

Moose Creek Service Area Road-Rail Crossings

Situation

The Alaska Railroad (ARRC) was completed in 1923, offering a vital transportation link between Alaska's tidewater and interior region. Over time, hundreds of roads have intersected the tracks as government agencies (and a few private parties) sought access for their roadways. These entities are responsible for the upkeep of their crossings, just as they are responsible for maintaining their respective roadways.

Crossings offer access points, but they also incur immediate and long-term expense (installation and maintenance) and carry safety risks inherent where vehicle, pedestrian and train traffic overlap. That's why the Alaska Railroad looks for opportunities to reduce the number of crossings. But when the need for a new crossing is clear, ARRC will permit the crossing as long as the roadway owner agrees to take responsibility for its costs and risks.

In uncommon cases, permitting didn't occur as it should have, or existing permits have expired. This is the case for five crossings along a mile-long

stretch of track running parallel to the Old Richardson Highway through Moose Creek (mid-way between North Pole and Eielson AFB). Moving west to east, crossings occur at Claude Street, Cory Street, Baker Road, Bellwood Street and Osage Street.

Because active permits do not exist for these crossings, the resulting lack of maintenance will cause these timber plank structures to degrade.

Space between the five crossings ranges from 900 to 1700 feet. Generally, the railroad aims for at least two miles between crossings. However, this goal is not always feasible, particularly in more populated areas.

Proposed Solution

Crossings that lack a permit and associated maintenance support inevitably fall into disrepair. When that happens, ARRC may be forced to close unclaimed and unsupported crossings. Before it gets to that point along this stretch, the railroad wants to work with residents on a solution to provide affordable access long-term.



A vehicle traveling south on Claude Street crosses the Alaska Railroad tracks before crossing Old Richardson Highway to access Richardson Highway. The Claude Street crossing is one of five unpermitted crossings in Moose Creek.

With input from the community, ARRC will investigate crossing consolidation. Reducing crossings may be possible and preferable, given the cost to support each crossing.

Within the Fairbanks North Star Borough, road service associations (RSA) perform the road maintenance role. ARRC would issue a permit formalizing Moose Creek RSA responsibility for performing minimum administrative and maintenance functions for each crossing location.

For each permitted crossing, ARRC will pursue replacement of degraded timber plank structures with modern and durable concrete panels.

Benefits

- Residents gain adequate, long-term access from their neighborhoods to the Old Richardson Highway.
- Formalized permits will enable requests for federal grants to help fund crossing upgrades.
- Upgraded concrete crossings last more than 20 years and require less maintenance, thus lowering annual expense.
- Crossing reduction reduces intersection risks and maintenance costs to the community.
- Upgraded crossings improve traffic safety.

Costs and Funding

Crossing maintenance falls outside the railroad's main focus to operate trains, and also outside ARRC's financial

means. Railroading is already a capital-intensive industry requiring tens of millions of dollars invested annually to ensure adequate and safe railroad infrastructure. Roadway owners must assume the cost of crossing that railroad infrastructure.

The borough's road service areas are funded by taxes paid by each area's citizens. Crossing permits assigned to the Moose Creek RSA would require Moose Creek residents to vote for a minimal tax to pay for these basic service costs.

Proposed upgrades feature durable concrete panels. The typical upgrade cost is about \$250,000. This includes procuring materials, and underwriting engineering and construction work, as well as temporary detours and traffic management during construction.

Once permits are in place, the railroad can coordinate with the Alaska Dept. of Transportation & Public Facilities to apply for federal grants to pay for crossing upgrades. Assuming federal grants pay the bulk of this capital expenditure, the cost would not be passed along RSA residents. Only the ongoing minimal administrative and maintenance costs would be underwritten by tax revenues.

For More Information

- **Permit process information:** Kate Dueber, ARRC Right-of-Way & Public Projects Manager, 907-265-3026
- **Railroad information:** Tim Sullivan, ARRC External Affairs Director, 907-265-2357

Area Map

