

Ship Creek Intermodal Transportation Center Public Involvement Process

The Environmental Assessment takes design and engineering functions through the Preliminary stage to gauge the environmental, social and economic impacts of a project. The EA process for the Ship Creek Intermodal Transportation Center (ITC), which took place in 2002 and 2003, included significant public involvement, including scoping meetings with the public and agencies, presentations to community councils and other interested groups, and public meetings on the draft EA.

Following the EA approval in summer 2003, design and engineering functions were refined with various engineering measurements, studies, etc. Through each phase of the project, the Railroad continues a tradition of public involvement. For example, when the design of the structure for the ITC was approved by the ARRC Board, we shared that with the public in an open house in fall 2005 and with the Government Hill and Downtown community councils.

With the structure and track plans more fully defined through the final design process, the Project Team turned its attention to the crossing. Railroad policy mandates that we convene a Diagnostic Team for any major changes to a crossing. We did so for the C Street Crossing with a Diagnostic Team comprised of:

- Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Traffic Engineering
- Municipality of Anchorage Traffic Division
- DOWL – Traffic Engineering Consultant
- Railroad Engineering and Signals Departments

The Diagnostic Team looked at the five-track layout. They considered the approximately 200-foot distance that would be required between the crossing gates, the longer train lengths, and the adjacent intersections on either side of the crossing (1st Avenue and Ship Creek Avenue). As the Diagnostic team tried to engineer placement and operation of signals and gates, it became clear that the complicated situation posed a problem to maintaining a safe crossing environment.

At its first meeting, the Diagnostic Team agreed that we needed to investigate options for the crossing, including possible closure, to address safety concerns. The team recommended that a Design Study be completed. Here is specific thinking with regard to the crossing and impacts to users and safety:

- 1) The primary reason to consider closing North C Street is safety. A five-track crossing at North C Street creates credible safety concerns whether a train is in the depot or not, and whether a train is blocking North C Street or not. The primary goal of the Design Study is to address these safety concerns.
- 2) The ability to stage longer trains (23 to 25 passenger cars) at the station is a secondary concern. It sparked the original discussions about North C Street, and was recognized in the Traffic Impact Analysis. However, it became a secondary concern during design development when the safety hazards of the five track crossing became more evident.
- 3) If North C Street were closed, a valuable connection between downtown and Ship Creek would be lost. Concerns have been expressed over how this might impact Ship

Creek tenants. However, this same closure would activate 1st Avenue and Ship Creek Avenue in a way that is not currently possible. Closure of North C Street would direct traffic past businesses on both of those streets. This may increase the visibility of several businesses and could prove to be an economic benefit.

- 4) Saving money by not requiring signals is not a primary reason to close the North C Street crossing. Rather, the complexity of signaling the five-track crossing and coordination of train signals with traffic signals would actually make the intersections and crossing worse from a traffic perspective. The signalization required and the resulting long times to clear the crossings from all directions would result in significantly longer wait times than are currently experienced both with and without trains in the crossing.

With these thoughts in mind, the Railroad hired DOWL Engineers to look at the crossing and come up with some options for creating a safer traffic environment. Options identified for consideration are listed below.

- 1) Move the crossing east to line up with Barrow Street
- 2) Move the crossing east to line up with Cordova and make improvements to 1st Avenue, Cordova Street and a portion of Ship Creek Avenue to meet municipal collector street standards
- 3) Extend 2nd Avenue east, so that it runs parallel and south of 1st Avenue, going past the south side of the Odem building, to tie into either Barrow or Cordova alignment
- 4) Do nothing option (don't close C-Street)

These options were presented to the Diagnostic Team during its second meeting. Team members unanimously agreed that the railroad needed to consider crossing closure and recommended public involvement prior to making a final determination.

Once this recommendation was made, the Railroad initiated its public involvement efforts to glean public input and sentiment and to identify any issues not previously considered.

- The Project Team presented crossing alternatives to the AMATS Technical Committee on March 23.
- The Project Team presented to the Downtown Community Council on April 6.
- A presentation is scheduled before the Government CC on April 20.
- A briefing for tenants (lessees and permittees) of the Railroad's Anchorage Reserve (Ship Creek area) will be conducted noon-2 April 24
- A public meeting was held April 25.

Public input from these meetings, briefings and presentations, as well as from comments received from the public from other means, will be considered by the Diagnostic Team and the Project Team before a final solution is determined.

The Original Ship Creek Intermodal Transportation Center Environmental Assessment did not specifically address North C Street closure. Since this issue has arisen with clear impacts, the Railroad has decided to accomplish a re-evaluation of the EA to address this aspect of the project. The EA re-evaluation is currently underway.

While the EA re-evaluation does not require a public process, the Railroad felt it important to conduct further public involvement to keep stakeholders and the public in the loop on possible plan changes for this crossing.

Public input and the Diagnostic Team final report and recommendation will accompany the EA Re-Evaluation. The Federal Transit Administration, the project's federal funding agency, will review the re-evaluation. The Re-Evaluation will be approved as long as there is not a finding of significant impact (i.e. impact that cannot be mitigated).