

**Statement of Tom Brooks, Assistant Vice President and Chief Engineer, Alaska Railroad
House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
U.S. House Natural Resources Committee
Hearing on S. 1808, to authorize the exchange of certain land in Denali National Park, AK
September 27, 2007**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, for your invitation to speak with you today on behalf of the Alaska Railroad. My name is Tom Brooks, and I am Assistant Vice President and Chief Engineer at the Alaska Railroad.

The Alaska Railroad is a State-owned railroad carrying both passengers and freight. The Alaska Railroad was originally built and operated by the U.S. Government in the early 1900's through the enabling statute adopted by the U.S. Congress in 1914. It was sold to the State of Alaska in January 1985. The 500-mile-long mainline runs from the south central city of Seward to the interior city of Fairbanks as the enabling act required. The Alaska Railroad carried over a half-million passengers in 2006.

The Alaska Railroad provides passenger service to Denali National Park. Through H.R. 830, the bill being considered at this hearing, the Alaska Railroad, with the help of Congressman Young, seeks to exchange up to 25 acres of Denali National Park land for an equal amount of Alaska Railroad land, in order to build a turnaround for our trains. The formerly Alaska Railroad land given to the National Park Service would be designated as wilderness lands.

The Alaska Railroad has been carrying passengers to this national park since the early 1920s, long before rail access into our national parks came into vogue. The number of rail passengers to Denali National Park has been increasing each year. In 2001, 198,737 passengers used the Denali Park Rail Station, and in 2006 that number grew to 303,741 passengers. The Alaska

Railroad has accommodated this growth by adding additional direct trains; however, the options to improve service are limited because trains cannot be turned around. The existence of a turnaround track, known as a “wye track,” at Denali would allow more frequent trains and more flexible rail schedules, thus accommodating the continued growth and development of rail access to Denali Park. There was originally a turnaround track at the Denali Rail Station, which was too short for modern train lengths and thus, with Railroad concurrence, converted to Park Service use in the 1980s.

Besides enhancing visitor access options, there are other public benefits of a turnaround track at Denali National Park. The rail mode of transportation offers less highway traffic congestion, improved public safety, and less environmental impact than the highway alternative. Improved access to parkland through public transportation is a national policy goal, as evidenced by the Department of Transportation’s Transit in the Parks program created by Congress in 2005.

The National Park Service and the Alaska Region of the National Parks Conservation Association both support the land exchange as described in the bill. The Association has written a letter of support, which I will submit for the record. We are also pleased that there is a companion bill in the other body.

H.R. 830 is thus a win-win for the Alaska Railroad, the National Park Service and the hundreds of thousands of visitors that would benefit from access to our nation’s treasured Denali National Park.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today. I will be happy to answer any questions the Committee might have.