North Pole Road/Rail Crossing Reduction

PROJECT FACTS

Project Scope

The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC), in cooperation with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System (FMATS), has initiated an environmental assessment (EA) and associated preliminary engineering for the proposed North Pole Road/Rail Crossing Reduction Project (North Pole Rail Project).

ARRC proposes to reduce the number of at-grade (same level) road/rail crossings on an 8-mile section of the Eielson Branch track (from Richardson Hwy Milepost 9 to the Chena River Floodway) that currently runs through North Pole. Crossing reduction options may include realigning this section of track on or along the Tanana River Levee. The existing at-grade crossing of the Richardson Hwy may also be removed and a new grade-separated crossing (overpass) installed.

The proposed project represents Phase One of a larger proposed realignment project (Fairbanks Area Rail Line Relocation). This phase has independent utility and would provide immediate safety benefits.

Purpose and Need

Current train movements through the City of North Pole and across the Richardson Highway pose a safety risk to the public and to rail operations. The project purpose is to enhance public safety in downtown North Pole, improve railroad operating efficiency, and to maintain rail access to existing and future customers along this portion of the track.

Benefits

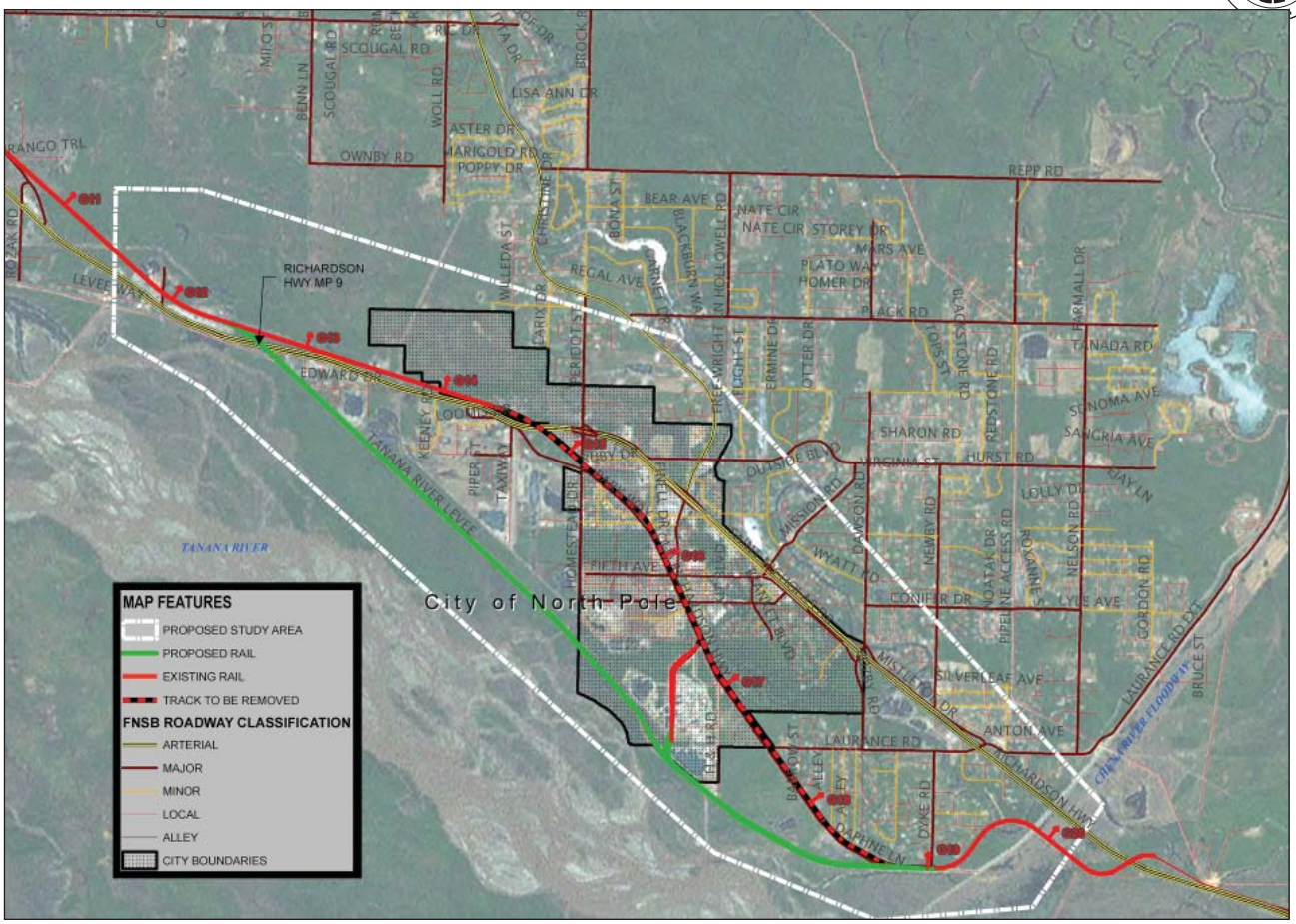
- Eliminates multiple at-grade crossings, thereby reducing inherent risks of train derailment and train/vehicle collision.
- Eliminates North Pole traffic delays caused by railroad operations through downtown.
- Improves operational efficiency by allowing for increased track speeds.

Status

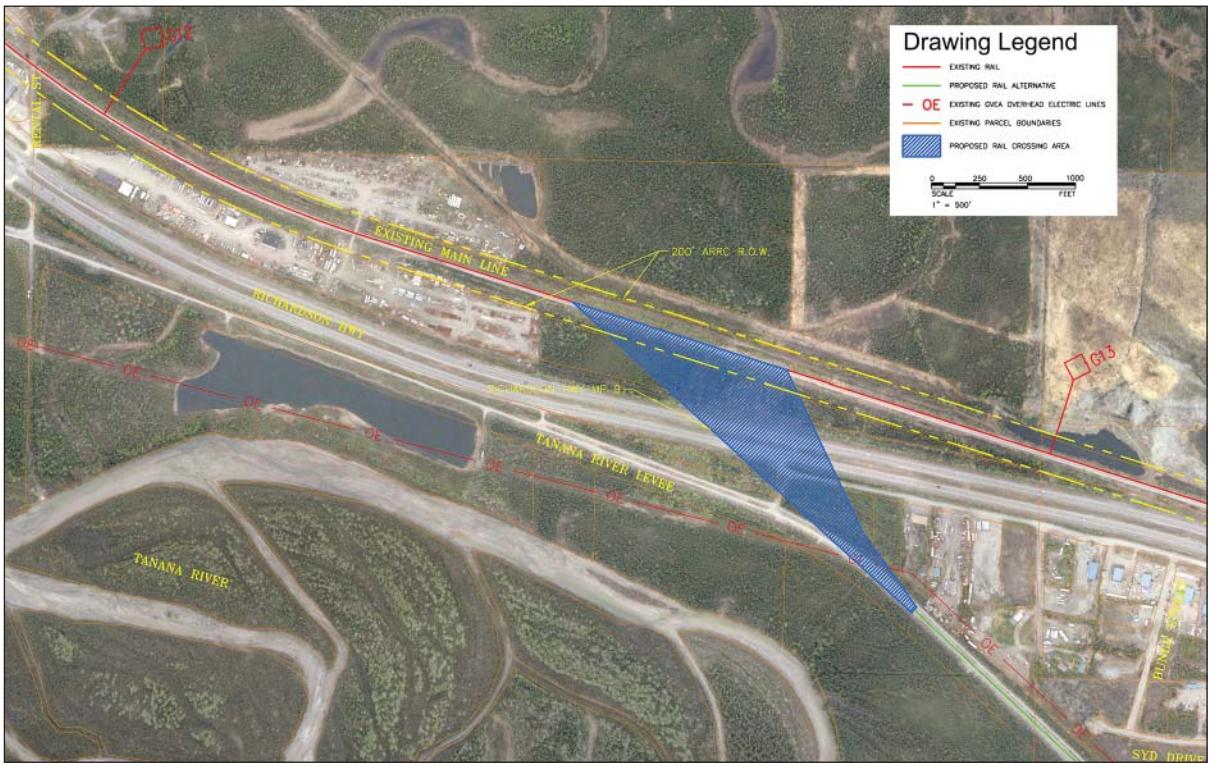
- With new funding available, an environmental assessment was initiated in mid-2010.
- DOWL and TransSystems were hired as consultants to assist with EA planning and activities.
- Scoping activities — to include initial agency and public scoping meetings — were completed during January 2011.
- Technical studies were completed during summer 2011.
- FRA review of a Draft EA began fall 2011. The Draft EA is expected to be available for public review and comment in early 2012.
- A Final EA is expected to be submitted to the FRA during the first half of 2012.

Project Costs & Funding

- The North Pole Rail Project EA is financed by $1 million in reallocated FHWA Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds (federal $909,700; local match $90,300). In FY 2010, the FHWA STP allocated funds to the FMATS and several FMATS STP projects were completed under budget. FMATS and Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (ADOT/PF) transferred these FHWA funds to the FRA for use on road/rail crossing reductions.
- The cost for final design and construction of this phase will be refined through the EA process. Funding is not yet identified.



The project corridor stretches from Mile 9 of the Richardson Highway to the Chena River Floodway.



The EA will consider replacing the existing at-grade crossing over the Richardson Highway with a grade-separated crossing.