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Senator Drue Pearce District F

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Senate Makes Railroad Accountable for Projects

(JUNEAU) – The Alaska Senate passed a bill today requiring the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) to obtain legislative approval each year for construction projects.

“Even though it is a state-owned company, the ARRC is not directly accountable to the Legislature, the administration or to the people of Alaska for its actions,” said Sen. Drue Pearce (R-Anchorage), sponsor of the bill. “The railroad is able to approve projects internally, qualify independently for federal transportation funds and begin projects without obtaining input from Alaskans.”

The \$48 million railroad terminal under construction at the Ted Stevens International Airport is a recent example of the problem that this lack of oversight is creating. Many West Anchorage residents are opposed to the depot because the ARRC will need to realign and elevate the railroad tracks near their neighborhoods, increasing train traffic and noise. There are also serious concerns about the feasibility and economic practicality of the project.

Pearce and the ARRC collaborated to draft Senate Bill 123, which requires annual legislative approval of the railroad’s Program of Projects, a list of federally funded projects required by the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration. This will ensure approval for major construction projects that will impact surrounding communities, while excluding regular maintenance projects, minor construction and realignment projects, and projects near communities that are entirely on federal land.

“The intent of the legislation is not to deny necessary railroad projects to communities, but to guarantee them a voice in the process as projects are planned and implemented,” said Pearce. “This bill will allow the people of Alaska some control over their railroad without significantly impacting day-to-day operations.”

SB 123 passed the Senate with a vote of 14-5. A notice of reconsideration was filed.

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