## Knik-Goose Bay Road Grade Separation Alternatives Analysis

## Prepared for:

Alaska Railroad Corporation
Alaska Department of Transportation \& Public Facilities City of Wasilla
Matanuska-Susitna Borough
Matanuska-Susitna Community Transit
Prepared by:
HDR Alaska, Inc. 2525 C Street, Suite 305 Anchorage, AK 99503

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Grade-separated "Rail over Trail" near downtown Anchorage, Alaska


Bus at Knik-Goose Bay Rail Crossing


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Large traffic generators, such as the Carrs Mall, City Hall, the Post Office, and schools, such as the Iditarod Elementary School, Wasilla Middle School and Ice Arena, and Wasilla High School and Swimming Pool are within a mile and a half of the Main Street/KGB Road/Parks Highway intersection. The Wasilla Public Library and the Dorothy Page Museum \& historic To


Knik-Goose Bay Road at-grade crossing in Wasilla, Alaska

### 1.0 Introduction

The population and subsequent traffic growth that has occurred in the Wasilla area coupled with ever growing train traffic on the ARRC mainline hrough town, led the Alaska Railroad (ARRC) to commission this alternatives analysis to examine a grade-separated intersection of the Alaska Railroad to replace the at-grade crossing at Knik-Goose Bay Road (KGB). The KGB-ARRC intersection is the busiest north-south street crossing the tracks in Wasilla, and the growing rail and vehicle traffic necessitate an improvement. The intent of the analysis is to identify and evaluate at, a conceptual engineering-level, reasonable and feasible project alternatives for a grade separation of the KGB Road and the Parks Highway in Wasilla.

### 1.1 Purpose of this Document

This document presents an alternatives analysis of the options for closing the KGB-ARRC intersection and replacing it with a grade-separated crossing in downtown Wasilla. According to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), "alternatives analysis" has been a part of established transportation planning practice for several decades. An effective alternatives analysis answers the questions:

- What are the problems?
- What are their underlying causes?
- What are viable options for addressing these problems
- What are their costs?
- What are their benefits?

The alternatives analysis process is a locally managed study that develops information on travel patterns, problems, and needs as part of a planning process. The FTA allows local agencies participating in an alternatives analysis to have broad latitude in how the study is performed, including the
choice of whether to conduct the analysis under the review process established by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Completing an alternatives analysis is an important process for requesting FTA funding and is required when seeking funds under the Section 5309 New Starts program. The FTA likes to see the following information presented in an alternatives analysis:

- Description of Study Area, Transportation Problems, and Needs
- Study Goals, Objectives, and Preliminary Evaluation Measures
- Description of Conceptual Alternatives.


### 1.2 Document Overview

The ARRC organized this report to closely match the FTA's guidance on preparing an alternatives analysis.

Because the analysis must respond to the unique conditions of the problem under review, the analysis first presents information that provides a basic understanding of the local study area and the specific problems and needs to be addressed in the study. In section 2.0, a summary of relevant transportation, socioeconomic, land use, and other data is presented to give an overview of the study area and the context for the problem experienced at the KGB-ARRC intersection. This information also provides supporting information for the purpose and need for the project, which is presented in Section 4.

Section 5 presents an overview of the alternatives considered and evaluated in the analysis. The alternatives address the identified problems and meet the study goals and objectives. Information presented will help decision makers in choosing a course for remedying the problems at the KGBARRC intersection. The alternatives have been structured to isolate the differences among potential solutions and to highlight the trade-offs inherent in the selection of a proposed alternative. The alternatives include alignment and grade options for meeting the project purpose and need. Conceptual engineering drawings of those alternatives have been prepared and could be used to initiate environmental analysis at a later date

### 1.3 History of the project

The intersection at ARRC Milepost [MP] 159.9 is adjacent to the Parks Highway (MP 42.2). Heavy vehicle traffic on the Parks Highway and KGB Road coupled with the layout of the intersection relative to the ARRC mainline (which intersects the KGB Road about two car-lengths south of the intersection of the Parks Highway and KGB Road) causes safety concerns as traffic has grown. The ARRC and the Parks Highway are major east-west facilities that tend to inhibit the north-south movements in and

This analysis is being performed as part of a Pre-NEPA process. If the ARRC decides to move forward with the project, environmental analysis would be initiated at that time.


Aerial view of the ARRC/Knik-Goose Bay Road/Parks Highway Intersection
around the City of Wasilla. The layout of the intersection, growing traffic, roadway capacity, and safety concerns at the intersection of KGB Road with the ARRC line and Parks Highway have been a concern for some time. In fact, the DOT\&PF has performed a number of studies examining the transportation system through Wasilla, looking at ways to reduce congestion and improve safety. Almost a decade ago, an environmental assessment was conducted for Parks Highway improvements through Wasilla. DOT\&PF recently conducted a Parks Highway Corridor Management plan which looked at long-term transportation needs along the highway corridor, including the Wasilla area.

In 2002, a joint committee ("Wasilla Intermodal Steering Committee") consisting of representatives from state and local Wasilla-area transportation providers (including representatives from DOT\&PF, City of Wasilla, Matanuska-Susitna (Ma-Su) Borough, ARRC, and Mat-Su Community Transit [MASCOT]) was formed to provide oversight on the development and coordination of a number of transportation and transitoriented projects in the greater Wasilla area. FTA requested a joint planning effort be initiated among the several agencies to ensure that federal funds are being wisely and are cooperatively invested in the Wasilla area. A joint planning document was developed (The Wasilla Area Intermodal Plan) in spring of 2003. One of the projects identified by the Steering Committee to move forward for conceptual engineering and alternatives analysis was the potential for a grade separation to resolve the problems. The ARRC initiated a study which culminated in this document. mas.acont

### 2.0 Description of the Study Area

### 2.1 Community Description

Wasilla is located in the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough in southcentral Alaska on the (Anchorage to Fairbanks) Parks Highway, 43 miles north of Anchorage. The community lies south of the Talkeetna Mountains, about 12 miles north of Knik Arm. The Alaska Railroad mainline, which stretches from Fairbanks to Seward, passes through the middle of the community.

Wasilla (and the Mat-Su Valley in general) is among the fastest growing regions in Alaska. The Mat-Su Borough gained more than 20,000 new esidents between 1990 and 2000. The 2000 census indicates that the MatSu Borough's population was 59,322 , up from 39,683 in 1990, and 17,816 in 1980. The majority of people live in the southern part of the Mat-Su Borough within about an hour drive time of the Anchorage metropolitan area. The two largest towns in the Mat-Su Borough are Palmer and Wasilla, each with a current population of roughly 5,000 residents. The "Core-Area" of the Mat-Su Valley (the area between Wasilla and Palmer) is largely residential. Approximately $35 \%$ of the employed labor force commutes south to Anchorage on a daily basis.

### 2.2 Corridor History

Construction of the Alaska Railroad (ARRC) and subsequent road connections to Anchorage fueled population growth in the Wasilla area. Wasilla's istory as a community dates back to 1917 when he federal government sold town lots prior to onstructing the ARRC. The Railroad officially ped service through the 1923 and provided Ano he only direct link between the Mat-Su Valley and Anchige 1970s developed in the 1970s

Direct road access to and from Anchorage through Wasilla came with the construction of the Parks Highway in the early 1970s. This highway enabled Anchorage workers and their families to live in the Wasilla area, and commute each day to the city for employment. Support and service industries began 0 expand will . needs of 1 residents. The City of Wasilla incorporated in 1974, and ha developed as a retail and commercial hub

## Knik Goose Bay

 Road CrossingVehicle traffic through KGB Road-ARRC intersection has grown significantly and causes safety and capacity concerns.


The Alaska Railroad crosses Knik-Goose Bay Road just south of the Parks Highway intersection of Knik-Goose Bay Road and Main Street in downtown Wasilla.

### 3.0 Transportation Problems and Needs

### 3.1 Overview

Land use patterns have been largely shaped by the early development of the rail and highway corridor. As Wasilla grew, it grew linearly along the rail/highway corridor. With increasing population, demand for north-south crossings of the rail/highway corridor also increased. Wasilla is the hub for several regional roads, including the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, Wasillaseveral regional roads, including the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, WasillaFishhook, and Knik-Goose Bay (KGB) Road. (Main Street turns into KGB Road when it crosses south of the Parks Highway). Main Street/KGB Road is the critical north-south link in downtown traffic circulation in the City of
Wasilla. Main Street is one of only three north-south crossings in the City of Wasilla. Church/Mack Road and Palmer-Wasilla Highway an the City of Wasilla; Church/Mack Road and Palmer-Wasilla Highway are the other
two. Main Street is the only crossing serving the downtown business grid.

When the population was small, these crossings were not a problem but When the population was small, these crossings were not a problem but
with the community's rapid expansion over the past 15 years, the growing population and traffic has overburdened the road network and increased the demand for travel crossing the highway and railroad as well as the demand running along the major through-town corridors. Traffic congestion is evident at the Parks Highway, with the ARRC and other large traffic generators in the nearby vicinity, such as the post office, city hall, Carrs Masill public library, and schools, such as the Iaitarod Elementary School, Wasilla Middle School and ice arena, and Wasilla High School and swimming pool. Recreational and tourist-oriented development north of Wasilla has contributed to the increased through traffic and now presents its own problems; burdening the road network. The growth and inefficient layout of the road network aggravates conditions.
To deal with the worsening traffic problems, the state has embarked on an aggressive road construction program in the area. The state's emphasis on the Parks Highway corridor reflects the highway's importance as one of the state's main commercial corridors and the critical nature of the corridor for intercity travel. Completion of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway extension to the KGB Road at Glenwood Avenue provides a convenient routing to the Parks Highway from south of Wasilla to help relieve some of the demand for the KGB Road in downtown. Much of the travel remaining on the KGB Road crossing the ARRC/Parks Highway is local in nature; bound for Wasilla or points west (north). While these improvements have helped move traffic, over time the road network improvements are likely to foster additional growth and demand for crossings of the rail line.
The increasing cross traffic (vehicle and pedestrian) coupled with increasing through traffic (vehicle and rail) exacerbates safety concerns for at-grade crossings of the rail line in Wasilla, particularly at the intersection of KGB Road and the ARRC mainline.

### 3.2 Intersection Configuration-Part of the Problem

This section describes the existing conditions and layout of the current intersection configuration. The location and configuration of the rail crossing relative to the KGB-Parks Highway intersection contributes to the concerns.

An Intersection of Key Arterial Roadways. Though the Parks Highway is experiencing on-going construction, it is generally a 6-ane is experiencing on-going ornort, it through Wasilla. It is the signalized, major arterial that runs easprimary commuter corridor to Anchorage.

The facility is also the main highway connecting Anchorage to points north. KGB Road runs north-south through Wasilla and is the primary route moving traffic from the south side of Wasilla and the Mat-Su Borough along the west side of Knik Arm. Near the intersection with the Parks Highway, the KGB Road is a 2-lane arterial. KGB Road becomes Main Street on the north side of the KGB-Parks Highway intersection. Due to severe north-south congestion on the KGB Road, the DOT\&PF is studying adding capacity to the roadway.

Configuration Exacerbates Congestion and Causes Safety Concerns. The Alaska Railroad mainline and a siding cross the KGB Road The Alaska Railroad mainline and a siding cross the KGB Road When trains block the crossing the already congested roadway situation is exabe The crossing is so close to the roadway intersection that many vehicles back up ong the railroad tracks when stoped the many vehicles back up onto the railroad tracks when stopped at th intersection.

Overuse on a road not designed for a high number of vehicles decrease safety of the facility. The increasing stop and go traffic not only adds more travel time, but stop and go traffic can result in more accidents. With the increase in congestion, vehicles wait lengthy periods to turn across traffic, or vehicles maneuver where they would not under normal conditions (such as cutting through parking lots, passing on the shoulders around stopped cars, or trying to beat the railroad warning gate before it comes down)

Traffic is often backed up at the KGB Road-Parks Highway intersection As the busiest intersection in Wasilla, and with an at-grade railroad crossing, people are generally aware of stopping at or driving through the intersection with caution. However, heavy traffic sometimes has vehicles stopped on or too close to the tracks. This can be problematic when the gate is trying to come down. Sometimes drivers try to drive through to miss waiting at the gate. School buses are required to stop at railroad tracks, which slow down traffic even more at the intersection.

## Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)

The Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) is the estimated number of vehicles traveling over a given road segment during one 24 hour day. In practice, AADT is usually obtained from a sample (coverage count) adjusted for seasonality. Traffic data, such as AADT, is used to provide information for road planning, design, construction, and maintenance.

Annual Average Daily Traffic in Downtown Wasilla

| Wasilla Roads | $\mathbf{2 0 0 1}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 0 2}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 0 3}$ |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  |  |  |
| KGB Road junction with Parks Highway | 9,661 | 10,060 | 9,068 |
| Parks Highway junction with KGB Road/ <br> Main Street | 15,850 | 25,953 | 26,990 |
| Parks Highway junction with Palmer- <br> Wasilla Highway | 31,947 | 33,270 | 29,753 |
| Parks Highway junction with Seward <br> Meridian Road | 19,487 | 20,292 | 21,113 |
| Parks Highway junction with Crusey <br> Street | 33,000 | 30,575 | 31,800 |
| Wasilla Fishhook Road junction with <br> Parks Highway | 8,880 | 9,751 | 9,798 |

Source: DOT\&PF Annual Traffic Volume Report, as accessed 1/05
www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/mapping/trafficmaps/trafficdata reportscen/2003VRPT.pdf
As can be seen in the table above, traffic on the KGB Road at the Parks Highway junction has averaged around 10,000 trips per day over the last several years, while traffic on the Parks Highway junction with KGB Road and Main Street has ranged between nearly 30,000 and 33,000 trips per day.

The reduction in traffic between 2001 and the 2003 is likely a result of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway extension. The Palmer-Wasilla Highway was extended south of the Parks Highway and connected with KGB Road at Glenwood Avenue in 2002. The project included a grade-separated railroad crossing south of the Parks Highway and construction of a paved separated path. The extension was built to relieve pressure caused by congestion in the city core at the KGB Road-Parks Highway intersection, thereby reducing volumes of traffic through Wasilla's busiest intersection.

In the long-term, a road/highway bypass of downtown Wasilla may be the required solution. For many years, long-term transportation plans in Wasilla have included either a rail or highway bypass. In the near term, a grade separation of the KGB-ARRC intersection and increased capacity on the existing roadways are needed. The DOT\&PF is pursuing highwa improvement projects to address the
pursuing the grade-separated crossing

Train Depot Location Exacerbates Congestion. The existing railroad depot is located on the existing mainline, in downtown Wasilla, near the intersection of the KGB Road and Parks Highway. The depot has a siding, the mainline track running adjacent to the facility, a small parking lot, and a rail platform. The ARRC owns the property that the existing depot sits on, but no longer owns the depot building itself because the ARRC donated the depot to the City. The historic train depot houses the Greater Wasilla Chamber of Commerce. The ARRC only uses the platform occasionally, as a flag stop, to allow local residents to load and unload. The primary problem is when the train stops to pick up passengers; it blocks the KGB Road and southbound turns off of the Parks Highway.

In a separate report, the ARRC is examining several potential commuter rail tation locations in the Wasilla vicinity. Given the interference with the KGB Road, the existing location is not satisfactory. See Section 7 for more details on future intermodal and commuter facility plans for Wasilla

### 3.3 Congestion \& Travel Delays Caused at the

## Crossing

Typical train speed at the KGB Road crossing is 49 miles per hour (mph). As a train approaches the KGB Road crossing, lights start flashing and bells will ring for three seconds, and then the gates start down. The gates will reach the horizontal position in about 12 seconds, and the train will be crossing about five seconds later. This is an average time sequence of 20 seconds of warning before the train arrives. Trains block the crossing for varying periods, depending on the length and speed. The average total time the crossing is blocked is 1 minute, 42 seconds. A shorter train (approximately 2,000 feet), such as the daily summer northbound ( 230 N ) or (approximately 2,000 feet), such as the daily summer northbound (230N) or
southbound passenger trains (230S), would block the crossing for 1 minute, 15 seconds. A larger train, such as an 80-car northbound empty coal train 15 seconds. A larger train, such as an 80 -car northbound empty coal train
$(183 \mathrm{~N})$ would take more than 2 minutes. Southbound trains experience a (183N) would take more than 2 minutes. Southbound trains experience a increases the amount of time through the crossing.

Using the time schedule from Tables 1 and 2, the amount of time the KGB Road is blocked varies daily between nearly 9 minutes total on a winter Friday to nearly 16 minutes total on a summer Sunday. The crossing is blocked longer in the summer because more trains are operating. These times do not reflect a new gravel service beginning in the summer of 2004. The gravel trains traveled through Wasilla this past summer to accommodate the opening of Quality Asphalt Paving's new gravel pit located on the northwest outskirts of the City of Wasilla. The gravel service addition adds up to 15 extra minutes of trains daily crossing the KGB Road during the summer. These are also optimum train times, which do not eflect differences in train operators and engineers and other considerations, such as weather. The time the trains are actually blocking the KGB Road crossing is likely higher than the listed optimum crossing times. Table 2 depicts the daily train delay caused at the KGB Road crossing during the summer and winter, not including the new gravel service.

### 3.4 Growing Highway and Rail Demand Will Worsen the Problems

Rail demand for use of the crossing is anticipated to grow and further exacerbate roadway congestion, travel delay, and safety. The types of trains traveling through the KGB Road crossing are a mix of northbound and southbound; empty and loaded; freight, coal, oil, gravel, and passenger trains. Table 1 lists the types of trains and their corresponding lengths and approximate time it takes to cross through the KGB Road. Throughout the year, there are occasional passenger charter trains, company work trains, and other extra trains that cannot be accurately predicted. A new gravel train service for Quality Asphalt began early summer 2004. A more detailed time schedule of rail traffic at the KGB Road crossing is depicted in Figures 1 and 2.

ARRC in Wasilla
Approximately 6 miles (ARRC MP 156.6 to 162.7) of Alaska Railroad tracks pass through the city limits of Wasilla, all on the south side of the Parks Highway. There are six at-grade road/rail intersections within the city limits.


The Historic Wasilla Train Depot near the Knik-Goose Bay Road Rail Crossing

Most of the transportation issues facing the Wasilla area stem from the rapid population growth and subsequent increase in roadway traffic and congestion. The Parks Highway is heavily used throughout the year by tourists and Alaskans traveling between Fairbanks and Anchorage and to Denali National Park. As one of the fastest growing regions in Alaska, the Parks Highway will continue to see an increase in the average daily traffic count.

If feasible, the ARRC foresees commuter rail as a large portion of their future daily train traffic at the KGB Road crossing. Over the past two decades, studies have been conducted analyzing the potential for commuter ridership between Anchorage and surrounding communities. Table 3 depicts peak existing and forecasted daily rail traffic through the KGB Road crossing.


| Train Type | Approximate Time through Crossing** | Approximate Number of Train Cars |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 130N (Northbound empty oil train) | 2 minutes 25 seconds | 70 |
| 183N (Northbound empty coal train) | 2 minutes 25 seconds | 80 |
| 130S (Southbound loaded oil train) | 2 minutes | 70 |
| 183S (Southbound loaded coal train) | 2 minutes 25 seconds | 80 |
| 135S (Southbound empty trailer train) | 2 minutes | 40 |
| 135N (Northbound loaded trailer train) | 2 minutes | 40 |
| 235N (Northbound passenger train) | 40 seconds | 4 |
| 235S (Southbound passenger train) | 40 seconds | 4 |
| 230N (Northbound Daily Summer passenger train) | 1 minute 15 seconds* | 24 |
| 230S (Daily Summer Southbound passenger train) | 1 minute 15 seconds* | 24 |
| 150N (Northbound empty gravel train) | 2 minutes 25 seconds | 80 |
| 150S (Southbound loaded gravel train) | 2 minutes 25 seconds | 80 |

* Times are variable due to tourist companies and how many cars they attach to the train, particularly during the peak or shoulder season.
** All times are optimum times. Actual time will vary and will probably be higher due to variations in the way different engineers operate the train and any special instructions that may affect the train operations. Northbound passenger trains stopping at the depot may block the crossing while passengers are loading and unloading. If the train doesn't block the crossing, the time it blocks the crossing once moving would be longer than 75 seconds due to acceleratio time.

Table 2. Approximate Daily Delay at the KGB Crossing Due to Trains

| Daily Delay at the KGB Road <br> Crossing | Winter | Summer |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
|  |  |  |
| Sunday | 13 min .55 sec. | 15 min .45 sec. |
| Monday | 10 min .50 sec. | 15 min .20 sec. |
| Tuesday | 10 min .50 sec. | 15 min .20 sec. |
| Wednesday | 10 min .50 sec. | 15 min .20 sec. |
| Thursday | 11 min .15 sec | 15 min .45 sec. |
| Friday | 8 min .50 sec. | 11 min .20 sec. |
| Saturday | 9 min .30 sec. | 11 min .20 sec. |
| Weekly Total | $\mathbf{7 6 ~ \mathbf { ~ m i n } . 5 0 \mathrm { sec } .}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 0} \mathbf{~ m i n . ~} \mathbf{1 0} \mathbf{~ s e c}$. |

## Summer and Winter Rail Traffic through the at-grade KGB Road Crossing

During the winter, on average, seven trains go through the KGB Road crossing on Sundays; five on Mondays; five on Tuesdays; five on Wednesdays; five on Thursdays; four on Fridays; and five on Saturdays. In the summer, the 235 southbound and northbound passenger train is replaced with a daily northbound passenger train crossing the KGB Road at 9:45 a.m. and a daily southbound passenger train running through the KGB Road crossing at 6:30 p.m. During the summer, on average, 12 to 13 trains are traversing through the crossing daily. A new gravel train service began in the summer of 2004. For purposes of this report and the time schedule described here, the expected summer gravel train schedule adds four trains daily on Monday through Saturday, with an occasional train on Sunday.
Southbound trains are flexibly scheduled to fit around the northbound train traffic, which is more rigidly scheduled. Most trains run on a tighter schedule and cross the KGB Road at specific times during the day. Other trains cross the KGB Road within a time range rather than at a specific scheduled time. These trains are typically the southbound loaded oil train, southbound loaded coal train, southbound empty trailer train, and northbound empty coal train.

Table 3. Peak Daily Rail Traffic at the KGB Road Crossing

| Train Type | 2004 Peak Daily <br> Train Traffic |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Day | Night | 2025 Future Peak <br> Daily Train Traffic |  |  |  |  |
|  | Day | Night | Total |  |  |  |  |
| Passenger (through Wasilla) | 2 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 6 |  |
| Passenger (Commuter) | - | - | - | 16 | 0 | 16 |  |
| Freight | 2 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 10 |  |
| Gravel | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 8 |  |
| Coal | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |  |
| Total Base | $\mathbf{7}$ | $\mathbf{7}$ | $\mathbf{1 4}$ | $\mathbf{3 1}$ | $\mathbf{1 1}$ | $\mathbf{4 2}$ |  |
| Occasional | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 4 |  |
| Passenger Charter | 4 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 4 |  |
| Company Work | $\mathbf{1 3}$ | $\mathbf{7}$ | $\mathbf{2 0}$ | $\mathbf{3 9}$ | $\mathbf{1 1}$ | $\mathbf{5 0}$ |  |
| Total Base + Occasional <br> (Peak) | $\mathbf{1 3}$ |  |  |  |  |  |  |




### 4.0 Preliminary Purpose and Need

A well-specified statement of the problem for which alternative solutions are being analyzed is a key early step of the alternatives analysis planning process. Later, as part of the NEPA process, the "purpose and need" establishes the problems that must be addressed in the analysis; serves as the basis for the development of project goals, objectives, and evaluation measures; and provides a framework for determining which alternatives should be considered as reasonable options to a given problem. More fundamentally, the statement of purpose and need serves to articulate - and justify - why an agency is proposing to spend potentially large amounts of taxpayer's money to study and implement a project that may cause significant environmental impacts, and why these impacts are acceptable.

For studies performed outside of NEPA, the same type of information For studies perrormed outside of Ne generated. Like the purpose and need statement, this information
should be provides the context for performing the analysis and for identifying the measures against which alternatives strategies are to be evaluated. It also serves as an introduction for decision makers (like FTA, but also local and state agencies), stakeholders, and the general public to the study area and its transportation problems and needs.

Goals of Improving the Knik-Goose Bay Road at the Railroad and Parks Highway Intersection

- To improve vehicle-train safety.
- To improve travel times.
- To improve vehicle capacity \& circulation.
- To maintain local access and through traffic
- To satisfy existing and future traffic demand.

The Alaska Railroad has identified a need to construct a grade-separated crossing of the Alaska Railroad in the vicinity of downtown Wasilla to allow the closure of the current at-grade crossing on Knik-Goose Bay (KGB) Road. The intent of the proposed project is to address a number of safety concerns and operational inefficiencies caused by the at-grade crossing of KGB Road with the ARRC rail tracks and the resultant vehicle congestion, travel delay, capacity problems and safety concerns. The purposes of the project are to:

- Improve safety by eliminating the potential for train-vehicle collisions caused by
- Growing vehicle and train traffic through the crossing, and
- Driver failure to comply with traffic regulations at this complex intersection.
- Maintain roadway and access circulation with sufficient northsouth capacity. In other words, simply closing KGB Road would not be reasonable. The solution must account for the anticipated growth in north-south roadway traffic and circulation needs in downtown Wasilla
- Eliminate congestion caused by trains closing the intersection during traverses of the crossing and while stopped at the depot.

As the traffic of both vehicles and trains grows the inherent safety risk also increases. Improving the safety of the crossing is the overriding goal of the project. The intent of the proposed improvements would be to improve the safety of the transportation network by removing the possibility of a trainvehicle collision. A bridge would be built to carry either the rail over the road or visa versa. Putting the two systems on different levels would eliminate the potential conflicts.

The growing roadway traffic not only causes concerns for the ARRC, but the DOT\&PF has been building improvements on the Parks Highway and is studying capacity improvements for KGB Road-Main Street. By eliminating the additional delay interjected into the roadway network by the ever increasing train traffic, traffic circulation and capacity for vehicles would be improved. Moreover, it is critical that any improvements that are made be sized sufficiently to take into account the projected growth in roadway traffic.


The Wasilla Historic Depot \& existing railroad platform and tracks are located immediately south of the Parks Highway and east of the Knik-Goose Bay Road

"Road over Rail" Alternatives

## Conceptual Alternatives

In this analysis, two types of grade separations are considered - "Road over Rail" concepts, in which the road alignments go over the rail alignment, and the "Rail over Road" concept, in which the railroad goes over KGB Road. Eight alternatives have been conceptually engineered. The adjacent figure shows the six "Road over Rail" alignments. Note that all of the road over rail options also go over the Parks Highway (due to the roadway's grade requirements, there is insufficient distance to get back to grade in the short distance between the tracks and the Parks Highway). Sub-options vary between mixing certain road configurations that are grade-separated with at-grade roads intersecting the Parks Highway, to one-way southbound or northbound travel lanes configured as couplets. Many of these alternatives have been considered in the past by DOT\&PF. None have been pursued due to the impacts on right-of-way, businesses, and downtown ambiance.

Alternative 1 presents the No Action Alternative. In this alternative no improvements would be made. The existing crossing between the KGB Road and the ARRC rail line would remain at-grade

Alternative 2 explores an alternative that develops a bridge over the rail line that would have one travel lane each direction plus a center turn lane. The three lane cross-section would add capacity to the KGB-Main Street road network. A three-lane road cross-section with an at-grade crossing is currently being examined by the DOT\&PF to determine if it would have enough capacity

Alternative 3 explores developing a 5-lane bridge over the rail line that would have two travel lanes each direction plus a center turn lane. A five lane cross-section would greatly add capacity to the KGB-Main Street road network. A five-lane road cross-section with an at-grade crossing is currently being examined by the DOT\&PF to determine if it would have enough capacity

Alternative 4 presents a couplet that pairs Yenlo Street as a 3-lane northbound facility with KGB-Main Street as a 3-lane southbound facility. Northbound Yenlo is depicted as an overpass. Such a concept could be combined with Alternative 2 (i.e. grade separating both legs of the couplet). A similar couplet, with at-grade intersections, is currently being examined by DOT\&PF.

Alternative 5 presents a couplet that uses KGB-Main Street as a 3-lane northbound facility with Knik Street as a 3lane southbound facility. Southbound Knik Street is depicted as an overpass. Such a concept could be combined with Alternative 2 (i.e. grade separating both legs of the couplet). A similar couplet with at-grade intersections is currently being examined by DOT\&PF.

Alternative 6 consists of connecting KGB Road with Crusey Street as a five-lane roadway with an overpass over the Parks Highway/ARRC tracks. Ramps would connect to Railroad Avenue to facilitate a connection between the north and south sides of downtown.

Alternative $\mathbf{7}$ proposes connecting KGB Road with Knik Street as a fivelane roadway with an overpass of ove the Parks Highway/ARRC tracks.

Alternative 8 would take the ARRC tracks over the KGB roadway Th track would be raised on an track would be raised on an over the roadway. The bridge could be sized to accomoda dith 3 or lanes.


Alternative 8 - "Rail over Road"

## Conceptual Alignment Alternatives Comparison




| Characteristics |  | Alternative 1 Present Main Street configuration | Alternative 2 Three-lane Main Street Grade Separation | Alternative 3 <br> Five-lane Main Street Grade Separation | Alternative 4 Main Street \& Yenlo/ Talkeetna Streets One-way Couplet | Alternative 5 Main Street \& Knik Street Couplet | Alternative 6 Crusey Street Grade Separation | Alternative 7 Knik Street Grade Separation | Alternative 8 KGB Road Grade Separation |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  |  |  |  | "Road over Rail" |  |  |  | "Rail over Road" |
| Total Number of Lanes |  | 3 lanes | 3 lanes | 5 lanes | 6 lanes | 6 lanes | 5 lanes | 5 lanes | 3 or 5 lanes |
| Main Street/KGB Road at Parks Highway Intersection |  | At-grade | Grade-separated | Grade-separated | At-grade | At-grade | Intersection closed at KGB Road; Main Street open at Parks Highway intersection (Main Street "T" to highway) | Intersection closed at KGB \& Main Street. | Grade-separated |
| Main Street/KGB Road |  | 3-lane | One-way each way, with a shared turn lane | Two-way each way, with a shared turn lane | Southbound: <br> Three lanes, one-way | Northbound: <br> Three lanes, one-way |  |  | 3-lane |
| $\begin{aligned} & \stackrel{\rightharpoonup}{2} \\ & \stackrel{\rightharpoonup}{\ddot{0}} \end{aligned}$ | Yenlo Street \& Talkeetna Street at Parks Highway Intersection |  |  |  | Grade-separated overpass |  |  |  | Three lanes in one direction on each street <br> Grade separation of the ARRC with either: <br> (1) Main Street, <br> (2) Main Street and Boundary/Yenlo, or <br> (3) Main Street and Knik Street |
|  | Yenlo Street/Talkeetna Street |  |  |  | Northbound: <br> Three lanes, one-way traffic |  |  |  |  |
| $\begin{aligned} & \stackrel{\rightharpoonup}{0} \\ & \stackrel{\rightharpoonup}{\overrightarrow{0}} \end{aligned}$ | Knik Street at Parks Highway Intersection |  |  |  |  | Grade-Separated overpass |  |  |  |
|  | Knik Street |  |  |  |  | Southbound: <br> Three lanes, one-way traffic |  |  |  |
| Crusey Street at Parks Highway Intersection |  |  |  |  |  |  | Grade-separated |  |  |
| Crusey Street |  |  |  |  |  |  | Two-way each way with center turn lane |  |  |
| Knik | Street at Parks Highway Intersection |  |  |  |  |  |  | Grade-separated |  |
| Knik | Street |  |  |  |  |  |  | 5-lane (2 lanes each way with center turn lane) |  |
| Intersection road closures to the Parks Highway |  | None | Total: 6 <br> Knik Street, Boundary Street, Yenlo Street, and 3 access driveways | Total: 6 <br> (Same as Alternative 2) | Total: 3 3 access driveways | Total: 1 Willow Street | Total: 4 KGB Road, 3 access driveways | Total: 6 <br> Willow Street, Main Street, Boundary Street, KGB Road, and 2 access driveways | None to the Parks Highway* |
| On-Off ramps to Parks Highway** |  | None | Total: 4 <br> One each: Eastbound and <br> Westbound, on \& off <br> ramps | Total: 4 <br> (Same as Alternative 2) | Total: 2 <br> One Westbound off ramp, One Eastbound on ramp | Total: 1 <br> One Westbound on ramp. | Total: 4 One each: Eastbound and Westbound, on \& off ramps | Total: 4 <br> One each: Eastbound and <br> Westbound, on \& off <br> ramps | Not Applicable |
| Number of Parcels Impacted by the Alignment |  | 0 | 23 | 35 | 24 | 42 | 15 | 46 | 2 |
| Estimated Right-of-Way (ROW) <br> Costs*** |  | 0 | \$2.0 million | \$5.2 million | \$9.0 million | \$5.5 million | \$850,000 | \$5.4 million | \$50,000**** |
| Total cost (including design, ROW \& construction) |  | \$3.5 million | \$15.4 million | \$23.9 million | \$39.2 million | \$33.8 million | \$47.3 million | \$35.9 million | \$32.5 million |

* The Frontage Road, which runs south and parallel along the Parks Highway would be closed off west of the KGB Road. The Frontage Road east of KGB Road would have to be relocated slightly to the south.
${ }^{* *}$ The Parks Highway is an urban arterial serving as a strip commercial business roadway through Wasilla. Ramps would necessitate approximately $1 / 2$-mile ( $1 / 4$-mile ramp and $1 / 4$-mile merge/weave) controlled-access before the next open driveway $* * *$ Right-of-way cost is according to a "total take" of the parcel (total appraised value of the land and buildings) regardless of the percentage of impact to the parcel.
**** Value is low because the alignment assumes most of the existing ARRC right-of-way; therefore only 2 parcels are impacted.


## Conceptual Alignment Alternatives

 o depict baseline conditions with which to compare the other alternatives and to identify conditions that are anticipated if nothing is done to remedy the problems

## Alternative 1:

Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative) Present Main Street configuration

- At-grade intersection remains at the Main Street/KGB Road/Parks Highway Intersection
- 3-lane Main Street/KGB Road
- 20-year traffic capacity demands not met for road system
- Does not disrupt existing businesses


## Present Main Street At-Grade configuration

The current three-lane at-grade intersection of the Parks Highway at Main Street-KGB Road would remain at-grade and the tracks would not be relocated. There is not much that can be accomplished to significantly mprove the capacity or safety of the intersection, as it exists now.

Trains and vehicles would continue to stop on the ARRC tracks. Northbound traffic on the KGB Road stopped at the Parks Highway intersection will continue to back up across the railroad tracks. Southbound KGB Road traffic that is required to stop at all crossings (buses, fuel trucks, hazmat vehicles, etc) would continue to slow down and back up traffic on the Parks Highway.

## Keeping traffic moving at the intersection

Northbound traffic on KGB Road causes traffic to back up over the ARRC tracks, causing safety concerns. Allowing traffic to travel southbound only from Main Street onto KGB Road would alleviate traffic that would otherwise be backing up over the railroad tracks.

Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 8 either grade separates the KGB Road-Parks Highway intersection or has southbound-only traffic traveling through the rail crossing


Main Street/ KGB Road: Existing Conditions (Road \& Rail At-grade)

## Alternative 2

Three-lane Main Street Grade Separation

- Grade-separated intersection at the Main Street/KGB Road/Parks Highway Intersection
- One-way each way with a divided turn lane
- 20-year traffic capacity not met for road system
- ROW/Business impacts


## Alternative 2:

## Three-lane Main Street Grade-Separation

Under Alternative 2, the Main Street/KGB Road and Parks Highway intersection would be grade-separated. From the north, the 3-lane alignment would begin at Swanson Avenue, near the City library. Main Street would rise over the Parks Highway and become KGB Road. Main Street/KGB Road would be one-lane, each way, with a divided turn lane. The overpass would begin to rise south of Herning Avenue, continuing over the Parks Highway and leveling off before touching back on the ground near Lakeview Avenue.

Under this alternative, a large fill contained by retaining walls would have to be constructed in order to cross the Parks Highway and the railroad tracks. The walls would be close to many Main Street businesses. Additional fill for retaining walls would be placed south of the Parks Highway intersection for eastbound on- and off-ramps and north of the Parks Highway intersection for westbound on- and off-ramps.

A westbound off-ramp and a westbound on-ramp of the Parks Highway would close six intersections/ access driveways north of the Parks Highway between Yenlo Street and Knik Street. Traffic normally accessing these businesses from the Parks Highway would have to find a different access route. Direct access on and off the Parks Highway from the north would be restricted to the on- and off-ramps at Main Street. Direct access on and off the Parks Highway from the south would be restricted to KGB Road, as it currently is now, except access would be via on- and off-ramps. Additional fill for retaining walls would be placed south of the Parks Highway for eastbound on- and off-ramps.

## Alternative 3

Five-lane Main Street Grade Separation

- Grade-separated intersection at the Main Street/KGB Road/Parks Highway Intersection
- Two-way each way with a shared turn lane
- 20-year traffic capacity met for road system
- Extensive ROW/Business impacts
- Potential Section $4(\mathrm{f})$ impact to Wasilla Community Hall/Museum (ANC-135)
- Past public involvement shows a five-lane alternative in front of the museum and along Main Street is not acceptable to the public or local government (Public Hearing 3/3/92 for Wasilla Fishhook Road, DOT\&PF Project No. 53150)


## Alternative 3: Five-lane Main Street Grade-Separation

This alternative is similar to Alternative 2, although the amount of lanes is increased by one in each direction, making KGB Road a total of five lanes instead of three. From the north, this five-lane grade-separated alignment begins at Swanson Avenue, raises and crosses over the Parks Highway, and continues on to Lakeview Avenue. Main Street/KGB Road would be two lanes in each direction, with a shared center turn lane.

This one-way couplet alternative was developed with the primary idea of keeping Main Street in its current location, but converting it to three lanes. With this concept, however, there would still be an at-grade crossing of the Parks Highway and the railroad. Both Boundary Street and Yenlo/ Talkeetna Streets were looked at for the pair; however, with an embankment fill, it would not be possible to provide driveway access to the abutting properties if Boundary Street were chosen as an option.

This alternative is designed to meet future suggested traffic needs. Under this alternative, as with Alternative 2, large fill or walls would be necessary on Main Street to provide the grade-separated crossing of the Parks Highway and the railroad. Businesses would be significantly impacted, with one side of development being inaccessible. The walls would be close to many Main Street businesses, many of which would have to be relocated or acquired. Additional fill for retaining walls would be placed south of the Parks Highway for eastbound on and off ramps.

A westbound off-ramp and a westbound on-ramp of the Parks Highway would close six intersections/ access driveways north of the Parks Highway between Yenlo Street and Knik Street. Direct access on and off the Parks Highway from the north would be restricted to Main Street, and from the south, Parks Highway access would be restricted to the KGB Road, as it is now

## Main Street \& Yenlo /Talkeetna Streets One-Way Couplet

- At-grade crossing at the Main Street/KGB Road/Parks Highway Intersection
- Main Street/KGB Road becomes three lanes, oneway traffic travels southbound (this avoids northbound traffic from stopping over the ARRC tracks which currently happens)
- Grade-separated Yenlo/Talkeetna Streets overpass
- Yenlo/Talkeetna Streets become three lanes, oneway traffic travels northbound
- 20-year capacity met for road system
- Does not disrupt existing businesses on Main Street
- No access to businesses along Boundary Street or Yenlo Street
- Difficult transitions at each end


## Alternative 4: <br> Main Street and Yenlo/Talkeetna Streets One-Way Couplet

Under Alternative 4, Main Street/KGB Road would be converted to three lanes and one-way traffic would travel southbound. There would still be an at-grade crossing of the Parks Highway and the railroad tracks Yenlo/Talkeetna Streets would be converted to three lanes an accommodate one-way travel northbound via a grade-separated overpass.

The intent of this alternative, is if the couplet is paired with a street to the east (Yenlo/Talkeetna), then the one-way southbound Main Street traffic would not back up across the railroad tracks while waiting at a red ligh Traffic would be required to make right/left turns to return to the Main Street/KGB Road, or new intersections would have to be constructed at the turnaround close to Centaur Avenue to the south, and the tie-in to Bogard Road to the north. A turnaround near Centaur Avenue would be available for cars heading southbound on KGB Road to turnaround and head north on Talkeetna Street. There would be an off-ramp at Yenlo Street for westbound traffic, and an eastbound traffic on-ramp at Talkeetna Street.

## Alternative 5

Main Street \& Knik Street Couplet

- At-grade crossing at the Main Street/KGB Road/Parks Highway Intersection
- Main Street/KGB Road becomes three lanes, oneway traffic travels northbound (traffic still backs up across ARRC tracks)
- Grade-separated Knik Street overpass
- Knik Street becomes three lanes, one-way traffic travels southbound
- 20-year capacity met for road system
- Does not disrupt existing Main Street businesses
- Buys out entire Knik Street Business district
- Difficult transitions at each end


## Alternative 5: Main Street and Knik Street Couplet

With this alternative, Main Street/KGB Road would be converted to three lanes and one-way traffic would travel northbound. There would still be an at-grade crossing of the Parks Highway and the railroad tracks. Knik Street would be converted to three lanes and accommodate one-way travel southbound. The three-lane Knik Street would tie in to Wasilla Fishhook Road to the north and tie in to KGB Road near Centaur Avenue to the south. A turnaround near Centaur Avenue would be available for vehicles heading southbound on Knik Street to turnaround and head north on KGB Road. The three-lane Main Street/KGB Road would begin at Bogard Road to the north and become two lanes at the tie-in near Lakeview Avenue, as does Knik Street.

This Alternative was designed to retain the couplet concept and to minimize impact on development that has occurred along Boundary Street and Yenlo Street. Development in recent years has almost precluded a grade-separated Boundary Street and Yenlo Street. This alternative would provide the necessary traffic capacity. However, the drawback of this alternative is having Main Street as the northbound leg and traffic again backing up across the railroad tracks at the Main Street/KGB Road and Parks Highway signal.

## Alternative 6

## Crusey Street Grade Separation

- Grade-separated intersection at the Crusey Street/Parks Highway Intersection
- Two-way each way with center turn lane
- Can connect to either Railroad Avenue or extend to Glenwood Avenue/KGB Road
- 20-year traffic capacity met for road system


## Alternative 6: Crusey Street Grade-Separation

Under this alternative, Crusey Street would be grade-separated. Crusey Street would begin to the north as a two-way each way, rising up sharply from Swanson Avenue, crossing over the Parks Highway and the railroad, and continuing south to connect to the KGB Road at either Railroad Avenue and/or before Glenwood Avenue. Once over the Parks Highway, southbound traffic would be able to take an off-ramp from Crusey Street onto Railroad Avenue Alignment 2 would be less curvilinear for through trips. The KGB Road at grade crosing of the railroad would be closed between the Park Highway and Raiload Avenue. Traffic traveling
 would access Crusey Street by going underneath Crusey Street, and then on
 the Park Highway from Crusey Street would be wia on off ramp Pe Stea - a westbound off-ramp, a westbound on-ramp, an eastbound on-ramp, and an eastbound off-ramp.

The main disadvantage to this idea is the grade between Swanson Avenue and the crossing over the Parks Highway is close to 8 percent. Also, the access between the KGB Road and Wasilla-Fishhook Road is inconvenient unless a better connection is constructed between Crusey Street/Bogard Road and Wasilla-Fishhook Road

Traffic wanting to move from one side of the Parks Highway to the other will have to use the grade-separated Crusey Street. Motorists used to using will have to use the grade-separated Crusey Street. Motorists used to using
the Main Street/ KGB Road and Parks Highway intersection may find the new route via Crusey Street a bit circuitous.

## Alternative 7

## Knik Street Grade Separation

- Grade-separated intersection at the Knik Street/Parks Highway Intersection
- 5-lane Knik Street (2 lanes each way with center turn lane)
- Railroad crossing by KGB Road is closed; Main Street becomes a "T" with the Parks Highway
- 20-year traffic capacity met for road system
- Does not disrupt existing businesses on Main Street
- Buys entire business district on Knik Street


## Alternative 7: Knik Street Grade-Separation

This alternative realigns most of the northbound and southbound through traffic into a five-lane Knik Street grade-separated crossing of the Parks Highway. In an effort to remove the through trips from the Main Stree business center, this alternative aligns the KGB Road and the Wasill Fishhook Road with Knik Street to provide a continuous corridor. Knik Street would become a five-lane urban arterial. The railroad crossing would be closed, in effect, keeping KGB Road local in character, with a "T intersection to the Parks Highway. The Knik Street transition into the KGB Road would be a smooth realignment on the south end; on the north end Knik Street would run into Wasilla-Fishhook Road just north of the Bogard Road and Main Street intersection.

Like Alternatives 2 and 3, a fill contained by retaining walls would have to be constructed in order to cross the Parks Highway and the railroad tracks A westbound off-ramp and a westbound on-ramp of the Parks Highway would close six intersections/access driveways. Additional fill for retaining walls will be placed south of the Parks Highway for eastbound on- and off ramps.

Most likely, an entire row of lots will have to be acquired on the east side of Knik Street. Under this alternative, the drawbacks are the circuity of acces for KGB Road traffic bound for the westbound Parks Highway - probably the majority of the trips will use the Tommy Moe Drive. An option would be an eastbound on-ramp that could be provided between the Park Highway and the railroad.

## Alternative 8

KGB Road Grade Separation ("Rail over Road")

## - Grade-separated intersection at the Knik

Street/Parks Highway Intersection with the Railroad elevated over KGB Road

- Alignment assumes most of the existing ARRC right-of-way
- Creates a major embankment running west to east along downtown Wasilla


## Alternative 8: Main Street Grade Separation

 ("Rail over Road")This is the only alternative that elevates the railroad over KGB Road. The alignment would begin climbing on an embankment near Lake Lucille on he west (railroad north) end of the project, climbing to a height of about 25 feet at the crossing of KGB Road. East (railroad south) of KGB Road the embankment would run out to near South Wasilla Street before touching back down. The crossing of KGB Road would accommodate up to six travel lanes and sidewalks under the bridge. The crossing and embankment would look much like the railroad's crossing of Dimond Boulevard in Anchorage (see adjacent photo).

To maintain rail service during construction, a shoofly track would be constructed on an alignment that runs approximately along Railroad constructed on an alignment that runs approximately along Railroad
Avenue. The alignment elevates the tracks over the cross streets running Avenue. The alignment elevates the tracks over the cross streets running
south of the Parks Highway, including KGB Road. Traffic patterns would south of the Parks Highway, including KGB Road. Traffic patterns would
remain the same, except for the elimination of a railroad crossing. Railroad remain the same, except for the elimination of a railroad crossing. Railroad
Avenue, a frontage road that runs south and parallel along the Parks Avenue, a frontage road that runs south and parallel along the Parks
Highway, would be closed west of the KGB Road. The Frontage Road east Highway, would be closed west of the KGB Road. The Front
of KGB Road would have to be relocated slightly to the south.

The existing historic depot at the KGB Road-ARRC intersection, which mouses the Waill Chamber of Commerce, would need to be rectoch houses the Wasilia Chamber of Commerce, would need to be relocated because of the embankment created by this alternative. The depot's plattorm, which is still used occasionally by the ARRC as a flag stop would be eliminated. An interim flag stop location may need to be constructed ntii a new depot/station/intermodal facility is constructed. The wasilla Chamber of Commerce has no immediate intentions of moving the depot to nother location. If needed to do so because of this alternative or some other track realignment, the Chamber or Com


Dimond Boulevard in south Anchorage

### 6.0 Pre-NEPA Alternatives Analysis:

## Human \& Environmental Considerations

As mentioned earlier in Section 1, FTA does not require an Alternatives Analysis to be performed as part of the National Environmental Policy Act NEPA) process. NEPA requires projects that use federal funds to evaluate design alternatives and locations, as well as potential impacts to the human and natural environment.

The purpose of this section is to identify the potential physical and environmental issues of potentially realigning the KGB-Main Street-Parks Highway intersection. The discussion of issues here is limited to those categories that may be impacted by any of the alternatives and that would need to be eventually addressed in further environmental analysis. Key issues that might require special study include Right-of-Way impact, Archeological and historic site impact, Section 4(f) impact, and contaminated sites impact.

## Land Use

Land use within the project corridor consists primarily of residential and commercial. The project area is within the City of Wasilla and is subject to its zoning regulations. Because of the various permitted uses in the area, here are numerous locations with private residences or developed residential subdivisions next to commercial buildings.

## Socioeconomics

Minor tax base reduction could occur due to ROW acquisition of private parcels. Relocations of displaced businesses and residences, and ROW acquisition would result in a slight decrease in the local tax revenues. Improved access to and through the area would increase the development potential of the area.

A modification to existing access due to raised medians has been a past concern of local business owners. Owners feel that circuitous travel caused by raised medians could adversely affect their business. Changes in access patterns could substantially affect business or commercial property values. Temporary road closures due to construction activities could cause delays and inconvenience to highway users and business owners.

## Essential Fish Habitat/ Threatened \& Endangered

 SpeciesThere are no known streams that support anadromous or resident fish within the project area. The project corridor does not fall within the known range or habitat of any listed, proposed, threatened, or endangered species.

## Coastal Zone

The project area falls within the boundaries of the Coastal Zone Management Plan for the Mat-Su Borough and is therefore governed by the regulations of the Alaska Coastal Management Program (ACMP).

## Noise

Noise impacts would be a sensitive environmental issue associated in the project area. A noise analysis would be required during the environmental phase. Mitigation measures could include constructing noise barriers. There may be a possible decrease in horn sound if the at-grade crossing were eliminated because trains would not need to sound their horn at the crossing.

## Archeological and Historic Sites

The following historical sites are documented Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) sites

- ANC-456 Woodward Cabins

The location of this site is on western side of Main Street, between Parks Highway \& Herning Avenue. The site has historical significance; however, it was determined ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

Within the project corridor, the following three sites are identified as historically significant:

- ANC-765 Tom Maurine/ Dodson Cabin

This cabin is located on the western side of Knik Street, between Parks Highway \& Herning Avenue, adjacent to the Oscar Tryck Cabin (ANC764). The Maurine/Dodson Cabin was built in the early 1920s as a storefront and a residence for Mr. Maurine. The cabin operated as a commercial outlet for baked goods from the North Pole Bakery in Anchorage from the early 1920s until the early to mid-1930s when the structure was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Dodson. This cabin is considered eligible for the NRHP.

- ANC-764 Oscar Tryck Cabin

This cabin is located on western side of Knik Street, between Parks Highway \& Herning Avenue, adjacent to ANC-765. The Oscar Tryck Cabin was originally constructed in the City of Knik. It was moved to Wasilla in 1917 after Oscar Tryck bought a townsite lot during the June 20, 1917 sale. This cabin is considered eligible for the NRHP

- ANC-135 Wasilla Community Hall/Museum

This historical site is located on the eastern side of Main Street, between Herning Avenue and Swanson Avenue. The Wasilla/Community Hall/Museum is currently on the NRHP. This was built in 1930-1931 for use as the first community hall in Wasilla. It was built on land willed to the community of Wasilla by an early Wasilla homesteader. Threatened with demolition in the 1960s, the building's interior was fully refurbished Renovations were made with centennial funds so the building could be used as the headquarters for the Wasilla-Knik-Willow Creek Historical Society.

The following sites found in the Wasilla vicinity are listed on the NRHP according to the National Park Service website listing, as accessed 1/5/05:

- Teeland's Country Store, listed 1978-11-14, and located at mile 42 of the Parks Highway and Knik Road.
- Wasilla Community Hall, listed 1982-09-08. This is the same historical site as listed previously as AHRS ANC-135.
- Wasilla Depot, listed 1977-12-16, and located at the Parks Highway and Knik Road, as discussed in Section 3 of this report.
- Wasilla Elementary School, listed 1980-02-05, and off of the Parks Highway.


The Wasilla Community Hall/Museum, located on Main Street, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey.

## Section 4(f) Properties

Section 4(f) of the U.S. DOT\&PF Act of 1966 (80 Stat. 931, Public Law 89-670), as amended by 23 U.S.C. 138, states that no administrative action will use land from any significant publicly owned public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge, or any historical site of national, state, or local significance unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative o the use of such land, and such action includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the land from such use. Leo M. Nunley Park (Townsite Park) is a 1.14 acre urban park located along Swanson Avenue between Willow and Knik Streets. A long safety fence separates the park from wanson Avenue. The Townsite Park and ANC-135 (Wasilla Community Hall/Museum) may require a Section 4(f) evaluation.

## Contaminated Sites

An Initial Site Assessment (ISA) was conducted in 1993 for the WasillaFishhook Road Rehabilitation (DOT\&PF Project No. 53150) to determine the potential of encountering hazardous substances. The Rehabilitation is proposed in a similar footprint of the KGB Road grade separation Iternatives analysis project corridor footprint. An environmental reevaluation (STP-0525[12]/54302) for the Alaska Department of Transportation \& Public Facilities was conducted in August 2003. The reevaluation found eight medium or high-risk sites in the project vicinity long KGB Road, from Glenwood Avenue to the Parks Highway, and along Main Street, from the Parks Highway to Bogard Road. Further coordination with Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation would be necessary to determine the project's potential to encountering impacted soils and contaminated sites within the project area.

## Zoning

The majority of the land within the project corridor is commercially zoned. Several segments of land north of the Parks Highway, along Main Street, Herning Avenue, and Swanson Avenue are zoned public land. These areas house Wasilla City Hall, the public library, the museum historic block, and the public safety building. Land southeast of Crusey Street (Wasilla Lake Park) is also zoned public land. The most recent City of Wasilla Comprehensive Plan (October 1992) calls for improving the City's downtown historic block and improving recreational opportunities along
Wasilla Lake. Wasilla Lake.

### 7.0 Long-term Planning: The Project in Context

Two evolving transportation concepts would impact the Wasilla core area in a significant way. These are the Knik Arm Crossing and the Alternative Parks Highway corridor. For many years, long-term transportation plans in Wasilla have included either a rail or a highway bypass. These concepts are not included as part of an adopted long-term plan or schedule. For the purposes of the KGB Road grade separation, we assume neither projects are likely to be constructed in the next 20 years. While these major projects are on a longer study timeframe, the KGB Road and the Parks Highway intersection is already operating unacceptably and in critical need of improvements. Even if the ARRC rail line eventually moves out of the central business district of the City of Wasilla, potential future commuter rail may still use the existing rail line in the downtown area. It is reasonable to proceed with a study upon these assumptions and will not preclude future options.

The 2002 Parks Highway Corridor Management Plan produced by DOT\&PF calls for a possible second or even a third corridor to address the traffic volume anticipated by 2030. The Plan says that if all the roadway(s) have direct access, as many as 12 lanes could be needed to carry the have direct access, as many as 12 lanes could be needed to carry the expected east-west traffic in downtown Wasilla. A 1982 Parks Highway through and around Wasilla to accommodate the project traffic growth. Eventually, additional travel lanes will be needed on any section not bypassed.

## Wasilla: An Intermodal Community

As mentioned in Section 1, a joint committee, known as the Wasilla Intermodal Steering Committee, was formed to provide oversight on the development and coordination of a number of transportation projects in the greater Wasilla area. Along with the KGB Road grade separation analysis, the steering committee identified three other projects to be moved forward into further analysis:

- Wasilla Realignment Alternatives Analysis This analysis is examining future long-term potential realignment options for relocating the ARRC outside of downtown Wasilla
- Wasilla Intermodal Facilities Alternatives Analysis

This analysis is examining several potential commuter rail station locations in the Wasilla vicinity

- South Wasilla Track Realignment project

This project would entail track straightening and eliminating five at-grade crossings to improve safety and operations in South at-grade
Wasilla

## Future Intermodal Facility Plans for Wasilla

Commuter rail has long been on the minds of Southcentral Alaska residents. For the past 10 years, reports have studied the potential for ridership between Anchorage and surrounding communities. Commuter rail has bee in the long-term development plans of the Alaska Railroad as well. The Alaska Railroad is proposing to construct one or more intermodal facilities in the greater Wasilla area. Key features of the facility would include an enclosed waiting room, platform and station siding, parking area, transit drop-off area, and some pedestrian amenities. The facility would serve commuters traveling to and from their homes in Willow, Houston, Big Lake, and Wasilla and their places of work in Anchorage on a commuter rail line.

The Wasilla Area Intermodal Steering Committee meeting, as described earlier, identified four potential locations for an intermodal facility, one of which is the current Alaska Railroad platform (Historic Depot) located at the KGB Road-ARRC intersection. The other three locations are: the Wasilla Airport area, Kenai Supply Company Building Area, and the Fairview Loop Area. Placement of an intermodal facility and/or retaining the existing ARRC platform for commuter rail purposes would be influential factors in choosing what alternative is best suited for the KGB Road grade separation.

### 8.0 Summary \& Recommendations

The population and subsequent traffic growth that is continuing to occur in he Wasilla area combined with the growing train traffic on the ARRC mainline through town has resulted in the need for improvements at the busy KGB Road-ARRC-Parks Highway intersection. The intersection configuration is a key part of the problem, which exacerbates vehicle congestion, causes safety concerns, and delays travel.

To help alleviate the growing travel demand through the corridor into Anchorage, the ARRC has been pursuing rail improvements that, when complete, will provide commuter rail and enhanced passenger services hrough the corridor. The KGB Road grade-separation is one such improvement.

By grade-separating the intersection, a number of safety concerns and perational inefficiencies would be addressed. The project would: improve safety by eliminating the potential for train-vehicle conflictions; maintain roadway and access circulation with sufficient north-south capacity; and eliminate congestion caused by trains closing the intersection.

The road over rail alternatives necessitate also taking the Knik Goose Bay Road over the Parks Highway because of the limited space in which to get back down to grade. To keep a direct connection to the Parks Highway, on back down to grade. To keep a direct connection to the Parks Highway, on and off ramps were explored. In either case, with or without ramps, the "road over rail" solutions require extensive right-of-way from the core area
of downtown Wasilla. These business impacts would be substantial. of downtown Wasila. These business impacts would be substantial.
Further exploration of the road over rail options makes sense only if the Further exploration of the road over rail options makes sense only if the DOT\&PF were to have intentions of grade separating the entire highway
through Wasilla, which they do not. As a solution to the ARRC's concerns the Knik Goose Bay Road rail crossing, the road over rail options are not the Kope bas to the business and social and substantial right commended due to the business and social impacts and substantial right-of-way requirements.

The recommended solution is for the rail to go over the Knik Goose Bay Road. Most of the project could be accomplished with the right-of way that the ARRC already owns. The project can be constructed with minimal direct affect on the downtown business community.

The primary impacts would be changes to noise levels of the elevated railroad (approximately 17 feet high over the KGB road), although horn noise at the crossing would be eliminated, and the visual effects of the mbankment needed to raise the tracks. No road crossings or driveways would be eliminated and circulation would improve as traffic and pedestrians would no longer be required to stop for trains at the crossing.

"Road over Rail" Alternatives (Alternatives 2-7)
The "Road over Rail" Alternatives (Alternatives 2-7) are not reasonable and are not recommended due to:

- Substantial business impacts in downtown core area
- Social impacts associated with loss of downtown.
- ROW acquisition cost is substantial, and potential for relocation limited
- Impacts to traffic circulation create circuitous routing to get to remaining business due to long embankment run-outs and closed remaining
- Have more difficult pedestrian accessibility of climbing up over the overpass to get from one side of downtown to the other.
- It is anticipated that a high degree of controversy would be generated by these alternatives.

The "Rail over Road" Alternative (Alternative 8) is the recommended solution because it:

- Has least impact on downtown business district
- Maintains downtown traffic circulation the best.
- Provides the best flexibility for DOT\&PF to increase future capacity of KGB road under the rail crossing.
- Provides better pedestrian linkages in downtown.
- Has the least ROW requirements

Concerns of this alternative, which would have to be explored during the environmental phase, are primarily due to the embankment running through downtown on which the rail would traverse, and include visual impacts and potential changes in noise levels. It is unknown whether these impact would be significant; an Environmental Assessment is the recommended documentation to proceed with during the next phase of work

"Rail over Road" Alternative (Alternative 8)

Appendix A. Preliminary Engineered Alternatives


ALASKA RAILROAD CORRORATION
 IK GOOSE BAY GRADE-SEPER
ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS ALTERNATIVE ?

$\qquad$











## Appendix B. Preliminary Right-of-Way Analysis

The purpose of this section is to identify impacted properties based on each alignment, and to determine the impacts and costs associated with the acquisition of that land, whether it is a "partial take" of the property or a "total take" of the property.

The right-of-way footprint was created by electronically superimposing the engineered alignments upon the Mat-Su Borough parcel layout using ArcGIS 8.3. The right-of-way footprint relative to the parcel lines is depicted on the figures adjacent to the alternatives described earlier in this document. In determining right-of-way cost, the appraised values from tax year 2002 were used. Appraised values rather than tax assessor's value was used because sometimes businesses or other types of parcel owners get tax breaks, and the value of the parcel would not reflect the cost of impacting that property. Likewise, appraisal value sometimes isn't reflective of what the parcel and associated buildings are really worth.

Right-of-way impact includes impacting parcels with no buildings, parcels with buildings though the alignment does not affect the building, parcels with buildings in which the alignment directly impacts the buildings on the property, and parcels where the alignments restrict vehicular access to the property. In Table 1, the 'number of parcels with buildings directly impacted' column represents those alternatives in which the alignment directly impacts the building, and in which the buildings would have to be acquired or relocated. Further right-of-way impact analysis is still needed for traffic circulation, particularly whether or not the alignments impact business accessibility. Even if the superimposed alignment does not impact a property, the fill used to create a ramp or raise the road alignment may significantly impact how easy or difficult it is to access parcels with businesses.

Many of the alternatives impact a significant number of parcels. The "Road over Rail" alternatives (Alternatives 2-7) range from impacting 15 to 45 parcels. The City core along Main Street is well developed, which includes the Post Office, the Library, the Wasilla/Community Hall/Museum, and many businesses. One block to the west, along Knik Street, is City Hall, Nunley Townsite Park, and many other businesses. The Main Street, and other neighboring streets, corridor is fairly well developed. Alternative 8 , the only "Rail over Road" alternative, impacts only two parcels, as this alignment assumes most of the existing ARRC right-of-way.

While many of the alternatives impact a significant number of parcels, most of the impacts are by a small percentage. Only two alternatives impact any parcel by greater than $50 \%$. Of the 15 parcels impacted by Alternative 6 , only three parcels are impacted by greater than $50 \%$. These three parcels require roughly $58 \%, 67 \%$, and $46 \%$ take of these properties. Of the 45 parcels impacted by Alternative 7, only two parcels are impacted by greate than $50 \%$. These two parcels require roughly $63 \%$ and $53 \%$ take of the properties. No buildings are on these five parcels.

| Alternative | Number of Parcels impacted | $\begin{gathered} \text { Number } \\ \text { of } \\ \text { parcels } \\ \text { with } \\ \text { Buildings } \end{gathered}$ | Number of parcels with <br> Buildings Directly Impacted | Total Appraised value of all impacted parcels ("total take" ~ worst case scenario") | Total Appraised value of affected buildings ("total take of building") | Total Appraised value of affected land ("partial take") |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Alternative 1: Present Main Street At-Grade configuration | 0 | - | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Alternative 2: Three-lane Main Street Grade-Separation | 23 | 9 | 4 | \$2.0 million | \$550,000 | \$136,000 |
| Alternative 3: Five-lane Main Street Grade-Separation | 33 | 14 | 5 | \$5.2 million | \$570,000 | \$211,000 |
| Alternative 4: Main Street and Yenlo/Talkeetna Streets OneWay Couplet | 23 | 11 | 1 | \$9.0 million | \$410,000 | \$200,000 |
| Alternative 5: Main Street and Knik Street Couplet | 41 | 15 | 3 | \$5.5 million | \$2,690,000 | \$114,000 |
| Alternative 6: Crusey Street Grade-Separation | 15 | 1 | 1 | \$850,000 | \$33,000 | \$106,000 |
| Alternative 7: Knik Street Grade-Separation | 45 | 15 | 5 | \$5.4 million | \$2,690,000 | \$150,000 |
| Alternative 8: Main Street Grade Separation ("Rail over Road")** | 2 | 0 | 0 | \$50,000 | \$0 | \$1,900*** |

*Appraised values from Tax Year 2002
**All "Road over Rail" alternatives (Alternatives 2-7) require take of ARRC right-of-way
*** Value is low because the alignment assumes most of the existing ARRC right-of-way; therefore only 2
parcels are impacted.

Appendix C. Preliminary Cost Estimates

## Knik Goose Bay Road Grade-Separation

Main, Knik, Yenlo and Crusey Streets
COST ESTIMATE

| SECTION | $\begin{aligned} & \bar{\pi} \\ & 0 \\ & 0 \\ & \overline{3} \end{aligned}$ | O 0 0 0 0 0 0 | $\overline{0}$ 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0.0 0 0 |  | $\begin{aligned} & \text { 등 } \\ & 0 \\ & 0 \end{aligned}$ |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Alt. 1: Present Main Street Configuration | \$1.9 | \$0.6 | \$2.5 | \$0.4 | \$0.3 | \$0.3 | \$0.0 | \$3.5 |
| Alt. 2: 3-Lane Main Street Grade-Separation | \$7.5 | \$2.3 | \$9.8 | \$1.5 | \$1.0 | \$1.0 | \$2.1 | \$15.4 |
| Alt. 3: 5-Lane Main Street Grade-Separation | \$10.6 | \$3.2 | \$13.8 | \$2.1 | \$1.4 | \$1.4 | \$5.2 | \$23.9 |
| Alt. 4: Main Street \& Yenlo/Talkeetna Streets One-way Couplet | \$16.9 | \$5.1 | \$22.1 | \$3.4 | \$2.3 | \$2.3 | \$9.1 | \$39.2 |
| Alt. 5: Main Street \& Knik Street Couplet | \$16.0 | \$4.8 | \$20.9 | \$3.2 | \$2.1 | \$2.1 | \$5.5 | \$33.8 |
| Alt. 6: Crusey Street Grade-Separation | \$26.3 | \$7.9 | \$34.3 | \$5.2 | \$3.5 | \$3.5 | \$0.8 | \$47.3 |
| Alt. 7: Knik Street Grade-Separation | \$17.3 | \$5.2 | \$22.5 | \$3.4 | \$2.3 | \$2.3 | \$5.4 | \$35.9 |
| Alt. 8: KGB Road Grade-Separation | \$18.5 | \$5.5 | \$24.0 | \$3.6 | \$2.4 | \$2.4 | \$0.1 | \$32.5 |



Knik Goose Bay Road Grade-Separation
Alternative 2: Three-Eane Main street Grade-Separation
CosT ESTIMATE

| Knik Goose Bay Road Grade-Separation Alternative 2: Three-Lane Main Street Grade-Separation COST ESTIMATE |  |  |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| typical section | 3-Lane Main Street/KGB Road: $6^{\prime}$ (sidewalk) - $\mathbf{2}^{\prime}$ - $12^{\prime}-14^{\prime}-12^{\prime}-2^{\prime}-6^{\prime}$ (sidewalk) $=$ |  | 54 | DESCRIPTION: | Main Street Grade-Separation. The current 3-lane at-grade intersection of the Parks Highway at Main |
|  |  |  |  |  | Streetk G R Road will grade-separated over the tracks. There will be no access ramps; access will be |
| structural section(inches) | $\begin{aligned} & \text { SMA Pavement = } \\ & \text { CAB = } \\ & \text { Borrow "A" = } \end{aligned}$ | ${ }_{6}$ |  |  | Palmer-Wasilla Highway at Glenwood Avenue to the south. |
|  |  | ${ }_{42}^{6}$ |  |  | - ${ }^{\text {a }}$ |
| SEGMENTS (feel) | Main Street, Parks Hiway to Swanson: KGB Road, Lakeview Avenue to Parks Hiway | $\begin{aligned} & 750 \\ & 1430 \end{aligned}$ |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| RAMPS (feet) | n/a |  |  |  |  |
| structures (feet) | Bridge over Parks Hiway and ARRC: | 300 |  | ALTERNATIVE 2 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Whatmper |
|  |  |  |  |  | \% 5 - 58 |
| description | ITEM No    <br>  Pay Unit  Unit Price | Quantity ${ }^{\text {Q }}$ Amount |  |  |  |




## Road Grade-Separation

Alternative 4: Main Street and Yenlo/ Talkeetra Streets One-Way Couplet


Knik Goose Bay Road Grade-Separation



Knik Goose Bay Road Grade-Separation
Alternative 6: Crusey Street Grade Separation
Alternative 6: Crusey Street Grade Separation


Knik Goose Bay Road Grade-Separation
Alternative 7: Knik Street Grade Separation
Alternative 7 : Knik Street Grade Separatio




