Other Mat-Su Area Rail Corridor Studies

PROJECT FACTS

City of Wasilla's Rail Relocation Study - 2002

Background

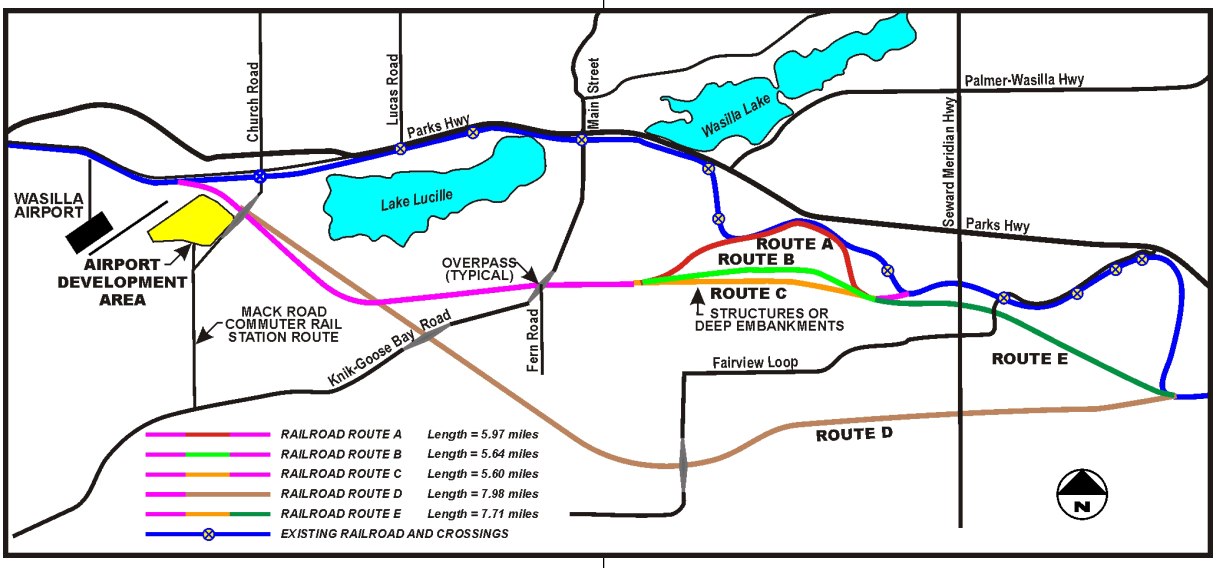
In September 2000, the City of Wasilla authorized a study to develop alternatives and estimate costs for relocating the Alaska Railroad around the community. Currently, the Alaska Railroad mainline track is located alongside the Parks Highway through much of the central business district. There are 11 at-grade crossings between the Glenn Highway and Wasilla Airport.

The City of Wasilla commissioned LCMF Incorporated to perform the reconnaissance study. Entitled *Wasilla Alaska Railroad Relocation Reconnaissance Study*, the draft document reviews five options, including a "no build" option and five different rail relocation routes.

The city hosted public open houses in November and December to provide information and gauge public sentiment on these preliminary findings. The deadline for public comment was extended into 2002. The final reconnaissance study was released in early 2002.

Options Considered

- Under the No Build alternative, the tracks would remain where they are.
- Alternative A would eliminate seven at-grade crossings, require 136 acres of new right-of-way (ROW), impact 44 acres of wetlands and cost about $47 million.
- Alternative B would eliminate eight crossings, require 138 ROW acres, impact 62.7 wetland acres and cost about $57 million.
- Alternative C would eliminate the same eight crossings, require 137 ROW acres, impact 53.3 wetland acres and cost about $54 million.
- Alternative D would eliminate all 11 at-grade crossings, require 193 ROW acres, impact 13.1 wetland acres, and cost about $55 million.
- Alternative E was added as a result of public input. This option would eliminate all 11 at-grade crossings, require 187 ROW acres, impact 53.3 wetland acres, and cost about $62.5 million.



7/15/2004

Mat-Su Borough's Rail Corridor Study – 2003

Background

The Matanuska Susitna Borough (MSB) has long aspired to build a deep-water port near Point MacKenzie. Numerous studies through the 1980s and 1990s looked at various aspects of developing a port in this area. These efforts culminated in construction of a sheet pile type barge dock in 1999.

Through all previous work, one common thread was apparent – the need to provide good surface transportation access to support a port as a viable economic engine for the borough. In spring 2002, MSB commissioned a Rail Corridor Study to determine a mix of railroad and highway options for surface access to Port MacKenzie that would:

1. Provide the level of transportation access necessary to allow for the safe and efficient movement of material into and out of the MSB and the rest of Alaska.
2. Provide that access in a manner generally acceptable to the residents of the project area.
3. Keep the environmental impacts to a manageable level.

This study began with a thorough review of previous studies and MSB's programmed construction projects. A total of 11 basic alternatives were identified and presented to the public.

The study included a Commodities Flow analysis to determine how much, and what type, material was likely to flow through the port. A Traffic Study was performed to help understand potential impact to the surrounding road system resulting from port-related growth.

The final corridor study report was released in July 2003.

Recommendations

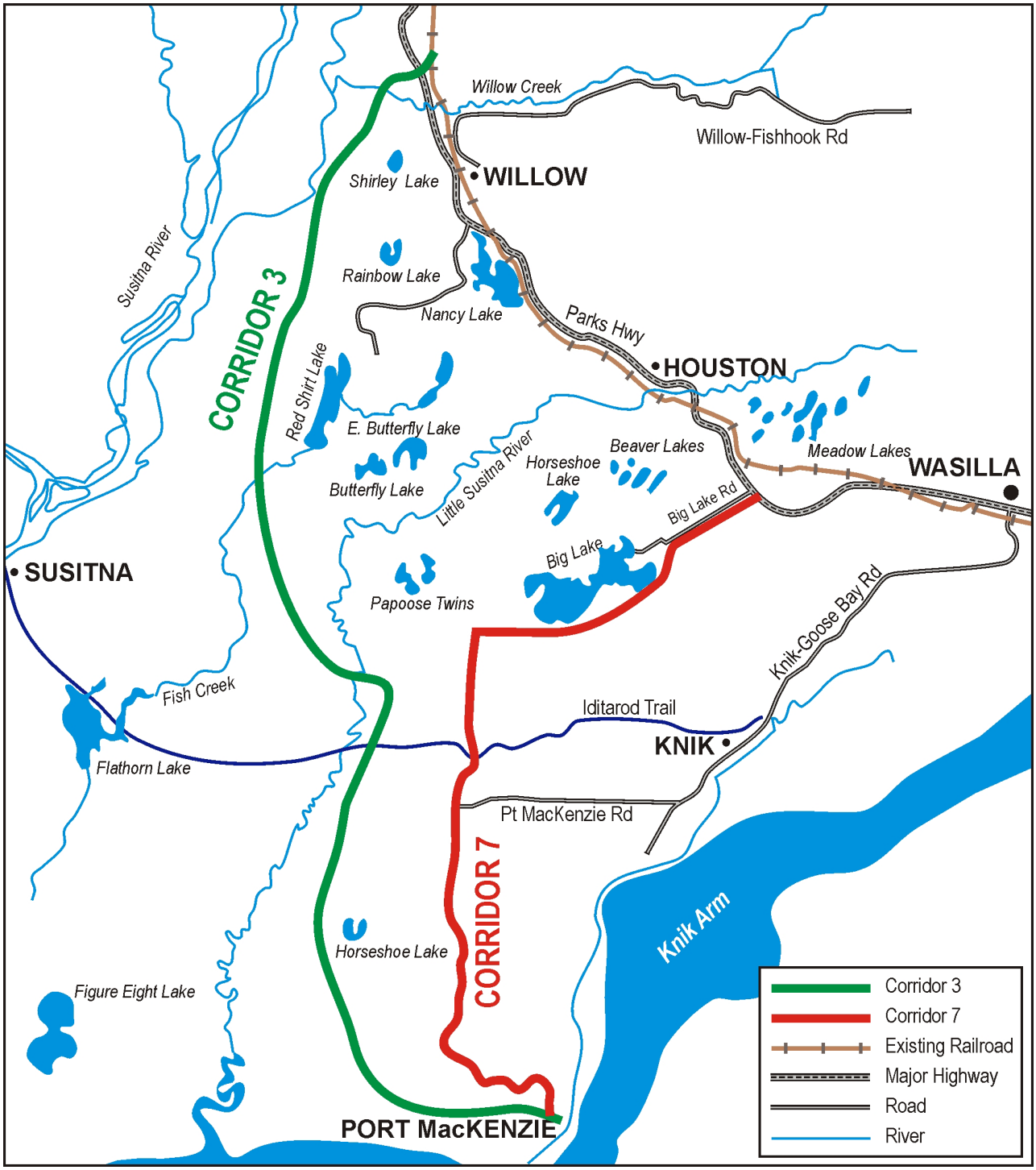
The study recommendations had to meet three criteria. 1) They had to be feasible and constructible from a technical standpoint. 2) They had to be as gentle on the environment as possible. 3) They had to be generally acceptable to the residents and business community through which corridors would pass. Corridor 3 and 7 meet these stipulations.

Corridor 3 is recommended primarily as a railroad corridor. The alignment was selected specifically to meet the railroad requirements for grades and curvature. Public input suggested that the ROW should be wide enough to accommodate a major highway and to provide space for a wide range of utilities that often seek location within public transportation corridors. Corridor 3 includes a recommendation to preserve an 800-foot wide corridor to offer space for the railroad ROW, sidings, utilities, bike/pedestrian path and a four-lane highway. This would also provide a corridor for use should the Knik Arm Crossing project ever be built.

Corridor 7 is recommended primarily as the highway access. This alternative was selected because it is essentially the completion of a series of projects that MSB has already programmed and started work on. It includes the least amount of new alignment construction and the overall least impact on private property and wetlands because significant sections of Corridor 7 can be constructed within existing ROW. Where new ROW is required, a 300-foot ROW is recommended in order to provide sufficient width for the roadway, pathway and utilities. When acquiring new ROW, only the ROW necessary should be purchased. Additional ROW acquisition should avoided in order to control costs and to avoid causing ill will among the community.

More information

For more information on this project, contact the Mat-Su Borough Plannign Department, (907) 745-9856.



This map shows the current alignment of area roadways, including the Parks Highway, Knik-Goose Bay Road, and Point MacKenzie Road; as well as the current rail alignment. Corridor 3 is recommended as a primarily railroad corridor, which also includes room for a highway. It could serve as an extension for bypass traffic if the Knik Arm Crossing is constructed. Corridor 7 is recommended primarily as a highway corridor, with much of the corridor work already programmed.