

FMATS Existing Conditions Report Comment - Response Transmittal

FMATS COMMENTS and HDR RESPONSES ON THE DRAFT EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT – February 24, 2017

Reviewers' comments to the FMATS Freight Mobility Plan (FMP) Draft Existing Conditions Report are identified below. HDR's specific responses and actions are also presented below for each comment. In the cases in which comments required revisions to the text, HDR identified these revisions with yellow highlights which are consistent with the revised text in the next version of this Draft Report.

Alaska Railroad Corporation - ARRC

Page Number/Section: Page 26, first sentence

ARRC Comment: ARRC freight trains are unscheduled and may move at any time over a 24-hour period. This is incorrect. Out freight train service between Anchorage and Fairbanks is regularly scheduled. Likewise, local service to the Airport Branch and the Eielson branch is regularly scheduled. ARRC does operate trains outside of these schedules such that any area many have a freight train at any time.

Resolution: The first sentence has been replaced with "The ARRC has regularly scheduled freight trains between Anchorage and Fairbanks. They also have regularly scheduled service to the Airport branch and the Eielson branch. The ARRC does operate trains outside of these schedules which may mean that any area may have a freight train at any time."

Page Number/Section: Page 26, first paragraph, last sentence

ARRC Comment: This sentence is confusion. While it is true that we do own property within the FAI boundary that we have not serviced in nearly 20 years, the way the sentence is written it leaves the impression that it refers to the entire Airport Branch. The fact is that the ARRC serves the rest of the Airport branch 4-5 times per week. We suggest this be clarified.

Resolution: The sentence has been revised to say "However, the portion of this rail line within the FAI boundary has not been used in over 20 years and is partially inoperable; the rest of the Airport branch has service 4-5 times per week."

Page Number/Section: Page 26, second paragraph

ARRC Comment: Midway through this paragraph, there is a discussion about coal deliveries to Clear AFB. Clear AFB is outside the FMATS boundary by over 50 miles, and the coal traffic does not, and did not ever originate from Fairbanks. We suggest removing the reference to Clear AFB coal deliveries.

Resolution: The sentence referring to coal deliveries to Clear AFB has been deleted.

Page Number/Section: Page 26:

ARRC Comment: The authors would have not have known this item as it was just announced last week. It really does not have much to do with Fairbanks, but it was noted on Pg 26 of the "Existing Conditions" that our Seward Coal Unloading facility had been idled. It has now been officially shut down

and the Hooper cars purchased for export coal were now for sale. It could be reopened within 90 days should business warrant, however that is not anticipated.

Resolution: Footnote deleted, because the sentence was also deleted in response to the comment above.

Page Number/Section: Page 27, first paragraph:

ARRC Comment: The entire first paragraph discusses railroad passenger traffic. This topic is not germane to the Plan, and the data itself is disjointed and not well related. ARRC suggests that the some statement regarding the fact that ARRC provides daily passenger service to Fairbanks each way, but no further data or discussion is required.

Resolution: The paragraph has been replaced with “In addition to freight, the ARRC also provides passenger service including regularly schedule service to/from Fairbanks.” Table 3-4 has also been removed.

Page Number/Section: 5.2.1

ARRC Comment: This section is very short and provides only several brief statements regarding the history of ARRC. These are facts that are widely known. What is widely not know is how the railroad is housed within the state government, how it is managed, and how it operates. We strongly suggest that it be substantially expanded to provide more detail and perspective rather than simply a brief history.

Resolution: The paragraph has been revised and now states “Congress funded railroad construction from Seward to Fairbanks in 1914. The Alaska Railroad was completed and began operations as a federally owned railway in 1923.¹ In 1985, the State of Alaska purchased the railroad, and subsequently has operated it as a state-owned corporation. Unlike other state agencies, the ARRC acts as an independent entity that owns and operates the railroad and manages railroad property. The ARRC receives no operating funds from the state and is expected to, and does, generate enough revenue to cover its expenses. It is governed by a seven-member board of directors appointed by the governor.”

Page Number/Section: Section 6.4, second paragraph

ARRC Comment: The discussion relating to landslides and avalanches on ARRC is not germane. The nearest area where this is a concern is over 100 miles from the FMATS boundary. ARRC suggests this paragraph be removed.

Resolution: Paragraph has been removed.

Appendix A, Page 16:

ARRC Comment: This section discussed the original 2001 Fairbanks Area Line Relocation Study. However, there was a substantial amount of additional work done in 2005 and 2006 to expand upon the study and refine the alternatives. This report is nowhere in the appendix and needs to be added.

Resolution: The 3-Mile Gate Alignment Study and Fairbanks North Pole Realignment Phase III Technical Analysis was added to the Appendix A. The text is shown below.

¹ For a short history of the ARRC, please see Section 2.1.

3-Mile Gate Alignment Study (2007)

Conducted By

PDC Engineers for the Alaska Railroad Corporation, 2007

Summary

The 3-Mile Gate Alignment Study was conducted to identify a route that connects the South Fairbanks Realignment, North Pole Realignment, and Fort Wainwright Realignment and to remove the existing at-grade crossing just west of 3-Mile Gate.

Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the 3-Mile Gate Alignment Study was to identify alternative alignments that connect the realignments and remove the existing at-grade crossing.

Key Freight Conclusions and Findings

The study identified three alternatives:

- High Speed Railroad, Highway over Rail
- Low Speed Railroad, Highway over Rail
- High Speed Railroad, Rail over Highway

A preferred alternative was not identified in this study.

Emerging Freight Issues

There is little to no information included within the plan that is related to freight movement.

Applicability to FMP

The 3-Mile Gate Alignment Study identified three alternatives that could improve the efficiency and safety of the transportation system in the 3-Mile Gate area.

Fairbanks-North Pole Realignment Phase III Technical Analysis (2007)

Conducted By

Tyrck Nyman Hayes, Inc. for the Alaska Railroad Corporation, 2007

Summary

This report documented information that can be used to assess the technical feasibility of realigning a portion of the ARRC's freight line in the Fairbanks area. The purpose of the realignment would be to reduce congestion resulting from traffic operations and improve traffic safety by eliminating at-grade rail crossings. Three alternatives (Parks Highway, Chena Pump, and Trainor Gate) were studied. The analysis did not recommend a preferred alternative but did determine that all three alternatives met the project goals of improving safety and reducing congestion.

Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the Fairbanks-North Pole Realignment Phase III Technical Analysis was to provide information for use in assessing the technical feasibility of realigning a portion of the ARRC's freight line to eliminate many of the at-grade rail crossings in and around the Fairbanks area. This strategy was designed as a way to improve traffic safety and reduce traffic congestion resulting from rail operations.

The study's primary objective was to provide stakeholders, including the ARRC, DOT&PF, the City of Fairbanks (COF), the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB), and others the data necessary to evaluate potential infrastructure modifications that may result from realignment of the ARRC rail line.

Key Freight Conclusions and Findings

The analysis documented three potential realignments of the ARRC in the Fairbanks area. A preferred alternative was not identified in this study. There was little to no information included within the plan related to freight movement.

Emerging Freight Issues

This study focused on rail infrastructure and there was little information that related to freight movement. The study recognized that "Local freight service in the Fairbanks area is provided by the Airport Branch serving the airport and the industrial area of South Fairbanks. Service to Fort Wainwright, Eielson Air Force Base, North Pole and the North Pole Refinery is provided by the Eielson Branch." It also noted that approximately 45% of ARRC's rail traffic move through the Fairbanks Terminal.

Applicability to FMP

The Fairbanks-North Pole Realignment Phase III Technical Analysis identified three alternative alignments for the ARRC that could improve the efficiency and safety of the transportation system in the Fairbanks area.

Appendix A, Page 29:

ARRC Comment: As a matter of proper planning practice, plans of this sort should not be using other draft plans as references as they have not been approved and are subject to change. This is particularly true of the current draft of the State rail Plan.

Resolution: Draft plans were included in our Literature Review because they were reviewed to determine if they had any information that would be useful in the FMATS Freight Mobility Plan. In many cases, the adopted plan is out of date old and contains information that is no longer relevant. Information from the draft plans will not be used for decision making purposes unless it has been coordinated with the appropriate entities.

Appendix A, Page 16:

ARRC Comment: Just as with the draft State Rail Plan, this document should not be referencing the draft Alaska Long-Range Transportation Plan. Please remove.

Resolution: Draft plans were included in our Literature Review because they were reviewed to determine if they had any information that would be useful in the FMATS Freight Mobility Plan. In many cases, the adopted plan is out of date old and contains information that is no longer relevant. Information from the draft plans will not be used for decision making purposes unless it has been coordinated with the appropriate entities.