

Why would anyone build a railroad in Alaska? That was a question often asked during the early part of the 20th century. Why should the federal government build and operate a railroad in such a remote land ? What useful benefit could it perform ... for anyone ?

Fast forward about a hundred years and the question has been answered; along with confirming the correctness of the decision to build it !

Looking at a map of Alaska a thin line can be seen running from the Pacific Ocean to the heart of the 49th state. It is the Alaska Railroad: a main artery of infrastructure: along it's route it has attracted the development that those who proposed it could have only dreamed of.

While the pioneers persevered to overcome every challenge while building the railroad through the harsh wilderness environment it's destiny was controlled by a distant federal government. Although some leaders argued against the enterprise, the more visionary in Washington D.C. prevailed through the line's early years. Soon the benefits came with the growth of the territory.

Found to be an important lifeline during a world war and then on the front lines of the cold war it's value to Alaska and the nation could no longer be questioned.

Continued growth during the mid century led to Alaska's statehood in 1959. Soon a new challenge shook the young state, it's people and the Alaska Railroad: the earthquake of March 27, 1964 . A heroic effort by the employees brought an early restoration of train service and the start of a return to normal for the region.

Further growth in the 1960's and 1970's brought changes in the railroads freight traffic, an increase in tourist travel and a push towards state ownership of the railroad. The state of Alaska acquired the Alaska Railroad from the federal government in 1985; it is operated as the Alaska Railroad Corporation. Now local control insures that the line can continue to make modern improvements to serve the ever evolving needs of it's freight customers. And from it's trains the ever increasing numbers of visitors can view the scenic wonders and wildlife of Alaska.

As the state of Alaska's motto says "North to the Future" !

Happy centennial to the Alaska Railroad !

- Don Marenzi