a ticket to Spencer Glacier where they will step off the DMU with a U.S. Forest Service interpreter. The interpreter will lead a narrated walk to a viewing platform, about

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1.5 miles from the whistle-stop. Unguided and overnight use is also welcome, or visitors can prebook with an outfitter for Spencer lake canoe or rafting opportunities. The site includes a group campsite accommodating up to twenty-five people. The trail and facilities are fully accessible.

The completed project will include a series of Whistle Stop Stations with restrooms and other amenities where visitors can disembark the train to take a day or overnight trip into the heart of the Chugach National Forest. Multi-year plans call for a connected system of trails linking the different recreation sites and allowing visitors access to lakes, glaciers and high mountain passes. Once complete, visitors will also find campsites and public-use cabins along the trail system. Other recreation opportunities include guided interpretive hikes along the more developed trail segments as well as opportunities to engage in a variety of outfitted/guided recreation opportunities.

Currently the Alaska Railroad, along with a private vendor, operates several daytrips at Spencer Glacier and the Placer River as well as sightseeing further south at Grandview.

“Our partnership with the United States Forest Service on this project has been very successful,” said Pat Gamble, Alaska Railroad Corporation president and CEO. “We want to expand on that success and offer more opportunities to see and explore the natural beauty of the Chugach National Forest.”

“The Alaska Railroad has been a valued partner in connecting residents and visitors to the beautiful and un-roaded Chugach backcountry,” said Joe Meade, Forest Supervisor on the Chugach National Forest. “We look forward to extending this incredible recreation opportunity to our next four whistle stops.”

The car cost \$5.7 million to build. The DMU purchase was principally funded through securing a competitive grant administered through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) under the Paul Sarbaine Alternative Transportation to Parks and Public Lands Act which distributes up to \$25 million per year, for alternative transit. The initial funding was secured by the U.S. Forest Service, with funding beginning in 2007.

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Media: The dedication ceremony will take place on Tuesday, June 30 and begin promptly at 8:45 a.m. at the Ship Creek Intermodal Facility located at 411 W. 1st Ave. The DMU will depart at 9 a.m. and return at approximately 2:30 p.m. Media interested in covering the dedication ceremony are asked to arrive by 8:30 a.m. Media traveling on the DMU must contact Tim Thompson at 265-2695 before June 30 to be put listed on the manifest.

The ARRC is an Equal Opportunity Corporation. If you need special assistance in order to participate in any ARRC service, program, or activity, please contact The Alaska Railroad Corporation; P.O. Box 107500; Anchorage, AK 99510; Attention: Ouida Morrison- morrisono@akrr.com; 907-265-2529; via Alaska Relay Service for hearing impaired - Dial 7-1-1 from anywhere inside Alaska, OR dial toll-free from anywhere outside the state (800) 770-8255 (voice); (800) 770-8973 (TTY.) Upon request, printed materials can be made available in alternative formats.