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SERVICE DATE - NOVEMBER 19, 2002

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

DOCKET NO. AB-844 (Sub-No. 0X)

**Santa Maria Valley Railroad Company - Abandonment Exemption - in Santa Barbara County,
CA**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Santa Maria Valley Railroad Company (SMVRR) filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 for SMVRR to abandon a portion of line in Santa Barbara County in California (CA). The portion of rail line proposed for abandonment spans 4.87 miles from Milepost 9.75 at College Drive to Milepost 14.62 at Gates Station. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to this report. If the notice becomes effective, SMVRR would be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and dispose of the right-of-way (ROW).

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

The rail line is located in Santa Barbara County in southern California. According to SMVRR, there has been no originating or terminating rail traffic on the subject line for the past 2 years. SMVRR has also stated that there is no overhead rail traffic on the line.

Land use in the vicinity of the ROW is approximately 95 percent agricultural and 5 percent residential. The City of Santa Maria is located to the north and west of the rail line. The width of the ROW varies but is generally 25 feet on each side of the main track centerline. SMVRR owns the ROW and intends to offer it for sale to adjacent property owners. The subject rail line was constructed in 1911, the year in which SMVRR was chartered. The line was initially used to haul crude oil. In later years, however, agricultural commodities replaced crude oil as the predominant material moved on the line. The last rail car handled on the subject line was in November, 1997.

SMVRR stated that there are no structures on the ROW that are 50 years of age or older.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The applicant submitted environmental and historical reports that indicate that the quality of the human environment would not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities. The applicant served these reports on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's (Board) environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.7(b)]. We have reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

At the time this document was prepared, none of the Federal, state or local agencies that were served copies of the applicant's environmental report had responded.

SMVRR states that the contour of the roadbed under the rail line would not be changed appreciably during abandonment activities, and that the areal extent of disturbed areas would be kept to a minimum and limited to the ROW wherever possible. Therefore, if prime agricultural land is present, any impacts would be expected to be minimal.

Noise emissions associated with rail removal and salvage operations would be temporary and would not be expected to have significant impacts on adjacent land uses.

Because traffic has not moved on the subject rail line for the past 2 years, the proposed abandonment would not be expected to impact the development, use and transportation of energy resources or recyclable commodities, or result in the diversion of rail traffic to truck traffic that could result in impacts to air quality or the local transportation network.

SMVRR stated that it is unaware of any wildlife sanctuaries or refuges, or National or state parks or forests that would be affected by the proposed abandonment.

According to SMVRR, the subject rail line does not cross any creek, stream or river. Therefore, the proposed abandonment would not be expected to impact water quality or floodplains. SMVRR stated that it has no knowledge of any hazardous waste sites or sites of hazardous material spills that would be affected by the proposed abandonment.

The National Geodetic Survey has not yet completed its review of the proposed abandonment, and we, therefore, recommend a condition to address this concern.

The California Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of Historic Preservation (CA State Historic Preservation Office or SHPO) has not completed its assessment of the potential impact of this project on historic resources, and we, therefore, recommend a condition to address this concern.

CONDITIONS

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

1. The applicant shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the ROW until completion of the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f.
2. The applicant shall retain the integrity of the rail line until the National Geodetic Survey has completed its review of the abandonment proposal and determined if any geodetic markers could be adversely affected.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, 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 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 ROW 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 20 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 ROWs 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 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 Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of David Navecky, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-844 (Sub-No. 0X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board. Questions regarding this environmental assessment should be referred to David Navecky at 202-565-1593 (naveckyd@stb.dot.gov).**

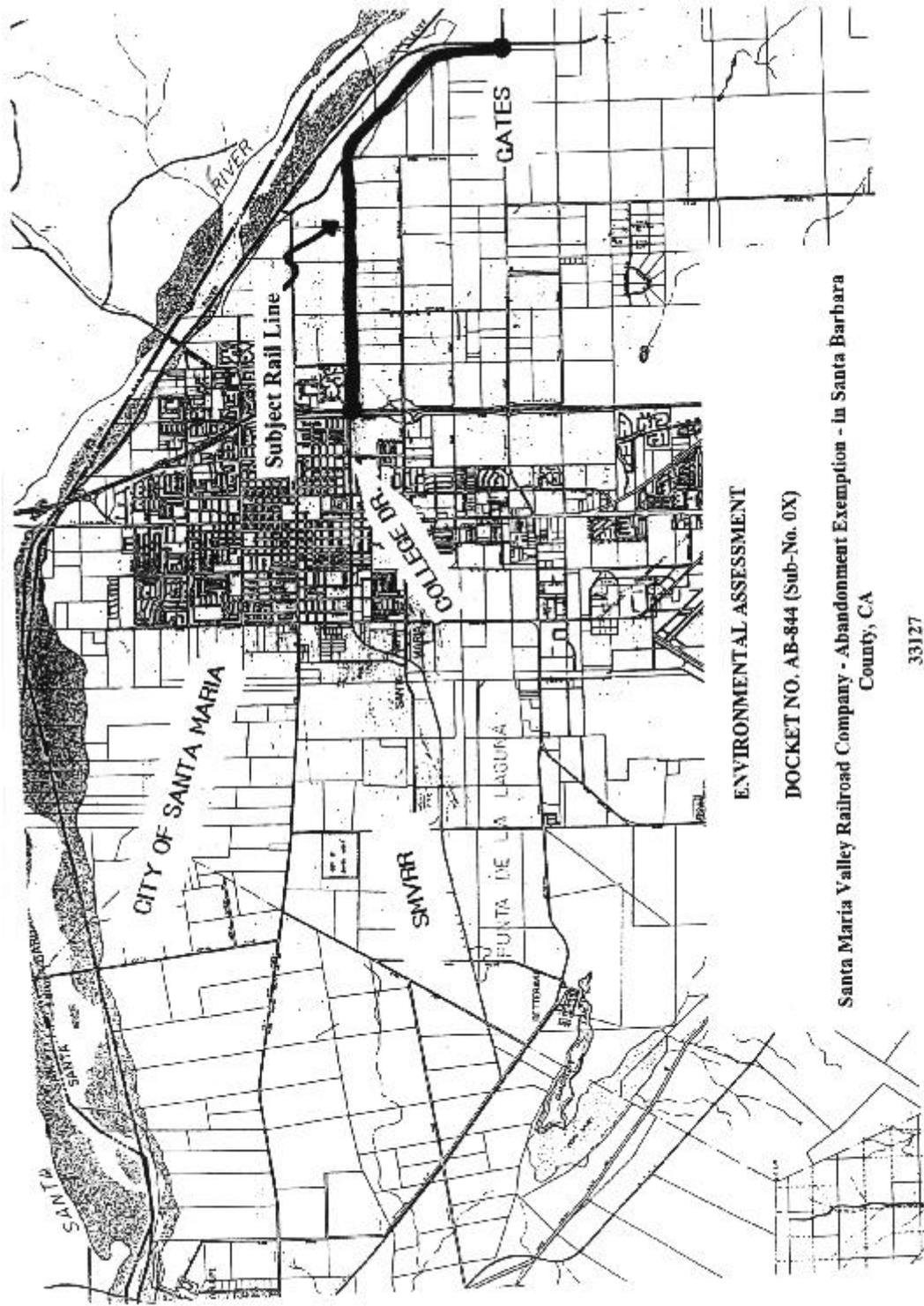
Date made available to the public: November 19, 2002.

Comment due date: **December 3, 2002**

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment



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