

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS

March 1, 2022

1:05 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Chris Tuck, Chair
Representative Andi Story
Representative Geran Tarr
Representative Matt Claman
Representative George Rauscher
Representative David Nelson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Laddie Shaw

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 35

Supporting the completion of the Northern Rail Extension; supporting the increase in defensive capabilities at Fort Greely, Alaska; and encouraging the development of critical Arctic infrastructure.

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HJR 35

SHORT TITLE: NORTHERN RAIL EXTENSION

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) CRONK

02/22/22	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/22/22	(H)	MLV, TRA
03/01/22	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE MIKE CRONK
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HJR 35.

SUE STANCLIFF, Staff
Representative Mike Cronk

Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on HJR 35 on behalf of Representative Cronk, prime sponsor.

DAVE TALERICO, representing self
Healy, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 35.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:05:06 PM](#)

CHAIR CHRIS TUCK called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. Representatives Story, Nelson, Tarr, and Tuck were present at the call to order. Representatives Rauscher and Claman arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HJR 35-NORTHERN RAIL EXTENSION

[1:06:00 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 35, Supporting the completion of the Northern Rail Extension; supporting the increase in defensive capabilities at Fort Greely, Alaska; and encouraging the development of critical Arctic infrastructure.

[1:06:27 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:06 p.m. to 1:08 p.m.

[1:08:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MIKE CRONK, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HJR 35. He said that HJR 35 is a statement in support of completing the Northern Rail extension, because the project would help military operations, mining, and agriculture in Alaska's Interior.

[1:10:49 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked about funding for the project and responsibility for maintenance.

[1:11:11 PM](#)

SUE STANCLIFF, Staff, Representative Mike Cronk, Alaska State Legislature, answered that Tim Sullivan of the Alaska Railroad Corporation informed her that the estimated cost to complete 81 miles in 2013 was \$850 million, and that the current estimate is \$1-1.6 billion. Funding for the first phase came from the Department of Defense at \$104 million and the State of Alaska at \$84 million. Future funding for the project had not been determined. In response to a follow up question, she clarified that maintenance was the responsibility of the state of Alaska and the Alaska Railroad Corporation.

[1:13:30 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK opened public testimony on HJR 35.

[1:13:50 PM](#)

DAVE TALERICO, representing self, gave a brief history of the Alaska Railroad project, including the funding Congress gave it in 1914 for the transport of certain goods and military equipment from Alaska's harbors to the Interior. He stated his belief that the U.S. Government originally intended to fully fund the Alaskan Railroad, but it was never fully completed, and that finishing the Northern Rail Extension was critical for Alaskan self-sustainability. He stated that it would make sense for the federal government to help with the funding because of the path it would take through federal lands and the potential national security implications of nearby Fort Greely.

[1:18:10 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK asked about mining in the Tetlin area.

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK answered that it would be much quicker and easier to truck the ore to Delta Junction than to Fairbanks, and that building the railroad would potentially open other mining opportunities.

[1:20:08 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked if the project would be a necessary component of another project to connect Alaska to the lower 48 through Alberta, Canada.

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK replied that it would.

CHAIR TUCK commented that such a railroad would alleviate some of the issues with trucking during the winter, and that maintaining rails is easier than maintaining highways.

[1:21:31 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked if it would be possible for the Alaska Railroad Corporation to apply for infrastructure grant money previously mentioned by United States Senator Lisa Murkowski.

[1:22:10 PM](#)

MS. STANCLIFF answered that she believes it is possible, but is not certain.

[1:22:50 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 1:22 p.m.

[1:22:58 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK closed public testimony on HJR 35.

[HJR 35 was held over.]

[1:23:57 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 1:24 p.m.