



Testimony for United States Senate – Committee on Environment and Public Works
The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, United States Senator, Chairwoman Committee on
Environment and Public Works

April 14th, 2003 – Palmer, Alaska

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Railroad

Alaska Railroad and Transportation Planning and Needs

Alaska Railroad is a vital component of the transportation infrastructure for the entire State of Alaska. The railroad is comprised of 611 miles of track from Seward to Fairbanks and supports vital transportation needs for the entire State of Alaska providing links to and from other modes of transportation. The Alaska Railroad connects three major deep water ports, Anchorage, Whittier and Seward complementing the National Highway System comprised of the Seward Highway, Glenn Highway and the Parks Highway, to provide efficient and safe movement of interstate and intrastate goods and services and people.

Alaska Railroad supports the economic development of the communities through which it travels. As a consequence, we have come to understand our planning efforts must become more fully integrated with community needs and desires. To that end, the Railroad has become an active member of the federally recognized Metropolitan Planning Organization in the Anchorage area (AMATS), the Metropolitan Planning Organization in the Fairbanks area (FMATS) and is an active participant in the informal Regional Transportation Planning Organization comprised of the Municipality of Anchorage, Matanuska-Sustina Borough, the Alaska Railroad, representatives from the US Military and state legislature. Committee make-up includes the mayors of Anchorage and the Mat-Su Borough, Assembly members, local and state legislators, etc.

Railroad community outreach programs ensures the public has an opportunity to comment on railroad plans and projects. Railroad staff frequent community council meetings and other organizations presenting and explaining our programs. The Railroad is currently involved as technical advisors on local projects such as the Ship Creek Trail, Palmer Urban Revitalization project, Pt McKenzie Road and Rail Corridor Study, Meadow Lakes Long Range Plan, Wasilla Area Intermodal Planning Study, Fairbanks Rail Task Force and the Knik Arm Crossing Study.

Madame Chairwoman, as you know this is a key year for transportation because the 6 year surface transportation bill known as TEA-21 is up for reauthorization. The ARRC is very pleased and delighted because of your key committee position and the leadership you have already shown. We would like your support for realignment projects that will



support the growth and quality of life for Fairbanks, Nenana and Wasilla. These realignments details have been provided for your review under separate cover.

The Alaska Railroad believes in our mission of being a safe, high quality service transportation provider to our freight, passenger and real estate customers. This will allow us to foster our mission of development of Alaska's economy by integrating Railroad and railbelt community development plans. As such the Alaska Railroad fully supports the Knik Arm Crossing as a vital road/rail link which will dramatically expand the opportunity for development in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. The Crossing will dramatically improve the velocity of transportation movement throughout the entire region and its effects will be felt state-wide. The Crossing however, is only one piece of the total project. An equally critical component will be the "connectors" on each side of the Crossing. Adequate transportation links on both sides of the crossing will be vital to achieve all the benefits this vital project makes possible.

As the State looks at other opportunities to grow the Alaska economy, the Alaska Railroad will take its lead from state and federal policy makers regarding rail extension initiatives. The ARRC supports extending and building new railroad links and believes this falls under its mission to foster state and community economic development. The state will need congressional support to obtain capital funding for these initiatives that are important to growth and development of the Alaska economy. A rail link joining Alaska and Canada could serve vital national security interests as well as developing a new transportation link to the lower 48. A rail link west to Nome will enable development of world class reserves of mineral resources in the Kobuk Valley and other deposits.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address your committee and discuss the Alaska Railroad participation as a vital transportation provider.

ALASKA RAILROAD

2003 SESSION CONGRESSIONAL REQUEST

Federal Aid Highway High Priority Projects

A. Nenana Realignment (Request \$14 Million) (Exhibit A) – Straighten track to eliminate as many as six curves, of which three are excessively sharp (7, 9 and 12 degree) curves and **six mainline crossings** to improve the safe operations of the railroad. In addition, this project is expected to reduce train running time from Anchorage to Fairbanks by 8 minutes. We continue to receive support from the City of Nenana to coordinate the necessary right of way required to complete the project.

B. Fairbanks-North Pole Railroad Realignment) (Exhibit B)

PHASE 1 (Request \$43 Million -- Under this option, ADOT/FHWA would provide an additional \$29.6 Million) This phase of the project starting on the Eielson Branch near the Ft. Wainwright “3 Mile Gate” will allow ARRC to realign track onto the Tanana River Flood Levee for approximately ten miles. This section of the track crosses the Richardson Highway, and cuts through the City of North Pole and the Fairbanks North Star Borough. Significant improvements in the areas of safety and reduced noise will result from this phase of the project. As many as **thirty-eight railroad/highway crossings will be eliminated.**

PHASE 2 (Request \$50 Million) This phase of the project will extend the realignment effort through the City of Fairbanks and will realign another ten miles of track that will extend the safety improvements, reduce potential for noise impacts, add further savings in time by allowing increased speed, and reduce maintenance costs. The existing main line and spurs are currently routed through both urban and rural, commercial and residential areas within the city of Fairbanks and Fort Wainwright. **An additional ten railroad/highway crossings will be eliminated.**

C. Wasilla Alternate Route (Exhibit C)

Phase I – (Request \$8 Million) - This project will allow for substantial improvements in alignment without precluding alternatives for future realignment around the City of Wasilla Business District area. The project area is between curve 154 and curve 158B and will concentrate on reducing excessively sharp curvature in the existing alignment and substantially shorten the distance between the two curves allowing for increased train speeds and safer operations. This project will potentially eliminate five mainline crossings and enhanced safety features at new road crossings.

Phase II – (Request \$62 Million) – This project will provide for realignment around the City of Wasilla Business District area. The project boundary starts at the culmination of the Phase I project; i.e. at curve 158B with alternatives outside the business district area, connecting back to the existing track alignment on the north side of the city. This project is currently in conceptual planning and being reviewed by Wasilla Planning Committee Task Force that includes Borough, City, DOT and ARRC officials. All options proposed would greatly alleviate the existing traffic congestion and safety concerns associated with the existing alignment now passing directly through Wasilla’s business district.



Nenana Rail Realignment

PROJECT FACTS

Project Scope

The Alaska Railroad (ARR) is investigating potential realignment of the mainline track to the southern side of Nenana. The goal of this planning phase is to better define the scope, purpose and need through coordination with local, state and federal agencies, and through input from the community and general public. Phase 1 allows for work on the environmental/ (National Environmental Protection Act) NEPA process including preliminary engineering, environmental fieldwork and documentation, and public involvement activities.

Benefits

Currently, the track runs along the Nenana waterfront. Realignment to the southern side of the community has the potential to:

- Reduce rail traffic at 6 crossings, thereby reducing the risks inherent in all at-grade crossings, and improving traffic circulation in Nenana.
- Remove large 12 degree and 9 degree curves from the main track, thereby increasing efficiency and safety, by reducing the risk of derailment.

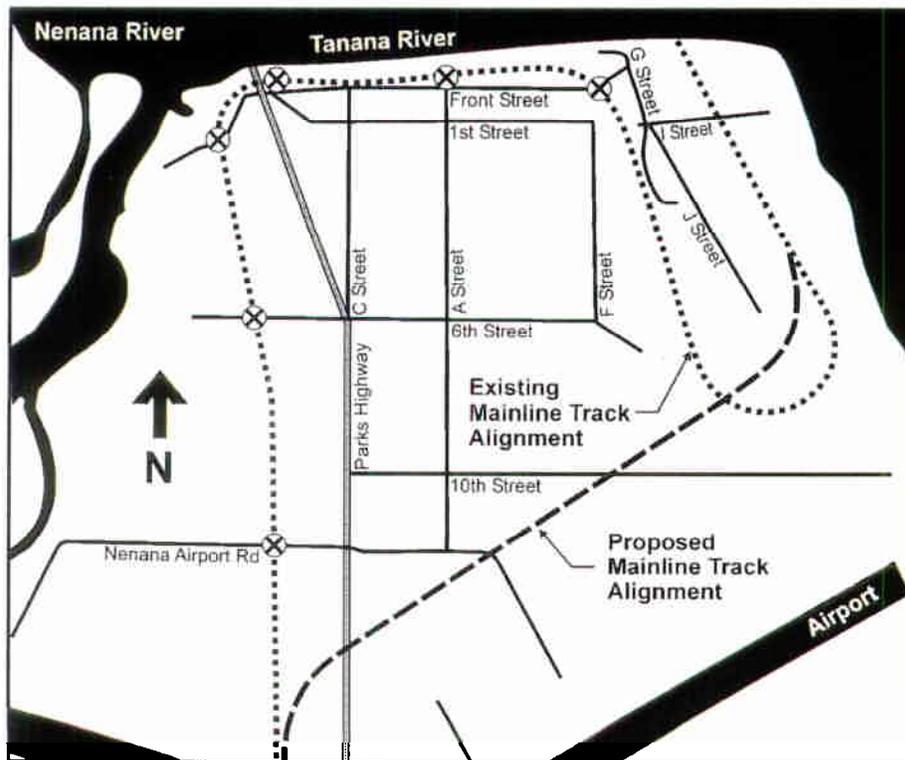
- Reduce the length of main track (and associated maintenance costs) by about 2 miles.
- Reduce running time by about 10 minutes.
- Maintain direct rail service to Nenana.
- Reduce flood hazard from the Tanana River in downtown Nenana.

Status

- Engineering and environmental studies will begin in early 2003 and public participation will be solicited during 2003.
- Completion of this planning phase is expected in late 2003.

Project Costs

- The budget for preliminary engineering, environmental studies and public involvement is \$500,000, funded 80% by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and 20% by ARR.
- The budget for design and construction will depend on the alternative selected, including analysis of a "no build" alternative.



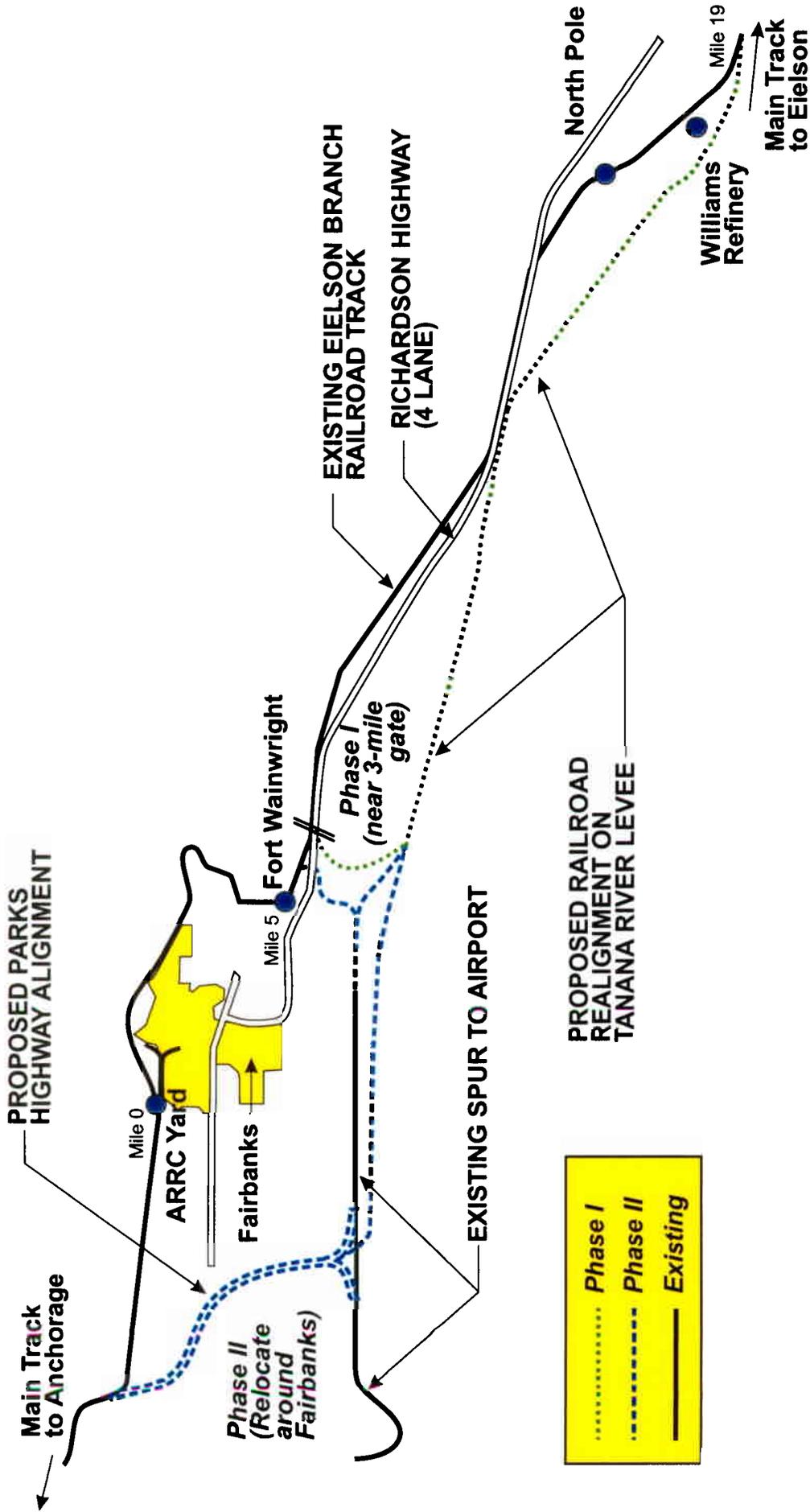
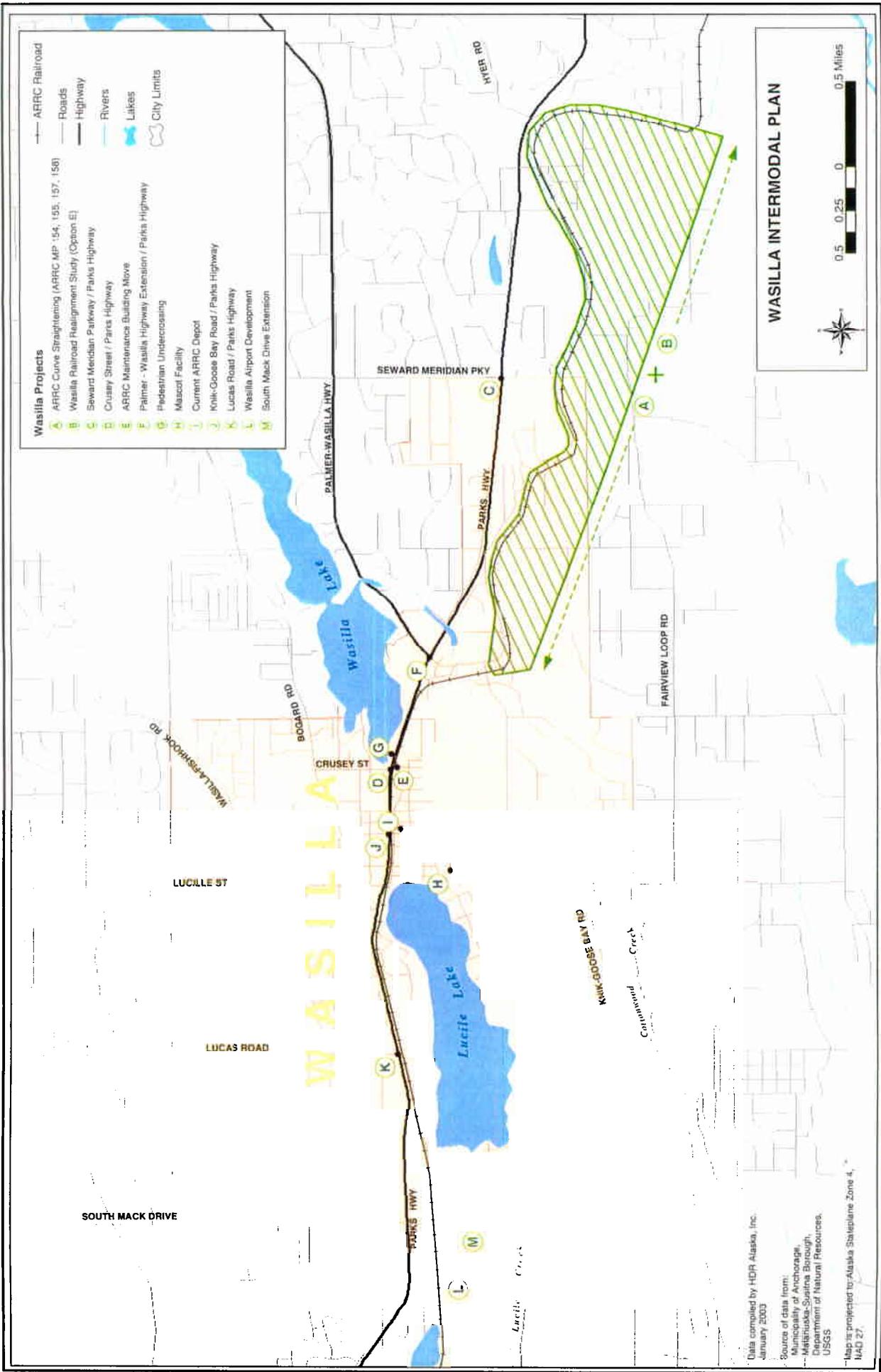


Exhibit B



Data compiled by HDR Alaska, Inc.
 January 2003
 Source of data from:
 Municipality of Anchorage,
 Matliksuqa-Sustina Borough,
 Department of Natural Resources,
 USGS
 Map is projected to Alaska Stateplane Zone 4,
 NAD 27.

Exhibit C