

# Railroad transfer may erode land claims : Blatchford

ANCHORAGE (AP) — Native leaders, shipping and trucking firm officials say they fear transfer of the Alaska Railroad from the federal government to the state could cause problems.

They testified during public hearings on legislation mandating the railroad's transfer. That measure was introduced by Sens. Frank Murkowski and Ted Stevens.

The hearings got under way Monday in Anchorage and were to continue Tuesday in Fairbanks.

Representative of Eklutna Inc., Cook Inlet Regional Inc., Toghotthele Native Corporation and Chugach Natives, Inc. said they do not oppose the proposed transfer, but fear their "valid existing rights" in the Native Claims Settlement Act would be nullified.

The proposed legislation revokes claims to railroad properties and declares lands subject to transfer are not to be consid-

ered public lands under the settlement act.

Edgar Blatchford of Chugach Natives, Inc. said the legislation erodes Native selection rights granted in 1971 and 1980 legislation.

"Even before a single acre is conveyed to us as promised by Congress, that right is being diluted," he said.

Freight hauling firms said Monday the transfer could threaten private businesses because of state subsidies.

"It is a unique opportunity for Alaskans to develop their state's resources, particularly coal, but it is also a serious threat to continued private water carrier service to Alaska," said Robert B. McMillen, president of Totem Ocean Trailer Express (TOTE).

TOTE would not oppose a state takeover of the railroad, as long as rates were kept competitive with private industry, he said.