

SENATE TRANSPORTATION

Mar 02, 2000

SB 235-APPROVING TRANSFER OF RAILROAD LAND

SENATOR LOREN LEMAN, sponsor of SB 235, informed committee members that SB 235 authorizes the ARRC to enter into several land exchanges needed for a railroad track upgrade and realignment project between the Port of Anchorage and Wasilla. The first phase of the project will upgrade tracks as far as the Eagle River bridge and includes lands held by the military on Elmendorf Air Force Base and Ft. Richardson, the Municipality of Anchorage, and Eklutna, Inc. One other parcel to be exchanged, north of Seward, is held by the State of Alaska.

The benefits of the track upgrade project, which ARRC estimates to cost \$45 to \$60 million, will be decreased travel time between Anchorage and Wasilla which could result in commuter travel between the two cities, and a safer track. Some of the existing track has very sharp curves which the train must take at a slower speed. The track upgrade is also expected to reduce maintenance costs and could eventually result in reduced traffic on the Glenn Highway. All parties are working together to come to an agreement on the land transfer and he has encouraged them to work out any remaining minor differences so that the project can proceed.

SENATOR LEMAN noted that the Alaska Visitors' Association, the Chambers of Commerce of Palmer and Wasilla, the City of Wasilla, the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation, the Matanuska-Susitna Commission and Visitors Bureau, and the Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau support the bill. He proposed a committee substitute that contains a few technical changes in the land descriptions.

SENATOR PEARCE moved to adopt CSSB 235 (TRA) in lieu of the original bill.

SENATOR LINCOLN objected and asked for a description of the changes made in the committee substitute.

MR. MIKE PAULEY, aide to Senator Leman, explained that the first change is on page 2, lines 1-5. New language was inserted after the word "Eklutna, Inc." to more accurately describe the specific

lands that will be exchanged between ARRC and Eklutna. The initial legislation was not specific and the language as written could have authorized a transfer of any land owned by Eklutna, Inc. to ARRC. The second change was made on page 2, line 18. The amount of acreage was increased from 225 acres to 227 acres as the result of a reassessment which indicated that 227 acres was the more accurate figure.

CHAIRMAN WARD noted that representatives from ARRC and Eklutna, Inc. were available via teleconference for questions.

CHAIRMAN WARD asked Bill Stoltz to present the amendment proposed by Senator Halford.

MR. BILL STOLTZ, legislative aide to Senator Halford, noted Senator Halford's amendment deals with three property owners in the Birchwood Loop area whose concerns were presented through the Birchwood Community Council. Two of the property owners are considered pioneer residents in Birchwood who moved there about the time the road was built. The third property owner is a long time resident. According to ARRC personnel, if land is not transferred to these individuals, it will revert to BLM.

CHAIRMAN WARD asked if Senator Halford's amendment is supported by ARRC and acknowledged that ARRC staff were nodding in agreement.

SENATOR LINCOLN asked if anyone else had signed up to testify to the amendment.

CHAIRMAN WARD said no one has signed up.

WENDY LINDSKOOG, ARRC, verified that ARRC supports Senator Halford's amendment.

SENATOR PEARCE moved to adopt Senator Halford's amendment (labeled I.2) which reads as follows.

"APPROVAL OF THE TRANSFER OF CERTAIN REAL PROPERTY WITHIN THE MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE. (a) Contingent upon the approval of the conveyance of affected municipal park land by the voters of the Municipality of Anchorage, the Alaska Railroad Corporation is authorized to convey the corporation's entire

interest in

(1) approximately 4.5 acres of railroad utility corridor between railroad mileposts 133 and 134, within Township 15 North, Range 2 West, Sections 13 and 24, Seward Meridian, to the Municipality of Anchorage in exchange for the conveyance of approximately 13.6 acres of land in the same vicinity to the corporation by the Municipality of Anchorage;

(2) approximately 5.1 acres of railroad utility corridor between railroad mileposts 133 and 134, within Township 15 North, Range 2 West, Sections 13 and 24, Seward Meridian, to Richard and Carol Drebert, Harry and Simone Thomson, and Richard Moore or their personal representatives, successors, or assigns; each to receive that portion of the railroad utility corridor immediately adjacent to their respective parcels of land."

There being no objection, Senator Halford's amendment was adopted.

SENATOR MILLER moved CSSB 235(TRA) from committee with individual recommendations.

SENATOR LINCOLN asked if anyone else signed up to testify.

CHAIRMAN WARD said there is not.

There being no objection, the motion to moved CSSB 235(TRA) from committee carried.

SENATE RESOURCES

Apr 05, 2000

SB 235-APPROVING LAND TRANSFERS FOR RAILROAD

SENATOR LOREN LEMAN, sponsor of SB 235, explained that the measure deals with land transfers among the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC), the U.S. Army, the U.S. Air Force, the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), and Eklutna, Inc. He asked Ms. Highland to present the sponsor statement and answer questions.

MS. WHITNEY HIGHLAND, an intern to Senator Leman, read the following statement.

SB 235 authorizes the ARRC to enter into several land exchange and transfer agreements needed for a track upgrade and realignment project. This bill approves exchanges of railroad land for certain parcels held by five landholders who are the Army, the Air Force, Eklutna, Inc., Chugach Alaska Corporation, and the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA). SB 235 also approves the conveyances of 5.1 acres to certain private landowners in Chugiak who live adjacent to railroad right-of-way. It is federal law that abandoned railroad land will be reverted back to the federal government after 18 years. The federal government would then deed the land out to the adjacent landowners. SB 235 thus accelerates a land transfer that is already required to occur under federal law. The exchanges and transfers will allow the railroad's track realignment project between Anchorage and Wasilla to proceed **and will also allow the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to relocate a portion of the Seward Highway just north of Seward**. Upgrading and realigning the track will increase safety and efficiency. A straighter track is safer due to reduced track and equipment wear, consistency in train handling, increased sight distance, and reduced maintenance requirements.

Another benefit of this project is that the running time between Anchorage and Wasilla will be decreased from 95 minutes to less than 55 minutes, making commuter service a more viable option. This would also mean a potential reduction in the traffic growth and impact on the Glenn and Parks Highway. Most importantly for the communities neighboring the railroad, this project includes upgrades to vehicle crossings and public access amenities that will enhance safety and access across the tracks.

The railroad plans an investment of between \$45 and \$60 million for its first phase of improvements and these funds will come from federal transportation grants as well as the Alaska Railroad's operating revenues. No general funds will be used for this project. This project is supported by a number of organizations including the Alaska Visitors' Association, the Alaska Chamber of Commerce, Chugiak-Eagle River Chamber of Commerce, Palmer Chamber of Commerce, Wasilla Chamber of Commerce, Anchorage Economic Development Corporation, Matanuska-Susitna Convention and Visitors'

Bureau, Anchorage Convention and Visitors' Bureau, and the City of Wasilla.

CHAIRMAN HALFORD noted that, being a member of the Transportation Committee, he has reviewed this legislation and therefore has no questions.

Number 879

SENATOR LINCOLN asked if anyone else would be testifying on SB 235.

CHAIRMAN HALFORD said no one else signed up but that representatives of ARRC are available to answer questions. He noted a House hearing is being held on the same topic.

SENATOR LINCOLN asked whether the realignment will have any effect on the Coastal Trail.

MS. HIGHLAND responded that Senator Leman is aware of that issue which is very distinct and separate from SB 235.

CHAIRMAN HALFORD asked if SB 235 will have no impact on the Coastal Trail.

MS. HIGHLAND said that is correct.

SENATOR PARNELL moved SB 235 from committee with individual recommendations and accompanying fiscal notes. Without objection, the motion carried.

SENATE FINANCE

Apr 11, 2000

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 235(TRA)

"An Act authorizing the exchange of land between the Alaska Railroad Corporation and Eklutna, Inc., between the Alaska Railroad Corporation and the United States Department of the Army and the United States Department of the Air Force, between the Alaska Railroad Corporation and Chugach Alaska Corporation, and between the Alaska Railroad Corporation and the

Municipality of Anchorage; authorizing the transfer of land between Alaska Railroad mileposts 133 and 134 from the Alaska Railroad Corporation to certain named individuals; and providing for an effective date."

SENATOR LEMAN, as sponsor to this legislation recommended the adoption of the work draft to SB 235, version "1-LS1282\S." He explained that this legislation authorizes land exchanges between the Alaska Railroad, the Air Force and the Army through the base and post at Elmendorf and Fort Richardson, as well as Eklutna, Inc. closer to Eagle River, the Chugach Alaska Corporation, near Seward and the Municipality of Anchorage. He continued that this legislation included a railroad track-straightening project, with the overall goal of maintaining a safer railroad while at the same time implementing upgrades that will reduce the travel time between Anchorage and Wasilla.

Senator Lemman continued that this project would cost from \$45 to \$60 million dollars. He noted that the Senate Transportation Committee included a provision in the legislation that provided for the conveyance of slightly over five acres to private landowners in the Chugach area. He pointed out that these individuals would have received this land under federal law, but this legislation would accelerate this transfer. He added that Article 2, on page 4, was the proposed section providing for transfers between the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities and the railroad, primarily for the Potter to Girdwood section improvements including avalanche prevention upgrades.

Senator Lemman made a motion to adopt SB 235, version "1-LS1282\S as a work draft. Hearing no objection this version was ADOPTED.

WENDY LINDSKOOG, Alaska Railroad Corporation went on record to state that the railroad was in favor of SB 235. She added that the railroad would like to commence construction this year.

Senator Lemman asked if there was some federal legislation

that was necessary to authorize these changes as outlined.

Ms. Lindskoog confirmed that this was the case and that this federal legislation was moving along. She noted that this legislative appropriation was expected to pass, while the railroad received a very positive vote on Proposition 2 at the municipal level also.

Senator Leman made a motion to move SB 235, version "1-LS1282\S" from Committee with individual recommendations and a zero fiscal note from the Alaska Railroad Corporation. Hearing no objection SB 235 was MOVED FROM COMMITTEE.

SENATE RULES

Apr 13, 2000

SB 235-APPROVING TRANSFER OF RAILROAD LAND

SENATOR LEMAN moved all versions of SB 235 with individual recommendations and accompanying fiscal notes for calendaring at the Chairman's discretion. Without objection, the motion carried.