

28719

SERVICE DATE - FEBRUARY 3, 1998

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-55 (SUB-NO. 552X)

CSX Transportation, Inc.
-- Abandonment Exemption --
In Raleigh County, WV

NO. AB-290 (SUB-NO. 201X)

Norfolk and Western Railway Company
-- Discontinuance of Trackage Rights Exemption --
In Raleigh County, WV

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT) has filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of its railroad line located between milepost CAR-0.58 at Beckley Junction and milepost CAR-6.82 at the end of the track at Cranberry, a distance of 6.24 miles in Raleigh County, WV. The Norfolk and Western Railway Company (N&W), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Norfolk Southern Railway Company (NS), has jointly filed this petition to discontinue its trackage rights over this rail line. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the exemption becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances, and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

In recent years, only CSXT has provided rail service to the four shippers on the line. NS has not handled any rail traffic over this line in over two years. Austin Powder Company received 114 carloads of ammonium nitrate at Beckley in 1995, 244 carloads in 1996, and 29 carloads through March 1997, when it began receiving all its shipments at its new rail-served facility in Mt. Hope, WV. Dowell Schlumberger, Inc. received 33 carloads of industrial sand at Beckley in 1995, 47 carloads in 1996, and 46 carloads through September, 1997. Dowell is relocating its

Beckley rail receiving facility to another rail-served facility in Raleigh, WV. Beckley Newspapers received 37 carloads of newsprint in 1995, 25 carloads in 1996, and its last shipment of one carload in January 1997. Beckley now uses motor carriers exclusively. Southern West Virginia Asphalt received 169 carloads of aggregate at Sprague in 1995, and 151 carloads in 1996. Since late 1996, Southern has used truck transportation exclusively. The right of way width varies from 66 to 180 feet. There is one deck plate girder bridge on the line.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The railroad has submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. The railroad has served the environmental report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules at 49 CFR 1105.7(b). We have investigated the record in this proceeding. Also, we have consulted with appropriate agencies and individuals to verify the railroad's report and to obtain additional information and comments regarding the potential environmental effects of the proposed abandonment. Contacts have included U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the State Historic Preservation Office.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that no environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, and subject to the recommended condition, we conclude that, as currently proposed, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 CFR 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

TRAILS USE

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of the petition for exemption in the Federal Register. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 CFR 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services (OPS) responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact OPS directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Room 848, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Room 711, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Mike Dalton, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-55 (Sub No. 552X) and AB-290 (Sub NO. 201X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Mike Dalton at (202) 565-1530.

Date made available to the public: January 30, 1998.

Comment due date: March 2, 1998.

By the Board, Elaine K. Kaiser, Chief, Section of
Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

*****MAP HAS TO BE SCANNED*****