

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 19

SPONSOR STATEMENT

This resolution advocates for completing two pivotal rail extensions, the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension and the Northern Rail Extension, alongside critical initiatives to fortify our state's infrastructure and defense capabilities. Alaska's strategic position as the sole state bordering the Arctic Ocean highlights the significance of these endeavors, especially given recent expansions in defense infrastructure at Fort Greely.

The Alaska Railroad Transfer Act (ARTA) of 1983 reaffirmed Congress's recognition of the railroad's importance in providing freight and passenger rail service to Alaska. Recognizing the necessity of continued services and expansion to meet federal, state, and private objectives, Congress deemed the state's continued operation and expansion of the railroad a fitting public use of the rail system.

The completion of Phase 1 of the Northern Rail Extension project, including crossing the Tanana River, represents a significant milestone, bringing the rail line within 70 miles of Delta Junction and Fort Greely. This progress demonstrates our commitment to realizing the full potential of rail transportation in Alaska and lays the foundation for further expansion and connectivity.

With the United States Department of Defense expanding the anti-ballistic missile facility and the United States Army developing new training range areas to support the Stryker Brigade, ensuring seamless rail connectivity is crucial to sustaining military operations effectively. Notably, the lack of rail access at Fort Greely, the only military base in Alaska without it, underscores the urgency of this resolution.

Moreover, commendable progress by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Alaska Railroad in completing nearly two-thirds of the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension is essential. This extension will substantially reduce energy and transportation costs, improve air quality, and facilitate efficient movement of goods from tidewater to and across Interior Alaska.

Furthermore, the extension of the Alaska Railroad from Port MacKenzie to Houston, Delta Junction, and Fort Greely aligns with long-term objectives, promoting economic integration and enhancing transportation networks. These extensions offer significant economic and resource development benefits, particularly for mining operations in Delta Junction and Tetlin, as well as the agricultural industry in the Delta Junction area.

In conclusion, this resolution underscores our commitment to fostering economic development, enhancing defense readiness, and promoting community engagement in critical infrastructure projects essential to Alaska's long-term prosperity and security.

Your support for this resolution is greatly appreciated.