

# Alaska-Canada-Lower 48 Rail Link Again on Agenda for the Americas, Eurasia

by Marcia Merry Baker and Robert Hux

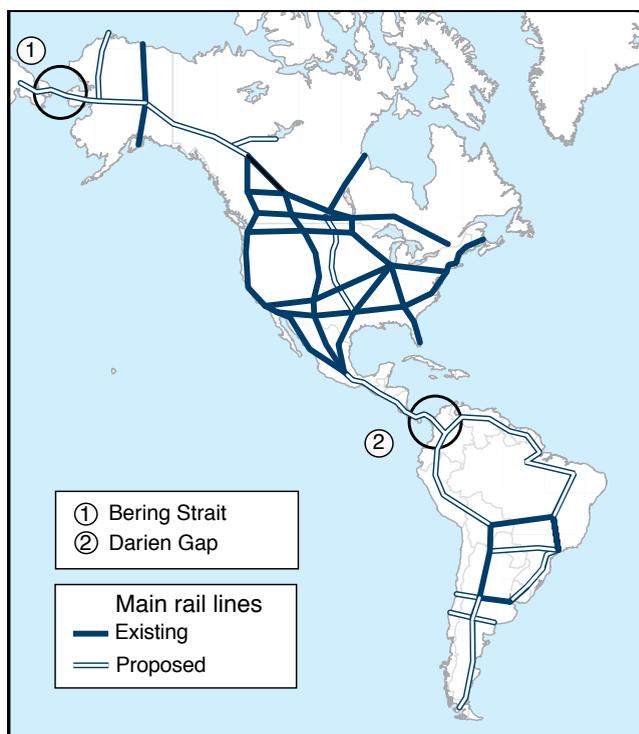
Aug. 18—Plans to connect the Alaskan rail system to the North American rail grid are now back on the continental infrastructure agenda, as of specific proposals in recent months, from Alaska-Canada rail-link promoters. One is by the Alaska to Alberta Railway Development Corporation (A2A Rail), which in June announced plans to cooperate with the Alaska Railroad Corporation, to build a 2,400 km (1,500 mile) line. Another plan is from the Generating for Seven Generations (G7G) Railway Corporation, based in Alberta. A rail connection has never been made from Alaska to Canada to the Lower 48 States.

The idea is to build the missing link, by going from the Alaska border, through the Canadian Yukon Territory and British Columbia, into Alberta, to connect into the CN and CP Rail systems, and thence throughout the continent. This is the critical element of the century-old idea to run a north-south rail line, from the far northwest of the continent, down through Mexico and southward, including the concept of connecting this line into Eurasia by crossing the Bering Strait, linking up Alaska and Chukotka, Russia. But these plans have always been thwarted, though the Alaska Railroad within the state was first commissioned in 1914.

In recent decades, the perspective of intercontinental rail connectivity has been advanced in proposals for a worldwide Land-Bridge grid of priority rail corridors for development, as laid out in [reports](#) calling for a worldwide “New Silk Road,” commissioned by the late statesman and economist Lyndon LaRouche, and his wife Helga Zepp-LaRouche, founder and Chairwoman of the Schiller Institute.

In a more limited way, the main impetus for the new Alaska-Canada rail link-up comes from the desire to ship out oil products from the Athabasca oil sands, the large deposits of bitumen or extremely heavy crude oil located in northeastern Alberta, and otherwise open up transport for the significant mineral deposits in the far

FIGURE 1



EIR

northwest. However, the rail link has much larger positive economic implications, as the promoters are quick to point out. Just as Abraham Lincoln foresaw the importance of the east-west Transcontinental Railway across the United States, the benefits of a grand north-south Bering Sea to Cape Horn route are evident.

Now there is renewed motion on the vital Alaska-Canada link-up, including personal action taken by President Donald Trump in April this year, to ease border-crossing regulations.

## Alberta to Alaska Railway

On June 27, a formal agreement was announced between A2A Rail and the Alaska Railroad Corp. to work

together on building the new rail project, which is the largest rail project currently under active consideration in North America. The A2A Corporation was established in 2015 for this express purpose—to build, own and operate the new railway. “A rail connection between Alaska and Canada and the rest of the United States is a project that has been talked and dreamed about for close to a century,” said Alaska Railroad President and CEO Bill O’Leary in a press release announcing the agreement.

This development builds upon the momentum created by the release in 2015 of a pre-feasibility [study](#) on the construction of a railway capable of carrying bitumen, petroleum products and minerals along a route linking northern Alberta (Fort McMurray) and tidewater at the Port of Valdez, Alaska. The study was carried out over 2013 to 2015 by the Calgary, Alberta-based Van Horne Institute with funding from the Alberta government, based upon a project proposal by the G7G Railway Corporation and AECOM. The Van Horne Institute had been asked by Alberta Energy to organize the study based upon its participation in an earlier 2006 study by the State of Alaska and Yukon Government—to connect the Alaska Railroad from its eastern terminus at Delta Junction to the North American rail network at Fort Nelson, British Columbia.

An important part of this picture is the role played by Frank Murkowski, U.S. Senator for Alaska from 1981 to 2002 and then Alaska’s Governor from 2002 to 2006. He had been the sponsor of S.2253, the Rails to Resources Act of 2000, which called upon the President to reach an agreement with the Canadian government for a joint study of the feasibility and advisability of linking the Alaskan rail system to the North American continental rail system. Although the Yukon territorial government was interested in participating in the study commission, the Canadian federal government at the time did not agree to join or commit funds to the study.

Later in 2005, as Governor, Murkowski signed a memorandum of understanding with Yukon Premier Dennis Fentie to start the Alaska-Canada Rail Link Feasibility Study. The Phase 1 feasibility [study](#) was published in March 2007.

In 2017 Alaska Governor Bill Walker appointed Murkowski as an unpaid “special envoy” to work on developing a rail link between Alaska and Canada. At a [presentation](#) in Anchorage, Alaska on May 24, 2017, Murkowski made the point that recent actions by the Canadian government to impose a ban on oil tankers having access to ports along the “pristine” Pacific coast of northern British Columbia, coming on top of the apparent in-



ability in Canada to construct sufficient oil pipeline capacity, has created a situation in which an Alaska-Canada Rail Link becomes much more likely, if serious damage to the Canadian economy is to be avoided. The successful completion of such an Alaska-Canada rail link at some point in the hopefully near future will owe much to Murkowski’s tireless efforts over the recent decades.

### For Much More than Petroleum

The A2A project map shows the basic design, which links the South-Central Alaskan ports to the inland Alberta town of Fort McMurray, in the Athabaska oil sands region. Proceeding northward from the ports area of Seward, Whittier and Anchorage, the existing Alaskan rail route goes through the town of North Pole, very near Fairbanks, then eastward to the border town of Delta Junction. Some 500 miles along the main line will have to be upgraded for the new traffic load. From North Pole, the new rail line will proceed southeastward through the Yukon, British Columbia and into Alberta as shown on the map (next page). The Yukon settlements close to the new rail will be Pelley Crossing, Carmacks, Faro, Ross River and Watson Lake.

The two firms are to cooperate in the process of getting rights of way, doing the engineering design specifics, and getting financing. The projected cost is in the range of US \$13 billion (CAD \$17 billion), for a system A2A describes as “dual-direction, 24-hour-a-day operation,” equipped with the latest technologies for safety, including modern standards of Positive Train Control, heat detectors for mechanical faults, and fiber optics for continuous communication. A2A officials have been in discussions with the First Nations and Tribal Corporations, representing some 40 groups of native peoples along the proposed rail route, who are to have a significant ownership position in the new venture.



The Alaska to Alberta Railway Development Corporation's proposal for a 2,440 km two-way freight railway from Fort McMurray, Alberta to Delta Junction, Alaska—the currently approved end-point of the Alaska Railroad. From there cargo will move on Alaska Railroad tracks to tidewater at Port MacKenzie, where the plan envisions a multi-modal purpose rail yard to allow shippers to move a variety of types of cargo both inbound and outbound. To increase efficiency, reduce impacts and otherwise improve safety, the plan calls for average grading not to exceed 1%, and curves not to exceed 5%; and fiber optics and heat detectors for continuous communications and monitoring of rail integrity. All trains are to be equipped with Positive Train Control (PTC), an advanced system designed to automatically stop a train in circumstances of potential head-on collisions, derailments due to excessive speed, and movements through misaligned switches. Provision is made for potential connection to existing rail in Canada and the Lower 48 States.

The CEO and President of A2A, John Falcetta, who is also, since 2011, the Vice President of AECOM, in speaking to the media over recent months, has stressed that while a principal intended A2A cargo will be bitumen—a heavy form of petroleum, extracted from the Alberta oil sands—which will be transported through Alaska for export, there will be other important cargoes, including coal and minerals, as well as two-way general freight and even intermodal containers. The A2A will be a common carrier rail corporation, not, Falcetta said, “a one trick pony.”

There is the additional intermodal opportunity for bitumen brought to Alaska by rail from Alberta. At Delta Junction, it could then go into a pipeline connection to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System.

Capitalizing on the proximity to Asia is another point stressed by the railway promoters. A former lieutenant governor of Alaska, Mead Treadwell, who is a consultant with A2A, pointed out to *Yukon News* that the new



railway “will make the Cook Inlet Alaska ports the closest ports to Asia, which means that shipping containers to and from Asia could get there faster.” He explains, “An example I use is that, there’s an automobile plant in Windsor, Ontario that’s bringing in automatic transmissions from Japan. The goods could be unloaded in the Anchorage area and put on a railroad, and probably be at



Forum International

*Walter Hickel, former Alaska Governor, speaking to the Megaprojects of Russia's East conference on the Bering Strait project, in Moscow on April 25, 2007.*

the factory before the ship is even unloaded.” This point is shown in the A2A map of comparative shipping times between American ports and Asia.

### President Trump's OK

There are many stages of work ahead for the project. By the end of 2019, the designers hope to complete a full project description of where exactly the train will go. Next comes an environmental assessment from Canada and the United States. Then the railroad must secure approval from the Canadian Transportation Agency and the U.S. Surface Transportation Board.

In the meantime, there has been action on the requirement of U.S. Executive Branch approval for the train to cross the Canada-U.S. border. This has been expedited by President Trump. In April this year, Alaska Gov. Michael Dunleavy wrote a letter to Trump, requesting a permit for the railroad. Within a short time, President Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 13867, “On the Issuance of Permits with Respect to Facilities and Land Transportation Crossings at the International Boundaries of the United States” (April 10), which clears the way for speedy approval of the railroad by the White House directly, without procedural delay (see box).

Prior to Gov. Dunleavy’s appeal to Trump, the Alaskan legislature had taken solid action in favor of the proposed rail link earlier in 2019. A joint resolution, SJR 11, was passed by the state’s Senate and House, which listed many benefits of the new rail project. The resolution is described as, “urging the United States to issue a presidential permit authorizing a railroad crossing of the Alaska-Canada border from state land into Yukon, Canada; and supporting cooperation between the United States and Canada to establish a public-private partnership for construction of a railroad from Alberta, Canada, to the state that would connect the Alaska Railroad to the North American railroad system. . . .”

These concrete actions foreshadow the ease of going

## President's Executive Order Expedites International Transport Crossing Permits

On April 10, President Trump issued Executive [Order](#) 13867, “Order on the Issuance of Permits with Respect to Facilities and Land Transportation Crossings at the International Boundaries of the United States.” In regard to rail and highways, pipelines, water conveyances, bridges, and many other kinds of cross-border infrastructure, the order stated, as its purpose:

“Presidents have long exercised authority to permit or deny the construction, connection, operation, or maintenance of infrastructure projects at an international border of the United States (cross-border infrastructure). Over the course of several de-

acades, executive actions, Federal regulations, and policies of executive departments and agencies (agencies) related to the process of reviewing applications for Presidential permits, and issuing or denying such permits, have unnecessarily complicated the Presidential permitting process, thereby hindering the economic development of the United States and undermining the efforts of the United States to foster goodwill and mutually productive economic exchanges with its neighboring countries. To promote cross-border infrastructure and facilitate the expeditious delivery of advice to the President regarding Presidential permitting decisions, this order revises the process for the development and issuance of Presidential permits covering the construction, connection, operation, and maintenance of certain facilities and land transportation crossings at the international boundaries of the United States.”



EIRNS/Rachel Douglas

*Lyndon LaRouche and Helga Zepp-LaRouche arriving at the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, May 16, 2007, on the occasion of the prominent economist Professor Stanislav Menshikov's 80th birthday.*

ahead in the larger strategic economic sphere, with continuous rail connections from inland North America all the way into Eurasia. In a new paradigm of friendship diplomacy and mutually beneficial trade, the possibility of a Bering Strait tunnel connection to Russia becomes very feasible. In turn, this opens up the vast World Land-Bridge span from Africa, through Eurasia all the way to South America, via North and Central America.

The importance and history of this perspective has been promoted for decades by Lyndon and Helga Zepp-LaRouche. In May 2007, LaRouche spoke of it in Moscow, when he was a featured guest at the Academy of Sciences. A month earlier, his [paper](#), “The World’s Political Map Changes: Mendeleev Would Have Agreed,” was delivered by an associate at a Moscow conference on “A Transcontinental Eurasia-America Transport Link via the Bering Strait.” LaRouche began the paper with these words: “The intention to create a trans-Siberian rail system, implicitly extended across the Bering Strait, to North America, dates implicitly from the visit of Dmitry Ivanovich Mendeleev to the 1876 U.S. Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. . . .”

LaRouche’s paper, and other reports from relevant Moscow meetings that year, are included in a 2007 LaRouche PAC [pamphlet](#), “LaRouche Trip to Moscow: A Strategy for War Avoidance.”

Former Alaska Governor Walter Hickel spoke out strongly at a Moscow Megaprojects Conference in April in 2007, in favor of “big projects as the alternative to war,” and in particular, of the Bering Strait tunnel and the benefits of Russia-U.S. collaboration. They “together will change the world.”

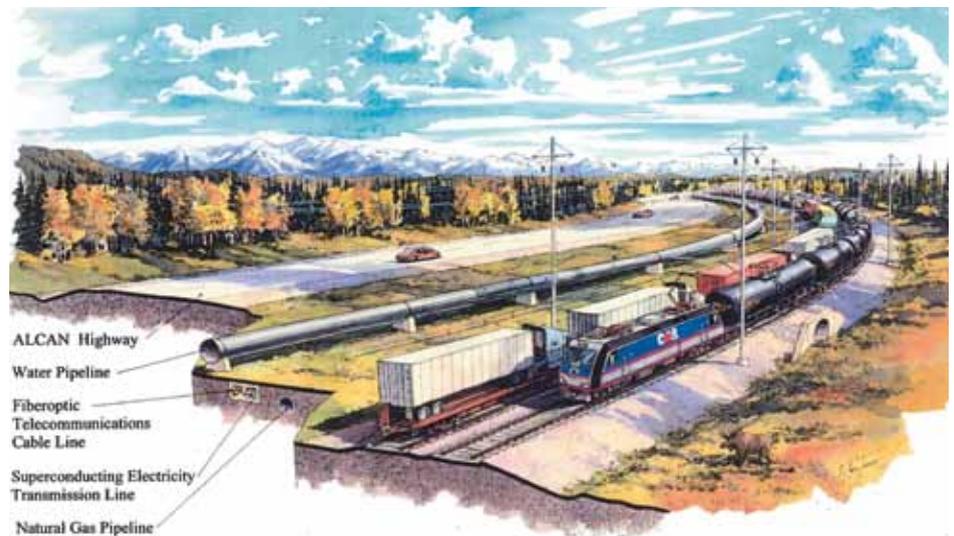
Specific requirements for the rail grid needed to connect Canada and Alaska for the Bering Strait tunnel link to Eurasia have been spelled out in several fora by Hal B.H. Cooper, P.E., advisor to the Schiller Institute on the World Land-Bridge.<sup>1</sup> Cooper prepared a feasibility study for the Canadian Arctic Railway, a private company seeking to build the missing links. And he also

studied what was necessary on the Russian side in Siberia. He presented this concept to the Alaska legislature, and in November 2002, he presented it in Novosibirsk at the Siberian State Transport University, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary conference on Railroad Transportation Developments in Siberia.

Cooper’s artist’s view of the new Alaska-Canada rail corridor in the Yukon is shown in **Figure 2**.

1. See the [interview](#) with Cooper by Richard Freeman in *EIR*, May 11, 2007, “Bering Strait Conference Marked ‘Major Phase Shift’.”

FIGURE 2



Hal Cooper

*Artist’s conceptual view of the proposed Alaska-Canada Railroad near Lake Kluane, Yukon, showing utilities and pipelines.*