Commuter Opportunities

PARTNERSHIPS

Alaska Railroad Projects in Support of Commuter Rail

Southcentral Commuter Rail Study and Operations Plan

Initiated in 2000 and completed in early 2002, the Alaska Railroad (ARRC)-commissioned study offers a blueprint for further action to establish a commuter rail system between the Anchorage Bowl and Mat-Su Valley. $200,000 funded by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and ARRC. **The plan is being updated in 2009-2010.**

Anchorage-to-Wasilla Track Realignment

Initiated in 1999 and primarily completed in 2007, this $78 million effort straightens the track from Anchorage to Wasilla, thereby cutting train travel time between communities by 30 minutes, which is critical to commuter rail viability. Funded by the Dept. of Defense (DOD), FTA and ARRC.

Bill Sheffield Alaska Railroad Depot at the Anchorage International Airport

Initiated in 2000 and completed in May 2003, the rail station at Ted Stevens International Anchorage Airport is a visionary hub offering travelers an intermodal terminal and commuters a connection to a major employment center. $28 million funded by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). In 2008, $2.162 million was spent to re-establish bus and truck access after construction of a new airport rental car garage blocked access. Funding 91% FTA and 9% ARRC.

Palmer Park-and-Ride Rail Station

Constructed 2002-2004 in collaboration with the Palmer Alaska State Fair, the $2.3 million project features a passenger shelter, restrooms, ample parking and drop-off lanes to facilitate commuting. Administered by ARRC, project funded by FTA, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the State Fair.

Ship Creek Intermodal Transportation Center

Initiated in 1999, this is a phased $60 million project to facilitate inter-community connections with enhanced depot facilities and accommodations for all transit modes. Phase 1 (track addition) began in 2007, funded by FTA and ARRC. Phase 2 (depot upgrades) began in 2009, funded by the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act via FTA.

Self-propelled "DMU" Rail Car Purchase

As part of a joint U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and ARRC Chugach Forest Whistle Stop project, a self-propelled rail car was purchased and delivered spring 2009. The diesel multiple unit (DMU) may be available for flexible demonstration service during winter months. The $5.3 million DMU cost was funded primarily by the USFS.

Next Steps

Regional Transportation Authority

ARRC's *2002 Southcentral Commuter Rail Study & Operations Plan* recommends forming a regional transportation authority (RTA) as a critical first step to establishing commuter rail as a component of integrated commuter services. In order for regional commuter systems to be effective, links between communities must be planned and implemented with coordination between local governments and their transit systems, such as the Anchorage People Mover and Mat-Su Community Transit (MASCOT) city bus systems. A joint RTA makes such coordination possible, along with coordinated support from state, federal and private sector partners.

On June 13, 2008, then Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich and then Mat-Su Borough Mayor Curt Menard signed an agreement to improve mass transit in Southcentral Alaska, beginning with RTA formation. (Current Anchorage Mayor Dan Sullivan and Mat-Su Mayor Talus Colberg renewed the agreement, extending it through December 2010). This move acknowledges the RTA's critical role in developing a regional commuter strategy to better serve thousands of people who regularly commute between Mat-Su and Anchorage bowl communities.

Thanks to the agreement, local transportation officials are investigating commuting opportunities. New options could include additional bus and van capacity, Glenn Highway improvements, commuter rail development and exploration of other transportation modes such as the Mat-Su Ferry. This detailed analysis will be considered by the RTA.

Local governments have adopted a draft RTA formation agreement. Once operating ground rules are established, the RTA agreement can be finalized and the authority can be formed with state approval. Legislation to approve the RTA was introduced in early 2009 and will be addressed during the 2009-2010 legislative session.

Funding Mechanisms

The RTA's first order of business will be to identify and develop funding mechanisms to cover operating expenses and capital investments. Most RTAs fund operations with a combination of ticket fares, state and local taxes, and federal funding. This mix must be determined. Capital funding is also needed to purchase road and rail transit equipment, improve road and track infrastructure, design and construct additional depots and other intermodal facilities.

ARRC Identifies Future Capital Expenditures to Support Commuter Rail

Specific capital investments must be identified for each commuter enhancement option. ARRC has identified the following capital expenditures needed to support the commuter rail option.

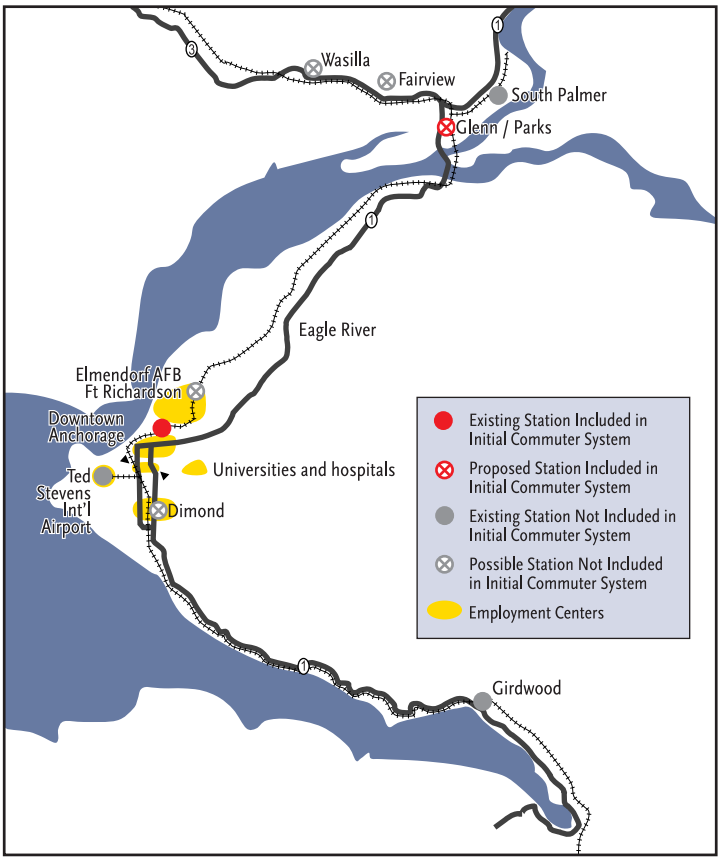
- *Purchase sufficient self-propelled rail cars.* Successful commuter rail service depends upon fast, flexible passenger transportation equipment, such as the Colorado Rail Car DMU delivered in spring 2009. This rail car would only be available during winter months, because it is dedicated to Chugach Forest Whistle Stop Service in summer. Additional capacity is needed through purchase of five additional DMUs.
- *Straighten remaining track curves.*
  - *Beach Lake Park:* Straighten three curves currently on hold due to an underground ice lens making work complex and costly.
  - *Birchwood:* Overcome complications posed by constructing additional sidings.
  - *Eklutna:* Following a recent land swap between Eklutna, Inc. and the Alaska Railroad, land development plans are still pending. Once settled, track straightening decisions can be made.
  - *South Wasilla (Fairview Loop):* The land acquisition for Phase 1 (first two miles) is nearly done for this four-mile track realignment project.
- *Construct Rail Stations and Depots*
  - *Ship Creek ITC:* Complete the intermodal transportation center (ITC) that includes the Anchorage Historic Depot. Phase 1 (track and utility upgrades) complete 2009. Phase 2 (depot upgrades) begins 2010. Phase 3 includes surrounding area.
  - *Potential Depots:* Additional depots for pick-up and drop-off in Wasilla, the Glenn/Parks highway intersection, and Dimond Mall in south Anchorage.

A potential plan for a *Commuter Rail System* and a *Sample Initial Commuter Rail Service Schedule* are illustrated on the following pages. These models are drawn from information gathered and analyzed as part of the *2002 Southcentral Commuter Rail Study & Operations Plan*.

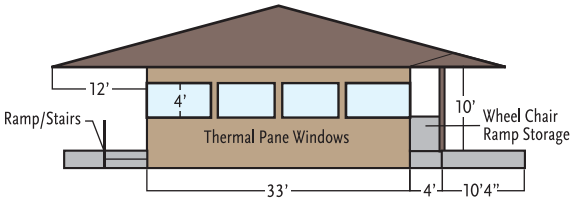
Potential Commuter Rail System Infrastructure

Based on recommendations from the *2002 Southcentral Commuter Rail Study & Operations Plan*, along with updates on depot development and construction since 2002.

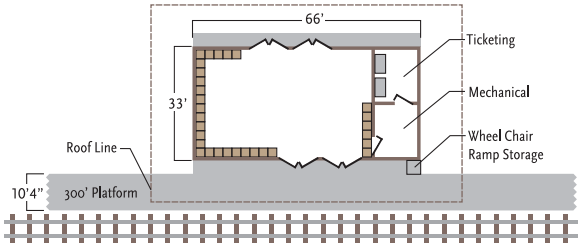
Commuter Rail System Plan



150-person Station Facility Layout

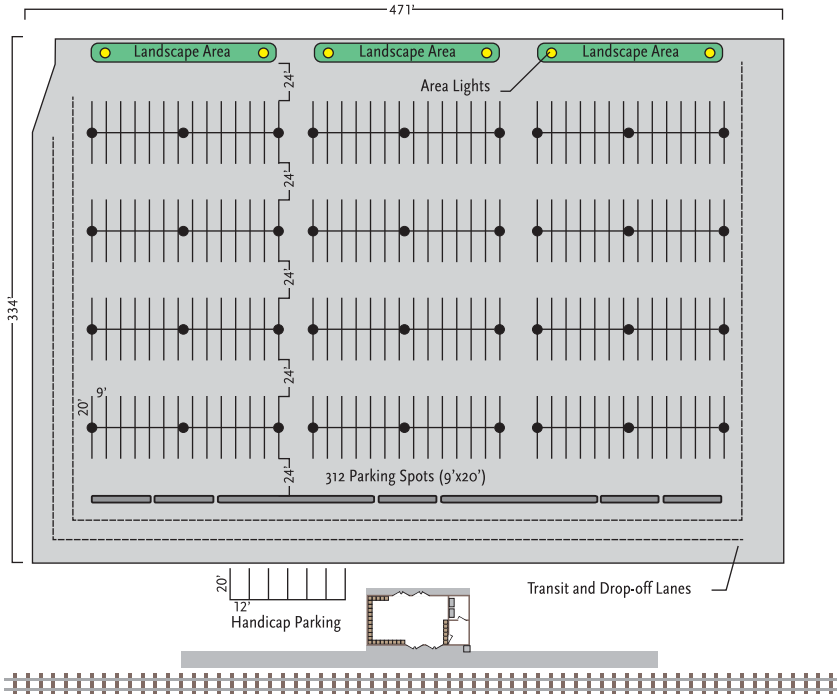


Station Side View



Station Floor Plan

150-person Capacity Station Site Plan



Sample Initial Commuter Rail Service Schedule

- Before 1999, train traveling time between the Ship Creek Historic Depot in Anchorage to the Glenn Highway and Parks Highway intersection was approximately 78 minutes. After an extensive multi-year track-straightening effort aimed at shaving time, passenger trains can now travel between the two points in approximately 52 minutes – nearly a half-hour faster.
- The sample commuter train service schedules (at right) make use of the 52-minute travel factor, along with input derived from the *2002 Southcentral Commuter Rail Study & Operations Plan*. "Anchorage" represents the Historic Ship Creek Depot in lower downtown Anchorage.
- An exact actual schedule would be formulated with close coordination from the Anchorage People Mover and Mat-Su Community Transit and other major commuter shuttle systems. The schedules of these city bus and van providers and a commuter rail service would need to offer seamless intra-city and inter-city mass transit.

Weekday Schedule: Monday - Friday

MORNING MAT-SU COMMUTER

Depart From	Depart Time		Arrive At	Arrival Time	
Anchorage	04:30	AM	Wasilla	05:45	AM
Wasilla	06:00	AM	Anchorage	07:15	AM

ANCHORAGE - AIRPORT

Depart From	Depart Time		Arrive At	Arrival Time	
Anchorage	07:20	AM	Anchorage Airport	07:50	AM
Anchorage Airport	08:00	AM	Anchorage	08:30	AM

ANCHORAGE - AIRPORT - GIRDWOOD

Depart From	Depart Time		Arrive At	Arrival Time	
Anchorage	08:45	AM	Anchorage Airport	09:15	AM
Anchorage Airport	09:25	AM	Girdwood	10:25	AM
Girdwood	10:30	AM	Anchorage Airport	11:15	AM
Anchorage Airport	11:30	AM	Anchorage	12:00	PM

ANCHORAGE - AIRPORT

Depart From	Depart Time		Arrive At	Arrival Time	
Anchorage	12:30	PM	Anchorage Airport	01:00	PM
Anchorage Airport	01:05	PM	Anchorage	01:35	PM
Anchorage	01:40	PM	Anchorage Airport	02:10	PM
Anchorage Airport	02:15	PM	Anchorage	02:45	PM

ANCHORAGE - GIRDWOOD

Depart From	Depart Time		Arrive At	Arrival Time	
Anchorage	02:50	PM	Girdwood	03:50	PM
Girdwood	03:55	PM	Anchorage	04:55	PM

EVENING MAT-SU COMMUTER

Depart From	Depart Time		Arrive At	Arrival Time	
Anchorage	05:00	PM	Wasilla	06:15	PM
Wasilla	06:30	PM	Anchorage	07:45	PM

Weekend Schedule: Saturday-Sunday

MORNING MAT-SU COMMUTER

Depart From	Depart Time		Arrive At	Arrival Time	
Anchorage	05:15	AM	Wasilla	06:30	AM
Wasilla	06:45	AM	Anchorage	08:00	AM

ANCHORAGE - GIRDWOOD - AIRPORT

Depart From	Depart Time		Arrive At	Arrival Time	
Anchorage	08:10	AM	Girdwood	09:10	AM
Girdwood	09:20	AM	Anchorage Airport	10:20	AM
Anchorage Airport	10:30	AM	Anchorage	11:00	AM

ANCHORAGE - AIRPORT

Depart From	Depart Time		Arrive At	Arrival Time	
Anchorage	11:15	AM	Anchorage Airport	11:45	AM
Anchorage Airport	12:00	PM	Anchorage	12:30	PM
Anchorage	01:15	PM	Anchorage Airport	01:45	PM

AIRPORT - GIRDWOOD - ANCHORAGE

Depart From	Depart Time		Arrive At	Arrival Time	
Anchorage Airport	02:00	PM	Girdwood	03:00	PM
Girdwood	03:05	PM	Anchorage Airport	04:05	PM
Anchorage Airport	04:10	PM	Anchorage	04:40	PM

EVENING MAT-SU COMMUTER

Depart From	Depart Time		Arrive At	Arrival Time	
Anchorage	05:00	PM	Wasilla	06:30	PM
Wasilla	06:45	PM	Wasilla	08:15	PM