



City Council Minutes
December 3, 2004 ~ 12:15PM

Special Meeting
City Hall, Delta Junction, Alaska

The special meeting of the Delta Junction City Council was held on Friday, December 3, 2004 at the City Hall conference room in Delta Junction, Alaska. Mayor Gilbertson called the meeting to order at 12:24PM.

Council members present: Mayor Roy Gilbertson (excused at 12:58), Mayor Pro tem Mary Leith-Dowling
Leslie Feilner, Will Pecchia, John Sloan

Council members excused: Lou Heinbockel, Susan Sandy

City employees present: Pete Hallgren, Dennis Dooley and Letha Burcham

Also present was General Pat Gamble, Alaska Railroad CEO and DGSD Superintendent Dan Beck (arrived at 12:37 and left at 1:03PM).

Hallgren introduced Alaska Railroad CEO General Pat Gamble. He said a resolution from the City is needed to support the railroad expansion to Delta. The initial draft had a caveat included because of concern with folks at Ft. Greely living in Fairbanks and commuting to/from work. He said he now understands that where soldiers live is of no concern to the Alaska Railroad. The draft resolution was reworded to reflect those changes. He said the railroad would provide many benefits to the community, such as removing convoys from the road system between here and Fairbanks and carrying U.S. Army Alaska supplies. Some highly important concerns are that the Ft. Greely troops are intended to be career postings and it would be our hope that they and their families would consider moving into our community. We were worried that the amenities that should come to support the troops might not be built if they were encouraged to live in Fairbanks. Another concern relates to amenities being available to community members who aren't military so that we won't suffer the same problems experienced prior to BRAC (building amenities on Ft. Greely eliminates the population base to build in Delta).

Gilbertson stated a railroad in Delta, regardless of the military, would reduce the cost of building a home because materials will be less expensive to transport. Maybe the possibility of transporting vehicles could allow a car dealership in Delta. The passenger service would allow a different mode of transportation and that will be good for both the community and the military. It will take five to seven years before the railroad is completed. In the meantime, Installation Management Agency – Pacific Area Regional Office (IMA-PARO) is looking into putting in some amenities for the troops at Ft. Greely. He said he felt the housing issue in Delta would take care of itself within the next few years. People can choose to live in Fairbanks but the natural growth of Delta in the next few years will happen nonetheless.

Sloan reported convoy traffic “is not just convoy traffic.” He said transporting anything to Fairbanks is very easy to accomplish. He knows of two trucking companies that are running two trucks a day. With snow conditions it can be unsafe for travel, not to mention the road being narrow and winding. He said he supported railroad construction 100%.

Pecchia and Feilner agreed with supporting the railroad for both communities, Delta and Ft. Greely.

Sloan said he would like some day to put his car on the train, purchase some airline tickets and meet up with the car in Seattle.

Feilner stated the community as a whole is positive. She had not talked to anyone that was opposed to the railroad. She asked where it would be located.

Gamble stated an area has yet to be designated. An agreement with the community must be reached first. Where do they want the railroad with a small station to start? What does the Army want? Is the railroad to continue to Ft. Greely? Do they want a spur onto Ft. Greely at all? Is it financially feasible? Gamble said a bridge that crosses a river is very, very expensive and a few extra feet can add a few million dollars to the construction cost. Paul Metz, from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, has a contract with the Army to research this area. At this point there is no preconceived or preordained success in terms of where that line will come in. Delta has a lot to say in the decision-making.

Feilner asked *how big* and what *kind* of area would be required.

Gamble stated the railroad would be small to begin with. It would be more like a shelter from the rain, like the one in Talkeetna. The area would be paved with a shelter. It would allow vehicles to pick up or drop off passengers. Later as the business grows and a pattern is established a larger facility would be constructed but it is doubtful that it would be as large as Fairbanks'. It would have an Alaskan architectural appearance (log, beam, deck, porch, some glass).

Hallgren asked if a freight yard would be needed.

Gamble said it would depend upon how much freight is moved. A siding (track) would be needed in the beginning, maybe even three tracks where you would ladder off and put an area in. Creating a loop could allow the train to move without having to back up to turn around as in a "Y" shape. Either one works though and it would require just a few acres. What is available would also need to be determined. Gamble stated the project is still a concept and he has been "shopping around" for over a year. Another possible site was at Ft. Wainwright. He explained the history of researching and services that they could provide for what was actually needed. The railroad was given a positive reception from everyone, Senator Stevens to the U.S. Army. Needs include the Stryker Brigade and its expanded area. Gamble said the idea of suggesting or telling enlisted Army where they are to live is not the railroad's business. Transportation gives people choices. Many may choose to live in Delta once homes are available. Some may opt to live in Salcha or Fairbanks. Give them the choice but offer them transportation also. The amenities that are to be constructed are probably going to occur faster than railroad transportation will be made available so there is no need to try to offset it. The two are out of sync by 5 to 7 years. Gamble said he visited Washington D.C. three weeks ago to brief the Pentagon. There was clear support for the railroad from the major players in the army, many who happened to be former commanders in Alaska. The railroad itself is a "you call, we haul" service. What does the army get for its money? A 500-million dollar project. It will be between 40 and 50 million a year to operate. What will they get out of a railroad? They value the ability to transit quicker and more efficiently. They value the safety factor, the fact that they can cross the river year round and with a 38,000-pound vehicle. He said the "you call, we haul" service won't be exclusive to the army. Freight service and passenger service to and from Fairbanks will be for everyone, civilian and military. Regarding a resolution of support for the railroad, Gamble asked Council to use alternative language to eliminate delay in processing the EIS associated with the rail line and public comment. The City's position on the project is very important. Any resistance could certainly delay the process. The EIS will require one year and construction will take four summers.

Sloan asked if service would provide one train a day or once a week.

Gamble said requirements need to be known in order to know how many locomotives are needed and how many flat cars, gas and crews are needed for each run. He guessed 4 locomotives, 60 flat cars, 2 passenger cars would cost 15 million dollars. The army will be charged for the work crews and fuel and that cost will vary depending upon how often the train runs, 100 or 300 times a year. At this time the army is unsure of the number of runs that will be required. It could be as high as six trips a day. The army needs their soldiers carrying weapons and involved in military activities, not using their time in transition. That is how the railroad will provide service.

Tourism is another consideration. Delta will become the end of the (railroad) line. Gamble stated General Hirai has been briefed. He understands concerns and he is positive about the railroad project.

Pecchia moved to adopt Resolution 2005-04, A Resolution Supporting the Alaska Railroad as amended; Feilner seconded.

Motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote with four (Pecchia, Feilner, Leith-Dowling, Sloan) voting.

Meeting adjourned at 1:05 pm.

Letha Burcham
Acting City Clerk
City of Delta Junction

Date of approval: December 21, 2004