



METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
4700 Elmore Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

August 25, 2023

Andrew Donovan
Director of Real Estate
Alaska Railroad Corporation
327 W Ship Creek Ave,
Anchorage, AK 99501

Dear Mr. Donovan,

On behalf of the AMATS Policy Committee, I am writing in regard to a Proposal to Lease *A Portion of Lot 2 of US Survey 9083* (published 8/18/2023) that is currently being considered by the Alaska Railroad Corporation. We respectfully request that the Alaska Railroad Corporation refrain from accepting this lease as it is in direct conflict with the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) active transportation project known as the Fish Creek Trail Connection. Should the proposed lease be granted, it is highly likely that the Fish Creek Trail Connection project will be unable to proceed.

The Fish Creek Trail Connection project has been a priority for Anchorage since it was first identified in the 1997 Areawide Trails Plan. In 2020, AMATS in partnership with the State of Alaska DOT&PF and the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) formalized an agreement to begin design and engineering work on the Fish Creek Trail Connection and have collectively invested over \$1.5M on the project to date. The project has evaluated several alternatives based on costs, feasibility, stakeholder, and community input. The current preferred alternative route identifies the property in question as the most suitable location for the Fish Creek Trail Connection to connect to the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail.

AMATS and the project team have worked closely with the Alaska Railroad Corporation since 2017 to scope the Fish Creek Trail Connection project to ensure that the project meets the goals of the railroad to improve safety and minimize trespass in railroad Right-of-Way. Through ongoing consultation with the Alaska Railroad Engineering Division, the project team has identified appropriate control measures such as fencing and signage to minimize trespass and clearly delineate between pedestrian and active railroad zones. This separation not only promotes safe recreational activities but also contributes to the overall safety of the railroad environment. Additionally, the proposed route does not interfere with the current operation of the Alaska Railroad and allows for future expansion of a second track.

The Fish Creek Trail Connection project promises a wide array of benefits to Anchorage residents and visitors from community and economic development to public health and quality of life. Trails are a key factor in why people choose to live, work, and play in Anchorage. They are also a key part of Anchorage's growing visitor industry and recreation economy. In fact, trail count data for the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail at Fish Creek shows an average of 900 daily bike or pedestrian trips or roughly 328,500 trips annually. When evaluating the potential community benefit of the Fish Creek Trail Connection project, that would equate to over 30 million trail trips over the course of the proposed 95-year lease period. The development of this trail would connect Anchorage neighborhoods and pull more tourism into Spenard, Turnagain, and Midtown. The potential economic boost, coupled with the promotion of a healthier



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lifestyle and increased tourism, underscores its significance. This trail stands poised to become an asset that enriches the lives of both residents and visitors.

Considering the points outlined above, we request that the Alaska Railroad Corporation factor in these pertinent aspects during the evaluation of the lease request. We acknowledge the complexities involved in such determinations, but we hold the firm belief that the long-term advantages of progressing with the proposed trail outweigh any potential immediate gains from leasing the specified area. By endorsing the preservation and development of this project, we uphold our duty to cultivate a thriving and sustainable community.

We extend our gratitude for your time and consideration. The AMATS Policy Committee is confident that the Alaska Railroad Corporation, under your guidance, will arrive at decisions that reflect the collective welfare of our community and its inhabitants.

Should you require further information or desire a deeper discussion regarding this matter, please feel free to reach out to aaron.jongenelen@anchorageak.gov or (907) 343-8254. We anticipate your thoughtful response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Aaron Jongenelen'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Aaron Jongenelen

Executive Director/MPO Coordinator

Electronic CC:

AMATS Policy Committee