

EI-7072

**Port McKenzie Rail Extension EIS**

**Public Meeting**

**Wasilla Multiuse Sports Complex**

**March 10, 2008**

**Vern Halter** – My name is Vern Halter. I live in Willow, Alaska, 9373 North Rappie Road. I moved to Alaska 30 years ago and have spent a good deal of my 30 years right here in the Susitna Valley, both at Trapper Creek Alaska and in the Willow area. I came up here as a young lawyer as a public defender for the Alaska Court System Law Clerk and Magistrate Judge for the Alaska Court System. I am currently the Mat-Su Borough Planning Commission and quite active in the Willow community and the Borough community as far as planning and things like that. I'm a musher by trade. I have completed 26 Iditarods and Yukon Quests so I value the Susitna Valley for its mushing ability and Iditarod race which left Willow on the restart. I am drastically opposed to what is called the Willow Corridor Three route for the rail extension going up west of Red Shirt Lake coming into crossing into our park systems and cross at Willow Creek and then it has to recross the Parks Highway and attach to the railroad. I believe this would devastate what is the value of our community up in Willow. The community of Willow is based on – it's a residential community but it's based on recreation and it's based on outdoors.

I think a great majority of people who live there, sustain themselves through recreation and tourism. Along with my wife Susan, I operate a Dream, Dream sled dog farm and it's a tourist operation in the summer. We see thousands of people who come up here to experience Alaska as it really is and I'm really truly worried about what the rail extension project will – if it goes up through Willow would do to us. I also live close to the City of Houston and I'm five or six miles north of Houston and I know the City of Houston wants the rail extension to come through their city which I guess the Mac West Houston route. I prefer that route. I realize there's people down in the Horseshoe Lake area and Big Lake area that are against that but I think that truly is the better route that meets the needs of the railroad. The concerns up in Willow – and I don't think I can overstate it – people like Farley Dean who has Willow Resort

on Willow Creek, if the railroad were to go in half a mile west of him across Willow Creek, I think it would basically close down a family operation and I think it would devastate a lot of our family businesses that Willow is based on.

The way the growth of the Susitna Valley is going, with Wasilla, Big Lake, Meadow Lakes and Houston, the core area down here needs a place like Willow to recreate. We have the best trail systems in the world. There is the West Gateway Trail System that the Willow Corridor Three would cut right in half and then we have the Hesser Norris (ph) and the Amil Stanzie (ph) and I believe these have far more value than the rail extension project. Another thing that really bothers me about this whole process, the Mat-Su Borough who is a joint partner with the railroad in this project, have went to every community. They've promised, if you were to get this route you would have a terminal put in in your community for tourism and things like that. But I'm finding out that that's not true at all. Also, this is proposed to be a 200 foot corridor but at the same time I believe a road corridor would soon follow and of course that would actually devastate the community even more in my opinion because if the community is going to keep its basis of a rural recreational community, sometimes things like that actually effect the real economy more than they help.

I'm opposed to the Willow Corridor Three and I think the community of Willow – we just submitted a packet tonight that I think states the concerns. I think every major user group and stakeholder – Iditarod Trail Organization, the Iron Dog Trail Organization, there's 10 or 12 letters – and the Alaska Travel Industry Association, the Mat-Su Convention and Visitor's Bureau Association, every one of them oppose this Corridor Three and there's a good reason because of the effect it's going to have on our parks. Corridor Three is going to go through state parks and cut them right in half and of course, I find it very unusual that the Mat-Su Borough and

the railroad even proposed putting a railroad corridor through a state park. It would cut through the Little Su River which is I think the second leading silver salmon stream in the state of Alaska and then of course it's going to through Willow Creek which has all four species of salmon and sooner or later the impact of development on the salmon is going to cause a decline and I think all those considerations should be taken in. The matrix thing that was used last fall clearly showed that the Houston route was the cheapest, least expensive, cut through the least amount of wetlands, didn't go through state parks and of course, didn't cross the rivers, which I would think would be something of major concern. I would ask that the FTB certainly look at this very carefully and not award that route on the Willow route and I guess those are my comments and I appreciate having the time to have a chance to come in here.

**David Robinson** – My name is David Robinson and my wife is Koreen Robinson, that's K-O-R-E-E-N and we're concerned of the new alignment now listed of the Willow alignment. At the last meeting with the railroad that I went to, they had the right-of-way split down the property line between our property, which is at milepost 19 and 20 I believe. There's a 79.9 acre parcel there at the junction of Gomer and Mishap and north of that there is a 40 acre parcel and now the new alignment that we see today presented by the Government has now got it going down through the middle of my property. I've been an Alaskan all my life. My folks homesteaded in Peter's Creek in 1948 and so we're well aware of how the government seems to find need for properties. At any rate, I'm not anti-building anything. What I am concerned about is sharing of the wealth. I don't really relish the idea of it inheriting the whole railroad right-of-way and I was much more amenable when it when down splitting my property and McCain's which would be towards the Deshka Landing from where I'm at down the property

line where we each gave up the same amount, impacting us the least amount. That's my retirement where me and my wife hope to spend our golden years.

I'm currently approaching 55 and probably start moving up there within the next five to eight years so, although I think that it would be a good place to go and I believe after looking at the different routes, flying over them and walking them, that it probably makes the most sense to the government as well as the railroad. It's the least amount of privately owned property. I am concerned of losing my whole ground due to the railroad. Coming right down the middle of it doesn't give me access to both sides to be able to farm. If it went down one edge, I'm sure that I would be amenable to working something out. Is that enough? One more point I want to make is this is the second time I've given deposition and I sure hope it doesn't fall on deaf ears again because last time, we get this alignment come back again on us so hopefully you guys are listening. Thank you.

**Marty Quaas** – My name is Marty Quaas and my comment is pretty simple. I hope we can see the dirt fly very shortly. I think this is a great help for the Mat-Su Valley economy. I think that we need this type of thing. Another rail connection to the port would be great. I am not for wanton environmental destruction but I see no reason why it can't be done intelligently and with a minimal amount of environmental impact. I guess that's it. Thank you.