

Appendix F

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
AND PUBLIC FACILITIES
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

FRANK H. MURKOWSKI, GOVERNOR

3132 CHANNEL DRIVE
PO Box 112500
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-2500

FAX: (907) 586-8365
PHONE: (907) 465-3900

August 2, 2006

Patrick Gamble, President and CEO
Alaska Railroad Corporation
PO Box 107500
Anchorage AK 99510-7500

Dear Pat,

We have discussed on a number of occasions various aspects of ARRC operations in the Fairbanks area. Of particular concern to me are considerations associated with the use of the median for a Parks Highway Bypass. If this bypass approaches reality, I will provide a detailed analysis as the particulars become available. However, I feel I need to provide you with some high level concerns from what I have heard of this bypass so that they may become part of the discussions and planning.

1. The present median of the Parks Highway is much too narrow to accommodate use by ARRC. The median will not accommodate a double track. Future highway capacity improvements will require added lanes. Also, snow storage for both the highway and the railroad must be accommodated. Further, we need to determine what FHWA, FRA or FTA require as a safe distance between railroad and highway traffic. It looks to me like additional ROW will be necessary to accommodate reconstruction of half the highway as well as new overpass bridges at Geist and Airport Roads and new highway bridges and a railroad bridge over the Chena River.
2. There are overpass structures in our long-term plans at the Parks Highway/Sheep Creek Road intersection as well as the Mitchell Expressway/University Avenue intersection that must be accommodated in any ARRC project.
3. Depending on elevations needed to pass over Airport Road and to exit the median near University Avenue, there could be a conflict with the aircraft runway approach at the airport as a result of FAA safety requirements.

Patrick Gamble

Page 2

August 2, 2006

Pat, these are the major considerations that presently come to mind. There may be others. A project such as this is quite complicated. Further, though I have not developed any cost estimates for the highway work, I can tell you it will be very expensive and probably require widening of the Parks Highway corridor to accommodate both the railroad and future highway expansion. I have not discussed this with FHWA but I think their participation is questionable. I ask that future discussions and planning address these concerns and costs.

I would be pleased to discuss this with you at any time and in the meantime will ask that a member of my staff participate in future project meetings.

Thanks.

Sincerely,



Mike Barton
Commissioner

cc: Andrew Niemiec, Northern Regional Director

STATE OF ALASKA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

NORTHERN REGION PRECONSTRUCTION

GOVERNOR SARAH PALIN

2301 PEGER ROAD
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709-5399
TELEPHONE: (907) 451-2271
TDD: (907) 451-2363
FAX: (907) 451-5126

December 29, 2006

Re: Fairbanks Area Rail Relocation/
Parks Highway Option

Clark C. Hopp
Manager, Civil Projects
Alaska Railroad Corporation
P.O. Box 107500
Anchorage, AK 99510-7500

Dear Mr. Hopp:

We have reviewed the proposed Parks Highway Alternative, Preferred Options (dated 10/25/06), and offer the following comments on the typical section variants. This expands on concerns that were identified in the Commissioner's letter of August 2, 2006, to Patrick Gamble.

There are three important concerns with the typical sections. The first is safety. The existing Parks Highway meets safety standards, and in particular, provides adequate clear zones for errant vehicles. Typical sections that reduce the clear zone will also reduce safety. When the railroad fills the median with retaining walls, errant vehicles will be forced back into traffic lanes, increasing the risk of secondary accidents. There will also be no room for disabled vehicles to pull off to the left.

Second, the typical sections point to maintenance issues, especially snow removal. Sections with only a 4-ft clear zone provide no space for either plowing or snow storage. Snow cleared from the elevated railroad tracks would be thrown directly onto the travel lanes of a high-speed roadway. This is unacceptable to the Department. The railroad would need to find another way to remove snow.

Third, the highway will need additional right of way (ROW) to compensate for the ROW lost to the railroad. Even if the railroad is somehow squeezed into the existing median, projects for future lane additions would include widening to restore the 30-ft-wide inboard clear zone which would require expansion of the ROW. The Department would condition the permit to occupy the median on the railroad's acquiring and providing this ROW when the plans for highway widening have been developed sufficiently to identify the property need in detail. In addition, it should be noted that current State regulations on accommodation provide only for crossings of, not for longitudinal facilities within, a controlled access highway. Changes in the regulations may be necessary to allow this to happen.

With regard to the individual typical sections:

Providing for the movement of people and goods and the delivery of State services."

Double Track Retaining Wall (Highway Clear Zone Provided)

- A “clear zone” width of 30 ft, measured from the edge of the traveled way to the near edge of the indicated barrier, is required for highway traffic safety. This allows errant vehicles to recover or stop without striking a fixed object, causing an accident. Providing a clear zone is a major element of highway design.
- The inside shoulder of the roadway shown on the right side of the tracks, and the median drainage system, would need to be rebuilt.
- Relocation of the left-side roadway prism, displaced by construction of the elevated tracks, would require widening the ROW, building new bridges on the offset alignment, and reconstructing interchanges and intersections. The properties affected by the widening have not yet been defined.
- Highway realignments to ramp up over the railroad’s entrance into, and exit from, the median alignment would necessitate constructing additional curves and significant grades. The twisting realignment would tend to decrease both sight distance and operating speeds, and increase the risk of accidents.
- Future highway widening would necessarily occur only along the outside of the proposed road, requiring additional ROW as well as reconstruction of the existing prisms.
- Both railroad and highway snow plowing operations would need to be controlled to avoid throwing snow on the adjacent facilities and traffic. In effect, a 20-ft-wide strip is available for snow. This would require plowing at slower than usual speeds to limit the distance snow is thrown, and would take more time to accomplish, affecting response times in other areas. The 20-ft strip should be adequate for snow storage, except in heavy snow years. It may require some additional maintenance effort on the high side of superelevated curves.
- From our experience on the Parks/Geist Interchange project, noise is likely to be a substantial issue requiring mitigation, which in turn may require additional ROW width for noise walls or other counter measures.

Double Track Retaining Wall in Existing Median (Highway Clear Zone Eliminated)

- This alternative proposes to construct a substantial fixed object adjacent to the inboard shoulder for nearly the full length of the alignment, eliminating the requisite 30-ft-wide clear zone provided by the existing facility. Loss of the clear zone is a significant safety concern, and it is a consequence the Department cannot support when other alternatives are available.
- Both existing roadway prisms would require reshaping, resurfacing and new drainage systems
- One of the roadway prisms would require bridge modifications or replacement, and approach realignment, to make room for the railroad bridges. In turn, interchanges and intersections would need to be modified.
- Highway realignments to ramp up over the railroad’s entrance into, and exit from, the median alignment would necessitate constructing additional curves and significant grades. Effects of the twisting realignment are described above.

- With the elevated railroad facility immediately adjacent to the highway, snow from railroad plows will be thrown directly onto the travel lanes of a high-speed, high-volume highway with ramifications as discussed above.
- Noise is likely to be a substantial issue requiring mitigation, as noted above.

Double Track Grading

- The roadway shown on the right side of the tracks would require reconstruction on its shifted alignment, drainage system revisions, modification or replacement of existing bridges, and adjustments at interchanges and intersections.
- The left-side roadway prism, displaced by construction of the railroad facility, would require widening the ROW, reconstructing interchanges and intersections, and building new bridges on the offset alignment.
- Highway realignments to ramp up over the railroad's entrance into, and exit from, the median alignment would necessitate constructing additional curves and significant grades. Effects of the twisting realignment are described above.
- Future highway widening would necessarily occur only along the outside of the proposed road, requiring additional ROW as well as reconstruction of the existing prisms.
- Both railroad and highway snow plowing operations would need to be controlled to avoid throwing snow on the adjacent facilities and traffic, as noted in comments on the first variant above.
- Noise is likely to be a substantial issues requiring mitigation, as noted above.

In summary, all three typical sections involve significant maintenance and operational issues, negatively affect traffic safety, require substantial present or future ROW acquisition, require construction or alterations of major structures, and limit future highway expansion options. The second alternative, in particular, constructs substantial fixed objects well within the roadside clear zone and results in unacceptable operational changes.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet and discuss the progress of your project. We look forward to continuing our joint efforts to identify and examine issues of mutual concern in this area.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Tyndall, P.E.
Design Group Chief
Northern Region

GCT/II

cc: John F. Bennett, PLS, Right of Way Chief
David T. Bloom, P.E., Preconstruction Engineer
Gerald J. Rafson, P.E., Planning and Support Services Chief