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SERVICE DATE - SEPTEMBER 28, 1999

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

AB-57 (SUB-NO.48X)

The SOO LINE RAILROAD COMPANY -- ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION -- IN
Marshall and Robert Counties, SD.

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Soo Line Railroad Company 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 service of 27.5 miles of railroad line between railroad milepost 208.8, near Rosholt, SD, and railroad milepost 236.3, near Veblen, SD, which traverses through United States Postal Codes 57224, 57255, 57260, and 57270, in Marshall and Robert Counties, SD. 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

The line extends through a rural area in South Dakota on the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribal Reservation. There are two active shippers on the line, Harvest States Elevator and Sisseton-Milbank Elevator. Both shippers transport grain. In 1997 and 1998, Harvest States Elevator, shipped 391 and 375 carloads respectively. Sisseton-Milbank Elevator shipped 27 carloads in 1997 and none in 1998. If abandonment authority is granted, approximately 375 rail cars will be diverted to truck, resulting in the addition of 6.3 trucks daily on the areas' transportation network. The impact of this additional truck traffic is not expected to be significant. There are three bridges on the line, all less than 50 years old.

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. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U. S. Department of Interior, National Geodetic Survey, South Dakota Department of Transportation, South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources, South Dakota Historical Society, South Dakota Rural Development Council, Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribal Council, Roberts County Commission Chairman, Marshall County Commission Chair, and South Dakota Division of Environmental Services.

CONDITIONS

We recommend the following environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

1. The South Dakota Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) has identified the entire railroad corridor as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The entire line is located on the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribal Reservation. The Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) has not yet completed their review of the proposed abandonment. Thus, we recommend, that a condition be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority, requiring the railroad to take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the railroad corridor until completion of the Section 106 Process, National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f.
2. The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has identified 8 station markers that may be affected by the proposed abandonment. The NGS has requested that it receive not less than 90 days' notification in advance of any salvage activities in order to plan for their relocation. Therefore, we recommend, that BNSF consult with NGS at least 90 days prior to salvage activities in order to plan for their relocation if appropriate.
3. The South Dakota, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), has expressed concern regarding storm and surface-water discharge due to salvage activity. Therefore, we recommend, that Soo Line Railroad Company consult with DENR, to determine if a permit for surface and storm-water discharge is required prior to salvage activity and to implement the Best

Management Practices for salvaging in areas with potential soil and erosion problems.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, and subject to the recommended condition(s), 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 Bernard L. Brown, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-57 (Sub No. 48x) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Bernard L. Brown at (202) 565-1554 or Phillis Johnson-Ball at (202) 565-1530.

Date made available to the public: September 28, 1999.
Comment due date: October 28, 1999.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

ATTACHMENT

MAP NEEDS TO BE SCANNED.