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SERVICE DATE - FEBRUARY 12, 2001

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD  
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**DOCKET NO. AB-491 (Sub No. 1 X)**

**R. J. CORMAN RAILROAD COMPANY  
PETITION FOR EXEMPTION FOR ABANDONMENT -  
IN CENTRE AND CLEARFIELD COUNTIES, PA**

**BACKGROUND**

In this proceeding, R. J. Corman Railroad Company (RJCP) has filed an application seeking authority under 49 U.S.C. 10903 to abandon rail service over the following portions of its Wallaceton Branch in Clearfield and Centre Counties, Pennsylvania (Lines): 1) the Wallaceton Secondary between approximately milepost 9.2 near Bigler and approximately milepost 11.7 near Wallaceton; 2) the Bigler Industrial Track between approximately milepost 31.4 and approximately milepost 31.8; 3) the Mills Industrial Track between approximately milepost 11.2 near Wallaceton and approximately milepost 24.5 near Osceola Mills; 4) the Moshannon-Clearfield Industrial Track between approximately milepost 0.0 and approximately milepost 4.0; and 5) the Trout Run Branch between approximately milepost 0.0 and approximately 0.3. The total trackage proposed for abandonment is approximately 22.7 miles in length. A map depicting the rail line segments in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the application is approved, 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 Lines traverse areas that are rural, wooded, and hilly except for those areas near the towns of Bigler, Philipsburg, and portions of the Mills Industrial Track where there are light commercial and industrial use areas.

RJCP acquired the Lines from Conrail in 1996 and served two shippers, Power Operating and Douglas Explosives. However, local traffic has decreased by 73 percent between 1997 and 1999 and eventually ceased altogether. In 1997, a total of 6,670 carloads traversed the Lines; in 1998 4,970 carloads, and in 1999 1,772 carloads. Power Operating has permanently closed and Douglas Explosives has been acquired by new owners who have given no indication that they are interested in resuming rail service.

Additionally, there has been no local traffic on the subject lines since September 1999. Additionally, the Lines do not provide connections from or to which overhead traffic could move. RJCP is not aware of any present or anticipated demand for future rail service on the Lines.

RJCP believes that the Lines may be suitable for alternative public uses.

RJCP's Environmental and Historical Report (ER) states that there are ten bridges on the Lines that are 50 years old or older. RJCP has reviewed its records and determined that it does not possess any engineering drawings that might be useful in documenting a structure that may be found to be of historic significance. Furthermore, RJCP believes that no structure found to be historically significant will be adversely affected by the abandonment. RJCP also believes that no culturally significant sites will be affected by the proposed abandonment. RJCP also states that substantial subsurface ground disturbance occurred during construction of the Lines.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

RJCP submitted an ER 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 verified the record in this proceeding. Also, the Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) has consulted with appropriate agencies and individuals to verify the railroad's report and to obtain additional information and comments regarding the potential environmental and historic effects of the proposed abandonment.

RJCP states that the rail line segment proposed for abandonment does not cross nor is it adjacent to State or National Park lands nor does it cross or is adjacent to any Indian Reservations.

SEA has consulted with the following agencies: Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection; Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; and the Centre County Commissioners Office.

## **Transportation**

As stated earlier, no rail traffic has moved over this rail line segment since September 1999. Additionally, RJCP indicates that it would remove all at-grade crossings located on the rail line proposed for abandonment. These existing at-grade crossings consist of both public and private at-grade crossings. SEA believes that removal of these at-grade crossings would reduce the number of injuries and fatalities that might otherwise occur.

SEA therefore concludes that adverse impacts to highway infrastructure and safety on roadways would not be significant.

### **Land Use**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has reviewed the proposed abandonment. NRCS believes that the abandonment, as proposed will have no impact to adjacent land. However, they further state that any changes to either the railbed or support structures (culverts, “swales,” drainage ditches, etc.) may affect surface water quality and ultimately impact agricultural lands.

### **Water**

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has reviewed the proposed abandonment and states that because RJCP has proposed to leave all crossing structures in place that their regulations require a permit to abandon structures used as stream crossings. The permit application must address the possible effects of leaving the crossings in place. All crossing proposed to be left in place must be shown to pass the appropriate flood event. Any crossing structure that does not pass the appropriate flood event must be removed.

The Clearfield County Office of Planning and Development (County) has reviewed the proposed abandonment and offers the following concerns:

- A) With regard to RJCP’s plan of leaving all stream crossing structures in place, who will be responsible for monitoring and maintenance? The County is concerned that the structures will deteriorate and fall into the stream creating an obstruction that results in a flooding event.
- B) The County supports the Lines being converted into recreational trail use.

### **Cultural and Historic Resources**

The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has informed SEA that 31 geodetic station markers may be affected by the proposed abandonment. NGS requests that it receive not less than 90 days’ notification in advance of any salvage activities that may affect the markers in order to plan for their relocation.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has completed their review and determined that they did not identify any properties or areas of archeological or historical significance.

## CONDITIONS

Because many of the concerns identified, we preliminarily recommend the following conditions. A copy of the Environmental Assessment has been sent to those agencies for consideration.

1. **If salvage operations are expected to destroy or disturb the 31 geodetic station markers, R.J. Corman Railroad Company shall notify the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Geodetic Survey, in not less than ninety days prior to commencement of such operations.**
2. **The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) states that some salvage activities, undertaken by R.J. Corman Railroad Company (RJCP), may affect agricultural lands. We recommend that RJCP shall consult with the NRCS specifically about salvage practice and activities that may ultimately impact agricultural lands prior to initiation of any salvage activities.**
3. **The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA-DEP) states that R.J. Corman Railroad Company (RJCP) must obtain a permit allowing them to leave stream crossing structures in place. We recommend that RJCP shall consult with the PA-DEP specifically about guidelines and requirements required for leaving stream crossing structures in place.**

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed and if the recommended conditions are imposed, abandonment of this rail line segment 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 Surface

Transportation 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 Surface Transportation 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).

\_\_\_\_\_ Both Clearfield and Centre Counties have expressed interest in pursuing acquisition of the abandoned rail corridor for conversion to a rails-to-trails project.

## **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 the Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, 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, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Troy Brady, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-491 (Sub. No. 1 X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board. Questions regarding this environmental assessment should be referred to Troy Brady at (202) 565-1554.**

Date made available to the public: February 12, 2001.

Comment due date: **March 14, 2001 (30 days).**

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

Vernon A. Williams  
Secretary

MAP TO BE SCANNED