

TO: Members of the Surface Transportation Board  
of the U. S. Department of Transportation  
Section of Environmental Analysis

Finance Docket No. 34284  
Southwest Gulf Railroad Company  
Construction and Operation Exemption  
Medina County, Texas

*Received  
1/12/05*

Public Meetings  
December 2, 2004

*EI-1358*

We have followed with great interest the efforts made by Vulcan Construction Materials to develop an aggregate quarry in northeast Medina County, Texas. To transport the crushed limestone from the quarry site, Southwest Gulf Railroad (SGR) has proposed building a seven-mile rail line to connect with a major rail line for further distribution of the product. We want your board to know that we favor this project and support the construction of this railroad which is to operate with a minimum impact on the environment and population within this area.

On December 2, 2004, we attended two public meetings in Hondo, Texas, which were to address the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the SGR.

We heard the presentations of your staff and the comments of interested parties who wished to speak. Staff members reviewed the duties of the Surface Transportation Board (STB). They commented on major issues of the Draft EIS to assure us that all environmental effects of the proposed railroad were being addressed by this report. We commend them for the thorough evaluation of all environmental impacts which may result. Most speakers from the audience presented negative input regarding the railroad and the quarry with many comments based on speculation rather than statistics and facts.

Following are our comments we wish you to consider in your further assessment of this project:

Transportation / Traffic Safety - As owners of rural land in northeast Medina County, we travel extensively on roads to be crossed by the proposed rail line and observe a minimal amount of traffic. We trust the SGR can be required to install appropriate warnings and the Texas

Department of Transportation (TexDOT) to be experts in planning for complete safety for all persons who travel these routes. Citizens of Medina County and surrounding areas have become accustomed to warning signals at railroad tracks since 1861 and are capable of observing warning devices which precede railroad crossings. Medina County residents continue to travel in cities where railroad tracks must be crossed to attend church services, conduct business, visit family and friends, receive medical services, attend school functions, etc. The crossings of SGR shouldn't cause any greater problems than others throughout the United States. To move the expected amount of material by truck would create tremendous adverse impacts on traffic safety.

Water Resources - We believe the rail line offers a better alternative than trucking to protect the groundwater and aquifer. Experienced SGR personnel will comply with all federal and local requirements during construction, operation, and maintenance to prevent significant impact on water resources. U. S. Army Corps of Engineers will address any issues of flooding and erosion during approved construction policies. Lands located in the local flood plain will flood again after significant rainfall whether there is a rail line or not.

Biological Resources - Any effects of the railroad can be remedied with additional plantings and reseeded of native vegetation.

Air Quality - We feel the rail line must comply with Clean Air Act requirements and produce fewer adverse effects on air quality than the option of truck transportation.

Land Use - Enforcement of conditions imposed by the Board can ensure landowners access and the continued appearance of the natural surroundings.

Noise - Since 1861 railroads have operated in Medina County. Throughout the years homes, businesses, schools, etc. continue to locate quite close to railroads here and across America without negative noise impact on the citizenry. Train horns are heard as many as 20 - 24 times a day in Hondo, the county seat. However, people within one block from the tracks or at the city limits continue to relax or carry on business during the day and rest well at night. Very few persons avoid Hondo because they object to the train whistles.

Vibration - There are many historical buildings over a hundred years old and early wells in our county. They have existed within close range of busy railroads with no significant damages due to vibration. One neighborhood home used an old well 2 blocks from a major rail route for garden irrigation until the 1950's. Monitoring rail design and construction could eliminate vibration impact.

Cultural Resources - Several old homes set in the area of the proposed railroad; two of them stand near the proposed rail route and are in poor condition. However, historical architects are presently assisting with plans to restore them with little concern that passing trains will damage or destroy them. If early artifacts had been sought on all surrounding lands in the Quihi area, little or no construction or improvements would have been allowed to the persons who wish to prevent the rail line.

Cumulative Impacts - We agree that no significant cumulative impacts would result from a seven-mile rail line operating from a quarry to the UP rail line in eastern Medina County.

To question or provoke further insight into matters of concern stated by some of those with negative comments during the hearing, please consider the following:

(All comments using quotation marks were taken from the December 9, 2004, issue of the Hondo Anvil Herald.)

1. "...so the quarry would also require an environmental study." Didn't the quarry project already undergo an additional three-year environmental study?
2. Did the Draft EIS actually "fail(ed) to take into consideration submission of impacts from the community and MCEAA"? It doesn't seem that SGR would have received the number of mitigations listed in the Draft EIS if they only considered information submitted by Vulcan .
3. Is the "rail totally dependent on the quarry"? If the next fifty years brings progress equal to the past fifty years, we might speculate that this will not be true in 2055.

4.

4. Was a proper flood study done by the speaker who said, "The area is already a flood hazard and the rail line will only increase that"?

5. If Congress created the STB and charged it with economic regulation of freight railroads construction, mergers, and abandonments while complying with the National Environmental Protection Act, or NEPA, why should they also be called on now "to consider the environmental impacts of the quarry before approving the railroad"?

6. Is it true that "the best defense is a good offense"? Too many speakers chose to offend the Draft EIS staffers and denounce the revealed information which the speakers opposed. Some psychologists teach that persons with poor self image belittle others to make themselves appear greater.

7. Was there ever any proof cited to verify that Vulcan Construction Material's submissions of environmental impacts were the sole source of results for the Draft EIS?

8. "You can turn this all around if you can represent the public good and not Vulcan." How many of "the public good" prefer to drive on two-lane asphalt roads with a weak road base?

9. "...he is to be commended for recommending Vulcan build none of the proposed rail routes and that the Dunlay to Medina Lake route be reexamined." Has Vulcan now discovered a high-quality limestone site at Medina Lake and wishes to have SGR reclaim an old 1912 route to build even more miles of railroad track in other persons' backyards?

10. The "significant difference between quarries and railroads in San Antonio and the quarry and railroad proposed in Quihi," is the people chose to live near the quarries after they were built in San Antonio and were able to function, progress, contribute and produce in spite of them.

11. Someone who "lives less than one hundred feet away from the proposed site for the rock crusher," must have been misquoted or misinformed. Any such residence would be inside the fenceline of someone who favors the project.

12. "If you are going to allow Vulcan to ruin this community, like they have San Antonio and Helotes," indicates the speaker has not visited the

campuses of O'Connor High School and Clark High School in the NISD nor the northwest (S.A.) baseball park which contains multiple diamonds for all ages. Vulcan is their next-door neighbor, was there first, and provided high fences to secure the areas.

13. Those who spoke about devaluation of their land need to see another realtor. Across our fence is a new development; the prospective landowner was told he would see a quarry if he built on the high point of his acreage. He felt it wouldn't bother him at all, bought the land, and is clearing the hill for his home. Acreage on FM 2676 east of Quihi was recently sold for a nice profit to a family for their homesite.

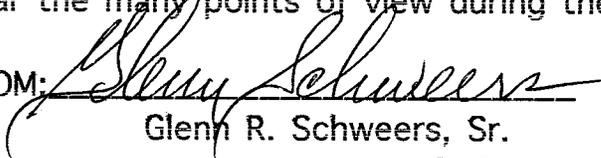
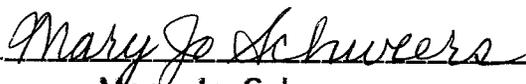
14. "... was concerned about an emergency occurring on the other side of the railroad tracks," is not an uncommon feeling. It is addressed and lived with by many thousands of people all over the world.

15. Why did no one ask for archeological experts in Native or non-Native American groups to come into the Quihi area when one resident used excavation and earth-moving equipment to redesign the terrain of his property? This work produced a series of ponds which capture water normally flowing into the Quihi Creek during rainfall.

We appreciate your dedication and efforts during your months of assessing the environmental impact of the proposed SGR rail line. Your Draft Environmental Impact Statement is evidence that you were extremely thorough in addressing any and all concerns of the community involved. Your explanations of the purposes and duties of the STB and the SEA were very helpful also.

Ms. Zyman-Ponebshek and Ms. Rutson were correct when they stated they did not hear anything new in the meetings of December 2. We regret that many speakers consistently chose to unite the Vulcan proposed quarry with the SGR project when they had been asked to address only items found in the Draft EIS. Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to hear the many points of view during the public meeting.

FROM:

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