

Port of Whittier Operational Efficiency Project

Background

The Port of Whittier serves as Alaska's primary rail-connected maritime gateway, linking the state to the North American rail network and supporting inbound freight for Alaska's consumers and industrial base. Freight movement relies on barge service and rail operations through the Portage Tunnel, which currently has limited vertical clearance that prevents double-stacking of containers. This constraint requires longer trains, creates inefficiencies in switching operations at both the Whittier and Anchorage yards, and results in additional handling and reliance on trucking due to limited rail capacity.

Purpose

The purpose of the project is to upgrade the Portage Tunnel and related infrastructure to allow double-stacked container operations on the Alaska Railroad network. Enabling double-stacking is intended to reduce train lengths,

improve operational efficiency at the Port of Whittier, and enhance the overall performance of freight transportation across Alaska by increasing rail capacity and reducing operational constraints.

Project Scope

The project scope includes infrastructure improvements to the Portage Tunnel to increase vertical clearance and support double-stack rail operations, along with procurement of well railcars and associated system upgrades. The project also includes tunnel safety and structural upgrades such as drainage improvements, rockfall protection, and rehabilitation of existing structural elements.



Map showing the Portage Tunnel and Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel.

Project Benefits

The project will provide significant operational, economic, environmental, and safety benefits. Key benefits include; reduced switching operations and operating costs, improved barge turnaround times, and elimination of container double-handling. Increased rail capacity will enable diversion of freight from truck to rail, reducing roadway congestion, emissions, and pavement wear while improving safety.

Project Status

The project is currently in the planning, project design and pre-construction phase where the project is expected undergo further Environmental review and permitting. Once environmental review is completed, the project design is accepted and permitting is finished, ARRC will solicit a construction contractor to complete the work.

- Construction is anticipated to begin 2028.
- Project completion is expected by 2029.

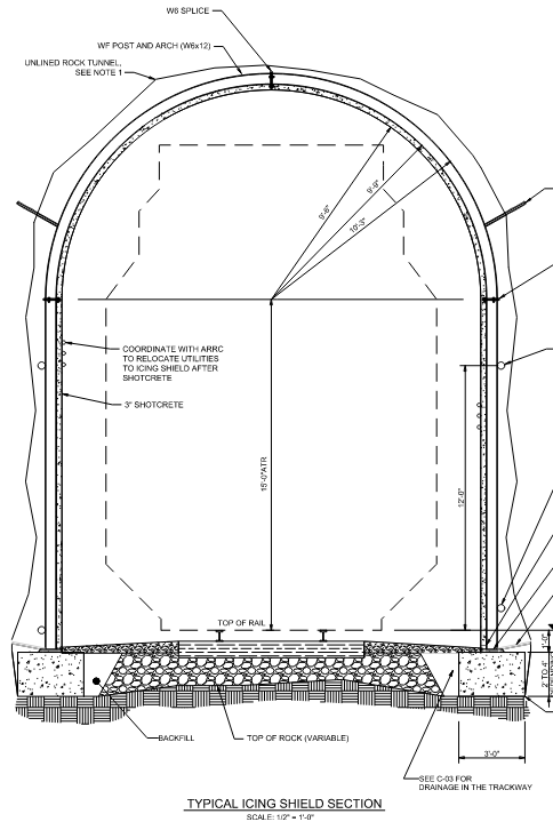
Cost and Funding

The project has been awarded a grant under U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP) with a 30% match by ARRC.

More Information

For more information, email the Alaska Railroad using the Public Comment email address: Public_Comment@akrr.com.

Additional project fact sheets are available at <https://www.alaskarailroad.com/corporate/projects>.



The Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel will undergo infrastructure improvements to increase vertical clearance.