

4.0 ISSUES AND ALTERNATIVES COMMENT SUMMARY

Several common themes emerged from the public comments, which are presented by alternative in summary form below. These comments were used in the evaluation of the preliminary environmental impacts of the project and were incorporated into Port MacKenzie Rail Extension project Preliminary Environmental and Alternatives Report. Appendix B contains all comments received during the preliminary scoping process.

4.1 Willow

The comments pertaining to the Willow corridor related to safety, trails, recreation, socio-economic impacts, and environmental impacts. Many comments referenced boaters, snowmachiners, dog mushers, cross country skiers, snowshoers, and small tour business operators as primary groups in the area who would be impacted. Concerns relating to environmental impacts included noise, wildlife, vegetation, stream and river crossings, and historic and cultural sites.

4.2 Houston

Comments relating to the Houston corridor focused on developing the opportunity for an industrial park and potential impacts to existing development. There were concerns relating to private property, noise pollution, wetlands and hydrology, fire hazards, and impacts to wildlife such as calving moose in the spring and the sandhill cranes nesting during the summer.

4.3 Big Lake

Comments regarding the Big Lake corridor ranged from long-term opportunities the extension might provide to support business development to concerns relating to private property such as “expected” decreases in property values and increases to congestion in the area.

4.4 Port MacKenzie West and East

Comments included concerns on impacts to farms, disruption of productive fields, and keeping agricultural parcels intact. There was a preference to follow the Port MacKenzie Road as a suggested alternative.

4.5 Other Comments

4.5.1 Trails/Crossings

Trails were a common theme in many of the comments and were recognized as important for recreational activities, such as dog mushing training and racing, and snowmachine riding. Trail access was a concern for all alternatives. Concerns focused on maintaining access across the railroad tracks and not consolidating the trails. There was a preference for more frequent rail crossings utilizing both underpasses and overpasses for trails.

4.5.2 Wetlands/Watershed and Anadromous Streams

Wetland areas were also highlighted in many comments. Some residents expressed concern that the rail embankment would become a barrier that would disrupt natural drainage, especially from Beaver, Horseshoe, and West lakes. Comments suggested the need to review flood hazard areas.

Anadromous streams, such as the outlet streams from Crooked Lake flowing into the Little Susitna River, were also highlighted as areas of concern.

4.5.3 Other Corridors

A small number of comments suggested other corridors. These suggestions focused on following the existing Knik Goose Bay Road and also following the natural boundary of the Knik Arm.

4.5.4 Purpose and Need

Purpose and Need comments focused on commodity availability and reliability of the Agrium plant as a potential market. There was concern expressed that not enough information was known about the economic forecast and market availability.