

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of Proposed Project

The MSB and ARRC propose to construct and operate a new rail line to connect the MSB’s Port MacKenzie to the existing ARRC rail system. The new rail line is anticipated to be approximately 30 to 45 miles long, depending on the route selected. This rail line has been considered for nearly 30 years.

New rail line construction requires the preparation of 1) a request to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) and 2) an environmental document in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The STB is the federal agency with jurisdiction over railroad rate and service issues and rail restructuring transactions (such as mergers, line sales, line construction, and line abandonments). A request to the STB to build and operate a new rail line initiates the NEPA process.

The information gathered by the MSB and ARRC through the public involvement activities and incorporated into the Preliminary Environmental and Alternatives Review (PEAR) will be presented to the STB to begin the NEPA process. The PEAR details the identification and analysis of reasonable alignment corridors, completes conceptual engineering design on the corridors, and estimates anticipated construction costs to be fully evaluated during the STB’s NEPA process. Figure 1.1 shows the process and anticipated schedule from the application phase through the STB NEPA process.

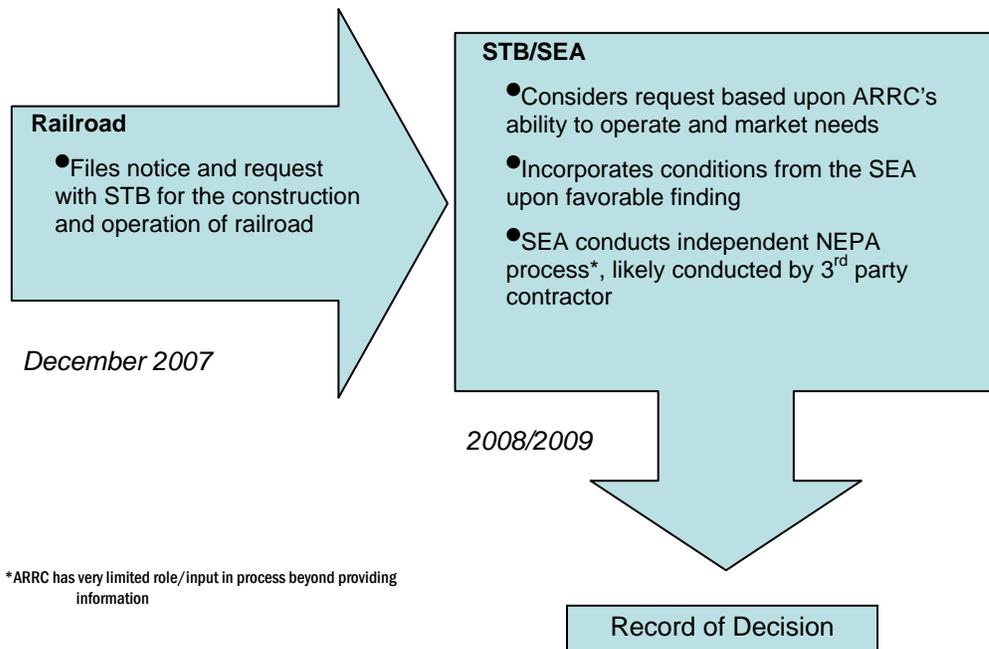


Figure 1-1 Surface Transportation Board Application process

1.2 Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension project is to establish a rail link between Port MacKenzie and the Alaska Railroad's main line, providing Port MacKenzie customers/shippers with efficient rail transportation between the Port and Interior Alaska. The Port MacKenzie rail extension would begin at the existing Port MacKenzie facility and tie into ARRC's existing main line between Mile 167 north of Wasilla and Mile 190 north of Willow.

Specifically, the project proposes to:

- Support Port MacKenzie's continuing development as a bulk material resources export and import facility, and as a multi-modal facility
- Provide an alternative to highway transportation for Port MacKenzie

Chapter 1.1 of the PEAR contains a detailed description of the project's Purpose and Need.

1.3 Public Involvement Tools Overview

Public involvement during the preliminary engineering and environmental data collection phase was led by the MSB's public affairs director. Public involvement was used to obtain information from the public and the various stakeholders to refine the corridor alternatives and provide background information to the MSB and ARRC, leading to the preparation and submission of an application to the STB.

Public involvement activities throughout this initial public outreach stage included:

- Web site creation and maintenance
- Mailing list creation and maintenance
- Timely response to written comments and concerns
- Media coordination and monitoring
- Message development and refinement
- Demonstration that MSB and ARRC value the public process

Table 1-1 Public Involvement Tools

Tool	Description
Mailings	Post card mailings were sent to approximately 7,700 recipients to announce public meetings. Contact information was obtained from the MSB property tax lists and from the ARRC's contact list of MSB residents.
Public Open Houses	Five public open house meetings were held on consecutive evenings between October 1 and October 5, 2007. Meetings were held in the potentially affected communities of Wasilla, Big Lake, Willow, Knik, and Houston. A court reporter was present at all open houses to record comments and ideas from people who preferred not to submit written comments.
Press Releases and Media Coverage	Press releases were sent to media outlets before and after each public meeting. These press releases resulted in print media coverage and radio broadcasts.
Informational materials	Maps, fact sheets, Frequently Asked Questions, comment forms and project business cards were produced and distributed at all public meetings.
Web site	A project Web site (www.portmacrail.com) was established to provide project updates, record comments, and distribute documents. The site was updated daily during the week of public meetings and regularly thereafter.
Individual meetings	A letter offering one-on-one or small group meetings with project staff was sent to 26 interest groups potentially affected by the project.
Flyers	Flyers were distributed to libraries and other public places (such as gas stations and post offices) to announce meeting dates and promote the Web site.
Newspaper Display Advertisements	Display advertisements were placed in the Anchorage Daily News, Mat-Su Frontiersman, and the Talkeetna Good Times to announce the public open house meetings and to direct the public to the project Web site.
Project Business Card	A business card provided contact information for the MSB public affairs director and ARRC public information officer. The open house meeting information and project Web address were also provided.
Fact Sheet	ARRC provided a Fact Sheet with basic information regarding the project, project history, and potential benefits.
FAQs	A list of frequently asked questions was provided at the public open house meetings and on the project Web site.