

Oral Presentation Session

## **Railroads and the Arctic: Historic and Ethnographic Examples from Russia and Alaska**

 Sunday, November 18  8:00 AM - 8:15 AM

 Location: Hilton, Lobby/Street Level, Winchester

### **Presenter(s)**

**Peter Schweitzer**

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### **Co-Author(s)**

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It can be argued that the development and construction of railroads in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was primarily driven by the attraction of cheap and fast transport of resources and goods. Human mobility, originally an afterthought, became central to rail projects at a much later stage and primarily in and between urban areas. Obviously, remote and sparsely populated regions – such as the Arctic – are no exception here. On the contrary, it can be argued that railroad construction plans in the Arctic, of which there is an increasing number in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, continue to be driven by resource extraction and the transport of goods and commodities.

Contrary to some geopolitical scenarios and globalizing development plans, the circumpolar North is not a frozen wasteland but a region with a long history of human habitation and an even longer history of flora and fauna. Given the sensitivity of arctic and subarctic ecosystems, the amplified impacts of climate change in the North, as well as the dynamics of remote human settlements, the construction of railroads can be expected to have even bigger impacts there than elsewhere. Our case studies come from Russia and Alaska, with an ethnographic emphasis on an ongoing research project in eastern Siberia. The goal of the presentation is to explore the materiality and sociality of transportation infrastructures in remote regions.