
**Report by the Honorable Walter J. Hickel
Conference Co-Chairman**

“Prospects for the Creation of a Multi-Modal Transport Corridor for Eurasia-North America via the Bering Strait.”

Central House for Scientists, Moscow - April 24, 2007

The world joins Russia in its sadness over the passing of Boris Yelsin yesterday. His courage changed a nation.

Bringing Russia and America together will change the world

Congratulations to Academician Granberg, the Council for the Study of Productive Forces, and our other hosts for this important gathering. By initiating this series of International Conferences on Transport Mega Projects of the 21st Century...you are doing a service for all peoples. And Alaska wants to help.

These conferences may prove to be one of the most significant initiatives of this century. And I share your vision.

This can be an alternative to war

In recent years, the clash of cultures in many parts of the world has expanded from misunderstanding and suspicion to hostility and violence. Countries that aspire to becoming cultures of freedom have become cultures of fear.

Having watched the world's conflicts all my life, I have long believed that war rarely solves problems.

Historically, the most cynical political and business leaders have used it as an economic strategy. Wars can unite and mobilize people. Wars put people to work and give them a purpose. But my question is, why war? Why not big projects? War is just a big project.

The price of progress does not have to be blood. It can be sweat.

Big projects are the alternative to war. This idea is as old as the pyramids of Egypt, the aqueducts of Rome and the cathedrals of Europe.

In that tradition, let's fulfill the theme of these conferences...let's create a worldwide transportation infrastructure for the 21st century.

- Why not transport fresh water to where it is dry?
- Why not replace coal and diesel fuel with natural gas and electrical power to clean up our smoggy cities?

- Why not open Russia's pioneering Northern Sea Route to the world?
- Why not explore space for the resources man needs?

All of this is possible. And much more.

When I was elected Governor of Alaska in the late 1960s, I proposed a railroad around the world...a railroad from the continental United States, through Alaska, across the Bering Strait into the Russian Far East...connecting with the Trans Siberia Railway and on to Europe.

Time Magazine had fun with the idea. They labeled it the "Vladivostok, Nome and the Santa Fe." But they weren't thinking big enough. Imagine boarding that train in London or Paris and riding it to Moscow, then across Siberia to Alaska and on to the Great Lakes and New York City.

Such a rail link would carry a wealth of ideas, curiosity and commerce. It would be one of the great wonders of the world.

For years, philosophers have dreamed of **building a new world**. My belief is that the way to build a new world is to actually BUILD it.

It begins with the optimists and the visionaries, like those gathered here. Then we need leaders who can make decisions. So the engineers can step forward. And the skilled workers. Tens of thousands, even millions, can get involved. It's time to re-write the old slogan, "Workers of the world unite." It's time to proclaim, "Workers, unite the world."

We have gathered today to discuss the prospects for the creation of a Multi-Modal Transport Corridor via the Bering Strait. On our side, it is still in the visionary stage.

In Alaska our attention is focused on another big project – a natural gas pipeline from Alaska's North Slope to tidewater or across Canada. We expect construction of the Alaska gasline to begin as soon as 2010.

A transport corridor to link Europe, Asia and North America will require leadership both from Alaska and from our President and Congress..... to permit access across Alaska's federal and state lands and waters.

This will require the support of the Alaskan and American people. The key to winning that support is **the validity of the vision**. Here is how I would describe that vision.

As we look at goals for the 21st Century, it's fitting that we **bring Russia and America together**. There couldn't be a more important symbol.

I have believed for many years that it will happen. And the place to start is the Bering Strait.

Let's build a link between our two great nations...a tunnel to move people, resources and goods east to west, and west to east.

The world's greatest reserves of natural resources await in Siberia, Alaska and Northern Canada.

- Let's build a rail connection to take that wealth to the world.
- Let's build a fiber optic cable link – to improve world telecommunications.
- Let's build long-distance transmission lines to the 1.6 billion people on earth who have no electricity.

Show me any area in the world where there is a lack of energy, and I'll show you basic poverty. There is a direct tie-in between energy and poverty, energy and war, energy and peace.

In the 1970s, inventor Buckminster Fuller launched the idea of a Global Energy Network. Existing electrical generators, unused during the nights in the North...can be tapped – at the speed of light – to bring poverty-fighting power to the South.

The technology to move electricity very long distances still needs improvement. Let's dedicate some of the world's greatest minds to this task. This can be a vast and visionary undertaking – worthy of our generation and the next. And one of the few missing links is across the Bering Strait.

Some ask, "Where will the money come from?" My experience is that money is never the problem. I remember the dark days of the Great Depression in the 1930s. We were struggling to save our farms and keep our families fed. When we asked the politicians for help, they told us there was no money. Then Japan invaded Pearl Harbor...and we had all the money in the world!

Today, there are critics who doubt that a tunnel can be built beneath the Bering Sea. They say, "It can't be done."

When I moved to Alaska as a young man, I argued for a highway from the South 48 States to Alaska. They said it was impossible to build a highway over 2,000 kilometers across some of Alaska and Canada's most remote wilderness. But once World War II began, the US Army built the Alaska Highway in 9 months!

Other critics of the Bering corridor believe that “small is beautiful” and “wilderness is the world.” They say that the rail link will do too expensive or will ruin the environment. They oppose all big projects. But we in the North understand the power of big projects to change society for the better. Russia did it with the 10,000 kilometer (6,500 mile) trans-Siberian Railway. Alaska did it with the great trans-Alaska oil pipeline. These modern wonders mobilized our people, gave them a challenge, and a goal.

And so will the Eurasia-North America transport corridor. In fact, I believe it will be great for the world environment. Because there will be no answer to pollution until we find an answer to poverty. That truth is as real as the Ten Commandments.

Today, I want to salute Russia for taking the lead in thinking about big projects.

The fact that this conference is taking place in Moscow is a sign of the new role Russia is playing in the world. I predicted this when I visited here as Governor of Alaska in 1992.

“You will see a new and prosperous Russia,” I said. “Not overnight...but in one generation.”

Today, you have surpassed even my optimism. You are the world’s largest energy exporter. Your major cities are flourishing. And you now ready to expand your prosperity from the Center to your far-flung regions.

This is where Alaska may be helpful. Alaska is a remote region, historically poor, ignored and exploited, that has found its own road to prosperity. Our solution began with **an understanding of the commons.**

There are vast, commonly-owned lands in Alaska. And it is the government, not the private sector, that controls these assets.

Other than Alaska’s indigenous, Native corporations that own 12 percent of our land... ..the government owns 99 percent of the rest. Private individuals own less than one percent.

The United States and Western Europe have a tradition of private ownership, but that is not true in Alaska. And it is not true in the world as a whole. Eighty-four percent of the world is owned in common, including the oceans.

The United Nations calls these commonly owned lands, waters and resources the “global commons.” So to care for this commons and to use it for the benefit of mankind, we must learn to work together.

How do we do this? Unbridled Capitalism may not be the answer. When dealing with the commons, the bottom line is important, but it is not the only line. Without concern for other people, for their needs and wants, activities for strictly private gain become destructive – not only to others but eventually to oneself.

The indigenous people of the North have always lived on the commons. They learned long ago that in a cold, harsh environment, you have to care about others. You waste nothing. You care for the total. You share to survive. Every hunter shares his whale, walrus or caribou with others – especially the very old – and the very young.

These same principles are enshrined in the Alaska Constitution. What we own in common in Alaska must be managed – not in the interest of a few – but for the “maximum benefit” of all. The obligation rests with government both to care for the land and to make it productive. That’s why I call Alaska the “Owner State.”

In conclusion, I believe that if we bring Russia and America together, it will change the world

First, we can create a new generation of hope, and a lessening of tension.

Second, a transport corridor will greatly improve communications and commerce.

And third, Russia and Alaska can offer a model for both conservation and development to other nations around the world that are owned in common.

The result can be a truly better world. Let’s do it!

In closing, let me say, right out of the blue, our hearts are with the Russians, too.

Thank you.

Bering Strait corridor – April 24 07

Walter J. Hickel served as Governor of Alaska from 1966-1968 and 1990–1994 and served in President Richard Nixon’s cabinet as US Secretary of Interior from 1969-70. He co-founded the Northern Forum in 1992 and founded the Institute of the North in 1995. He lives and works in Anchorage, Alaska, USA. For more information contact Yvonne Lindblom, at (907) 343-2201