

Gov / re: Railroad Corridor
Letter send to State DNR and MSB

February 12, 2007

RE: Public Notice, Pt. McKenzie to Willow Railroad Corridor Easement ADL 230025, AS 38.05.850

Dear Mr. Shishido,

The Willow Area Community Organization (WACO) approved a motion in the February general meeting to oppose the approval of easements over borough land as described in this public notice.

The proposed corridor from Willow to Pt. Mackenzie identified in the 2003 Matanuska Susitna Borough Rail Corridor Study (e.g. Corridor 3) was selected based on an unrepresentative public involvement process held in Houston (not Willow), and before it can be addressed in a community comprehensive plan. Further, two railroad corridors, the existing line and Corridor 3, by piercing a small community, will have significantly impact on the community of Willow. WACO opposes the reservation of railroad easement identified in the above Public Notice based on the following:

Impacts to Trails and Outdoor Recreation: Willow is widely known as a year around recreational community. A large portion of our local economy relies on fishing, hunting and boating in the summer to snow machining and dog mushing in the winter. Eighty miles of heavily used recreational trails identified in the Mat Su Borough Trails Plan are in or near the corridor. Many people recreate in two very popular State recreation areas, Willow Creek and Nancy Lake. They are there to enjoy the quite and beauty of Alaska. A railroad will greatly compromise their experience of reaching out to Alaska's wild places.

As stated in the Rail Corridor Study "The project [Corridor 3] would be expected to have some direct impacts on recreation, especially trail use and limiting access to recreation sites particularly if mitigation measures such as below and above ground crossings over trails for example are not utilized". It should be noted that no mitigation measures have been identified or approved for Corridor 3. **Impacts to residents:** Having two railroad lines running through one small community will have undue hardship on residents. Many homes will be displaced and dreams destroyed. Unfortunately, many residents will be disrupted from two different directions. This "surround sound" for their homes is not what was intended when they moved here and will diminish property values and quality of life.

The Public Involvement Process: The public involvement process upon which Corridor 3 was selected was held in the town of Houston, at Houston High School. Three public meetings were held at Houston High School during 2002-2003. During which time, several corridors closest to Big Lake and Houston were effectively eliminated and the selection of Corridor 3, which impacts only the community Willow was chosen as a preferred route. Houston High School is approximately 20 miles from the Willow Community Center and as far as 50 miles from people who live in North Willow. It is reasonable to assume that Willow did not have fair representation during the public process that elected Corridor 3. WACO requests that the Borough engage in a representative and fair public process beyond a simple public notice, before selection of a rail corridor or reserving any rail road easements on borough property.

Willow will be preparing a comprehensive plan this year. A fair public process would be for the Willow community to address transportation in general and the corridor issue in particular while developing the plan. The acquisition of corridor easements before completion of the

comprehensive plan is premature and not in our community's best interests.

Cost: Reserving railroad corridor easements based on the 2003 Matanuska Susitna Rail Corridor Study at this time could be a significant waste of tax dollars. To date the selection of Corridor 3 is at best only conceptual. Several state and federal funding and environmental review processes related to all seven of the potential rail corridors identified in the Corridor Study are still eligible for review and selection as a preferred rail corridor.

In addition, Corridor 3 impacts a large amount of wetlands, has the most bridges including an additional bridge over Willow Creek, is the longest and, thus, the most costly of the other corridor options.

The intent WACO's action to oppose corridor 3 does not mean the community opposes the railroad line in itself. Rather, the community feels the Matanuska Susitna Borough is pushing this corridor despite a flawed public involvement process, an ignored comprehensive plan process and before adequate feasibility and environmental review. Therefore, the Willow Area Community Organization opposes the acquisition of easements for rail corridor 3 at this time.

Sincerely,
Linda Oxley Chair