

This year is momentous as the Alaska Railroad marks 100 years since the completion of our route. One hundred years ago in Nenana on July 15, 1923, the swinging of a spike maul by President Warren G. Harding officially completed the Alaska Railroad. With that swing, our railroad was set into motion and has been a part of Alaska's story through wars, earthquakes, advancement, and even a pandemic.

As we celebrate the centennial, we will reflect on our past, honor our current service to customers and the state, and look toward developing our future.

With 656 miles of tracks, the Alaska Railroad carries it all — transporting anyone and anything from passengers to cargo. Throughout the decades, the railroad has been a critical pillar in transporting goods and supplies, contributing significantly to development all along the rail belt.

In the early 20th century, the Alaska Railroad helped develop the city of Anchorage and provided a monumental mode of transportation around the Interior to the southern terminus in Seward. Railcars haul natural resources including coal, gravel and petroleum products; and commodities including industry chemicals and supplies, dry goods, hazardous materials, pipe, lumber, heavy equipment and specialty items.

Use of rail mitigates highway congestion and safety issues, reduces roadway wear and lowers emissions. On average, one freight train can carry the equivalent of 280+ trucks. Moreover, trains can move a ton of freight, an average of 484 miles on a single gallon of fuel.

When the railroad isn't moving resources and cargo, it's taking passengers to some of the most picturesque destinations in Alaska.

The Alaska Railroad connects people to destinations such as Denali National Park and Preserve, Kenai Fjords National Park, the mountain centered towns of Talkeetna and Girdwood. The railroad also delivers people to otherwise remote destinations. For example, Spencer Glacier and Grandview are only accessible by train through a partnership with Chugach National Forest Service.

The Alaska Railroad has also been a significant link, with its Hurricane Turn Train flagstop service, to Alaskans living off the grid and needing access to backcountry cabins and homesteads not on the road system.

Among the railroad's more significant contributions to the state is helping visitors and locals simply explore "The Great Land." The centennial provides an ideal opportunity to acknowledge this and many other contributions over the past 100 years, and to look forward at what's to come during the century ahead.

This is a massive accomplishment for the Alaska Railroad and will be celebrated on the train tracks and throughout the community. The railroad will continue to uphold our mission to deliver safe, profitable, service-oriented transportation that fosters year-round economic development.

Over the last 100 years, through history, wars, earthquakes, advancement, and even a pandemic, the railroad continues to take the extra steps to ensure passenger and employee safety for all seasons and centennials to come.

Come along for the ride as we continue to diversify, build relationships and help create dream trips to get our passengers and customers where they want to go along the Alaska Railroad.

Bill O'Leary

President and CEO Alaska Railroad Corporation