

# STATE OF ALASKA

## DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF PARKS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

OFFICE OF HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

EI-13284

SARAH PALIN, GOVERNOR

550 W. 7TH AVENUE, SUITE 1310  
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99501-3565  
PHONE: (907) 269-8721  
FAX: (907) 269-8908

July 23, 2008

File No.: 3130-1R Surface Transportation Board

SUBJECT: Rail Line Extension to Port MacKenzie, Alaska  
Initiation of Section 106 consultation

Victoria Rutson  
Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis  
Surface Transportation Board  
Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis and Administration  
Washington, DC 20423

Dear Ms. Rutson,

The State Historic Preservation Office received on June 23, 2008, your letter and the attached document titled *Cultural Resources Work Plan: Proposed Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project, Port MacKenzie to Willow, Alaska STB Finance Docket No. 35095* by Stephen R. Braund & Associates (June 5, 2008). We have reviewed the referenced undertaking under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and have the following comments:

Definition of area of potential effect:

The *Cultural Resources Work Plan* defines the area of potential effect (APE) for direct effects as the 200 foot right-of-way and the construction footprint of other project components such as staging areas and material sources; the *Plan* also acknowledges that the APE for indirect effects is likely larger (page 5-6). Once we receive a more completely defined APE that includes future cumulative and other indirect effects we will be able to comment on the APE.

Study area and predictive model:

According to *Cultural Resources Work Plan*, the study area is defined as 1 mile on either side of alignment (p. 10). Cultural landscapes, historic districts and traditional cultural properties may be difficult to recognize by looking only at corridors. Instead, we encourage Surface Transportation Board to expand the study area to include the Susitna River-east/Willow/Houston/Knik/Port MacKenzie region when identifying cultural resources and developing the predictive model. The ground truthing surveys may focus on the corridors. Remember also to involve the other consulting parties regarding the predictive model and the types of cultural resources that may be present in the project area.

The variables of the predictive model appear reasonable and we look forward to receiving the resulting GIS map showing the levels of cultural resource probability throughout the project area.

Methodology for completing Section 106 consultation:

We understand that the Section 106 process will be phased and combined with NEPA in accordance with 36 CFR 800.4 (b)(2), 800.5(a)(3) and 800.8 (c). To ensure that the requirements of the Section 106 process will be adequately covered, we developed the following outline based on our understanding of the

*Cultural Resources Work Plan* (pp. 8-12). The only changes we made were the addition of involving consulting parties at each step and developing only one legal agreement.

- Description of affected environment; *36 CFR 800.4* (Identify historic properties):
  - Literature review and back ground research of the project area
  - Describe previously reported cultural resources in project area
  - Develop a predictive model for cultural resources
  - Ground truth the model in summer of 2008
  - Involve consulting parties
- Determination of environmental consequences; *36 CFR 800.5* (Assess adverse effects):
  - Assume National Register eligibility of properties unless previously determined not eligible
  - Describe potential effects (both direct and indirect) to historic properties as a result of each alternative
  - Involve consulting parties
- After selection of final alternative; *36 CFR 800.4 and 800.5*:
  - Pedestrian survey and sub-surface testing of the area of potential effect
  - Archaeological report with evaluations of National Register eligibility and recommendations regarding assessment of effect.
  - Involve consulting parties
  - Concurrence by SHPO of Surface Transportation Board's findings
- *36 CFR 800.6* (Resolution of adverse effects)
  - Will follow a programmatic agreement between STB and SHPO included in the EIS document
  - Involve consulting parties

Legal agreements

The *Cultural Resources Work Plan* states that a memorandum of agreement for mitigating adverse effects to the Iditarod National Historic Trail will be developed in addition to a programmatic agreement (p. 12). Under Section 106, only one legal document is necessary for an undertaking. Mitigation for Iditarod National Historic Trail should be incorporated into the PA.

Please contact Stefanie Ludwig (269-8720) or Doug Gasek (269-8726) if you have any questions or if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Judith E. Bittner  
State Historic Preservation Officer

JEB:sll

Cc: Fran Seager-Boss, Matanuska-Susitna Borough