FREQUENT QUESTIONS

ALASKA RAILROAD

Removing / Cleaning Graffiti from Rail Bridges

Each year, the Alaska Railroad receives a number of resident complaints about graffiti on railroad bridges and other structures, particularly within urban settings, such as mid-town Anchorage. The Alaska Railroad wholeheartedly agrees that graffiti-covered railroad assets can project a less-than-desirable image. In fact, no railroad wants graffiti on their rolling stock, buildings or bridges.

Not all graffiti is artistic and may even be considered offensive. The Alaska Railroad discourages members of the public – even talented artists – from drawing/painting graffiti on railroad infrastructure and equipment. As talented as some graffiti artists may be, they put themselves at risk and cost the railroad and other entities money in order to clean up the markings.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is graffiti a crime?

Yes. People who mar railroad assets with graffiti commit criminal trespass when they enter railroad property (the right-of-way generally includes 100 feet on either side of the track) and they commit vandalism when applying paint to railroad property. Special Agents with the Alaska Railroad Police & Security Department work with municipal police to catch and fine people who trespass and vandalize property.

What is involved with cleaning graffiti off a rail bridge?

Bridge clean up entails repainting. This is a time-consuming and costly endeavor that typically requires coordinated efforts between the railroad, municipality (as bridge permit-holder) and the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (ADOT&PF), as the agency responsible for maintaining the roadway under the bridge).

More specifically, the following activities are involved with repainting a rail bridge:

- Blast-cleaning the bridge structure
- Toxicity testing on blast debris
- Collecting and containing dust
- Field painting with a zinc-rich primer, epoxy intermediate coat and urethane top coat
- Flagging and inspection services
- Traffic control
- Project, construction and quality assurance oversight



Graffiti clean-up on the rail bridge over Anchorage's Northern Lights Boulevard involves safety measures and lane closures over three days in early May 2018.



The Dimond Blvd rail bridge is repainted after cleaning in 2011.

Sept. 8
2018

FREQUENT QUESTIONS

ALASKA RAILROAD

What does it cost to clean up graffiti?

Precise cost depends upon the structure or equipment that is affected, and where it is located. Nationwide, graffiti vandals cause millions of dollars of damage to railroad property every year. In Alaska, graffiti vandals cause tens of thousands of dollars in damage each year.





Volunteers paint railroad underpass structures in Anchorage (top) and Wasilla (bottom) in May 2018.

How much does it cost to clean a rail bridge over a busy roadway?

The effort can easily add up to a half million dollars. For example, in June 2016, the railroad compiled a cost estimate for blast-cleaning and repainting the Northern Lights Boulevard rail bridge. The estimated total cost of $451,000 included direct costs noted above, as well as indirect costs such as the ADOT&PF audited overhead cost, which is adjusted annually. Moreover, such cost estimates are subject to an estimated increase of 3.5% each year, which accounts for cost escalation due to rising material and labor expenses.

For power wash and painting only (such as the Northern Lights Blvd overpass effort in May 2018), the cost is $10,000 to $20,000.

How long does it take to clean graffiti from a rail bridge?

For bridges over busy roadways, such as Dimond Boulevard or Northern Lights Boulevard in Anchorage, traffic must be re-routed or delayed as equipment and maintenance personnel are brought in to clean the surfaces, and then apply new paint. This can take many hours, and sometimes multiple days. The Northern Lights Boulevard clean-up in early May 2018 required three days.

When is it best to clean / paint over graffiti?

Weather should be dry and relatively warm. Paint will not adhere well in wet or below-freezing conditions.

Who is responsible for cleaning graffiti from a railroad asset?

If the asset is a railroad building, vehicle, train or other railroad equipment, the cost of cleaning usually falls to the Alaska Railroad. However, many bridges over railroad tracks through Anchorage are actually owned by the government entity responsible for maintaining the roadway being crossed or for permitting the bridge crossing. In the case of the Northern Lights Boulevard Bridge, the Municipality of Anchorage is the permit-holder, and as such, is the entity responsible for graffiti clean-up.

In 1987, the Alaska Railroad granted the Municipality of Anchorage a 55-year permit (#5873) to construct, reconstruct, operate and/or maintain a railroad bridge, utilities and a four-lane public highway at ARRC Milepost 108.2 (76th Avenue) and at Milepost 111.76 (Northern Lights Boulevard). This permit is still in effect until 2042 and clearly specifies that bridge maintenance is the MOA's responsibility.

Will the Municipality clean up the Northern Lights Boulevard rail bridge?

Due to the cost and complexity of cleaning graffiti from this bridge, the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) recommended that the effort be submitted as a proposed capital improvement project. In June 2016, the Alaska Railroad submitted a detailed cost estimate ($451,000) to the Municipality's Project, Maintenance and Engineering (PM&E) department. Unfortunately, many other projects have vied for limited MOA capital resources. In the meantime, a limited clean-and-paint effort occurred late spring 2018.

Is there an alternative to capital improvement planning and prioritization?

The Alaska Railroad has been coordinating with the MOA to consider a partial cleanup effort using roller-and-paint with more temporary and less comprehensive results. In early May 2018, the railroad and ADOT&PF recruited volunteers to paint over graffiti on Anchoragage International Airport Road and Minnesota Blvd overpasses. And, in the Mat-Su Borough railroad volunteers painted the Palmer-Wasilla Hwy underpass and the overpass in Houston.

In the future, some limited bridge painting could be addressed as a MOA Street Maintenance project. In addition, the Municipality continues to support a Graffiti Buster Program, which could be another resource for addressing railroad bridge graffiti. Here is a link to a page with more information about this program.
www.muni.org/departments/operations/pages/graffiti.aspx