

Alaska State Rail Plan

Frequently Asked Questions



What is a state rail plan?

Rail plans develop a state's long-term vision for rail freight and passenger transportation. Rail plans identify needs, prioritize potential projects, determine funding needs and potential sources, and outline future rail policy direction.

Why do we need a state rail plan?'

Rail plans are encouraged by Federal Law—the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) of 2008. Alaska must prepare a plan, approved by the Federal Railroad Administration, to be eligible for federal rail funding and investment. The plan must be coordinated with other transportation plans, such as the State's Long-Range Transportation Plan.

What are the plan's goals?

The plan will develop specific goals for Alaska, which may include promoting efficient movement of passengers and freight, enhancing economic development, promoting connectivity, or supporting safe railroad operations.

When was the last time Alaska did a rail plan?

Alaska's last rail plan was completed in 1985 and updated in 1990.

Why is ADOT&PF leading the planning effort?

Alaska Statute 44.42 assigns ADOT&PF responsibility for planning for all modes of transportation, including rail.

Will the rail plan promote resource development?

Rail would support, but not drive resource development. For some resources, rail is essential. To be cost effective, rail works best when high volumes of freight are to be shipped over a long period of time. However, the plan will look at ways to support existing and developing resources and how those resources could be moved to market.

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What is an Island Railroad?

“Island railroads” are independently located lines that are not connected to the main rail system. For instance, the historic railroad from the Kennicott Mine to Cordova would have been considered an island railroad.

Are there different types of passenger service?

Passenger service includes passenger, commuter, and excursion service.

- Passenger: traveling from one point to another by rail, often from one city to another, often over long distance
- Commuter: traveling from home to work and return by rail, usually in an urban/suburban setting
- Excursion: traveling by rail for the experience, usually round-trip

Will commuter rail be considered?

Alaska must plan for continued growth, especially in the Girdwood to Anchorage to Matanuska Susitna Borough corridor. This corridor may need additional interconnectedness and intermodal support. The plan must also consider connectivity between different modes of transportation, such as rail to bus.

What is the project schedule?

A draft plan will be available for public review in fall 2013. A final draft plan will be submitted to the Federal Railroad Administration for review and approval by December 2013.

How can I be involved?

The Planning Team will have public meetings communities across the state in Spring 2013. Additional meetings will be in an “on-line open house format.” These on-line meetings will be available for a month at a time, allowing more individuals in more communities an opportunity to participate in a time and manner convenient to them. To learn more about the planning process, sign up for e-mail notifications, or send us your comments, visit

www.dot.alaska.gov/railplan.