

# Ray Debenham

E1-7363

Alaska

Phone: (907)562-9330

Fax: (907)562-9331

Cell Phone: (907)440-1117

E-Mail airondog@ak.net

May 13, 2008

David Navecky  
STB Finance Docket # 35095  
Surface Transportation Board  
395 E. Street SW  
Washington, DC 205423

Dear Mr. Navecky

I just got a copy of the report from the latest Point MacKenzie Railroad recommendations. I can not believe that the engineers gave the Houston South route the highest rating.

I was on the board that studied the series of routes that the Borough recommended in 1996. We went through all the recommendations and had many meetings with the public and came to the conclusion that the route very close to what you call the Willow route would be best for the people who live in the area.

I have gone through the report done by Tryck and Hayes in 2007. It errs in a number of areas.

1- The Big Lake Area is a very busy year-around recreational area. I, personally, have ridden my snow mobiles and 4-wheelers over this area since the 1960's. There are over 1000 snow machine/4-wheeler trails that the railroad would have to cross on the Houston Route. The Willow Route might have 20 to 30 trails.

2- The South Houston spur would require a bridge across the Little Susitna River in order meet the requirements for a siding, that the Alaska Railroad requires at each spur, to be put in Houston. This information is according to the Alaska Railroad. Tryck and Hayes did not mention it in their 2007 report.

3- Safety is a very important issue. With over 1000 recreational trail crossings by the railroad on the Houston Route, it will be very dangerous for the recreational riders year around. The Willow route will not impact recreational riders nearly as extensively..

4- On the Willow route, the soils are predominately moraine, while the Houston routes are predominately bog and out wash. The Borough was specifically informed by Alaska State Fish

and Game that they would have to build bridges over any wet lands that were identified as “bog” or “out wash”. This mandate alone would make the Houston route the most expensive to build.

5- The Houston Route traverses a known active earthquake fault. Peter Haeussler of the U.S. Geological Survey shows that the area can produce a earthquake in the magnitude of 6 to 7. This puts the railroad in a zone of “goo” where sediments liquefied and flowed during ancient earthquakes. I experienced first hand the 1964 Alaska earthquake. I saw what happened to roads and building in a earthquake of that magnitude. The buildings in downtown Anchorage slid out to sea. The road system on “goo” at the end of Turnagain Arm, disappeared. We could not even find any evidence that there was a road there.

6- The Environmental effects on the Houston Route would far exceed the Willow Route. It is eminently closer to many small lakes and recreational areas. Any spill, at all, would most likely directly affect or quickly leach into one of the many lakes. Additionally, the recreational cabins and permanent homes in this area rely on wells for their water. We cannot afford any contamination or interference with subterranean water streams.

The Willow Route is along a glacial moraine that is above the water table and has less of a chance of impact on the lakes, rivers or wells. With the soil in a moraine area, contaminants would tend to be contained in the ground soils and consequently easier to clean up. Also of note, there are almost no full-time residences along the Willow Route and very few cabins.

7- Air quality will be affected no matter which route is chosen. However, the Willow Route will impact the least number of people. The Willow Route would also provide that the train noise would occur in an area with the least amount of people impacted rather than the very quiet and much more densely populated residential and recreational area of the Houston route.

8- Cultural and Historic Resources of the report were just wrong from my point of view. It states that “because the Willow route was longer, there would be more effect on historical sites.” Just logic tells me that the natives lived around the areas that had water. These were their highways and trails. Looking at the map, it is obvious that the Houston route would cross or be closer to more lakes and rivers where the majority of historical sites would be located.

9- The Socioeconomic portion of the report I read with interest. DPOR states that the Willow route would “reduce recreation experience because the line is ¼ mile from one campsite.” This does not make sense. The fact is that the line through Houston would go right next to or within a ¼ mile of over 1000 recreational cabins and trails and campsites not just one which was not included in the Tryck and Hayes report either. I do not believe he was adequately informed on the environmental impact of the routes.

When DPOR report exclusively stated that the Willow would displace wildlife on “his” parks and recreation areas. Does the DPOR not care about the wildlife on the Borough, Native, State of Alaska (Mental Health and University) areas? These areas are currently being used for wildlife and recreation. Does this not have just as much effect, if not more, than the “official reserves” do? It is a lot more land.

I would like to close by saying that the Houston route for the railroad will have a greater impact on humans. The railroad will directly affect private property within several miles of the route with noise and vibration, restricting recreational use of trails, additional safety issues and visual impact; not to mention the potential for spills. Property value will be reduced, quality of life will decrease, and the quiet enjoyment of our land will be effected.

So why put the railroad where it effects the most people? Very few people would be effected by the Willow route. I urge you to choose the Willow Route.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ray G. Debenham".

Ray G. Debenham