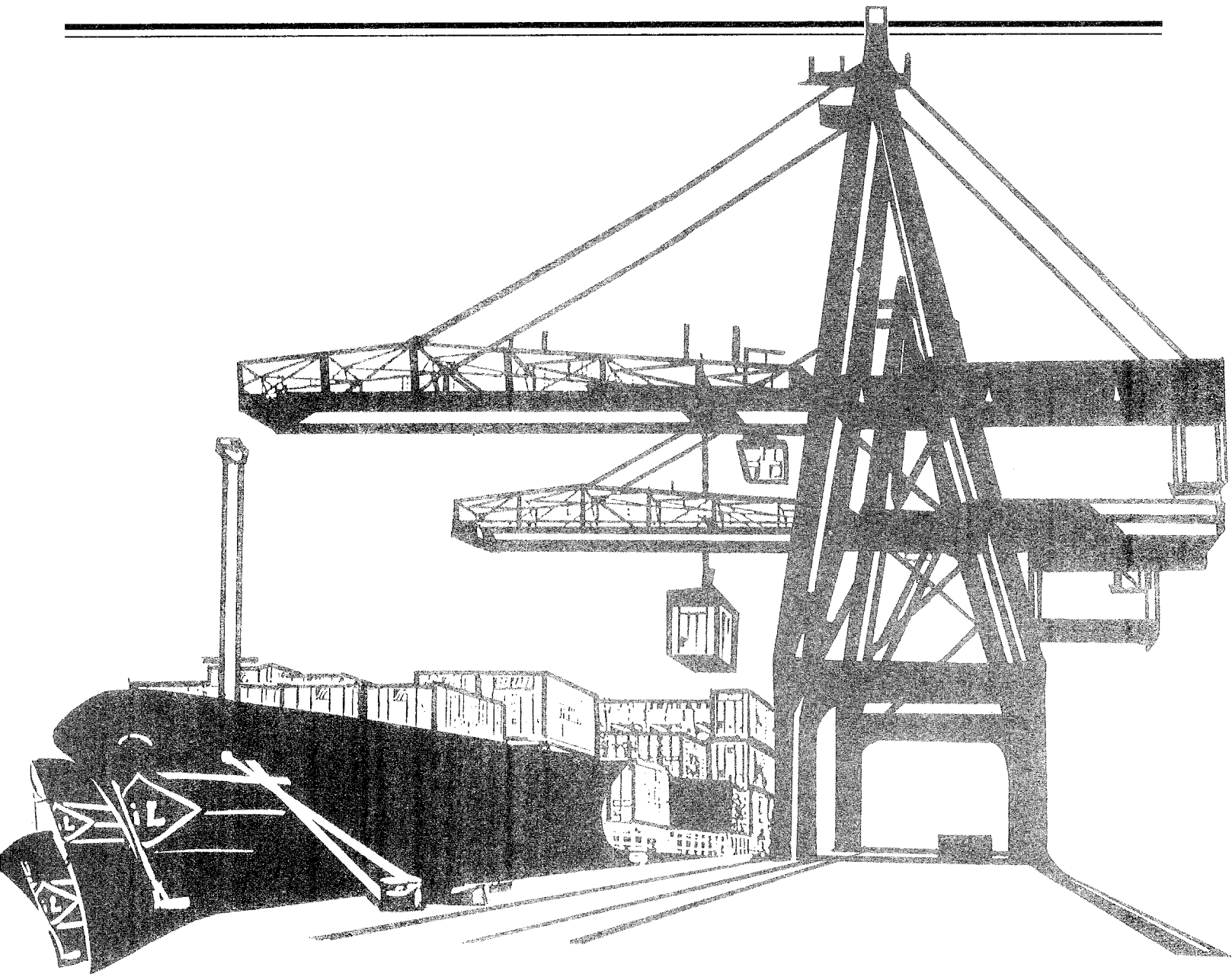

Fire Island
A Maritime Center
for the North Pacific



A Report by Commonwealth North

A report by
The Commonwealth North
Railroad Committee

First Printing....June 1988

935 West Third Avenue
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Cities as far away as Unalaska in the Aleutian Islands have expressed the need for Anchorage to take the initiative to establish a maritime center for the North Pacific. At present, these communities must rely on Seattle, Tacoma and Portland for critical supplies, expertise and financing. Anchorage is ideally suited to step into this role in terms of professional skills, Alaska-specific expertise and location. A major requirement, however, is to upgrade the existing infrastructure and create a world-class port facility at Anchorage.

The current Port of Anchorage has been one of the true success stories of the southcentral region. To expand its role and services, however, would be difficult. First of all, it is confined to a 110-acre area. Secondly, mid-winter ice restricts the flow of commerce.

In reviewing other locations, Fire Island, in close proximity to Anchorage, is by far the most appropriate alternative. There is ample acreage for needed facilities. In addition, the island provides physical separation from the residential mainland areas.

Since before World War II, Anchorage visionaries and planners have conceptualized a port at Fire Island. Beginning with a Corps of Engineers study in 1948, Fire Island has been the logical alternative for a more accessible, nearly ice-free and more expansive port location. While such a port would serve many uses, the principal functions would be for freight and commercial use and support of the North Pacific fishery industry. In addition, if the Navy decides to establish a home port in Alaska, this facility would be a natural location.

What are the benefits to the State of Alaska?

Better use of public funds

- Utilization of federal and state funds for construction of a major facility at Fire Island may be more cost effective than the proposed project to dredge the Knik Arm Shoal.

Fire Island would be the most cost effective location for constructing new dock facilities because of the ample source of backfill by dredging in the adjacent Cook Inlet area or excavating onshore.

- Expansion of the Alaska Railroad to this location would result in a significant increase in freight and utilization of the railroad.
- Fire Island could provide an attractive location to the Navy thereby resulting in a selection of an Alaskan location for a new home port.

What are the benefits for neighboring communities?

- If Fire Island attracts a large naval ship such as a battleship or an aircraft carrier, support ships will need to be located nearby at other Cook Inlet ports.
- A dock facility at Pt. MacKenzie, as envisioned by the Mat-Su Borough, is not threatened by this project. Increased economic activity from a North Pacific maritime center at Fire Island would spin off and assist the Pt. MacKenzie facility as well as most of the other communities on Cook Inlet.

What are the benefits to the Municipality of Anchorage?

- The location on Fire Island will lead to the development of a new, more accessible commercial port for the Municipality in close proximity to the international airport.
- Deep water at this location allows deeper draft vessels to utilize the new facility which means more freight coming through the Port of Anchorage.
- The extension of the railroad past International Airport could connect light-rail passenger service from the international and domestic air terminals to the Alaska Railroad system. This connection could open up the possibilities for light-rail service to downtown Anchorage, Girdwood, Portage, Whittier, Seward, and recreation destinations to the north such as Eagle River, Matanuska Valley and Denali National Park.
- The construction of a causeway including rail extension, pipeline, road and utility corridor to Fire Island as well as the construction of the initial Fire Island port and onshore facilities will provide construction opportunities and a much needed boost for the state and local economies.
- This transportation corridor opens up approximately 4,200 acres of land on Fire Island for a planned commercial development.