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SEA

SERVICE DATE – SEPTEMBER 16, 2009

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

**POST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**STB Finance Docket No. 35218**

**Meridian Southern Railway, LLC – Construction of Connecting Track Exemption –  
in Lauderdale County, MS**

**INTRODUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS**

On June 25, 2009, Meridian Southern Railway, LLC (MDS) filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1150.36 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10901 in connection with the construction of approximately 1,910 feet of connecting track in the City of Meridian, Lauderdale County, Mississippi, on land within existing rail rights-of-way, owned either by MDS or Norfolk Southern Railway, and on land within an acquired railroad easement. MDS anticipates that the proposed connecting track would provide the existing shippers and consignees with improved access to the national rail system by the addition of a routing option with more efficient flow and price competition. MDS anticipates that the proposed connection would encourage increased shipments from existing customers and foster new economic development in the East Mississippi area served by MDS.

The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) conducted an environmental review to ensure that the proposed action complies with the statutory requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Board's environmental regulations (49 CFR Part 1105), and other applicable rules and regulations. SEA prepared and Environmental Assessment (EA) to provide an independent analysis of the potential effects of the proposed construction. SEA concluded in the EA that construction of the proposed connecting track would not cause significant environmental impacts or significantly affect the quality of the human environment if the recommended mitigation measure requiring MDS to complete consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) prior to commencement of any track construction activities regarding potential impacts to waters of the United States was implemented. SEA served the EA on July 30, 2009.

The EA was served on all parties to the proceeding; appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies; and any party requesting copies of the document. In its service of the EA, SEA requested comments on all aspects of the document, including the adequacy of the recommended mitigation measure. The comment period closed on August 28, 2009. One comment on the EA was filed by the Acting City Engineer of the City of Meridian (copy attached).

## **COMMENT AND RESPONSE**

Although the City of Meridian (City) supports MDS's expansion plans and is not opposed to MDS's proposed connecting track construction, it has concerns that MDS has not satisfactorily demonstrated to the City how it intends to construct the proposed connecting track over existing utility lines. The City indicates that there are two sanitary sewer lines and one water line that would be crossed by the proposed connecting track construction. In addition, the proposed connecting track construction would increase the number of rail lines within the area that the City would be required to consider when maintaining or expanding utility, water, and sewer lines. Accordingly, we will recommend a condition requiring that MDS consult with the City to address the City's concerns about potential impacts to utility, water, and sewer lines.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MITIGATION**

SEA recommends that the condition recommended in the EA, as well as the additional condition recommended in this document, should be imposed upon any decision granting connecting track construction authority:

- 1. Meridian Southern Railway shall complete consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) prior to commencement of any connecting track construction activities regarding potential impacts to waters of the United States, including wetlands, and shall comply with the reasonable requirements of USACE.**
- 2. Meridian Southern Railway shall consult with the City of Meridian (City) prior to commencement of any connecting track construction activities to address the City's concerns about potential impacts to utility, water, and sewer lines.**

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on SEA's review of all information available to date and its independent analysis of the proposed connecting track construction and comments received on the EA, SEA concludes that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended mitigation is imposed, construction of the proposed connecting track would not cause significant environmental impacts or significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, SEA recommends that the Board impose on any final decision approving the proposed connecting track construction, conditions requiring MDS to implement the mitigation measures contained in this document.

By the Board, Victoria Rutson, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Anne K. Quinlan  
Acting Secretary

Attachments (1)