

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD  
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-55 (SUB-NO. 619X)

CSX Transportation, Inc. – Abandonment Exemption – in Allegan County, MI

### BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, 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 about 6.1 miles of rail line in Allegan County, Michigan. The proposed abandonment extends from milepost CGB 19.00 in Holland to Milepost CGB 12.90 in Hamilton, Michigan. 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

CSXT states that the line requires significant rail and tie work and the bridges on the line are in need of rehabilitation in the near future. According to CSXT, the right-of-way of the line is 100 feet from the centerline of track. CSXT states that the line passes through rolling countryside, crosses several rivers, and ends in the small community of Hamilton.

Hamilton Farm Bureau (Bureau) is the one customer on the line. According to CSXT, the principal commodities shipped by the Bureau are feed ingredients, fertilizer and lumber.

### 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 and reviewed the record in this proceeding.

The City of Holland submitted comments stating that the area of the proposed abandonment is zoned for industrial uses, and that continued rail service in the area would be beneficial. The City also stated that discontinuing rail service to the Bureau could increase truck traffic on State Highway M-40,

and advocated CSXT to upgrade and maintain the line and to continue operations over the line.

However, the City stated that an alternative would be to have the line jointly used for continued rail service for existing and perhaps new commercial users and for non-motorized trail use. The City stated that it would like to collaborate with CSXT to ensure that the proposed abandonment would lead to economic development and greenway or rails to trails interests.

The City also submitted comments regarding specific aspects of the environmental report prepared by CSXT. The City questioned whether the Michigan Department of Transportation had been contacted regarding the potential increase in truck traffic from the proposed abandonment. The City also stated that the proposed abandonment could increase safety by eliminating grade crossings, but could decrease safety by increasing the number of trucks on area roadways, so the overall impact on safety may be difficult to calculate.

The City requested that the proposed abandonment begin at a different location than that initially proposed by CSXT, in order to provide rail access to a potential new industrial development that could be located near the line. In response, CSXT changed the point of abandonment to preserve rail service to the site of the potential new industrial development.

## **Traffic**

CSXT stated that the Bureau intends to purchase the line for use as a private track, which would mean that the proposed abandonment would not divert rail traffic to truck traffic. However, CSXT stated that if the Bureau does not purchase the line, the current rail traffic could be diverted to truck traffic or be diverted to a nearby transload facility. The line is adjacent to State Highway M-40.

According to CSX data, using year 2001 data as the base year,<sup>1</sup> 195 carloads of rail traffic could be converted to truck traffic. Using a conversion factor of 4 trucks per railcar,<sup>2</sup> SEA calculated that on a per day basis, if all the rail traffic is diverted to truck traffic, an estimated 3 trucks (6 truck trips) per day would be added to the area roadways during a 240 workday year.<sup>3</sup> We are assuming an empty backhaul, meaning that approximately 6 trucks per day may be added to area roads.

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<sup>1</sup> CSX provided rail traffic data over the line for the years 2000 (183 railcars), 2001 (195 railcars), and 2002 (79 railcars from January to June). Because 2001 is the most recent complete year of data, the Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is using 2001 as the base year.

<sup>2</sup> The conversion factor is an estimate based on the varied nature of the commodities transported on the line.

<sup>3</sup> 240 workdays result when weekends and holidays are subtracted from a 365 day year.

## CONDITIONS

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

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, 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 responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact the Office of Public Services directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

## COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Rini Ghosh, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-55 (Sub-No. 619X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have

questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Rini Ghosh, the environmental contact for this case by phone at (202) 565-1539, fax at (202) 565-9000, or e-mail at ghoshr@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: **October 11, 2002.**

**Comment due date: November 8, 2002.**

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

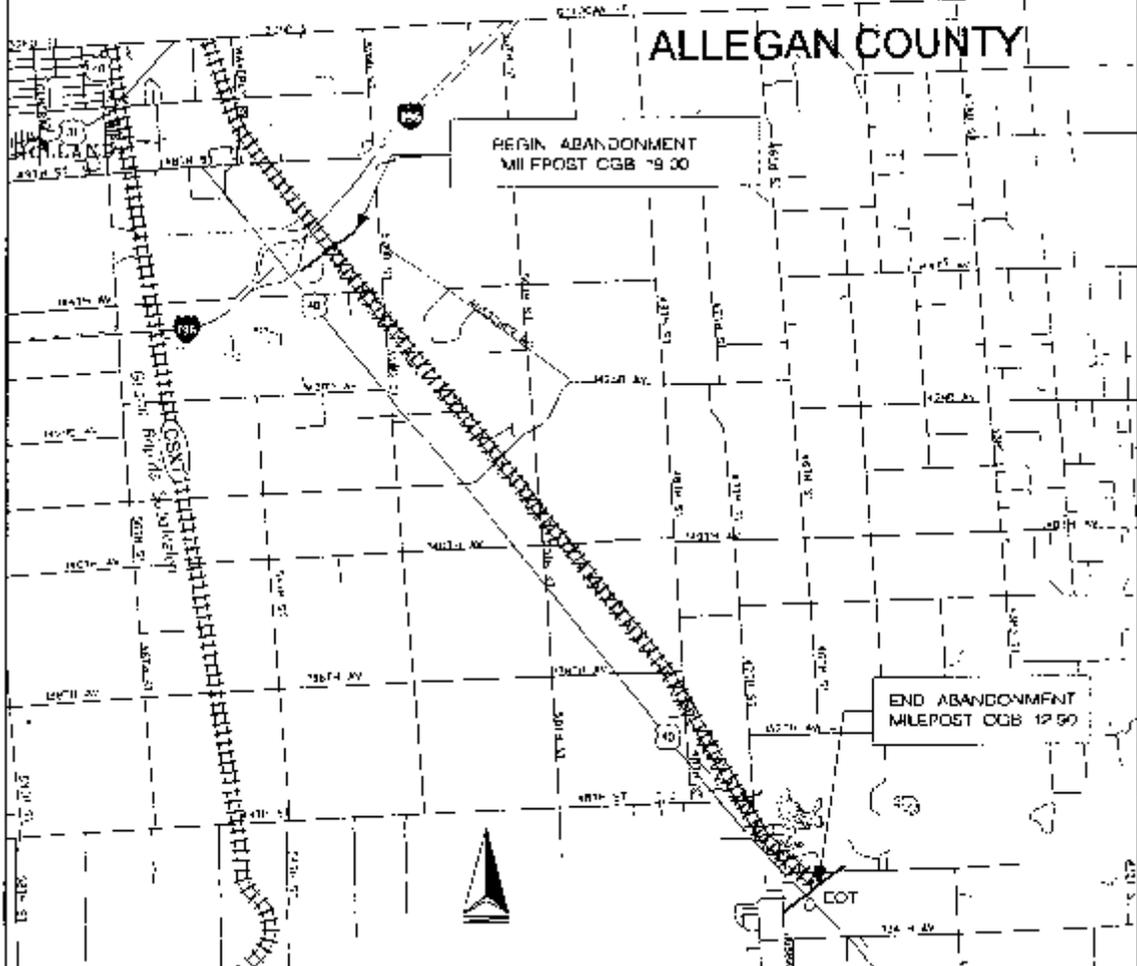
Vernon A. Williams  
Secretary

Attachment

EXHIBIT A

# OTTAWA COUNTY

# ALLEGAN COUNTY



## CSX TRANSPORTATION

### Proposed Abandonment of 6.1 Miles

City: Holland  
 County: Allegan  
 State: Michigan  
 Fips: 26005  
 Pin: OH-0850996940

VAL: V-3C/9 to 14  
 GIS: 22586, 22588, 22589,  
 22590, 22592, 22593  
 Scale: 1" = 5600'  
 Date: 05/15/02  
 Drawn By: JKOr

LEGEND:  
 PROPOSED ABANDONMENT  
 - - - - -  
 Total Distance - 5.1 Miles -