

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Docket No. AB 490 (Sub-No. 2X)

**Greenville County Economic Development Corporation -- Abandonment Exemption --
In Greenville County, South Carolina**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Greenville County Economic Development Corporation (GCEDC) filed a notice of exemption under 49 C.F.R. § 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. § 10903 in connection with the abandonment of a line of railroad in Greenville County, South Carolina. The rail line proposed for abandonment extends 3.29 miles from milepost AJK 585.34 in East Greenville to milepost AJK 588.63 in Greenville (the Line). A map depicting the line in relationship to the area served is appended to this Environmental Assessment (EA).

In a 2005 Surface Transportation Board (Board) decision, GCEDC was granted authority to discontinue service over the Line.¹ Since then, GCEDC has neither provided nor received request to provide local or overhead common carrier service on the Line. 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

GCEDC submitted an Environmental Report that concludes the quality of the human environment would not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. GCEDC served the Environmental Report on a number of appropriate federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules [49 C.F.R. § 1105.7(b)].² The Board's Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) has reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

¹ STB Docket No. AB-490 (Sub-No. 1X), Decision ID 36073, October 12, 2005.

² The Environmental and Historic Reports are available for viewing on the Board's website at www.stb.dot.gov by going to "E-Library," selecting "Filings," and then conducting a search for AB 490 (Sub-No. 2X).

Diversion of Traffic

According to GCEDC, no local traffic has moved over the line for at least two years and all overhead traffic was rerouted years ago. Accordingly, the proposed abandonment would not adversely impact the development, use, or transportation of energy resources or recyclable commodities; affect the transportation of ozone-depleting materials; or result in the diversion of rail traffic to truck traffic that could result in significant impacts to air quality or the local transportation network.

Salvage Activities

GCEDC states that the Line is adjacent to Laurel Creek and crosses at a trestle bridge. GCEDC intends to leave the bridge in place after salvaging track that runs the length of the span, incorporating it into any trail use agreement or restricting access if no agreement is reached. GCEDC plans to conduct salvage activities by using the existing right-of-way for access, along with existing public and private road crossings, and does not plan to construct new access roads. GCEDC does not intend to appreciably remove or alter the contour of the roadbed underlying the rail line, and disturbed areas will be limited to the right-of-way wherever possible. GCEDC also has no plans to undertake in-stream work or dredge and/or fill any materials in connection with the proposed abandonment. OEA has received comments from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) regarding these salvage activities and that permits may still be required and requesting consultation. Therefore, OEA recommends a condition that GCEDC consult the Corps prior to commencement of any salvage activities regarding potential impacts to waters of the United States, including wetlands, and shall comply with the reasonable requirements of the Corps. We have included the appropriate offices of the Corps and the Federal Emergency Management Agency on the service list for this proceeding to ensure that they receive a copy of this EA.

The Line is in an urban area, just southeast of the main business district of Greenville, South Carolina. According to GCEDC, Greenville County is not located within a coastal zone, and this was confirmed by the South Carolina Ocean and Coastal Resources Management.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) submitted comments stating that USFWS resources do not indicate that National Parks or National Wildlife Refuges are present along the right-of-way. Though no federally designated critical habitat is located within the project corridor, USFWS recommends that GCEDC conduct surveys along the project corridor for each of the threatened and endangered species that occur within Greenville County, notably two plant species, the dwarf flowered heartleaf (*Hexastylis naniflora*) and the bunched arrowhead (*Sagittaria fasciculata*). OEA believes the salvage and removal of track and materials along the Line, if conducted solely within the existing right-of-way without creation of new access roads, would have minimal impact on plant and animal species in nearby habitat, which will remain intact. In response, OEA recommends a condition requiring that GCEDC consult with USFWS prior to commencement of any salvage activities regarding the implementation and documentation of field surveys and that GCEDC comply with the reasonable requirements of USFWS. GCEDC shall report the results of consultation with USFWS in writing to the OEA

prior to beginning salvage activities.

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) submitted comments recommending that any permits required by future actions by GCEDC be obtained and that GCEDC notify DHEC of any contamination or remediation at the site. Therefore, OEA recommends a condition that GCEDC shall consult with DHEC if any contamination or remediation is found within the project area prior to beginning salvage activities. GCEDC shall report the results of consultation with DHEC in writing to the OEA prior to beginning salvage activities.

The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) commented that three geodetic station markers are located within the project area. Therefore, OEA recommends a condition that GCEDC shall notify NGS at least 90 days prior to beginning salvage activities that will disturb or destroy any geodetic station markers.

OEA believes that any air emissions associated with salvage operations would be temporary and would not have a significant impact on air quality. Noise associated with salvage activities would also be temporary and should not have a significant impact on the area surrounding the proposed abandonment.

Based on all information available to date, OEA does not believe that salvage activities would cause significant environmental impacts. In addition to the parties on the Board's service list for this proceeding, OEA is providing a copy of this EA to the following agencies for review and comment: USFWS; FEMA; the Corps; and DHEC.

HISTORIC REVIEW

GCEDC served the Historic Report on the South Carolina Archives & History Center (State Historic Preservation Officer or SHPO), pursuant to 49 C.F.R. § 1105.8(c). The SHPO has submitted comments stating that the proposed abandonment would not affect any known archaeological sites or historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). OEA has reviewed the report and the information provided by the SHPO, and we concur with the SHPO's comments.

Pursuant to the Section 106 regulations of the National Historic Preservation Act at 36 C.F.R. § 800.4(d)(1), and following consultation with the SHPO and the public, we have determined that no known historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register would be affected within the right-of-way (the Area of Potential Effect, or APE) of the proposed abandonment. The documentation for this finding, as specified at 36 C.F.R. § 800.11(d), consists of GCEDC's Historic Report, all relevant correspondence, and this EA, which have been provided to the SHPO and made available to the public through posting on the Board's website at www.stb.dot.gov.

Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 800.2, OEA conducted a search of the Native American

Consultation Database to identify federally-recognized tribes that may have ancestral connections to the project area.³ The database indicated that one federally-recognized tribe, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina, may have knowledge regarding properties of traditional religious and cultural significance within the right-of-way (the APE) of the proposed abandonment. Accordingly, OEA is sending a copy of this EA to this tribe for review and comment.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that the following condition be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

- 1. The Greenville County Economic Development Corporation shall consult with the National Geodetic Survey (NGS) and notify NGS at least 90 days prior to beginning salvage activities that will disturb or destroy any geodetic station markers.**
- 2. The Greenville County Economic Development Corporation (GCEDC) shall consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) prior to commencement of any salvage activities regarding the implementation and documentation of field surveys and shall comply with the agency's reasonable recommendations. GCEDC shall report the results of this consultation in writing to the Board's Office of Environmental Analysis prior to beginning salvage activities.**
- 3. If any contamination or remediation is found within the project area, the Greenville County Economic Development Corporation shall consult with the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) prior to beginning salvage activities that may affect remediation efforts underway or necessary. GCEDC shall report the results of this consultation in writing to the Board's Office of Environmental Analysis prior to beginning salvage activities.**
- 4. Prior to commencement of any salvage activities, the Greenville County Economic Development Corporation shall consult with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) regarding potential impacts to waters of the United States, including wetlands, and shall comply with the reasonable requirements of the Corps.**

³ Native American Consultation Database, <http://grants.cr.nps.gov/nacd/index.cfm> (last visited January 8, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, OEA concludes that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended mitigation conditions are imposed, abandonment of the Line would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include maintaining the discontinuance of service without abandonment or continued operation by another operator. In either 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 C.F.R. § 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. 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 C.F.R. § 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact this office directly at (202) 245-0238, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this Environmental Assessment, send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Adam Assenza, who prepared this Environmental Assessment. Environmental comments may also be filed electronically on the Board's website, www.stb.dot.gov, by clicking

on the “E-FILING” link. **Please refer to Docket No. AB 490 (Sub-No. 2X) in all correspondence, including e-filings, addressed to the Board.** If you have any questions regarding this Environmental Assessment, please contact Adam Assenza, the environmental contact for this case, by phone at (202) 245-0301, fax at (202) 245-0454, or e-mail at adam.assenza@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: January 16, 2015.

Comment due date: February 2, 2015.

By the Board, Victoria Rutson, Director, Office of Environmental Analysis.

Attachment