

Alaska-Canada-USA Rail Link Proposed

by Marcia Merry Baker

The “Rails to Resources to Ports” Feasibility Study was issued June 19, in Whitehorse, Yukon, calling for a 2,000-kilometer rail line, of new and existing routes, to connect Alaska, Yukon, and British Columbia, with Pacific ports and the North American rail grid. The estimated cost of the rail project is \$10.5 billion, and a 50-year cycle of operation was analyzed.

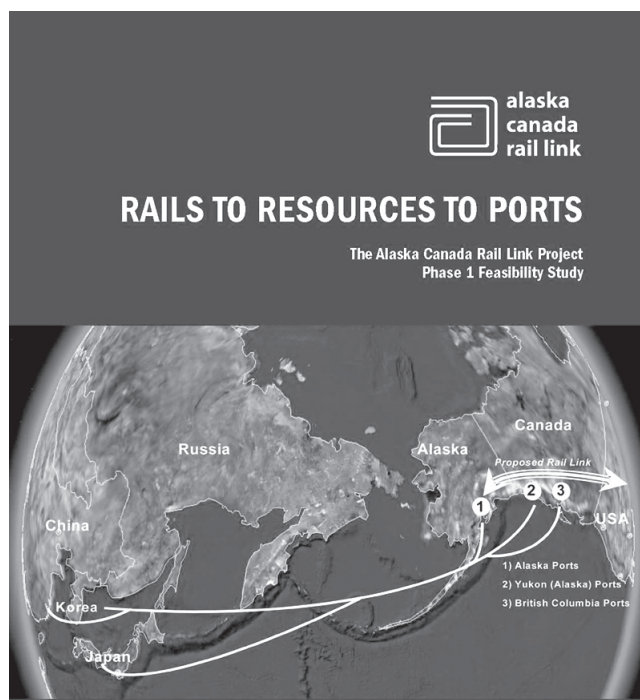
This would be a first-ever link-up of Alaska with the rail grid of the whole continent. However, the design and motivation of the project conform to globalization, by sticking to routes for hauling out bulk commodities by the shortest distances to Pacific ports to supply Japan, China, Korea, and other nations. This is in contrast to the growing mobilization for a North American/Eurasian Rail Corridor Development perspective, expressed in the call for a Bering Strait Tunnel, which envisions whole new agro-industrial sites and population centers served by new rail corridors in eastern Siberia, and northwestern North America. This approach would likewise utilize the vast minerals and fossil-fuel wealth of the region, but for development, not simply extraction. In the FDR years, the Siberia/Alaska/Yukon region was called the “Frontier of the North Pacific.”

The “Rails to Resources” study states that the proposed rail route is intended to link “North Pacific Rim markets in the shortest trade corridor between North Asia and North America, via a U.S. port. . . . Drastic changes in global demand, driven by Asian markets, have sharply raised the value of mineral resources in northwestern Canada and Alaska.” So a “market-driven route selection” was made, to haul out coal and minerals. In the other direction, a flow of Asian containers is projected. Maps and charts are provided of estimated tonnages.

The proposed route runs from south of Fairbanks, southeasterly over to Carmacks and Whitehorse, Yukon, with two lines to ports: one at Skagway/Haines on the Inland Passage, and the other down through British Columbia, connecting with the Canadian National Railway to the port of Prince Rupert.

Whatever the routes, the real challenge is the anti-infrastructure stance of both Ottawa and Washington, D.C. to date. Reflecting this, the study lays out the idea that the rail system would be built by public-private partnerships, of government and private entities. The international minerals cartels are pushing this very hard.

Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin and Yukon Premier Dennis Fentie spoke at a news conference in Whitehorse June 19. Ac-



cording to Whitehorse *Daily Star* coverage, Fentie stressed that, if the “Rails to Resources” project goes forward, it should be a “national infrastructure project.” The Yukon will now be presenting the findings of the study to the Federal government.

Area leaders have been beating the band for an Alaska-Lower '48 rail connection for decades. For example, Jeanette James, ex-officio member of the Advisory Committee of the Rails to Resources to Ports/Alaska Canada Rail Link Project, campaigned intensely for rail infrastructure when she was majority leader of the Alaska Legislature.

Larry Bagnell, a member of the Yukon Parliament for 20 years, told the Fairbanks *News-Miner*, “It’s a great long-term project. It’ll change the face of the world.” Transportation consultant Hal Cooper (interviewed recently on the Bering Strait Tunnel plan, *EIR* May 11, 2007), addressed the news conference on the larger need for rail-based development corridors, and presented a 50-page paper, with detailed maps of new corridor projects under discussion for eastern Asia, as well as North and South America.

On April 24, Walter Hickel, former governor of Alaska, (1966-68 and 1990-94, and U.S. Secretary of Interior, 1969-70), told a Moscow conference on “A Transcontinental Eurasia-American Transport Link via the Bering Strait,” that, as governor, he had proposed a “railroad around the world.” Now the time has come to make that a reality, based on the great infrastructure projects of the Eurasian-Land-Bridge proposed by Lyndon LaRouche and Helga Zepp-LaRouche, and not on the “market-driven realities” imposed by globalization.