

Wasilla Area Intermodal Plan

A Coordinated, Multi-agency, Transportation Improvement Program



FINAL

Prepared for:

**Alaska Railroad Corporation
Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
City of Wasilla
Matanuska-Susitna Borough
Matanuska-Susitna Community Transit**

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March 2003

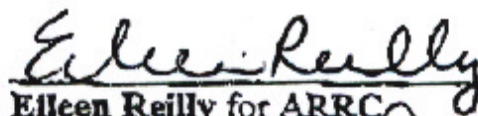
Wasilla Intermodal Plan

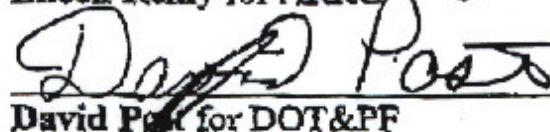
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Cooperating Agencies:

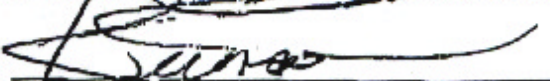
Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC)
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Matanuska-Susitna Borough
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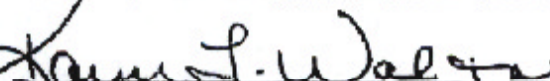
March 2003


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The signatures above represent agreement by the Wasilla Intermodal Planning steering committee to advance the recommended projects in this document (Phase I) into engineering and environmental analysis for Phase II of the Wasilla Intermodal Plan.

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The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the grantee or its consultants and not necessarily those of the Federal Transit Administration.

Recommendation Summary

Executive Summary

Several transportation agencies are developing and implementing a number of transportation and transit-oriented projects in the greater Wasilla area, in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, north of Anchorage, Alaska. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has requested that these agencies complete a joint planning effort to ensure federal funds are wisely and cooperatively invested.

Inadequacies in the transportation corridor through Wasilla have existed for quite some time. These agencies have pooled their resources together to seek coordinated, intermodal transportation solutions to the issues facing Wasilla's transportation challenges. The Wasilla Area Intermodal Plan comprises the results of that joint planning effort.

The major purpose of this document is to demonstrate a commitment by the transportation agencies – Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC), Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), Mat-Su Community Transit (MASCOT), City of Wasilla, and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough – to work together to explore ways of improving the Wasilla area transportation network.

Phase I of the Wasilla Area Intermodal Plan entails initial planning and project scoping for 16 transportation improvement projects in the project area. During Phase I, existing documents were reviewed and project personnel from the various projects were interviewed to obtain additional information. The results of Phase I are an identification of transportation improvement projects for environmental analysis and further engineering refinement (Phase II). This report summarizes which projects are recommended for advancement.

Summary of Issues

The following issues are being addressed in projects currently underway and will need to be continually addressed and coordinated among transportation providers as the Wasilla area population continues to increase.

- Increasing commuter trips between Wasilla and Anchorage.
- Poor traffic flow and circulation.
- Increasing friction and conflict between local access and through traffic.
- Increasingly unacceptable traffic congestion.
- Need for improved pedestrian access and safety in crossing major corridors.
- Need for improved safety for vehicle-train, pedestrian-train, and pedestrian-vehicle situations.
- Increasing congestion and safety concerns at several at-grade crossings.
- Need for adequate maintenance and rail station facilities.
- Need to seek Intermodal solutions to the problems facing the area.
- Desire to enhance downtown Wasilla transportation corridor.

Recommendations for Phase II (Engineering and Environmental Analysis)

The projects suggested for further design and environmental analysis in Phase II are inter-related to each other with environmental affects and tradeoffs that would benefit from a coordinated and integrated design and environmental analysis effort. The following list is of projects that are recommended for further study in Phase II.

- Conceptual rail engineering and potential environmental analysis for track straightening between ARRC mileposts 152.8 and 158.6 (Curves 154 – 158B).
- Investigation of an intermodal rail station that could include accommodation of commuter rail train set maintenance and/or the track maintenance facility, and/or a passing track/passenger siding. The following locations are reasonable alternatives: Airport/Transportation Museum area, Kenai Building Supply area, and Fairview Loop area. The existing depot site will be explored as the no action alternative.
- Investigate grade separation at Knik-Goose Bay Road.
- Investigate grade separation at South Mack Drive.

Project Summary Matrix	Sponsor	Stage	Phase II?	Reasoning/ Recommendation
Curves at ARRC Mile Post 154, 155, 157, 158	ARRC	Various	Yes	Advancing jointly to reduce curves and straighten tracks.
Wasilla Railroad Realignment Study Option E	City	Planning	Yes	
DOT&PF Parks Highway Improvements	DOT&PF	Various	No	Design and environmental complete.
Knik-Goose Bay Road & Parks Highway Intersection	ARRC/ DOT&PF	Planning	Yes	Look at possible grade-separation.
Intermodal Facility Options	ARRC	Planning	Yes	Examine locations for feasibility and environmental impacts to identify a preferred alternative.
Wasilla Maintenance Facility	City/ MASCOT	Construction	No	Categorical Exclusion complete. Project has independent utility.
ARRC Maintenance Building Move	ARRC	Planning	Yes	Explore in conjunction with Intermodal Facility Option. Project does have independent utility.
Pedestrian Tube	City/ DOT&PF	Final Design	No	Design and environmental complete.
Wasilla Airport Development	City	Construction	No	Area should be considered as a potential intermodal facility site.
South Mack Drive Extension	City	Construction	Yes	Extension is partially complete. Phase II should address grade separation, since it may be funded before construction to Knik Goose Bay Road.

Project Background

Intermodalism entails coordinated transportation policy and decision-making, interconnections among modes of transportation, and use of multiple modes for a single trip. Congress recognized the importance of the intermodal approach to the Nation's transportation system in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). In this Act, Congress established a new emphasis on a coordinated approach among all modes for providing transportation services.

The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) in cooperation with Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), the City of Wasilla, the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough, and Mat-Su Community Transit (MASCOT), are developing and implementing a number of transportation and transit-oriented projects in the greater Wasilla area. Many of these projects are funded through Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) or Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grant programs. The FTA has requested a joint planning effort be conducted among the several agencies to ensure that federal funds are wisely and cooperatively invested. This project comprises the results of that joint planning effort.

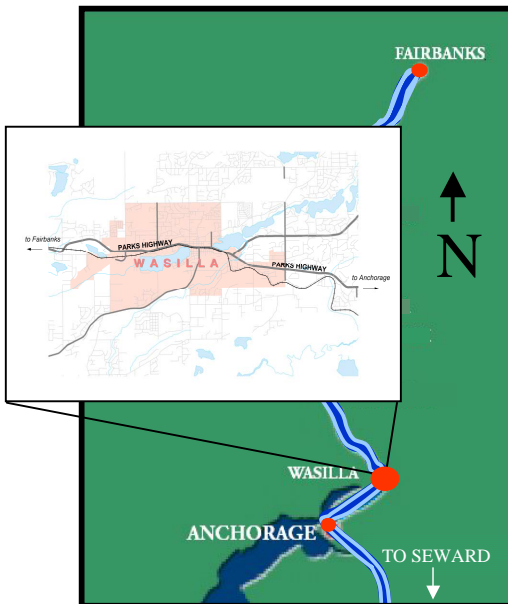
A number of the projects under consideration are to develop "intermodal" facilities to support improved transit operations. Intermodalism, by definition, anticipates joint-use facilities or interaction among different transportation and/or transit modes. Transit operators currently active in the Wasilla area are the ARRC and MASCOT. ARRC stops in Wasilla twice a day during the summer and less frequently during the winter. MASCOT operates on a year-round schedule and has expressed interest in working with the ARRC to provide feeder bus routes to support future commuter rail service.

Community Description

Wasilla is located in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough in south-central Alaska on the (Anchorage to Fairbanks) Parks Highway. Located 43 miles north of Anchorage, Wasilla (and the Mat-Su Valley) is among the fastest growing regions in Alaska. Wasilla lies south of the Talkeetna Mountains, about 12 miles north of Knik Arm on Cook Inlet, and is located alongside the Alaska Railroad mainline which stretches from Fairbanks to Anchorage, and then on to Seward.

Population growth has been rapidly shifting from Anchorage to the Mat-Su Borough over the past 15 years. The population growth in the Borough is partly attributable to the lack of affordable housing and developable land for new residential land tracts in Anchorage. The Mat-Su Borough gained more than 20,000 new residents between 1990 and 2000. The 2000 census states Mat-Su's population at 59,322, up from 39,683 in 1990, and 17,816 in 1980.

The majority of people live in the southern part of the Mat-Su Borough (the Mat-Su Valley) within about an hour drive time of the Anchorage metropolitan area. The two largest towns in the Mat-Su Borough are Palmer and Wasilla, each with a current population of roughly 5,000 residents. The "Core-Area" of the Mat-Su Valley is largely residential. Approximately 35% of the employed labor force commutes south to Anchorage on a daily basis (State of Alaska, Department of Labor).



Wasilla Transportation Corridor & Conditions

Construction of the Alaska Railroad and the statewide road system also fueled population growth in the Wasilla area. Wasilla's history as a community dates back to 1917 when the federal government sold town lots prior to constructing the Alaska Railroad. The Railroad officially opened service through the community from Anchorage to Fairbanks in 1923 and provided the only direct link between the Mat-Su Valley and Anchorage until road access came in the 1970s.



Significant roadway capacity projects are planned in the Wasilla area to deal with the ever-growing numbers of residents.

Direct road access to and from Anchorage through Wasilla came with the construction of the Parks Highway in the early 1970s. This development enabled Anchorage workers and their families to live in the Wasilla area, and commute each day to the city for employment. Support and service industries began to expand to meet the needs of new residents. The City of Wasilla incorporated in 1974, and has developed as the retail and commercial hub of the central Mat-Su Borough.

Land use patterns have been largely shaped by the early development of the rail and highway corridor. As Wasilla grew, it grew linearly along the rail/highway corridor. As the population increased, demand for north-south crossings of the rail/highway corridor also increased. When the population was small, these crossings were not a problem. With the community's rapid expansion over the past 15 years, however, the growing population and roadway traffic has overburdened the road network and increased the traffic crossing the highway and railroad as well as the traffic running along these major corridors. The increasing cross traffic (road and pedestrian) coupled with increasing through traffic causes safety concerns for at-grade crossing of both rail and highway facilities. Recreational land development north of Wasilla increased through traffic dramatically and now presents its own problems burdening local traffic pattern. The growth and inefficient layout of the road network exacerbates conditions.

To deal with the growing traffic problems, the State has embarked on an aggressive road construction program in the area. The state's emphasis on the Parks Highway corridor reflects the highway's importance as one of the state's main commercial corridors and Mat-Su Valley's rapid growth. Up to 20,000 cars and trucks a day travel along the Parks Highway south of Wasilla. Wasilla is the hub for several regional roads, including the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, Wasilla-Fishhook, and Knik-Goose Bay Road.

For many years, long-term transportation plans in Wasilla have included either a rail or a highway bypass. The 2002 Parks Highway Corridor Management Plan calls for a possible second or even a third corridor to address the traffic volume anticipated by 2030. The Plan says that if all the roadway(s) have direct access, as many as 12 lanes could be needed to carry the expected east-west traffic in downtown Wasilla. A 1982 Parks Highway location study investigated

alternative alignments for the Parks Highway through and around Wasilla to accommodate the projected traffic growth. Eventually, additional travel lanes will be needed on any section not bypassed.

To help alleviate the growing travel demand through the corridor into Anchorage, the Alaska Railroad has been pursuing rail improvements that, when complete, will provide commuter rail and enhanced passenger services through the corridor.

Several studies have been conducted for the ARRC and Mat-Su Borough related to commuter (rail) transportation projects. The Knik Arm (Alaska Regional Multimodal) Transportation Project Report (January 2000) was conducted for the Mat-Su Borough, in consultation with DOT&PF and the Municipality of Anchorage. This report calls for improvements that reduce track curvature and increase the speed of all trains, which will reduce travel time for commuters and improve railroad-operating efficiency. The South Central Rail Network Report (2001), produced for the ARRC, reported roadway congestion as the cause to commuter (vehicle) trips to Anchorage taking longer. The report suggests that implementation of a locally sponsored commuter rail service would enhance commuting alternatives. The report also suggests with the rail route between Wasilla and Anchorage being upgraded with straighter tracks, these improvements would translate to higher capacity and speeds on the route – speeds which could provide for a commuter rail service making the trip between Wasilla and downtown Anchorage in about an hour.

Transportation Service Providers

The transportation agencies providing services in the Wasilla area are the ARRC and MASCOT, DOT&PF, and the Mat-Su Borough.



ARRC Services

The ARRC service from Seward to Fairbanks includes both passenger and freight service. In 1998, the ARRC moved 614,000 passengers and 5,445,000 tons of freight over 525 miles of track. The ARRC stops in Wasilla twice a day during the summer and less frequently during the winter. During the summer, ARRC passenger services offer one northbound and one southbound trip daily between Anchorage and Fairbanks. During the winter, ARRC passenger services offer one northbound and one southbound trip weekly between Anchorage and Fairbanks.

MASCOT

MASCOT service began in 1998 as a pilot program with a refurbished vehicle from the Alaska Mental Health Trust. A year later, MASCOT formed as an Alaska non-profit organization that sets as its mission, “to provide a reliable, accessible, cost efficient, and effective transportation system which will increase the mobility of Mat-Su Valley residents and visitors.”



MASCOT operates a year-round schedule. Current commuter service exists between Wasilla and Palmer, Wasilla/Big Lake/Houston, and to Anchorage via an Eagle River Transit Station. MASCOT offers two trips daily southbound from the Wasilla Senior Center to the Eagle River Transit Station in addition to two flag stop services. Two northbound trips from the Eagle River Transit Station to the Wasilla Senior Center are offered daily as well as two flag stop trips originating from Eagle River. Since inception, MASCOT ridership has grown from 125 at start-up to nearly 6,000 in January 2002.



DOT&PF

The DOT&PF has primary responsibility for development and maintenance of State roads. As such DOT&PF maintains the Parks Highway, which runs through the heart of Wasilla. Other relevant roads DOT&PF maintains in the project vicinity are the Seward-Meridian Parkway, Palmer-Wasilla Highway, Lucas Road, Crusey Street, and Knik-Goose Bay Road.

City of Wasilla

The City of Wasilla has primary development and maintenance responsibility over local roads within the city limits. The City of Wasilla's maintenance duties fall into eight road service areas, of which the airport area falls into one of these areas. From an intermodal standpoint, the airport development area is important to the City maintenance duties. The City of Wasilla currently maintains Mack Drive and plans to extend its maintenance obligations to include the South Mack Drive extension, which is currently underway.



Matanuska-Susitna Borough

The Mat-Su Borough is the third largest borough in the state, both geographically and by population. The Borough is responsible for road construction and maintenance of most roads within the borough, excluding the three incorporated cities (Palmer, Houston, and Wasilla) and DOT&PF roads. The Borough maintains more than 1,000 miles of road, most paved within a central core from Willow to Sutton. Approximately 20% of these roads are paved.



As a second-class borough, the Mat-Su Borough has planning, platting, and land use regulation powers as authorized in Alaska Statutes Title 29. This statute requires the borough to provide for planning, platting, and land use regulation on an areawide basis and to establish a planning commission. The planning commission prepares and submits to the assembly for approval, a comprehensive plan for the systematic and organized development of the borough and reviews, recommends, and administers measures necessary to implement the comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan is a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, and maps for guiding the physical, social, and economic development, both private and public, of the borough.

Transportation Issues and Needs

Most of the transportation issues facing the Wasilla area stem from the rapid population growth and subsequent increase in roadway traffic and congestion. The Parks Highway is heavily used throughout the year by tourists and Alaskans traveling between Fairbanks and Anchorage and to Denali National Park. Unacceptable congestion and traffic jams are common in and around Wasilla, where the roadway also serves as the key commute corridor to Anchorage. Congestion has been growing not only along the Parks Highway, but also along adjacent and parallel routes.

The following issues and needs are driving the slate of transportation improvements identified and documented in this plan:

- A growing population in the Mat-Su Valley, with growing numbers of commuters to Anchorage, and the associated travel demand;
- Poor traffic flow and circulation caused by local road access competing with through traffic;
- Unacceptable levels of roadway traffic congestion;
- An increasing need for an intermodal rail commuter facility to help ease the growing roadway congestion problems;
- Straightening ARRC tracks to enable competitive and attractive commuter services;
- A desire for an enhanced central business district in downtown Wasilla (an established transportation corridor competing with other growing community desires);
- Lack of pedestrian access and need for pedestrian safety improvements for highway and rail crossings;
- A need to address the safety and congestion issues for vehicles caused by at-grade crossings of the rail tracks and the highway;
- Need for new intermodal buildings and/or building relocations that support bus transit and commuter rail options.

Common Goals and Objectives

The following are broad goals identified by the Steering Committee that focus on multimodal planning efforts to better meet the Wasilla transportation corridor needs:

- Develop and establish commuter rail services to meet increasing commuter needs and demands;
- Establish intermodal facilities that will support rail and bus transit alternatives;
- Improve rail transit times to make bus-rail transit options more competitive and attractive;
- Design road improvements to ease traffic flow, circulation, and congestion in the Wasilla transportation corridor;
- Increase access and safety for pedestrians across the highway and railroad corridors;
- Remove or improve at-grade crossings to foster safety and transportation efficiency;

- Improve general roadway and rail safety;
- Provide adequate maintenance buildings preferably outside of downtown Wasilla, with a side benefit of enhancing downtown Wasilla.

Wasilla Area Intermodal Planning Project Goals Matrix	Improve Travel Times	Improve Traffic Safety	Improve Capacity/Circulation	Reduce At-Grade Crossings	Allow for future Commuter Options	Results in less congestion in Wasilla's CBD	Improve Local Access & Through Traffic	Improve Pedestrian Access & Safety	Building Relocation
Curves at ARRC Mile Post 154, 155, 157, 158	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Wasilla Railroad Realignment Study Option E	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
DOT&PF Parks Highway Improvements Seward-Meridian Parkway Palmer-Wasilla Highway Extension Lucas Road North and Crusey Street	√	√	√	√		√	√		
Knik-Goose Bay Road & Parks Highway Intersection	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Intermodal Facility Location Options Current ARRC depot Kenai Supply Co. Building Location Fairview Loop Location Wasilla Airport Location	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√
Wasilla Maintenance Facility	√	√	√		√	√		√	√
ARRC Maintenance Building Move									√
Pedestrian Tube		√		√				√	
Wasilla Airport Development	√	√					√	√	
South Mack Drive Extension	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	

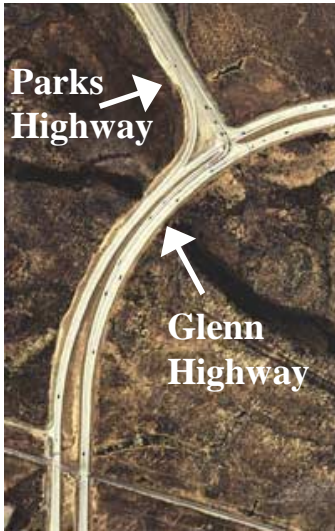
Multimodal Solutions Envisioned

To deal with the growing transportation demands, the transportation providers have planned a number of road, rail, and bus transit improvements. See detailed project descriptions, beginning on page 16.

Rail

To help deal with the growing transportation demands through the corridor and to achieve its transportation goals, the ARRC has been investigating and developing commuter rail and other passenger services upgrades in the Wasilla area. ARRC received a \$2.5 million Sec. 5309 New Start appropriation in FY02, which can be used for re-alignments, signalizations and other improvements. Current track

conditions are not amenable to a commuter rail service. Studies indicate that before a commuter rail is feasible, the travel time to Anchorage would have to decrease from 1.5 hours to less than one hour. The ARRC has been making track improvements and has more planned. When the ARRC track straightening projects are complete, the travel time one-way from Wasilla to Anchorage will be 58 minutes. In addition to reducing travel time, every curve removed also reduces wheel wear and wear on trains. Labor costs will also decrease because the train trip from Anchorage to Fairbanks will become a single shift. Capacity improvements also include a need for a siding in the Wasilla area to handle the increased forecast for train traffic through the corridor. Finally, to provide a safe and attractive passenger rail service, one or more new stations are needed within the Wasilla area.



The Glenn-Parks Highway Interchange is an example of transportation improvements between Wasilla and Anchorage

To effectively initiate commuter service, it will be necessary to have support facility infrastructure in place to accommodate the commuter trains and passengers at both ends of the journey. The ARRC is working to improve transit and pedestrian connections at the Anchorage end. A draft environmental assessment is in progress for an intermodal transportation center and associated improvements (e.g., pedestrian amenities, transit, parking, rail track changes) in the Ship Creek area of Anchorage to help support passenger connections at the Anchorage end of the trip.

Roads

More than \$63 million worth of paving, smoothing, realigning, and expanding was scheduled in 2002 on Mat-Su Borough roads, for arterials such as the Palmer-Wasilla Highway to more rural routes, such as Hatcher Pass Road. The Glenn Parks Highway Interchange Project, which is underway to replace the at-grade intersection of two of Alaska's largest highways with a grade-separated interchange, is another area improvement project. A number of the projects documented in this plan are intended to deal with the traffic congestion and safety problems in the Wasilla corridor.

Bus Transit

As a relatively new transit provider, MASCOT is still building the foundations of their service. FTA allocated \$800,000 in funding for MASCOT's joint venture with the City of Wasilla in a transportation/bus maintenance facility. Their primary short-term needs are for a bus maintenance and storage facility and additional busses for their fleet. In the long-term, MASCOT will play an important role in a commuter rail system, providing feeder bus service to a future Intermodal passenger station. In terms of a future bus station, it may be advantageous to be co-located with the ARRC station.

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Wasilla Area Intermodal Planning Process

Steering Committee formation

A joint committee (“Steering Committee”) consisting of representatives from state and local Wasilla-area transportation providers was formed to provide oversight on the plan’s development and to help coordinate transportation project development. The Steering Committee held a number of coordination meetings in Wasilla to discuss planned projects in the Wasilla area. The impetus for the coordination was several fold:

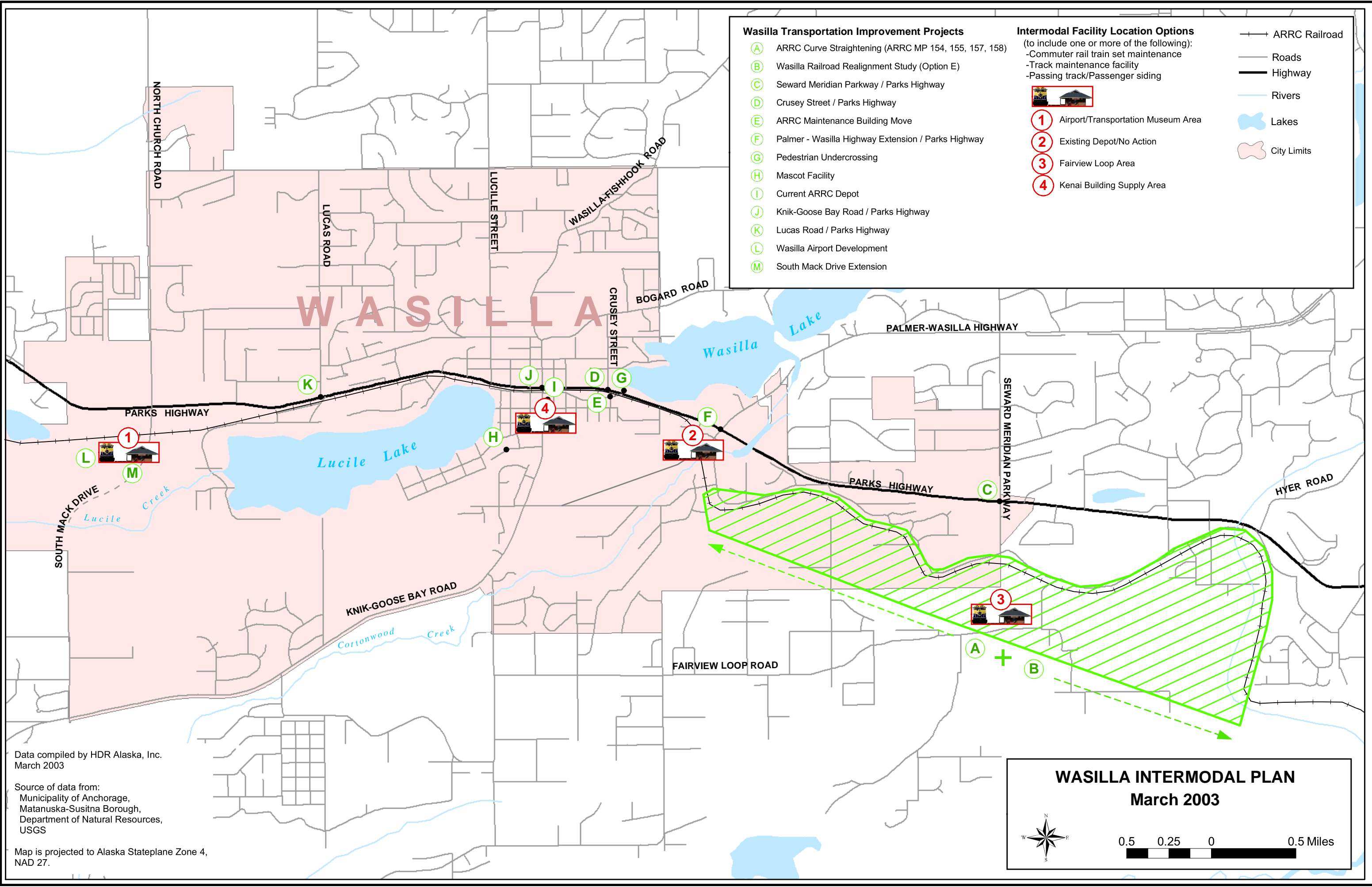
- FTA Region X requested such an effort to ensure **coordinated planning** was occurring;
- ARRC was processing a **grant for a Wasilla intermodal facility** (FY00 Sec 5309 Bus allocation which would lapse), while at the same time MASCOT and the City of Wasilla also received **grants for intermodal facilities** (FY02 Sec 5309 Bus allocations);
- DOT&PF is developing **several highway upgrades** which impact traffic circulation and rail facilities in the Wasilla area, making it critical that the various agencies coordinate the timing and scope of their improvements;
- City of Wasilla just completed a **rail realignment** reconnaissance study, to help reconcile railroad impacts on circulation and local neighborhoods.

The first Steering Committee meeting was February 28, 2002. The Committee met in Wasilla to discuss planned projects in the Wasilla area and to coordinate planning efforts. Another Steering Committee meeting was held on December 12, 2002. The meeting purpose was to brief the Steering Committee with the data collected during project scoping under Phase I; to discuss the environmental documentation phase for each project; and to receive Steering Committee recommendation to move projects forward into Phase II. A Steering Committee meeting was held in Wasilla on January 30, 2003. Hard copies of the Draft Wasilla Area Intermodal Plan were distributed to those present. An email version had been sent to committee members earlier in the week. The purpose of this meeting was to review recommendations made in the draft report to move projects forward into Phase II.

Transportation Improvements to be investigated

The Steering Committee originally developed a list of 16 transportation improvement projects that are either in the conceptual, design, or construction phase in the greater Wasilla area with a need for coordination and opportunity for integrated development. The list of potential projects to be explored included the following 16 projects:

1. Curves at ARRC Mile Post 154, 155, 157, 158
2. Wasilla Railroad Realignment Study Option E
3. Parks Highway to Seward Meridian
4. Intermodal Facility – Fairview Loop at Wal-Mart
5. Parks Highway to Crusey Street



- Wasilla Transportation Improvement Projects**
- (A) ARRC Curve Straightening (ARRC MP 154, 155, 157, 158)
 - (B) Wasilla Railroad Realignment Study (Option E)
 - (C) Seward Meridian Parkway / Parks Highway
 - (D) Crusey Street / Parks Highway
 - (E) ARRC Maintenance Building Move
 - (F) Palmer - Wasilla Highway Extension / Parks Highway
 - (G) Pedestrian Undercrossing
 - (H) Mascot Facility
 - (I) Current ARRC Depot
 - (J) Knik-Goose Bay Road / Parks Highway
 - (K) Lucas Road / Parks Highway
 - (L) Wasilla Airport Development
 - (M) South Mack Drive Extension

- Intermodal Facility Location Options**
 (to include one or more of the following):
 -Commuter rail train set maintenance
 -Track maintenance facility
 -Passing track/Passenger siding
- 1 Airport/Transportation Museum Area
 - 2 Existing Depot/No Action
 - 3 Fairview Loop Area
 - 4 Kenai Building Supply Area

- ARRC Railroad
- Roads
- Highway
- Rivers
- Lakes
- City Limits

Data compiled by HDR Alaska, Inc.
 March 2003

Source of data from:
 Municipality of Anchorage,
 Matanuska-Susitna Borough,
 Department of Natural Resources,
 USGS

Map is projected to Alaska Stateplane Zone 4,
 NAD 27.

WASILLA INTERMODAL PLAN
March 2003

Initial 16 projects grouped together according to Primary Agency Sponsor and functional relationship

- **Curves at ARRC Mile Post 154, 155, 157, 158 (ARRC)**
- **Option E from Wasilla Realignment Study (City of Wasilla & ARRC)**
- **DOT&PF Parks Highway Improvements**
Seward-Meridian Parkway
Palmer-Wasilla Highway Extension
Lucas Road North and Crusey Street
- **Knik-Goose Bay Road & Parks Highway Intersection**
(DOT&PF, ARRC, City)
- **Intermodal Facility Location Options**
(All agencies)
Current ARRC depot
Kenai Supply Co. Building Location
Fairview Loop Location
Wasilla Airport Location
- **Wasilla Maintenance Facility**
(City, MASCOT)
- **ARRC Maintenance Building Move**
- **Pedestrian Tube (City, DOT&PF)**
- **Wasilla Airport Development (City)**
- **South Mack Drive Extension (City)**

6. ARRC Maintenance of Way Move
7. Palmer-Wasilla Highway/ Parks Highway Grade Separation
8. Pedestrian Undercrossing
9. Intermodal Facility (all)
10. Wasilla Maintenance Facility
11. Current ARRC Station
12. Knik-Goose Bay (KGB), ARRC, Parks Highway Intersection
13. Parks Highway – KGB North (Lucas Road North)
14. Wasilla Airport Development
15. Church Road (South Mack Drive) Extension
16. Intermodal Facility (ARRC Wasilla)

One of the outcomes of the Steering Committee coordination was group agreement that the ARRC should proceed to use part of the FY00 SEC 5309 Bus allocation money for planning assistance – thus, the Wasilla Area Intermodal Planning Project. The ARRC drafted a scope of work for a request for proposals (RFP) for preliminary engineering, alternatives analysis, and environmental documentation that would cover the projects having potential for joint cooperation. The Committee reviewed the RFP and acted as a technical committee throughout the contract.

Scope of Services

The ARRC contracted with HDR Alaska, Inc. in the Fall 2002 to conduct initial planning and project scoping under Phase I for the 16 initial projects. ARRC is the Grantee and contract manager of this intermodal planning project. The project potentially calls for three phases. Phase I consists of project research and data collection on the 16 initial projects in the greater Wasilla area (this document contains the results of Phase I). An outcome of Phase I are recommendations of projects to undergo preliminary engineering and environmental analysis in Phase II. Phase II will include preliminary engineering, public involvement, and environmental documentation on projects moving forward. Projects from Phase II may subsequently be advanced into Phase III for final design services.

Phase I Project Research and Data Collection

The intent of Phase I was to collect sufficient information to review the 16 projects and inform the Steering Committee of potential “interconnectivity” of the projects. During initial analysis, and based on input from steering committee members and data gathered, these projects were categorized into groups according to similar scope, proximity and function, and/or primary agency sponsorship (see left side bar). The type of information collected for each of the projects included:

- **Contact information;**
- **Project function and its relationship to the existing transportation system;**
- **Features of the proposed project including length, mode, alignment, stations, etc;**
- **Cost estimates;**
- **Project status, schedule and milestones.**

Projects to be advanced to Phase II

- Curves at ARRC Mile Post 154, 155, 157, 158
- Option E from Wasilla Realignment Study
- Intermodal Facility Location Options
 - Kenai Supply Co. Building Location
 - Fairview Loop Location
 - Wasilla Airport Location
- ARRC Maintenance Building Move
- Siding location analysis (in conjunction with an intermodal facility if possible)
- Knik-Goose Bay Intersection Grade-separation.
- South Mack Drive Grade-Separation

Projects *NOT* to be advanced to Phase II

- DOT&PF Parks Highway Improvements
 - Knik-Goose Bay Road & Parks Highway Intersection
- Wasilla Maintenance Facility
- Pedestrian Tube
- Wasilla Airport Development (except as a possible intermodal facility location or ARRC siding location)
- South Mack Drive Extension (except as a possible intermodal facility location or ARRC siding location and potential grade-separation)



Project Scoping

HDR met with members of the Steering Committee and other key stakeholders to discuss each of the projects to be analyzed as part of the intermodal planning effort. HDR team members toured the Wasilla project area and visited each of the 16 project locations. HDR collected and reviewed existing documents and spoke with relevant personnel to obtain additional project information. See Appendix A for a list of background documents that were obtained for project analysis.

Phase I Results

The Steering Committee reviewed the data collected during Phase I; and recommended projects to move forward into Phase II. The remainder of this document contains the findings and results from Phase I, which includes:

- Project descriptions;
- Purpose and need information;
- Promotion of goals and objectives;
- Opportunity to coordinate efforts with other projects;
- Phase II recommendations.

In summary, the top list (left sidebar) consists of projects recommended to move on to environmental documentation under Phase II. The second list consists of projects that will not move into Phase II for reasons ranging from the project having already undergone environmental analysis to it having already been completed.

▪ **ARRC curve straightening/Option E**

Option E comes from a railroad realignment reconnaissance study conducted last year. A railroad alignment (Option E) of the study will be analyzed as an alternative to the ARRC curve-straightening projects at ARRC Mileposts 154, 155, 157, and 158. Only portions of the Option E alignment will be advanced. The segments to be advanced have independent utility and have been selected to have logical termini – i.e. they do not preclude reasonable options for future bypasses of Wasilla. It should be noted, that the purpose of recommending these alignment changes to Phase II would be to explore potential land use, social, economic, and other related impacts of relocating the ARRC’s main line, particularly as it would relate to the Fairview community.

▪ **Wasilla Intermodal Facility Location**

Siting an intermodal facility (which would include a rail station, passenger siding, and potential passenger track) is a key component to successful future commuter rail service. Several alternative sites should be explored including the **Kenai Supply Company building**, near a site near **Fairview Loop**, perhaps at a future juncture with Seward-Meridian. Such a location should be coordinated with the potential Wasilla Railroad Option E realignment. A third site to explore would be at or near the **Wasilla Airport**. As part of Phase II,

options would include potential locations suitable for park and ride facilities that may not be located in conjunction with rail facilities.

▪ **Siding Location Analysis**

In conjunction with the Intermodal Facility locations, a passing track/passenger siding is needed in the Wasilla area. Three options have been identified, including a west site (near the airport area/transportation museum site), the Kenai Supply Co. building site, or Wasilla Railroad realignment study Option E location, near Fairview Loop. The siding could be designed or constructed in conjunction with an intermodal facility.

If advanced together with the intermodal facility the recommended projects provide opportunities for joint development and essentially form three distinct but potentially reasonable alternatives for exploration during the design and environmental phase. Relocation of the track maintenance buildings and staff, while having independent utility, would benefit by being co-located with the passenger service functions. Commuter train set maintenance has the potential to be co-located but could also function at a separate facility. The issues associated with co-locating train set maintenance and storage should be explored in Phase II.

The three alternatives are:

West End/Airport Alternative. Develop an intermodal commuter rail station with accommodation of MASCOT feeder bus service in the vicinity of the transportation museum/South Mack Drive area; a passing track/passenger siding 6,000 feet long; development of a spur track into the airport with accommodation for train set and track maintenance equipment storage and personnel.

Central/Kenai Supply Co. Alternative. Develop an intermodal commuter rail station with accommodation of MASCOT feeder bus service at the Kenai Supply Building; a passing track/passenger siding 6,000 feet long, with the potential accommodation of train set storage and maintenance functions, and track maintenance equipment storage and personnel at the facility.

East End/Fairview Loop. Develop an intermodal commuter rail station with accommodation of MASCOT feeder bus service in the Fairview Loop area (Seward Meridian extended). Develop a passing track/passenger siding 6,000 feet long in conjunction with the Wasilla Railroad Realignment Study Option E alignment. Consider co-location of commuter train set maintenance and track maintenance functions along the siding.

Regarding the future analysis and refinement of the alternatives, it should be noted that:

- Commuter train set storage and maintenance could be located in a separate facility.
- Siding should consider that backtracking of the commuter train set in the morning would not be advantageous.

- It may be beneficial from an operations standpoint, but it is not essential that relocation of track maintenance personnel and equipment be co-located in the intermodal facility.

Phase II

The goal of Phase II will be to develop the information needed to obtain federal funding agency approval to prepare final design for the individual projects. Below are listed typical tasks of the preliminary engineering and environmental analysis phase. The methods and level of intensity of each of these steps will depend on the project type, its potential impacts, and its degree of controversy.

- Develop project purpose and need statement.
- Identify reasonable and feasible project alternatives. Prepare engineering concepts of those alternatives.
- Public and agency scoping to identify issues that must be addressed in environmental analysis.
- Work with federal funding agency to identify appropriate type of environmental document (Categorical Exclusion, Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Statement).
- Develop engineering concepts sufficient to support analysis of environmental issues.
- Analyze relevant environmental issues to describe impacts and determine their significance. This may include conducting specific technical studies.
- Work with the public, agencies, and other stakeholders to resolve issues.
- Identify and obtain necessary environmental permits for preferred alternative.
- Work with federal funding agency to gain formal agency approval of environmental document (determination that project is categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis, Finding of No Significant Impact, or Record of Decision).

Phase I Project Research and Analysis



The remainder of this document contains the findings and results from Phase I, which includes:

- Project descriptions
- Purpose and need information
- Promotion of goals and objectives
- Opportunity to coordinate efforts with other projects
- Phase II recommendations

Curves at ARRC Mile Posts 154, 155, 157, 158



(Left to Right) Curve at ARRC MP 157, south of Glenwood Avenue; ARRC crossing at Glennwood Avenue, Palmer-Wasilla Highway Extension ramp in the distance.

Curves at ARRC Mile Posts 154, 155, 157, 158

- **Lead Agency:** ARRC
- **Mode:** RAIL
- **Location:** ARRC MP 154, 155, 157, 158
- **Status:** construction currently underway at ARRC MP 157 & 158; ARRC MP 154 & 155 slated for construction Summer 2003
- Curves 154 and 155 to be advanced to Phase II

Project Description

The Alaska Railroad is currently straightening curves in their track alignment between Knik River and Wasilla. The project will eliminate or reduce four sharp curves. The vast majority of the proposed project will occur within the existing ARRC Right-of-Way as part of a larger commuter rail project extending from Girdwood to Wasilla.

The entire project entails reducing the curvature of the existing track alignment at eleven curves, which will result in decreased travel times and increased safety. A Categorical Exclusion was completed in 2001. Construction is currently underway on ARRC Mile Posts (MP) 157 and 158. Straightening curves along ARRC MP 154 and 155 is scheduled for 2003.

Purpose & Need

The existing alignment does not meet the criteria for commuter passenger service because the curves are too sharp. Sharp railroad curves cause reduced speeds, increased wear on tracks, increased train resistance, and raises track maintenance costs. Future passenger service needs require the reduced travel time created by the improvements.

Promotion of Goals & Objectives

The project will straighten these curves to allow for future higher-speed passenger trains; enabling trains to raise their speed from 25 mph to 35 mph. Straightening the tracks between Anchorage and Wasilla will allow for future commuter passenger rail service and facilitate a shorter (less than one hour) commute time.

Opportunity to Coordinate with Other Projects

Wasilla Railroad Realignment Study Option E. The curve straightening at ARRC MP 154 and 155 is closely related to the Option E Wasilla railroad track realignment. Option E would make straightening the ARRC MP 154 and 155 curves unnecessary. Realigning the railroad track, under Option E or a modified design, would incorporate the goal to smooth out the track curves to enable future commuter service. Several advantages exist if Option E were to be advanced. Not only will track curves be reduced, but there is a good opportunity for a siding track in this location. A side benefit of option E is the elimination of 2 at-grade road crossings.

The opportunity to advance Option E rail realignment must occur in early 2003, as the curve straightening on curves 154 and 155 is scheduled for summer 2003 and will proceed if Phase II of option E isn't completed in time for the scheduled curve straightening.

Recommendations

Conceptual rail engineering for Wasilla Railroad Realignment Study Option E, as an alternative that bypasses the straightening of the curves at ARRC MP 154 and 155, is recommended for further analysis in Phase II. Consideration of the alignment in conjunction with other passenger rail improvement alternatives is suggested. In Phase II, the potential land use, social, economic, and other related impacts of relocating the ARRC's main line will be assessed, particularly impacts to the Fairview community.

Wasilla Railroad Realignment Study Option E

Project Description

Option E from the Wasilla Realignment Study

- **Lead Agencies:** City of Wasilla
- **Mode:** RAIL
- **Location:** between ARRC MP 153 and 163
- **Status:** Study completed
- Alternatives analysis and conceptual design to be advanced to Phase II

On September 25, 2000, the Wasilla City Council passed a resolution authorizing the study of alternate transportation corridors for rerouting the Alaska Railroad's tracks around the community. The existing railroad is located alongside the Parks Highway through much of the central business district (CBD).

The City of Wasilla had a reconnaissance study prepared exploring relocating the ARRC out of the CBD. The study addressed five basic questions:

1. From an engineering standpoint, is it technically feasible to relocate the ARRC away from the Wasilla downtown business corridor?
2. If it can be relocated, what possible alternative routes might it take?
3. How much would it cost?
4. How long would it take?
5. What would the public's perception be?

The scope of the realignment study did not entail making a recommendation for a preferred alternative, however, the City of Wasilla preferred Option E. Option E begins at MP 153.7. If the entire alignment were built, it would eliminate eight at-grade crossings while also eliminating the four sharpest curves. Safety and capacity can be improved by eliminating eight at-grade crossings between MP 153 and 163.

Construction costs for the full Option E realignment are estimated at approximately \$35 million (Hattenburg, 2002). Total cost is estimated at approximately \$62.5 million, which includes environmental engineering and permitting; right-of-way; design; and construction, construction management, and construction contingency.

Purpose & Need

The reasons for the project are to improve traffic safety, improve capacity, enhance environmental protections, provide for pedestrian access and safety, and ultimately enhance the community's CBD. The project would enhance economic development by potentially returning a portion of the ARRC right-of-way in the city core to other uses. The project would also enhance community cohesiveness by not bisecting the core of the community. The project would eliminate serious safety concerns with respect to at-grade crossings located in or near the City. Specifically, the at-grade crossing at Knik-Goose Bay Road, which causes traffic congestion and ARRC safety concerns each time the train passes through the community. Passenger trains pick up passengers at the Wasilla station requiring automobile stoppages on Knik-Goose Bay Road of approximately 5 minutes.

Promotion of Goals & Objectives

Full implementation of Option E would foster the City of Wasilla's planning objective to change the character and environment of the transportation corridor through the center of the community. If the bulk of the railroad traffic were relocated out of the CBD, safety and capacity would be improved, while at the same time making the downtown area a more friendly and inviting place.

Track relocation would have an additional benefit of improving railroad run times to facilitate better commuter passenger service, improve area water quality protections, and make the railroad and highway consistent with City of Wasilla's planning objectives for the downtown area.

Opportunity to Coordinate with Other Projects

ARRC Curves 154, 155, 157, and 158. Option E of the Wasilla railroad track realignment study is closely interconnected with the curve straightening at ARRC MP 152.8 through 158.6 (curves 154-158). Reducing the curves at ARRC MP 154 and 155 are already planned for in 2003. By advancing conceptual design of portions of Option E, work on several track curves would be unnecessary. Safety improvement elements would be realized, by eliminating several at-grade crossings. Rail capacity opportunities of potential siding locations have better opportunities on the Option E Alignment than along the curves between milepost 152.8 and 158.6.

Recommendations

Conceptual rail engineering modifications for portions of Option E, to eliminate the need for straightening of the curves (ARRC curves 154 to 158), is recommended for further analysis in Phase II. The analysis should be coordinated with other commuter rail and intermodal facility needs as suggested above. Potential land use, social, economic, and other related impacts, particularly to the Fairview community, from relocating the ARRC's main line should be assessed in Phase II.

DOT&PF Parks Highway Improvements



(Clockwise from bottom Left) looking southbound at the Palmer-Wasilla Highway extension at the corner of the Parks Highway; looking westbound at the corner of Parks Highway and Crusey Street; proposed elimination of the at-grade railroad crossing at Snyder Road; view, from Financial Drive, of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway ramp south of the Parks Highway.

DOT&PF Parks Highway Improvements

- Seward-Meridian Parkway
- Palmer-Wasilla Highway Extension
- Lucas Road North and Crusey Street
- **Lead Agency:** DOT&PF
- **Mode:** ROAD, RAIL
- **Location:** Parks Highway, between the Glenn Highway and Church Road, through Wasilla
- **Status:** Improvements in various stages – from design, construction, to completion
- Will not be advanced to Phase II as part of this project because these are already underway

Project Description

In cooperation with Federal Highway Administration, DOT&PF is in the process of improving the Parks Highway corridor between the Glenn Highway and downtown Wasilla. Several projects currently underway will ultimately provide four travel lanes with access limited to interchanges. Where applicable, the projects are designed to allow easy upgrading to six lanes when that becomes necessary. The projects will address local access and significantly improve through traffic. Construction improvements on the Parks Highway, to date, have been completed east of the Seward Meridian interchange.

Businesses in Wasilla have traditionally developed along the highway. As a result, the core area of Wasilla is several miles long but only a few blocks wide. Access to businesses had been provided directly from the main highway. Through much of this segment, the Alaska Railroad runs parallel to the highway on the south side. The tracks have limited the development and access points from the

south. Areas of the highway not adjacent to the railroad on the south side have strip commercial development with numerous access points.

Purpose & Need

Major improvements for capacity, safety, and access management are needed on the Parks Highway near Wasilla. The volume of through traffic, mixed with the local traffic and access, have resulted in unacceptable congestion. In the long-term, a road/highway bypass of downtown Wasilla may be the required solution. In the intermediate term, better access management and increased capacity on the existing alignment are needed. The DOT&PF is pursuing highway improvement projects to address the roadway needs.

Seward-Meridian Parkway. Currently the Parks Highway has five existing lanes near the Seward-Meridian Parkway. After construction, the road will be a four-lane divided highway. The Seward-Meridian Parkway and the Parks Highway interchange have been designed as a single point urban interchange. The Parks Highway will go over the Seward-Meridian Parkway, with northbound and southbound off-ramps.

Construction along the Parks Highway, from the Glenn Highway to east of the Seward-Meridian Parkway, was completed in two phases. The final design is nearly complete for the Parks Highway segment between Seward-Meridian Parkway and Crusey Street. The section from Seward-Meridian Parkway to Crusey Street will be upgraded in 2003 to eliminate the current bottleneck east of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway. Seward-Meridian will eventually extend to Old Matanuska Road. (The pre-draft 2004-2006 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program [STIP] calls for Old Matanuska Road rehabilitation between the road termini near the Palmer-Wasilla Highway Extension and Fairview Loop Road [2.7 miles]. Work includes widening grade reduction on one hill, cleaning and reshaping ditches, culvert installations, and hard surfacing). Bidding is expected in February 2003, with construction beginning sometime between March and June 2003. As a part of the State's Garvee Bond issue, \$7 million is presently planned for improvements to Seward-Meridian Parkway.

Palmer-Wasilla Highway Extension. This improvement project extended the Palmer-Wasilla Highway south of the Parks Highway and connected it with Knik-Goose Bay Road at Glenwood Avenue. At the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, the Parks Highway has two left-turn lanes, two through-lanes, and one right-turn. The project consisted of repaving the highway and adding turn pockets and streetlights in selected locations. It was overlaid with asphalt. The project included grade separating the railroad crossing south of the Parks Highway, construction of a paved separated path, and signaling the Knik-Goose Bay Road/Glenwood Intersection. The Palmer-Wasilla Highway extension from the Parks Highway to Knik-Goose Bay Road cost approximately \$6.5 million. Construction

began in July 2001 and ended in November 2002. Landscaping will be completed in the Spring 2003.

Lucas Road North to Crusey Street. The portion of the Parks Highway, between Lucas Road and Crusey Street, will be repaved and rehabilitated. A rehabilitation of the existing five-lane section from Crusey Street to Lucas Road is planned for 2005. The cost is approximately \$10 million, but this estimate is considered a high estimate because the cost includes an overpass at the Knik-Goose Bay Road intersection, which is no longer a part of the project. Pedestrian facilities and landscaping will be included. Other improvements include an elimination of an at-grade railroad crossing at Snyder Road and driveway consolidation. At-grade road and rail crossings are a safety hazard and they impair the efficiency of both the road and rail systems.

Lucas Road North. The pre-draft 2004-2006 STIP calls for the following Lucas Road Improvements: *improve Lucas Road between Parks Highway and Spruce Avenue to an upgraded two-lane facility with shoulders, turning lanes, pedestrian facilities, landscaping and drainage improvements.* Construction of this project could be as early as 2006.

Crusey Street. The pre-draft 2004-2006 STIP calls for the following Crusey Street improvements: *reconstruct approximately 2,200 lineal feet of Crusey Street between the Parks Highway and Bogard Road to accommodate four lanes and center turn lane; provide landscaping and architectural improvements.* Construction of this project could be as early as 2005.

Other highway improvements. The pre-draft 2004-2006 STIP contains a few other transportation projects in the Wasilla area along the Parks Highway that are worth noting. Rehabilitation and resurfacing of Wasilla-Fishhook Road would occur beginning on Knik Goose Bay Road at Glenwood Avenue (south of the Parks Highway), continuing north along Main Street, and Wasilla Fishhook Road to Schrock Road. The Parks Highway reconstruction – Lucas Road to Big Lake Cutoff – will consist of constructing four lanes with other appropriate improvements.

Promotion of Goals & Objectives

The Parks Highway is a major thoroughfare for both local residents and through traffic. Other regional roads in the Wasilla area are also critical. Seward-Meridian Parkway and Palmer-Wasilla Highway Extension are major links to the Parks Highway for commuters traveling to Anchorage. By improving conditions for both local access and through traffic, all these roadway improvement projects will improve travel time and traffic circulation.

Opportunity to Coordinate with Other Projects

Relocation of ARRC tracks. In the vicinity of Wasilla Lake, along the Parks Highway, the existing north edge of the pavement will

essentially remain in the same place to prevent encroachment into Wasilla Lake. But an approximately 40-foot wide strip of right-of-way from the south side of the highway will be required to allow for the relocation of approximately 3,500 feet of the Alaska Railroad tracks. Before tracks are relocated possible relocation options (Option E), track straightening, and station options should be considered so that the ultimate relocation is determined and is not moved or relocated later.

Intermodal Facility location. The Kenai Supply Co. Building is located near the Palmer-Wasilla and Parks Highway intersection. This is a location under consideration for an intermodal facility. Track work through the area should consider the potential for a commuter station and/or potential passenger siding through the area.

Pedestrian Tube. A pedestrian tube connecting trail access under the railroad and highway has already been designed in conjunction with Parks Highway improvements. Construction will occur simultaneously. Agency coordination should continue.

Recommendations

The DOT&PF highway improvement projects will not be carried into Phase II analysis for this intermodal planning project. These projects are currently underway and are in various stages from design, construction, to actual project completion. All of them have environmental approval. The design and construction of these roadway projects should continue to be coordinated with adjacent projects.

Knik-Goose Bay Road & Parks Highway Intersection



(Clockwise from bottom Left) View of current ARRC depot looking East; Knik-Goose Bay Road & Parks Highway Intersection looking northbound; same intersection looking West; ARRC depot looking West.

Knik-Goose Bay Road & Parks Highway Intersection

- **Lead Agency:** DOT&PF, ARRC, City of Wasilla
- **Mode:** ROAD, RAIL, PEDESTRIAN
- **Location:** Knik-Goose Bay Road and Parks Highway Intersection
- **Status:** Improvements to Knik-Goose Bay Road intersection are still in the design phase; construction is expected to begin 2005
- Will not be advanced to Phase II (except for consideration to move the ARRC depot to another location for safety or intermodal facility purposes)

Project Description

The DOT&PF, ARRC, and the City of Wasilla are seeking solutions to problems posed by the Knik-Goose Bay railroad at-grade crossing near the Parks Highway and Knik-Goose Bay/Main Street Intersection. Serious traffic delays occur when a train comes through downtown Wasilla and stops at the train depot at this corner. The train depot location creates an increased risk of accidents and is not an adequate facility. The depot is listed on the National Register of Historical Places.

Purpose & Need

The Alaska Railroad stops at the historic train depot, off the corner of the Knik-Goose Bay Road and the Parks Highway, one of the busiest intersections in Wasilla. When passengers are unloading and loading, the train blocks the crossing on the Knik-Goose Bay Road four times a day in summer. The depot has a very small platform that creates a safety hazard for waiting passengers. While people are

waiting for the train, oftentimes they are waiting too close to the tracks. The stop is not an ideal location for a commuter stop. The railroad crossing interferes with the functionality and efficiency of the intersection and the causes railroad safety concerns. Cars stopped at the intersection could potentially extend onto the tracks given the relative location of the rail crossing with the intersection.

The short-term solution has been the Palmer-Wasilla Highway extension south of the city corridor to alleviate some of the congestion at the intersection. The Palmer-Wasilla Highway extension was designed to redirect traffic out of downtown Wasilla, where commuters jam up the Knik-Goose Bay intersection.

A grade-separated crossing, where the road goes over or under the railroad tracks, has been an option under consideration in the past. An issue, however, is concern over the embankment or “Great Wall of Wasilla” running through the city corridor that would be created by the earthwork needed to raise the railroad tracks. One way to improve the situation may be to move the depot facility, which would, at a minimum, reduce the blockage of the intersection and improve passenger waiting and loading safety. Concern with the at-grade crossing would remain, however, and providing a grade-separated crossing or routing railroad traffic out of the city core are options that would eliminate the pedestrian-vehicle-train conflicts.

Promotion of Goals & Objectives

Removing the conflict caused by this crossing would improve pedestrian and vehicle safety and improve train speed. Relocating and improving the depot would improve safety for passengers and improve traffic flow by reducing the blockage of Knik-Goose Bay Road.

Opportunity to Coordinate with Other Projects

Highway improvements at the Knik-Goose Bay Road and Parks Highway intersection are currently in the design phase and construction is expected to begin in 2005. Grade separation of the Parks Highway with Knik-Goose Bay Road is not currently in the design. Because moving the depot, may be needed to facilitate commuter train service, and would benefit the overall functioning of the intersection, relocating the depot should be considered along with the siting of a commuter rail station. Several other locations exist along the rail corridor for the proposed commuter railroad facility. Moving the current railroad depot from this location should be incorporated with analysis of an intermodal facility located elsewhere in Wasilla.

Recommendations

Road design is still underway for this portion of the Parks Highway, and therefore will not be furthered into Phase II. It is recommended that moving the railroad depot away from the Knik-Goose Bay Road and Parks Highway intersection be studied in conjunction with

analyzing possible intermodal facility locations during Phase II. It is further recommended that design and environmental analysis of grade separating the intersection advance to Phase II engineering and environmental analysis.

Intermodal Facility Location Options



(Clockwise from bottom Left) Fairview Loop turnoff from Parks Highway; Kenai Supply Co. Building near the Palmer-Wasilla Interchange; Existing ARRC Depot near the Knik-Goose Bay Road and Parks Highway Intersection; Construction of South Mack Drive Extension to the Wasilla Airport.

Intermodal Facility Location Options

- **Current ARRC depot**
- **Kenai Supply Co. Building Location**
- **Near Fairview Loop Road**
- **Wasilla Airport Location**

- **Lead Agency:** City of Wasilla, ARRC
- **Mode:** ROAD, RAIL
- **Location:** Various location options
- **Status:** Improvements in various stages – from design, construction, to completion
- To be advanced to Phase II

Project Description

This project would examine the future location of one or more intermodal transportation facilities that would serve commuter rail and maintenance facility needs for the railroad, and/or support existing MASCOT transportation options including vanpooling and carpooling. Several different location options exist for an intermodal facility in the Wasilla area. In general, steering committee members support placing an intermodal facility where the highest population density occurs or where it is conveniently accessible to the commuting traveler. Identified locations are listed at the left and discussed below.

Current ARRC Depot Location – Knik-Goose Bay/Parks Highway Intersection. The current depot is located just east of the Knik-Goose Bay/Parks Highway intersection. Relocating the depot from this site is an option that has some advantages. The building has a small platform, which does not

provide a safe waiting area for train passengers. Parking is limited to a small parking lot adjacent to the depot with no room for expansion. When the train stops to drop off and pick up passengers, the train set blocks the road crossing along Knik-Goose Bay Road for long periods, adding to an already congested roadway situation.

Kenai Supply Co. Building Location. The Kenai Supply Co. Building is located near the Palmer-Wasilla Highway and Parks Highway intersection. The Kenai Supply Building is currently being used as DOT&PF's project construction office and base of operations for DOT&PF work in the area. The yard there is used for storing heavy equipment. DOT&PF purchased the Kenai building for \$3 million using FHWA funds.

This location offers some advantages as a possible intermodal station and railroad maintenance location. Not many structural changes would need to be made to the building. Sufficient space already exists in the building for a potential bus-through. There's already an existing railroad spur as well. The structure is adjacent to the railroad tracks and is partially in the ARRC right-of-way. It may also be feasible to locate a rail along the back of the building for a long-term siding. As a passenger station location, the site is conveniently located in the middle of the Wasilla traffic corridor and is central to the Knik-Goose Bay/Wasilla Highway. A right-of-way of 100 feet exists, which would be enough room for a platform and parking. This site would serve commuter needs, particularly those who are traveling from the north.

Among the concerns with the site would be its use as rail maintenance or storage yard because of visual concerns for residents and the City's goal of reducing the industrial nature presented by the rail corridor.

Fairview Loop Location Near Wal-Mart. Members of the public have suggested having a potential commuter station near Wal-Mart or in the vicinity of Fairview Loop Road. Near-term additional growth is expected to the east toward the Fairview Loop area. Several years ago the demographic core of Wasilla was at Bogard and Seward-Meridian Parkway. However, recently planned residential development near Fairview Loop, suggests a shift of the demographic core. With the growing density of people in this area, it may be a good location for an intermodal station.

Wasilla Airport Location. The 2002 Wasilla Airport Master Plan calls for a commuter rail station and rail maintenance facility in its suggested airport development plan. The goals and objectives of the airport master plan stated that improvements should be made to allow the airport to grow, be prosperous, and to become economically viable. Increasing rail access at the airport is suggested as a means of accomplishing that goal. The airport's proximity to the nearby Parks Highway, the Alaska Railroad, and key valley trail systems are identified as key locational components in developing an intermodal transportation system. Connections at the airport to the rail and highway systems are hoped to enhance transportation, air

travel, business development, and recreational activities in the region.

Purpose & Need

To alleviate many of the problems facing Wasilla's transportation corridor, as evidenced by the other projects in this report (at-grade crossings, serious traffic delays, congestion, necessity for improved pedestrian access and safety, desire for timely commutes, etc), an intermodal facility is a necessity – thus one of the purposes of this entire planning project. The ARRC, MASCOT, and the City of Wasilla have all received grants to develop intermodal facilities and related transit operations. Planning, design, and construction of alternative modes of travel will be key components to creating balance in Wasilla's transportation system.

Promotion of Goals & Objectives

The purpose of joint-planning for an intermodal facility is to gain maximum benefits through coordination of resources. An intermodal facility that integrated feeder bus service and park and ride facilities would address nearly every goal or issue identified earlier in this report, including:

- Improved travel time
- Improved traffic safety
- Improved capacity/ circulation
- Reduced at-grade crossings
- Various commuter options at the intermodal facility
- Less congested downtown Wasilla
- Improved local access and through traffic
- Improved pedestrian access and safety
- Building relocation

Opportunities to Coordinate with Other Projects

Wasilla Maintenance Facility. MASCOT originally expressed an interest in locating a bus storage facility at or near the airport. In the intervening time, MASCOT has determined it will relocate to a bus storage and maintenance facility to be shared with the City on East Centaur Avenue, off of Knik-Goose Bay Road. Co-location of bus storage and maintenance facilities with the rail station/intermodal facility is not required.

ARRC Maintenance Facility. Co-location of a future Rail Car Storage and Light Maintenance Facility should be considered as part of the intermodal facility location. The Light Maintenance Facility would be used to do daily cleaning and light repairs of commuter rail passenger cars.

ARRC Sidings. Another goal of the ARRC is to have a 6,000-foot siding every 20 miles and eventually a 6,000-foot siding every 10 miles. There is a need for a 6,000-foot siding in the Wasilla vicinity. Location of a commuter station and/or rail maintenance facility should be considered in conjunction with the siding location, since a

passenger siding should be developed in conjunction with the commuter station. The passing track could function as the passenger siding if the facilities were planned and co-located.

Park & Ride Facility Locations. As part of Phase II, locations suitable for Park and Ride facilities that may not be located in conjunction with rail facilities would be examined.

Recommendations

Several possible options exist for locating an intermodal facility. Intermodal facility locations should be further analyzed in Phase II to decide which intermodal facility location would be best, based on refined engineering and the environmental analysis that would be completed as part of the EA.

Among the alternative locations to consider are:

- Current ARRC depot
- Kenai Supply Co. Building Location
- Near Wal-Mart along Fairview Loop Location
- Wasilla Airport Location

The analysis should consider a passenger siding/passing track in conjunction with the commuter rail station. Co-location of track maintenance and the Rail Car Storage and Light Maintenance Facility may benefit from being co-located, but their co-location is not essential. Alternative locations for park and ride lots in conjunction with commuter rail stations (and on their own) will be examined.

Wasilla Maintenance Facility



(Left) From Centaur Avenue, looking North, location for proposed Mascot Facility; (Right) space for vehicle storage

Wasilla Maintenance Facility

- **Lead Agency:** City of Wasilla, MASCOT
- **Mode:** Transportation storage and maintenance facility; City of Wasilla community transit headquarters
- **Location:** East Centaur Avenue
- **Status:** Funding has been allocated; currently in design phase
- Will not be advanced to Phase II

Project Description

The City of Wasilla and MASCOT obtained a Categorical Exclusion in the Fall 2002 to construct a new storage and maintenance facility for buses and other transportation equipment. The facility, a 15,000 square foot building, is proposed to be located at 191 East Centaur Avenue. MASCOT and the City will share the facility for storage and maintenance of buses and transportation equipment (snow removal and street maintenance). Of the 15,000 square-foot building, 12,000 square feet will be used to store and maintain buses and transportation equipment. The remaining area will be used for staff. This will be the center of operations for MASCOT.

Purpose & Need

In February 2002, both the City of Wasilla and MASCOT received federal funds to construct a facility for their respective services. MASCOT received \$1.4 million and the City received \$600,000 in funding. This funding would have enabled both parties to build adequate separate facilities; however, the City and MASCOT decided to join efforts for economics of scale. In June 2002, the City and MASCOT submitted a request to Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for a Categorical Exclusion for a joint Wasilla Transportation/Bus Facility. In September 2002, FTA approved the Categorical Exclusion. This facility will be located on City property, which the City currently uses to store public works supplies and equipment. The property was prepared for joint use by September 2002, to store MASCOT's buses outside, but within a fenced area. The area is zoned "Commercial" and has existing industrial users adjacent to the property. This zoning allows for public facilities and heavy equipment.

The project will use FTA funding allocated to the City in the amount of \$600,000, and about \$800,000 of FTA funding to MASCOT to construct the maintenance building. Of the \$1.4 million received by

MASCOT, the other \$600,000 is allocated to purchase buses and for maintenance. Design of the facility is expected to occur in the Winter 2002-03. Construction of the building is expected to begin in 2003-2004.

Promotion of Goals & Objectives

MASCOT's primary goal is to have a headquarters for their operations, as the organization has not had a permanent headquarters while it's been in existence. This facility will improve MASCOT's ability to provide bus service to the community, improving transit system delivery.

Opportunity to Coordinate with Other Projects

This facility entails a joint venture between the City, for transportation storage and maintenance purposes, and MASCOT, for its headquarters and dispatch center. MASCOT and the City believe this joint venture is a good fit, enabling both maintenance facilities for the City and a first-time headquarters and office space for MASCOT.

There have been discussions of possibly relocating the ARRC track maintenance buildings to this location. However, locating an ARRC facility at this location is not a viable option because the railroad tracks are not adjacent to this location. The track maintenance and commuter train set maintenance must be located adjacent to the rail.

MASCOT would like to develop a bus station at some point in the future – but not at the maintenance and bus storage location. Commuter station locations should provide sufficient road access, circulation, and passenger facilities to accommodate eventual MASCOT interfacing with the passenger rail services.

Recommendations

The joint maintenance facility with MASCOT and the City on East Centaur Avenue is an independent project with independent utility and is proceeding on its own. The location and function of the facility do not lend well to joint rail maintenance facility development.

This project will not be advanced into Phase II.

ARRC Maintenance Building Move



ARRC Maintenance Building Move

- **Lead Agency:** ARRC
- **Mode:** RAILROAD Track Maintenance
- **Location:** East Railroad Avenue
- **Status:** Discussion phase
- To be advanced to Phase II (in conjunction with intermodal facility location analysis)

Project Description

The ARRC owns several buff brown buildings in Wasilla, which are used as railroad track (not train) maintenance headquarters. The four buildings are located on East Railroad Avenue, east of the Knik-Goose Bay & Parks Highway intersection. The facility stores tools, and also has a phone, facsimile machine, and a computer. This project would relocate the function and dismantle the buildings.

Purpose & Need

These buildings are undersized and configured for the function they serve. There is limited parking and poor roadway access. The maintenance crew needs better office facilities, improved and enlarged storage, and better functionality. Moreover, these buildings are in the heart of Wasilla. Both the City of Wasilla and the ARRC Operations Division desire these buildings to be moved outside of the main city center corridor.

Promotion of Goals & Objectives

Relocating these buildings will serve the public better by providing an enhanced visual environment in Wasilla's central business

district. The improved facility would benefit track maintenance necessary for safe and efficient railroad operations.

Opportunity to Coordinate with Other Projects

Intermodal Facility Location Options. ARRC is looking to move its maintenance facilities out of downtown Wasilla, possibly in conjunction with determining a new location for an intermodal facility (station/train set maintenance and bus transit interface).

Recommendations

Co-locating the ARRC maintenance building with a new location for an intermodal facility, depending upon which location(s), may have benefits. The facility has independent utility, and while co-location is not essential, it would have benefits in terms of reducing the operating overhead associated with two facilities. The project should be considered in Phase II in combination with an improved intermodal facility. If the ultimate location for the commuter facility is not functional for the maintenance facility, a separate facility should be considered.

Pedestrian Tube



Looking north, view of Wasilla Lake (Left) and the Parks Highway (Right). The Parks Highway will have to be raised between 5 ½ to 6 feet to allow for the pedestrian tube.

Pedestrian Tube

- **Lead Agency:** City of Wasilla, DOT&PF
- **Mode:** Pedestrian, ROAD, RAIL
- **Location:** South of Wasilla Lake, underneath the Parks Highway and railroad tracks, towards Railroad Avenue/ Iliamna Street
- **Status:** Design almost completed; construction 2003
- Will not be advanced to Phase II

Project Description

An under-crossing of the Parks Highway for a trail at Wasilla Lake is being constructed as part of the Parks Highway upgrades. The request for a pedestrian tube surfaced from the City of Wasilla as the design phase of the Parks Highway was underway for the segment between the Glenn Parks Highway and Crusey Street. The pedestrian tube would traverse southbound from Wasilla Lake, underneath the Parks Highway and railroad tracks, towards Railroad Avenue/ Iliamna Street. The Parks Highway will have to be raised 5.5 to 6 feet from the existing grade. A multi-use trail, being developed by the City will connect the two lakes through the pedestrian tube. The cost of the pedestrian tube is approximately \$650,000. Preliminary design has been conducted. Construction would coincide with the Parks Highway construction.

Purpose & Need

Very little parking is available at Wasilla Lake, off of the Parks Highway. People end up parking on the other side of Crusey Street and then attempt to cross the highway. A pedestrian tube would allow parking on the other side of the Parks Highway, and a safe crossing to Wasilla Lake. A pedestrian tube would enable the lakes to be connected by trail with the danger and conflicts associated with crossing the railroad or highway at grade.

Promotion of Goals & Objectives

The City of Wasilla envisions a Lake-to-Lake trail between Lake Lucille and Wasilla Lake. The pedestrian tube will improve pedestrian safety and access to the lakes and foster pedestrian safety with an additional north-south grade separated crossing of the rail and highway corridors.

Opportunity to Coordinate with Other Projects

Design is almost completed and construction is slated for 2003 in connection with the Parks Highway improvements in this area. Continued coordination between the highway project and trail project is critical.

In rehabilitating the highway in this area, DOT&PF will be expanding south, away from Wasilla Lake, which is forcing realignment of the ARRC tracks along a segment 3,000 to 4,000 feet long. Consideration and coordination with a potential passenger siding through this area should be considered.

Recommendations

This project will not be advanced into Phase II.

Wasilla Airport Development

Wasilla Airport Development

- **Lead Agency:** City of Wasilla
- **Mode:** ROAD, AIR, RAIL, TRAIL
- **Location:** Wasilla Airport, bounded on north by ARRC and south by Lucille Creek
- **Status:** Development process
- Will not be advanced to Phase II (except as a possible intermodal facility location or ARRC siding location)

Project Description

Two of the City of Wasilla's top project priorities are the Mack Drive extension and development in the airport area.

Wasilla Airport Background. An airport master plan was produced in 2002. Of eight alternatives, including a no action alternative, the preferred alternative calls for airport expansion with a business park emphasis. The airport is currently used by a mix of general aviation, air taxis, and air cargo users. The airport master plan calls for airport facilities to be expanded to accommodate a new airport access road, additional lease lots, parking aprons, and ultimately commuter passenger aircraft and business jets. A grass ski strip, parallel taxiway, commuter rail station, and rail maintenance facility are other suggested airport developments. The preferred alternative was selected because it provides the "best fit" for planned development, safety needs and is supported by the Wasilla community and city officials.

Airport Property. The 370-acre airport property is owned by the City of Wasilla. The airport is bounded on the north by the Alaska Railroad and on the south by Lucille Creek. New homes have recently been constructed on the west and south side of the airport. Tracts D-2 and B-1 east of the airport property are currently owned by the City and are anticipated to be used for development of a regional sports complex, government and private offices and facilities and services supporting the sports complex. Key trails used for the Iditarod Sled Dog Race and Iron Dog Classic Snowmachine Race, two high-profile sporting events in Alaska, pass directly south of the airport.

Airport Access Road. The airport is connected to the Parks Highway with approximately 1.2 miles of paved roadway that was constructed in 1992. The two-lane road is narrow with no shoulders and is in poor condition with undulations caused by an inadequate pavement section over poor soils. It is inconvenient and inefficient. Speed is limited to approximately 25 miles per hour due to the road settlements.

The intersection at the Parks Highway is at-grade and controlled by a stop sign. The existing airport access road requires that northbound vehicle traffic cross southbound Parks Highway traffic, and back track over a mile to get to the airport. Access onto the Parks Highway has poor line of site because of its location on a horizontal and vertical curve. The intersection is located in a 55 miles per hour speed zone. Airport traffic from Wasilla must backtrack approximately 1.5 miles to get to the airport. The existing access road is also the primary access to a residential subdivision. A new primary access road from South Mack Drive was needed to improve the access and efficiency. A new primary airport access road will improve safety by avoiding residential subdivisions.

Trail System Connections. The Airport Master Plan describes how residents will need trail access to the airport and a potential future railroad depot along the primary airport access road. The existing airport access road does not have a separated bike path or widened shoulders to accommodate this need. Future access upgrades will provide for these user groups. As a part of the City's comprehensive Plan, Wasilla has a published Trail Plan that shows several key trails connecting at or near the airport. A proposed new trail along Mack Drive is needed to connect the Parks Highway trail system and airport with the trails to Big Lake used for the Iditarod and the Iron Dog. A trailhead is planned and funded for the east side of Mack Drive in the vicinity of the airport.

Sports Facilities. The City is planning a new regional multi-use sports complex near the airport east of Mack Drive. Design is underway and construction is planned for 2003. Although scheduled passenger service does not currently exist, air charters with players and gear can take advantage of the airport's key location near the City center and the sports complex. The same site is also under consideration for a future Iditarod Sled Dog Race headquarters and an Iron Dog Classic headquarters that would consolidate facilities, race staging areas, air support functions, and trailheads. The Wasilla Airport is a base for air support and logistical activities for these two key winter events.

Rail Car Storage and Maintenance Facility. The Airport Master Plan has consideration for a site for a future Rail Car Storage and Light Maintenance Facility for the ARRC. The Light Maintenance Facility would be used to do daily cleaning and light repairs of commuter rail passenger cars.

Purpose & Need

The airport is currently limited by poor highway and rail access and a lack of apron space for expanding tie-downs, lease lots, T-hangars, helicopter parking, transient aircraft parking, fuel storage, refueling facilities and related business support facilities. The Wasilla Airport Development project is linked with the South Mack Drive extension project. South Mack Drive is being extended for access to the airport development area and the proposed regional sports center.

Improvements need to be made to allow the airport to grow, be prosperous and to become economically viable. Improved highway and rail access are needed.

Promotion of Goals & Objectives

The airport's proximity to the nearby Parks Highway, the Alaska Railroad, and key valley trail systems is seen as prime opportunity in developing an intermodal transportation system at that end of Wasilla. Connections at the airport to the rail and highway systems are envisioned for enhance transportation, air travel, business development, and recreational activities in the region. The Airport

Master Plan discusses many different transportation modes that will utilize the improved airport facilities, some of which includes trail, transit, and rail usage.

Opportunity to Coordinate with Other Projects

The City of Wasilla submitted a STIP nomination package to DOT&PF for constructing an Intermodal Passenger Terminal and Parking area near the Wasilla Airport. In the nomination package, the City describes this facility as providing staging for commuter trains, vanpools, handicap accessible vehicles, and buses to facilitate year-round commuter services from Wasilla, Big Lake, and Meadow Lakes areas. The facility would be located at the north end of the Wasilla Airport near the intersection of Mack Drive and the Parks Highway.

Intermodal Facility Location Options. This is one of the locations where the intermodal facility could be located. There is some concern about the location because it is not in the heart of the population center, which would be better for a commuter stop. Having an intermodal facility at this location would serve Big Lake, Nancy Lake, and North Wasilla commuters. However, if this location was chosen as the primary or terminal location, most of the Wasilla population base would have to backtrack north (away from Anchorage) to access the station, likely limiting its effectiveness.

The location may be a good spot for a commuter train to be stored, maintained, and refueled at night. A track already exists near the airport and an existing track spur could be used for the ARRC maintenance of way facility. A suggested site has been near the Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry, located about ¼ mile from the aircraft parking area. This location should be further analyzed in Phase II.

ARRC Sidings. There is need for a 6,000-foot passing siding near Wasilla. There is concern that the transportation museum site, near the airport development area, is a bit too close to the next siding (Pitman) to the north. There may be space to locate an ARRC siding near an intermodal facility at this site but further investigation is needed

Recommendations

Phase II should explore the airport area as a possible location for locating an intermodal facility (to include the track maintenance and commuter train set maintenance facilities) and/or an ARRC passing track/passenger siding. If several commuter rail stops through Wasilla are developed, the Airport Area should be considered for the end stop in conjunction with over night storage and train set maintenance. Such a location represents the northern-most location where commuter passenger service may be feasible. Overnighing in this location has an advantage in that the train can proceed southbound without backtracking to pick up passengers.

South Mack Drive Extension



(Left to Right) Looking north, view of the South Mack Drive extension; northbound view of Parks Highway and South Mack Drive intersection

South Mack Drive Extension

- **Lead Agency:** City of Wasilla
- **Mode:** ROAD, AIR, RAIL, TRAIL
- **Location:** a north/south road extension between KGB Road and the Parks Highway
- **Status:** Construction underway
- Will not be advanced to Phase II (except as a possible intermodal facility location or ARRC siding location)

Project Description

This project consists of constructing South Mack Drive, a north/south connection, between the Parks Highway and Knik-Goose Bay Road. The City of Wasilla has constructed a portion of the roadway embankment previously as the Airport Access Road. The two-lane route will provide shoulders and provide pedestrian and bike facilities. The City constructed a pioneer road between the Alaska Railroad corridor and the proposed new sports complex in the fall of 2002. This project also includes a signalized intersection with the Parks Highway, to be designed and constructed in 2003. ARRC has programmed money for crossing signals at South Mack Drive.

Purpose & Need

Vehicular traffic currently bottlenecks at the intersection of the Parks Highway and Knik-Goose Bay Road. The traffic funneled to the Parks Highway/Knik-Goose Bay/Main Street intersection causes long traffic delays during peak hours. This project will provide an alternative route for motorists wanting to head north on the Parks Highway to avoid the congestion at this intersection. It also provides southbound travelers an alternative by providing a new north-south link between the Parks Highway and Knik-Goose Bay Road. The project reduces the travel distance of northbound Knik-Goose Bay Road traffic turning westbound on the Parks highway by approximately 4 miles, and shortens the distance to the airport by 1 mile. This project will support significant economic activities by providing direct access to the Wasilla Airport, its industrial area, and the new sports complex. The project will also facilitate the development of the airport and provide for quicker emergency response.

Promotion of Goals & Objectives

The goal is to improve the road network in this area, improve circulation, reduce traffic at the Parks/Knik-Goose Bay/Main Street Intersection, and provide alternative emergency access to the area. The project will also foster economic development in support of the goals of the airport master plan. This project will have a moderate effect on the health and quality of life of the traveling public, airport users, and maintenance personnel. The more direct and paved access will reduce dust, expenses and travel time. The project is expected to have a moderate effect on safety by shortening response time for emergency vehicles and police to the airport. Pedestrian facilities will also be improved with widened shoulders.

The City of Wasilla will pay for the upgrade and paving of the existing $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of Mack Drive. No Right-of-Way acquisitions would occur because the property is owned by the City of Wasilla. The new road would cross Lucille Creek. ROW estimates were provided by the DOT&PF's ROW section. According to the 1999 nomination package, the City of Wasilla will donate ROW valued at \$50,000. The City has committed \$1,150,000 towards this project. This equates to 20% of project costs.

Opportunity to Coordinate with Other Projects

This project improves intermodal transportation providing additional connections between the highway system, the Wasilla Airport and a potential Alaska Railroad intermodal facility in the airport development area. This road extension will be a key addition to improving Wasilla's transportation infrastructure, improving access to the Wasilla Airport, the new sports complex (currently under design).

Wasilla Airport Development. The South Mack Drive extension project is jointly connected to the development in the Wasilla Airport area. See the section for Wasilla Airport Development for multiple project coordination opportunities in this area.

Recommendations

Construction on the extension of South Mack Drive is currently underway. Several opportunities for project coordination could occur at the airport area relating to intermodal/commuter rail facilities. The intersection and area should be considered for a potential intermodal station. With increased use due to the road extension, grade separation of the crossing should be considered in Phase II. In the interim, signal and crossing improvements should be implemented as programmed.

Appendix A: Existing Documentation

<p><i>Curves at ARRC Mile Post 154, 155, 157, 158</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knik River to Wasilla Track Re-Alignment Documented Categorical Exclusion, AK-03-0038, June 28, 2001.
<p><i>Wasilla Railroad Realignment Study Option E</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wasilla Alaska Railroad Relocation. January 24, 2002. Prepared for the City of Wasilla by Scott L. Hattenburg, P.E.
<p><i>Other ARRC documents</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ South Central Rail Network Commuter Study and Operation Plan. August 13, 2001. Prepared for ARRC by Wilbur Smith Associates.
<p><i>DOT&PF Parks Highway Improvements</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revised Environmental Assessment, Parks Highway MP 37-44, Project No. IR-0A4-1(8)/59117. July 1996. Prepared by DOT&PF for FHA. ▪ DOT&PF Pre-Draft 2004-2006 DOT&PF STIP ▪ Wasilla-Fishhook Road (Glenwood Avenue to Schrock Road with Modified Main Street/Knik Street Couplet) Environmental Assessment. June 1993. State of Alaska DOT&PF and FHWA. ▪ Preliminary Design drawings for the Pedestrian Tube. November 2002. Prepared by R&M Consultants. ▪ Anchorage & Mat-Su Regional Transportation Planning Organization: Technical Committee 10/21/02 Meeting Notes. Prepared by Dowl Engineers. ▪ Parks Highway Corridor Management Plan. January 2003. Prepared for DOT&PF by CH2M Hill.
<p><i>Wasilla Maintenance Facility</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wasilla/MASCOT Transportation/Bus Facility Categorical Exclusion Request to U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration, July 5, 2002. ▪ Knik Arm (Alaska Regional Multimodal) Transportation Project. March 2001. Prepared by Northern Economics for Mat-Su Borough.
<p><i>Wasilla Airport Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wasilla Airport Master Plan, AIP No. 3-02-0417-0701, August 15, 2002. Prepared by LCMF Incorporated for the City of Wasilla. ▪ STIP Nomination Package submitted to DOT&PF by the City of Wasilla. November 19, 1999. The City of Wasilla submitted a STIP nomination package for constructing an Intermodal Passenger Terminal and Parking area near the Wasilla Airport.
<p><i>South Mack Drive Extension</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ City of Wasilla Mack Drive Improvements Project Nomination 2004/2006 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). September 2002. Prepared by Scott Hattenburg, P.E. ▪ Engineering design drawings for South Mack Drive. August 2002. Prepared by Scott Hattenburg, P.E.
<p><i>Background Reports</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Population, Employment, Earnings and Personal Income Trends, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, AK. December 30, 2002. Prepared by Sonoran Institute.

Appendix B: Key Project Contacts

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Palmer, Alaska 99645

Appendix C: Steering Committee Meeting Notes

ALASKA RAILROAD CORPORATION



Corporate Address: P.O. Box 107500, Anchorage, Alaska 99510
327 Ship Creek Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska 99501

April, 2002

To: Jennifer Bowman, Community Planner
Federal Transit Administration, Region X

From: Bruce Carr
Alaska Railroad

Subject: Notes from Joint Planning Meeting, 2/28/02 (copy of Agenda Attached)

Background:

On 2/28/02, representatives from Alaska Railroad ("ARRC"), City of Wasilla ("City"), Matanuska-Susitna Borough ("Borough"), Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities ("ADOTPF"), and the Matanuska-Susitna Community Transit service (MASCOT) met in Wasilla to discuss planned projects in the Wasilla area. The impetus for the meeting was several fold:

- 1) Region X requested such a meeting to ensure coordinated planning was occurring
- 2) ARRC was processing a grant for a Wasilla intermodal facility (FY00 Sec 5309 Bus allocation which would lapse in Sept 02), while at the same time MASCOT and the City of Wasilla also received grants for intermodal facilities (FY02 Sec 5309 Bus allocations)
- 3) ADOTPF is planning several highway upgrades which would impact traffic circulation in the Wasilla area making it critical that the various agencies understood what impact this would have on their plans
- 4) City had just completed a rail realignment reconnaissance study which impacted traffic circulation and local neighborhoods.

Discussion:

The meeting proceeded along the attached agenda. MASCOT and City of Wasilla indicated their plan for their FY02 Sec 5309 Bu allocation was intended for a joint maintenance facility. ARRC is also looking to move its maintenance facilities out of downtown Wasilla in conjunction with determining a new location for an intermodal facility. There appears to be an opportunity to explore a joint facility between all three agencies.

ADOTPF recently acquired a concrete building as part of a highway realignment project. The structure is adjacent to the tracks and is partially in the ARRC right of way. This facility could accommodate MASCOT and ARRC as a joint facility. In addition, the immediate area could accommodate an intermodal platform and siding for ARRC purposes. Traffic flow in the area is currently being re-aligned by ADOTPF to accommodate an upgrade to the Palmer-Wasilla Highway. There appears to be an opportunity here for cooperation which needs to be explored further.

ARRC is concerned about increasing traffic at the Knik-Goose Bay crossing. ARRC currently stops here twice a day just for passengers and in the near future will be scheduled for four stops a day and we expect more crossings for freight traffic. ARRC needs to determine what action can be taken to improve this crossing. ARRC has received a \$2.5million Sec. 5309 New Start appropriation in FY02 which can be used for re-alignments, signalizations and other improvements. By proper planning all of this money could be

ALASKA RAILROAD CORPORATION



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327 Ship Creek Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska 99501

used to create a solution. Again, what ARRC does at this location may impact the location of an intermodal facility and needs to be further explored.

The City wishes to develop the airport area with a number of facilities, including a sports facility whose funding was recently approved by voters. The Wasilla Airport Master Plan shows a proposed intermodal facility and at-grade crossing at the south extension of Church Road. This location will be included in the planning study as well.

Results:

- 1) The group agreed that ARRC should proceed to use the FY00 SEC 5309 Bus allocation as a planning grant.
- 2) ARRC agreed to draft a proposed scope of work for an RFP for preliminary engineering, alternatives analysis and environmental documentation which would accommodate as many of the projects having potential for joint cooperation as possible
- 3) A Core Committee consisting of representatives from each Agency was established which would review the RFP and act as a Technical Committee throughout the contract.
- 4) ARRC requested funding support for local match from the City, MASCOT, Borough and ADOTPF. This will be explored further by each entity.

ALASKA RAILROAD CORPORATION



Corporate Address: P.O. Box 107500, Anchorage, Alaska 99510
327 Ship Creek Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Notes
Joint Planning Meeting
February 28, 2002

Attendees:

City of Wasilla:	Tim Krug, Don Schiesel, John Cramer
Mat-Su Borough:	Sandra Garley
MASCOT:	Karen Walton
Alaska DOT&PF:	Dave Eberle, John Tolley, Steve Horn, Dave Post
Alaska Railroad:	Eileen Reilly, Tom Brooks, Barbara Hotchkins

1. Review Funding

	<u>Sec 5309 Bus Allocations</u>	<u>Apr Date</u>	<u>Lapse Date</u>	<u>Sponsor</u>	<u>Amount</u>
a.	Wasilla Intermodal Facility	FY99	Sept 02	ARRC	\$ 981,096
b.	City of Wasilla Bus Facility	FY02	Sept 05	Wasilla	\$ 594,017
c.	Mat-Su Community Transit Buses And Facilities	FY02	Sept 05	MASCOT	\$1,386,041

	<u>Sec 5309 New Start Allocation</u>				
a.	Wasilla Alternate Route Project	FY02	Sept 05	ARRC	\$2,475,033
a.	<u>DOT Projects</u>	??	??	DOT	?????

2. "Parade of Possible Projects"

a.	Curves at ARR Mile Post 154,155, 157, 158	ARRC
i.	Option E from Wasilla Realignment Study	ARRC/ADOTPF/Wasilla
b.	Parks Highway to Seward Meridan	ADOTPF
c.	Intermodal Facility – Fairview Loop @ Wal-Mart	ARRC/Wasilla/Mascot
i.	Parks Highway to Crusey Street	ADOTPF
d.	ARRC Maintenance of Way Move	ARRC/All
e.	Palmer – Wasilla Highway/Parks Hghy Grade Separation	ADOTPF
i.	Pedestrian undercrossing	ADOTPF/Wasilla/ARRC
ii.	Intermodal Facility	ADOTPF/ARRC/MASCOT
iii.	Wasilla Maintenance Facility	All
f.	Current ARRC Station	
i.	Knik-Goose Bay ("KGB"), ARRC, Parks Intersection	ADOTPF/Wasilla/ARRC
g.	Parks Highway – KGB North	ADOTPF
h.	Wasilla Airport Development	Wasilla
i.	Church Road Extension	Wasilla
ii.	Intermodal Facility	ARRC/Wasilla

3. Planning Proposal

- a. ARRC will draft Scope of Work and circulate



4. **What Funding Can Be Leveraged?**

- a. Project leveraging will be determined at conclusion of study. Local match will be the responsibility of ARRC/ADOTPF/Wasilla/Mat-Su Borough/MASCOT
- b. ARRC agreed to contribute \$80,000 to local match portion. ADOTPF (Comm Perkins) previously agreed to \$80,000)

5. **Next Steps?**

- a. Scope of Work
- b. Confirm local contribution (determines amount available for RFP)
- c. Issue RFP
- d. Select Contractor

Wasilla Intermodal Planning

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

December 12, 2002, 9:00 –11:00 am
City of Wasilla Council Chambers

Attendees

Eileen Reilly | AKRR | reillye@akrr.com | 265-2655
Bruce Carr | AKRR | carrb@akrr.com | 265-2468
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Leslie Robbins | HDR Alaska | lrobbins@hdrinc.com | 274-0000
David Post via teleconference | DOT&PF | david_post@dot.state.ak.us | 269-0516

Agenda

John McPherson of HDR Alaska opened the meeting at 9:00 A.M. with an agenda overview and introductions.

John M. briefly described what the scope of services entails to remind everyone the purpose of this intermodal planning project. The scope of services is potentially a three-fold process. Currently, Phase I consists of project research and data collection of 16 initial projects in the greater Wasilla area. An outcome of Phase I will be recommendation of projects to undergo preliminary engineering and environmental analysis in Phase II. Determining which projects should go into Phase II is a main objective of today's meeting. The goal of Phase II will be to develop the information needed to obtain federal funding agency approval to prepare final design for the individual projects. Phase III entails final design services for certain projects resulting from work performed under this contract, which may be separately negotiated.

John M. posed the following question to meeting attendees: What does each steering committee member hope to get out of the intermodal plan?

The City of Wasilla responded with the following main objectives/issues they hope to resolve:

1. Is the intermodal station at the airport feasible?
2. Removing the AKRR maintenance facility/ AKRR work camps and rail ties between the depot at the Knik-Goose Bay & Parks Highway intersection outside of downtown
3. Concern over double rail between Knik-Goose Bay and Kenai Supply Co. building
4. Joint maintenance facility with MASCOT on East Centaur Avenue seems to be an independent facility

The AKRR said their issues are:

1. The need for a passing track between AKRR MP 151 and 168. A minimum of 6,000 feet is needed for a passing track. The question is where to locate the passing track.
2. A possible location of an intermodal facility station is at the transportation museum grounds. A track already exists near the airport. An existing track spur could be used for the AKRR maintenance of way facility.
3. The goal is to have sidings every 10 miles. The transportation museum site is a bit too close to the next siding (Pitman) to the north. Option E would be an ideal location.
4. Two types of markets for rail passengers: commuter and intercity

The joint maintenance facility with MASCOT on East Centaur Avenue seems to be an independent facility. Group consensus showed it is not feasible or needed because the functions to be performed are not joint to co-locate three entities at this location. In addition, locating an AKRR facility here is not a viable option because the railroad tracks are not adjacent to this location. MASCOT foresees possible funding in the future for its own bus station, which would be advantageous to be co-located with the AKRR station.

Possible intermodal facility locations was an issue discussed throughout the meeting. It was mentioned that public involvement during AKRR's recent South Central Rail Network Commuter Study showed that people did not want to backtrack to go to an intermodal facility. For the intercity rail market, the AKRR said that the airport location might make sense for that type of market.

Several years ago the demographic core was at Bogard and Seward Meridian. However, Rex Turner is planning a residential development (7,500 acres) near Fairview Loop, inside of curve 155. This will probably shift the demographic core. A high density of people will be in this area and it may be a good location for an intermodal station.

John M. initiated a discussion about long-term transportation plans in Wasilla with a key question being whether or not our first project should consider an AKRR bypass of Wasilla. A general discussion ensued regarding various other projects in the greater vicinity that would impact transportation in Wasilla, particularly a major bypass. These projects include development in the Port of Anchorage, Port MacKenzie, Knik Arm Crossing, and a regional transportation development plan. David Post of DOT&PF noted that these projects are projected in the long-term, and while important to consider, immediate transportation needs should be addressed now, regardless of the projected projects that may or many not come online in the next 10-15 years. This was the general consensus of the group.

AKRR asked the City whether it is possible for cut and cover near the Knik-Goose Bay Road. The water table and money are factors. Also, the City is not keen on a siding/passing track near the Kenai Supply Co. building because of the residential area and nearby creek. The City would prefer to see the siding at the airport. The City noted that while there are wetlands in the airport vicinity, there are no major water bodies. The AKRR said since the DOT&PF is shifting the right-of-way 90 feet, the spur would be necessary at the Kenai Supply Co. building unless some other spur can be built. AKRR also said that the track maintenance and sidetrack would ideally be located close to the commuter station.

A group consensus was made that the product of Phase I will be two lists. The first list will consist of projects that will not move into Phase II and why these projects/issues have been resolved. The other list will consist of projects that will move on to environmental documentation under Phase II.

List of Projects to be furthered into Phase II:

1. Option E replacing the AKRR curve straightening. Seward Meridian is proposed to hook into Old Mark Road eventually.
2. Wasilla Intermodal Facility location/ moving existing depot
3. Siding location analysis
3 options: West (Airport), Kenai Supply Co. building area, or Option E

The meeting ended near 11:00 A.M. It was agreed HDR would move the necessary projects into Phase II and finish up project discussion in Phase I. Discussion hinted at reconvening in early January.

Wasilla Intermodal Planning

Steering Committee Meeting Agenda

January 30, 2003, 9:00 am
City of Wasilla Council Chambers

Next Committee Meeting: Tuesday, Feb. 25 at 9:00 AM*
City of Wasilla Council Chambers

*Committee members will be signing the plan document

Meeting Agenda

1. **Review Recommendations** made in Draft Report
2. **Two-week review period** of report. Send comments by February 14, 2003 to:
HDR Alaska
2525 C Street, Suite 305
Anchorage, AK 99503-2632
Phone: 907-274-2000
Fax: 907-274-2022
E-Mail: lrobbins@hdrinc.com
3. Decide on **Decision Meeting** date at the end of February

Attendees

Bruce Carr | AKRR | carrb@akrr.com | 265-2468
Archie Giddings | City of Wasilla | agiddings@ci.wasilla.ak.us | 373-9048
Tim Krug | City of Wasilla | tkrug@ci.wasilla.ak.us | 373-9052
John McPherson | HDR Alaska | jmcpfers@hdrinc.com | 274-2000
David Post via teleconference | DOT&PF | david_post@dot.state.ak.us | 269-0516
Leslie Robbins | HDR Alaska | lrobbins@hdrinc.com | 274-0000
Don Shiesl | City of Wasilla | dshiesl@ci.wasilla.ak.us | 373-9095
Ellen Wycoff | Mat-Su Borough | ewycoff@msb.co.mat-su.ak.us | 745-9856

Meeting Overview

John McPherson of HDR Alaska opened the meeting at 9:00 A.M. with an agenda overview and quick introductions around the table for David Post, who was teleconferenced into the meeting from Anchorage. Hard copies of the Draft Wasilla Intermodal Plan were distributed to those present. An email version had been sent to committee members earlier in the week.

John M. briefly reviewed the recommendations made in the executive summary to be advanced into Phase II. Those **recommendations** include:

- Conceptual rail engineering and potential environmental analysis for track straightening between ARRC mileposts 152.8 and 158.6 (Curves 154-158B)
- Investigation of an intermodal rail station that could include accommodation of:
 - commuter rail train set maintenance and/or the track maintenance facility and/or a passing track/passenger siding
 - Locations for reasonable alternatives:
 - Airport Transportation Museum Area
 - Kenai Building Supply Area
 - Fairview Loop area
 - Existing depot site will be explored as the no action alternative

- Investigate grade separation at Knik-Goose Bay Road
- Investigate grade separation at South Mack Drive

A round table discussion ensued regarding the recommendations to be advanced to Phase II. The group recommended including the exploration of moving the historical ARRC depot as part of intermodal location considerations. The following list incorporates the steering committee comments:

Draft Plan comments

- Suggestion to incorporate FTA funding language into the document (“We paid for this....but really we didn’t”
- Include on the map, potential intermodal/station locations to be analyzed in Phase 2
- Change “Mack Road” to “Mack Drive”
- Bruce Carr said he would like to see the document sent to the regional transportation organization
- In the MSB transportation providers section, include a paragraph from the MSB (the route realignments will impact MSB)
- Need City logo
- Make sure everything recommended is in a STIP or to be recommended in STIP

General comments

- Archie said a City transportation master plan is coming out soon
- Possible advanced land acquisitions in Phase II
- In the STIP: Old Matanuska Road is going to be improved (Design 2008)
- The City would take over maintenance of Old Mat. Road
- Gas stations are the only ones that really don’t want the bypass
- About 18 months was the suggested time before Phase 2 would be done
- Both the City and the ARRC want to get beyond the sewer plant
- The plan should be presented to respective planning and zoning commissions (City and Borough agreement)

Historic ARRC Depot Building comments

- Bruce Carr said the historical ARRC depot is not the Railroad’s anymore, but actually the City’s. Don Shiesl mentioned that exploration of moving the depot be considered in conjunction with the intermodal location. Bruce Carr said the historic depot would not drive the intermodal location. For planning purposes in the near future, Dave Post said DOT&PF anticipates the historic depot will stay at Knik-Goose Bay Road.
- One location option is to have it become a museum. Tim Krug mentioned a good spot for the historical depot might be near the pedestrian tube or the sports complex. It was stated that the Chamber of Commerce director would probably like the historical depot to be out near the sports complex.
- A railroad spur would have to be laid out again in order to go to the transportation museum. This location could be used for light maintenance and for storing trains overnight. (Marilyn McGuire at Mat-Su Borough is on the board of directors for the Transportation Museum). The ARRC could lay the tracks back down to the transportation museum; however, it’s not in ARRC’s right-of-way.

Intermodal location comments

- ARRC Station Stops: Bruce Carr said multiple locations need to be assessed for an ARRC station stop; however, they’ll probably be just one main station.

Knik-Goose Bay Road comments

- If Knik-Goose Bay Road is grade separated, the historic depot will have to be moved somewhere else.

Pedestrian Tube comments

- The pedestrian tube is ready to bid. Tim Krug said the City is trying to acquire additional parking near the pedestrian tube.

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South Mack Drive grade separation comments

- The ARRC is not happy with the at-grade crossing at South Mack Drive, and eventually wants a grade separation
- ARRC received a \$250,000 grant for signals at South Mack Drive
- Dave Post assumed the road would go over the railroad.
- A road going above the railroad would need a 23 foot clearance
- A road going under the railroad would need a 18 foot clearance
- There's a high water table in this area
- There are wetlands issues in this area – would an EA suffice or an EIS be necessary?

Track Straightening between ARRC mileposts 152.8 and 158.6 comments

- Four alignments crossing MSB and city land
- Route realignment D is outside the City (MSB land)
- Committee members concurred that Route realignment D is not going to happen in the foreseeable future
- Route realignment E helps reduce grade crossings to open up the current ARRC alignment for other City uses and subdivision access