

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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## **Alaska-Canada Rail Would Boost Economy** **Crossover Benefits Touted for Gas Line, Other Developments**

(JUNEAU) – Planning and building an Alaska-Canada rail link could open a new golden era of mineral development and ease the way for natural gas pipelines, roads, electric transmission lines, fiber optic cables or other utilities along the same right-of-way, government and industry officials told members of the House today.

Seventeen state representatives heard state geologists, representatives of U.S. and Canadian legislators, and Alaska railroad officials explain past plans and future hopes for linking Northwest and Interior Alaska with the North American rail network. The presentations came at a joint meeting of the House Transportation, Oil and Gas, and Economic Development, Trade and Tourism committees.

“We had a wonderful opportunity to look at the feasibility of a railroad utility corridor from Alaska to Canada down to the United States,” said Rep. Lesil McGuire (R-Anchorage), chair of the trade committee, and chair of the joint meeting. “While there are some stumbling blocks, mostly a need for funds to do the necessary geophysical studies, we heard clearly that this corridor carries some great opportunities.”

U.S. Sen. Frank Murkowski last year won \$6 million for a three-year U.S.-Canadian study of a rail line’s feasibility. The Yukon government is strongly inclined to support the process, but the next step comes only after Canada’s federal government signs on, said Rep. Jeannette James (R-North Pole), a long-time rail link advocate.

Dr. Paul Metz, a University of Alaska-Fairbanks geologist, told legislators that basic geophysical mapping of an Alaska-Canada rail corridor could spur an explosion of mining development along the proposed route through one of the continent’s richest mineral belts. He pitched for a \$12 million, three-year program to map and inventory a 500-foot-wide railway right-of-way corridor that could also accommodate rail, pipeline, power lines or fiber optics.

“The Yukon Territory government believes the project provides substantial benefits to Alaska and Yukon,” said Scott Kent, a representative of Yukon Premier Pat Duncan. “We believe the railroad feasibility study will be the first step for a transportation infrastructure that could benefit oil and gas, tourism, forestry and mining.”

Because the proposed rail link corridor closely matches a proposed natural gas pipeline route along the Alaska Highway, much of the environmental analysis and planning work could benefit both projects, said Alaska Department of Natural Resources geologist Dr. Milt Wiltse.

“Alaska has this continents’ richest deposits of coal and copper and other minerals, and getting those to market ... may be among the most significant things these legislatures will ever do,” said Rep. Fred Dyson (R-Eagle River).

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