

28657

SERVICE DATE - DECEMBER 11, 1997

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD**  
**WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**NO. AB-57 (SUB-NO. 43X)**

Soo Line Railroad Company:  
Notice of Exemption to Abandon Trackage  
Located in West Duluth, Minnesota

**BACKGROUND**

In this proceeding, the Soo Line Railroad Company has filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of its railroad line, known as the West Duluth Line, located between Milepost 465.43 and Milepost 468.43, a distance of 3 miles in West Duluth, St. Louis County, Minnesota. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the notice becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and to dispose of the right-of-way.

**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 contacted 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. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service; National Geodetic Survey;

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; Minnesota Historical Society; Office of City Planning, Duluth, Minnesota.

**CONDITIONS**

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has identified the southern end of the project area as an important fish and wildlife habitat. In addition, the project is close to the St. Louis River estuary shoreline. Therefore, **we recommend that Soo Line Railroad Company consult with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources prior to engaging in any salvage activities on the line.**

The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has identified 2 geodetic station markers that may be affected by the proposed abandonment. Therefore, **Soo Line Railroad Company shall notify NGS at least 90 days prior to engaging in salvage activities to plan for relocation of these markers.**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the information provided from all sources to date and subject to the recommended conditions, 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**

If abandonment and salvage of the rail line does take place, 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 exemption in the Federal Register. However, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so. 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) 565-1594, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Room 4412, Washington, DC 20423.

**ENVIRONMENTAL COMMENTS**

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, send an **original and two copies** to Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Room 2215, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Victoria Rutson, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-57 (Sub-No. 43X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Ms. Rutson at (202) 927-1545.

Date made available to the public: December 8, 1997.

**Comment due date: December 19, 1997.**

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

Vernon A. Williams  
Secretary

MAP HAS TO BE SCANNED

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