U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Transit
Administration**

REGION X
Alaska, Idaho, Oregon,
Washington

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JUN 10 2003

Patrick Gamble
President and CEO
Alaska Railroad Corporation
P.O. Box 107500
Anchorage, AK 99510

Re: Ship Creek Intermodal Transportation Center
AK-03-0035
Finding of No Significant Impact

Dear Mr. Gamble:

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has completed its review of the NEPA Environmental Assessment (EA), April 2003, for the Ship Creek Intermodal Transporation Center. Based on our review, FTA has issued a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) for the project. A copy of the FONSI is enclosed.

The FONSI, EA, and all related supporting materials should be made available to the public, with notice of availability published in one or more newspapers of general circulation. Notice of the FONSI's availability should also be sent to the agencies on the EA circulation list. Please note that if a construction grant is approved for this project, the standard terms and conditions of the FTA grant contract will require the grantee to undertake all environmental mitigation measures identified in the EA and FONSI.

Thank you for complying with the National Environmental Policy Act, and good luck with your project. Please contact Jennifer Bowman at (206) 220-7953 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

R. F. Krochalis
Regional Administrator

Enclosure

cc: Barbara Hotchkin

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

APPLICANT: **The Alaska Railroad Corporation**

PROJECT NAME: **Ship Creek Intermodal Transportation Center**

PROJECT LOCATION: **Anchorage, Alaska**

GRANT NUMBER: **AK-03-0035**

PROPOSED PROJECT

The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC), in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), seeks to construct an Intermodal Transportation Center (ITC) and associated improvements (e.g., pedestrian amenities, transit, parking, and rail track changes) in the Ship Creek area of Anchorage, Alaska. ARRC's current depot was constructed in 1942 and was designed and sized to handle the trains, traffic, and demand of that time. Some 60 years later, the depot is undersized and poorly configured to accommodate the current and projected demands placed upon it and the changed nature of the rail passenger traffic in the Anchorage area. The depot has insufficient capacity, unsafe and inadequate pedestrian access, inefficient baggage handling, insufficient parking, and poor traffic circulation. The forecasted increase in rail passengers will continue to exacerbate the already substandard conditions.

The primary purpose of the ITC is to facilitate connections from one transportation mode to another (rail, bus, public transit, air, taxi, private vehicle, and pedestrian) and improve links to Anchorage's central business district (CBD) to meet transit passenger needs over the next 20 to 30 years. The project includes the following:

- ***Intermodal improvements.*** A two-story ITC building with approximately 38,000 square feet of space will be constructed on the north side of the passenger main line, north and slightly west of the existing depot on a gravel lot that is currently used to support freight transfer operations. The facility will provide convenient and safe intermodal passenger boarding areas, with well-defined and adequately sized arrival and departure areas that serve rail, pedestrian, transit buses, and other rubber-tired vehicles. The ITC also will include transit-oriented retail and office space that complements transit ridership (such as newsstands, beverages, drugstores, etc.).

- ***Trackside improvements.*** Three new passenger siding tracks and two new passenger platforms will be constructed to allow the simultaneous loading and unloading of passengers without tying up the passenger main track.

- ***Baggage and Passenger Loading/Unloading Improvements.*** These improvements will provide improved baggage handling with adequate capacity, separate from passenger areas, to alleviate the cross-traffic that currently exists.

- ***Access, Circulation, and Parking Improvements.*** The project will improve queuing and circulation for vehicles providing drop-off and pickup for ITC users; enhance pedestrian facilities; and improve pedestrian connections between the Ship Creek ITC area, downtown Anchorage CBD, and the existing pedestrian/trail network. Road access to the ITC for passenger pickup and drop-off will be from 1st Avenue or an extension of West Ship Creek Avenue. An approximately 650-space garage, terraced up the hillside, will be constructed on the existing depot parking lot to serve transit users and employees in the ITC. To address pedestrian access problems associated with the steep hillside and horizontal distance separating downtown from the facility, an elevated walkway will extend from the parking garage to the ITC. The top of the parking garage will be a landscaped park and public plaza area. The project will provide connections to the existing sidewalks/trail network to serve pedestrians and bicyclists and keep them safely separated from road vehicles and trains. A traffic signal and left turn pocket will be installed at the intersection of North C Street and 1st Avenue as well as North C Street and Ship Creek Avenue to accommodate projected traffic to the facility and to improve safety at the wider crossing.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

The Environmental Assessment (EA) considered various alternatives for the facility, including a no-build and two build alternatives. The two build alternatives vary primarily in the location of the intermodal station building. Under the Northside Alternative (recommended action), the ITC building would be developed on the north side of the existing passenger mainline. Under the Southside Alternative (Alternative 3), the ITC building would be constructed south of the existing passenger mainline to the east of the existing depot (on the site now occupied by the baggage storage building). Both build alternatives include pedestrian improvements and connections to the platforms, the existing depot, parking facilities, the downtown business district, and existing sidewalks and trails. The new passenger tracks and platforms would be identical and a parking garage would be constructed on the current ARRC parking lot and adjacent hillside across West 1st Avenue from the existing depot. Three other alternatives were considered but eliminated for various reasons, including: adverse impacts on historic resources; adverse impacts on local traffic circulation; and inability to effectively improve pedestrian connections.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The EA documented that the proposed will not have any significant adverse environmental impacts. The following section provides a summary of the EA's findings.

Transportation Impacts

No adverse impacts on traffic and transportation will result from the project. The primary goals of increased operational efficiencies and safety in facilitating connections among from one transportation mode to another will be realized. The ITC development will have long-term positive impacts on the current and planned transportation systems in the Ship Creek area and for

the ARRC's passenger rail system. Among the transportation benefits that will be realized are improved connectivity to existing and planned facilities, better and safer pedestrian connections to downtown Anchorage, and more efficient circulation for buses, taxis, and automobiles accessing the ITC. Connections to the existing sidewalks/trail network will be a benefit to pedestrians and bicyclists and keep them safely separated from road vehicles and trains.

The project will increase the numbers of buses, taxis, and automobiles accessing the area. As part of the project, a traffic signal and left turn pocket will be installed at the intersection of North C Street and 1st Avenue as well as North C Street and Ship Creek Avenue to accommodate projected traffic to the facility and to improve safety. No adverse traffic impacts will occur.

The Physical Environment

Air Quality

The project will have no significant impact on air quality. The project area is designated as not being in attainment with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for carbon monoxide (CO). Based on traffic forecasts and intersection Level of Service (LOS) predictions, a quantitative micro-scale CO analysis was not required. Emissions from vehicles in the parking garage and the roadway were estimated to result in CO concentrations less than the NAAQS, and therefore, they will not cause or contribute to violation of the NAAQS. Dust and emissions from construction equipment may result in short-term increases in criteria pollutants and localized decreases in air quality.

Mitigation: Any fugitive dust emissions will be mitigated, if necessary, through application of water or other dust suppressants.

Soils, Geology, and Seismic Conditions

Grading and construction will result in minor impacts to the geological environment. Alteration of the existing topography will occur in the area of Quyana Park, where construction of the parking garage will occur on a geologically sensitive slope. Geological limitations include the potential for lateral movement during an earthquake of the size and intensity of the 1964 Earthquake. The primary concerns are the effect that the project could have on the stability of the buttressed slope (during an earthquake) and the subsequent potential effects to existing downtown infrastructure or to the parking garage itself. With proper design, there will be no significant impacts to existing or planned improvements due to geologic, soils, or seismic conditions.

Mitigation: The geotechnical limitations associated with constructing in the buttress area will be overcome with proper design. Site-specific technical explorations will be undertaken to determine the structural bearing support capabilities of the soils and to aid appropriate engineering design. The seismic design will comply with applicable MOA building codes. Impacts will be mitigated by maintaining or improving current stability conditions by filling and buttressing the toe of the slope and cutting or unweighting the upper parts of the slope. A storm water pollution prevention plan (SWPPP) will be prepared and implemented as part of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit required for the project (General Permit for Storm Water Discharges from Construction Sites). Best Management

Practices (BMPs) will be employed during construction to minimize the potential for erosion and sedimentation.

Hydrology and Flood Zone

The new terminal building, siding tracks, and platforms will be located within the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Army of Corps of Engineers (USACE) 100-year floodplain. The project area is within a developed industrial yard, and therefore, the surrounding area is not a natural flood storage area and does not support natural and beneficial floodplain values. There will be no impact on natural and beneficial floodplain values. The project will not result in significant floodplain encroachment and will not impact a regulatory floodway. However, a flood hazard permit will be required for the proposed development in the 100-year flood zone.

Mitigation: ARRC will obtain a flood hazard permit and adhere to the terms and conditions of that permit. The lowest habitable floor of the ITC building will be at least one foot above the base flood elevation (BFE) of 19 feet mean sea level (MSL) to minimize the potential for flood damage to life and property.

Water Resources and Water Quality

The project will increase the amount of impervious surface in the project area for the parking garage, roadways, sidewalks, new terminal, and platforms, reducing infiltration and groundwater recharge. However, the project will not violate state water quality standards, nor pose a threat to human health or pubic water supplies. Ship Creek will not be affected. No significant water quality impacts are expected. Ground disturbance activities during construction will be mitigated to minimize the potential for erosion and sedimentation.

Mitigation: The project will include the design of drainage facilities to minimize pollution of water sources by storm or snowmelt runoff. Site drainage will be designed to maintain existing drainage patterns and use existing storm drain systems. Runoff will be collected and treated by appropriate management practices, as required by the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) Department of Public Works Design Criteria Manual. A SWPPP will be prepared and implemented as part of a NPDES General Permit for Construction Activities. BMPs will be employed during construction to control erosion and sedimentation.

The Biological Environment

Vegetation and Wetlands

Development of the ITC at the proposed location will have no impact on vegetation or wildlife habitat. The ITC building site occurs in a highly developed industrial area and has been cleared of vegetation. The project will require the removal of a grass lawn and some ornamental trees at Quyana Park for construction of the parking garage and rooftop park/plaza, which will be landscaped with grass, shrubs, and trees. Neither the existing lawn nor the proposed rooftop park/plaza represent valuable wildlife habitat. Installation of additional tracks connecting to the freight line at the west end of the project area will require filling a small ditch-type wetland. This wetland has negligible value because of its size (0.16 acres), its isolation from other wetlands, and its location within an active industrial area.

Mitigation: If the wetland is determined to be under the jurisdiction of the USACE, ARRC will obtain a wetland permit and adhere to the terms and conditions of that permit.

Fish and Wildlife, Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and Protected Species

Development of the ITC will have no impact on birds or mammals in the project area. The project area is a highly disturbed industrial area that has been previously cleared of all natural vegetation. The existing lawn and ornamental trees in the location of the proposed parking garage offer negligible wildlife habitat.

Ship Creek is considered EFH for four species of salmon. The nearest improvement to Ship Creek is the proposed circulation road for buses (approximately 300 feet south of the creek). According to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), development of the project will have no significant impact on fish or EFH since the alternative is well outside of the Ship Creek stream corridor. There will be no in-water work and no changes in stream flow or other alterations that might affect fish or fish habitat.

Coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the NMFS indicates that no protected species exist in or near the project area. The project will not have an effect on populations or habitat of species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

The Human Environment

Land Use and Zoning

The project is compatible with the existing land use in the area. The zoning for the ARRC property is Planned Community (PC) District. However, the latest adopted PC plan is outdated and does not specifically identify or provide for development of the ITC. A revision to the PC zoning is needed, requiring submittal an updated master plan for the project area. A conditional use permit will also be required to construct the parking garage. No significant impacts on land use and zoning are expected.

Mitigation: ARRC will apply for a change to the "Planned Community" (PC) zoning. Impacts to the Public Land and Institution (PLI) zoning of the Quyana Park parcel will be mitigated by designing a more accessible park/plaza as the top level of the terraced parking structure. A joint use agreement or permit between ARRC, MOA, and DOT&PF will be developed for the use, operation, and maintenance of the affected parcels in Quyana Park.

Community and Socioeconomic Environment

No significant adverse impacts on socioeconomic conditions will result from the proposed project. Development of the project is consistent with, and will not adversely impact, the community character of the area, which is already rail-transit oriented. No residential structures are within the project limits; therefore, no relocation impacts to residents will occur. The project may require relocation of the Denali Federal Credit Union in the event the parcel on which it is located is needed before the lease expires in 2006. The project will not affect the population or housing supply of the greater Anchorage area, and there will be no disruptions in established

neighborhoods or to community cohesion. There will be no adverse impacts to minority or low-income populations.

The improved pedestrian and transit facilities and connections between the downtown and Ship Creek areas will have a positive impact on the overall character of the Ship Creek area. There will be increased employment by tenants of the transit-oriented retail/commercial space in the ITC and for ARRC personnel working on the trains and ITC operations. There may also be increased employment in the tourism sector associated with the downtown hotel district, which would bring money into the Anchorage economy. The project will create temporary employment and increase local expenditures on services, wages, and materials during construction. These increases will be short-term, but will have a minor positive economic effect on the Anchorage economy.

Mitigation: If relocation is necessary, it will be conducted in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended.

Noise and Vibration

Construction of the ITC will not cause significant adverse affects on noise or vibration. The immediate project vicinity encompasses an area with primarily industrial or commercial land uses and relatively high ambient noise levels. Highway vehicles and railroad activity account for the majority of the noise. An analysis of noise-sensitive receptors verified that there will be no noise impacts to any of the noise-sensitive land uses based on FTA criteria.

Utilities

Multiple sewer, water, and gas mains and overhead and buried electrical, lighting, and communication utilities exist throughout the project area. Temporary disruption of utility service may occur in the immediate vicinity as the new facility is constructed. The project also will require the relocation and/or replacement of some utilities. Further evaluation and field identification of all utilities will be performed prior to construction. No significant impact is expected to occur.

Mitigation: The ARRC will work with the utility companies and their clients that may be affected by utility disruptions to provide notice and determine amenable timing for utility disruptions to minimize impacts.

Archeological and Historic Sites

The new ITC will be constructed near the Anchorage Depot, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Early consultation with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) has indicated that the project will have no adverse effect on cultural resources, assuming compatible design (attention to scale, massing, and form) and integration of the existing depot to preserve its functionality. However, a formal determination of any adverse impacts to the depot cannot be made until the final design stage.

Mitigation. Consultation with the SHPO will continue throughout the design stages. SHPO will be contacted to provide design review at appropriate intervals to ensure that any potential effects are mitigated. Construction will not begin until the Section 106 consultation is complete, and any

required mitigation measures are incorporated into the design or construction plans. Should previously undiscovered cultural material be found during construction, potentially harmful activities will be stopped and the SHPO (Judith Bittner, 907-269-8721) will be notified.

Recreation and Section 4(f) Resources

The project will have favorable impacts on recreation mainly due to improved access and improvements to Quyana Park. The use of Quyana Park will be offset by the creation of the rooftop park/plaza, resulting in a net gain of park space. There will be no adverse impacts on nearby recreational activities, including fishing activities at Ship Creek, use of nearby trails and sidewalks, or on other nearby parks (Ship Creek Overlook Park and Barrow Park).

The project will use a portion of Quyana Park, a Section 4(f) resource, for construction of a parking garage with a rooftop park/plaza, changing the use and function of the terrain in that portion of the park. The Section 4(f) Evaluation concludes that no other prudent and feasible alternative to the project exists. The project will use approximately 1.62 acres of the 10.92-acre park on the park's lower elevations. Approximately 0.52 additional acres will be temporarily affected during construction, but will be returned to park use after construction. At the request of MOA transit department, a bus pullout has been incorporated into the design on the top floor of the parking garage. As proposed, after construction of the rooftop park, Quyana Park will be approximately 11.1 acres. The net gain in functional public space is approximately 0.21 acres.

Mitigation: Through early planning efforts and coordination with the MOA during the environmental review process, the following measures to minimize harm were identified and have been incorporated into the preliminary design:

- Minimize the footprint of the parking structure on Quyana Park by maximizing use of the existing parking lot and adjacent Denali Federal Credit Union lease area.
- Minimize the viewshed impacts from 3rd Avenue by terracing the parking structure and keeping the structure as low as possible.
- Replace an amount of park/open space equal to or greater than the amount used for the parking garage.
- Explore the opportunity of relocating the Engine No. 1 monument from the middle of the depot parking lot to a prominent location in the rooftop park.
- Enhance and relocate the Eisenhower Memorial to a prominent place in the park with a better north-facing view.
- Create a park/public space with improved views of the mountains and historic rail depot.
- Provide improved walking, resting, and viewing areas within the park on a more amenable slope, including landscaping, paths, and benches to enhance utilization.
- Keep the enhanced pedestrian corridor in line with E Street extended, in accordance with the MOA's vision for an E Street pedestrian corridor.
- Create a bus drop-off area on the roof of the parking structure to eliminate the need for city buses to descend into the Ship Creek Valley.

Consultation with the MOA will continue throughout the design for the parking garage with a rooftop park/plaza. MOA will be contacted to provide design review at appropriate intervals.

Potential short-term adverse impacts may occur in the form of temporary disruptions of road access to the Ship Creek area during construction. However, alternate access routes will be available.

Contaminated Sites

The primary potential for encountering contaminated soil or groundwater during construction appears to be due to the industrial use of the Ship Creek area and the fill material placed in the buttress area following the 1964 earthquake. In addition, former UST and leaking UST sites as well as other contaminated sites are present near the project area, and contamination could migrate to the project area.

Mitigation: The potential for encountering contaminated soil and groundwater and asbestos containing materials will be considered during construction planning. Contamination discovered during construction will be addressed in a manner consistent with applicable state and federal laws.

Visual Impacts

Views of the depot from the upper elevations of the park will change to include a park/plaza on in the foreground. A new viewing area will be created along the edge of the park, overlooking the existing depot and new ITC. Views of the rail yard, Ship Creek industrial area, Ship Creek, Mount Susitna, and Denali will remain unchanged with the exception that the new ITC will be in the lower foreground. The rooftop park/plaza, relocated Eisenhower Memorial, and enclosed skybridges will provide new high quality public space with added pedestrian and overlook safety, as well as improved public space affording views of the historic depot and mountains beyond.

Mitigation: The visual impacts will be mitigated through designs that minimize obscuring views of the depot and enhance other views of the area. SHPO will be involved with the project through final design to ensure that the building design is compatible with and minimizes visual impacts to the historic depot.

Construction

The project will create minor adverse impacts during construction, including temporary increases in noise, vibration, and dust; the potential for erosion; and temporary disruption of utility service. Air quality impacts will not affect compliance with air quality standards, because heavy equipment burning diesel fuel does not emit large quantities of carbon monoxide, the pollutant for which Anchorage is not in attainment. Construction noise will be minor in this industrial area and will be temporary in duration. Construction contractors will be required to comply with local ordinances that limit nighttime noise.

Soil erosion within the construction zones of the project area will be short-lived, with minimal impact. Pile driving during construction may result in vibration impacts and possibly short-term settlement of adjacent loose sand materials. However, these vibrations and settlements, if any, are expected to be minor temporary impacts.

Other minor adverse construction impacts include short-term delays for users of the depot, intermittent delays in traffic to move large machinery around the site, and temporary closure of a portion of Quyana Park. First Avenue and 2nd Avenue could be temporarily closed during construction of the parking garage. To ensure adequate traffic mobility, both roads will not be closed at the same time. Closures and detours of North C Street will be required during track construction across this roadway. Rail operations and passengers will experience potential delays during construction and track work.

Mitigation: Traffic delays will be mitigated through development of traffic control plans and timing construction to minimize the disruption during peak seasons. Appropriate signage will be used to direct travelers to alternative routes. ARRC will work with local businesses that may be affected by road closures to minimize impacts. A SWPPP will be prepared and implemented as part of an NPDES General Permit for Storm Water Discharges from Construction Sites. BMPs will be employed throughout the proposed project to control soil erosion and sedimentation. Any fugitive dust emissions will be mitigated, if necessary, through application of water or other dust suppressants. ARRC will work with the utility companies and their clients that may be affected by utility disruptions to provide notice and determine amenable timing for utility disruptions to minimize impacts.

Cumulative Effects

Several other developments in the Ship Creek area have been proposed that could potentially contribute to cumulative effects on resources. Although the Ship Creek ITC project will support future development of commuter rail service to the Mat-Su valley and shuttle service to the Ted Stevens International Airport (TSIA), development of these services is not guaranteed. If federal funding is obtained to facilitate development of either commuter rail or TSIA shuttle service, additional environmental impact analyses will need to be conducted before those services could be implemented. No significant cumulative impacts were identified.

Other Considerations

Environmental Justice

The project will not disproportionately or adversely impact low income or minority residents. No adverse impacts on minority or low-income populations will result of the proposed project.

Government-to-Government Coordination

FTA conducted government-to-government coordination with various federally recognized tribes and Native corporations. No concerns were identified.

Public Involvement

Public outreach efforts included: newspaper advertisements, mailings to businesses, and hand delivered flyers announcing the public scoping meeting (October 10, 2002); an interagency scoping meeting (October 9, 2002) and several other agency meetings; telephone interviews with key stakeholders; presentations at community council meetings, and a public hearing during the 30-day comment period on the EA. Meeting locations and times were chosen to maximize public involvement. The public hearing was held on April 23, 2003 at the ARRC depot, with

nearly two dozen people signing in. The comment period continued until May 15, 2003. No significant controversies or impacts relating to the project were identified.

ENVIRONMENTAL FINDING

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) finds under 23 CFR 771.121 that there are no significant impacts on the environment associated with the proposed project. This finding of No Significant Impact is based on the April 2003 EA and its supporting documents. FTA has independently evaluated these documents and has found that they accurately discuss the project's purpose and need, relevant environmental issues, impacts of the proposed project, and appropriate mitigation measures. They provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an environmental impact statement is not required.

Moreover, FTA has determined, based on the EA, that the project will have no effect on populations or habitat or species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, or on habitat protected under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and has so notified appropriate resource agencies.

In addition, FTA has preliminarily determined, in consultation with the Alaska SHPO, that this project complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Early consultation with SHPO has indicated the project will have no adverse effect on cultural resources. Consultation with the SHPO will continue throughout the design stages. Construction will not begin until the Section 106 consultation is complete, and any required mitigation measures are incorporated into the design or construction plans.

FTA has determined that the project complies with Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966. The project will involve use of a portion of a public park, however there is no feasible and prudent alternative to the proposed project, and efforts have been made to minimize negative impacts to Section 4(f) resources.

The project is in compliance with Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management. There will be no impact on natural and beneficial floodplain values.

The proposed project is in compliance with Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands. The project has been developed to minimize impact to wetlands. The project will require filling a small ditch-type wetland. This wetland has negligible value because of its size, its isolation from other wetlands or riparian systems, and its location within an active industrial area.

FTA has determined that the project meets the requirements of the Clean Air Act, as amended in 1990. The project will not cause or contribute to violations of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Finally, FTA has determined that the project complies with Executive Order 12898, (Environmental Justice) and the Department of Transportation Order on Environmental Justice.

This action complies with the National Environmental Policy Act; the Department of Transportation Act of 1966; the Endangered Species Act of 1973; the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act; the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966; Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management; Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands, and Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice.

R.F. Krochalis
Regional Administrator
Federal Transit Administration

6/9/03
Date