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SEA

SERVICE DATE – MARCH 30, 2007

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**STB DOCKET NO. AB-254 (SUB-NO. 9X), PROVIDENCE AND WORCESTER
RAILROAD COMPANY—ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION—SLATERVILLE
SECONDARY TRACK IN WOONSOCKET, RI AND BLACKSTONE, MA**

BACKGROUND

On March 6, 2007, the Providence & Worcester Railroad Company (P&W) filed a notice of exemption from regulation under 49 U.S.C. 10903, pursuant to the provisions of 49 U.S.C. 10502 and 49 CFR 1152.50, for abandonment of a portion of track known as the Slaterville Secondary Track from Mile Post 0.85 at the north side of Boyden Street in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, and continuing to a point that is 1480.3 feet north of the end of track at Mile Post 0.0 in Blackstone, Massachusetts, a total distance of approximately 1.1 miles. A portion of the track is located within Providence County, Rhode Island, and the remainder is located in Worcester County, Massachusetts. This line traverses United States Postal Service zip codes 02895 (Woonsocket) and 01504 (Blackstone). A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to this Environmental Assessment (EA).

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

P&W submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment would not be affected significantly as a result of abandonment, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. P&W served the environmental and historical 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)]. The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) has reviewed and investigated the environmental record in this proceeding.

According to P&W, the line has been out of service for more than two years. Moreover, there is no overhead traffic on the line. Under these circumstances, the proposed abandonment would not adversely affect the transportation of energy resources or recyclable commodities, and would not result in an increase in overall energy efficiency.

In a letter of December 8, 2006, the Rhode Island Office of Administration (Office of Administration) states that the City of Woonsocket is currently conducting a Commuter Rail Feasibility Study (Study) that will determine the feasibility of the establishment or re-establishment of passenger rail service from Woonsocket to Boston, Providence, and Worcester. The Office of Administration explains that the service to Boston could potentially be run on the tracks proposed for abandonment. The study is anticipated to be completed by June 2007. The

Office of Administration requests deferral of any action by the Board until the Study has been completed and the re-use potential of this corridor has been fully examined.¹

P&W explains in its notice of exemption that intends to abandon in place track materials, such as rails, and ties, and to leave the underlying roadbed intact. P&W's notification that it intends to abandon in place the track materials is consistent with the City of Woonsocket's desire to re-use the right-of-way for a future transportation corridor.

The line does not cross any agricultural land. P&W has requested a coastal consistency determination from the Rhode Island Resources Management Council (Council). As of the date of this EA, the Council has not responded to P&W's request. The Council will be placed on the Board's service list for this proceeding.

P&W maintains that it intends to abandon in place the track materials, therefore impacts on air quality and noise emissions associated with the abandonment should be negligible.

According to P&W, there are no wildlife sanctuaries or refuges, National or State parks or forests in the vicinity of the proposed abandonment. The P&W states that the proposed abandonment would be handled in a manner that is consistent with the applicable Federal, state, and local water quality standards. To the best of the P&W's knowledge, the proposed abandonment would have no effect on 100-year flood plains. The P&W explains in the notice of exemption that there are no known hazardous materials waste sites or sites where known hazardous material spills have occurred on or along the subject right-of-way. The United States Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) was notified of the proposed abandonment by letter dated December 12, 2006. As of the date of this EA, no response has been received. We will place the Corps on the service list for this proceeding. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) states that no significant adverse impacts to wetlands or federally listed endangered or threatened species are anticipated from the proposed abandonment.

HISTORIC REVIEW

P&W submitted an historic report as required by the Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.8(a)] and served the report on the Rhode Island State Historic Preservation Office (RISHPO) and the Massachusetts State Historic Preservation Office (MASHPO) pursuant to 49 CFR 1105.8(c). The RISHPO and the MASHPO have not completed their review of the proposed abandonment. Accordingly, we will recommend a condition requiring P&W to retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of all sites, buildings, and structures within the project right-of-way that are eligible for listing or listed in the National Register of Historic Places until the Section 106 process has been completed.

¹ Petitions to stay that do not involve environmental issues, formal expressions of intent to file an Offer of Financial Assistance under 49 CFR 1152.27(c)(2),[2] and trail use/rail banking requests under 49 CFR 1152.29 must be filed by April 5, 2007. Petitions to reopen or requests for public use conditions under 49 CFR 1152.28 must be filed by April 16, 2007.

SEA conducted a search of the Native American Consultation Database at www.cast.uark.edu/other/nps/nacd/ to identify Federally recognized tribes that may have ancestral connections to the project area. The database identified two tribes that may have an interest in the proposed abandonment. Accordingly, SEA is sending a copy of this EA to the following tribes for their review and comment: Narragansett Indian Tribe and Wampanoag Repatriation Confederation.

CONDITIONS

SEA recommends that the following environmental condition be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

- P&W shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of all sites, buildings, and structures within the project right-of-way that are eligible for listing or listed in the National Register of Historic Places (generally, 50 years old or older) until the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f, has been completed. P&W shall report back to the Section of Environmental Analysis regarding any consultations with the SHPOs and any other Section 106 consulting parties. P&W may not file its consummation notice or initiate any salvage activities related to abandonment (including removal of tracks and ties) until the Section 106 process has been completed and the Board has removed this condition.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, SEA concludes that, as currently proposed, abandonment 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

Following abandonment, discontinuance of service and salvage of the rail line, a portion of the rights-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 is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of the class 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) 245-0230, 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, send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Phillis Johnson-Ball, who prepared this environmental assessment. Environmental comments may also be filed electronically on the Board's web site, www.stb.dot.gov, by clicking on the "E-FILING" link. **Please refer to Docket Nos. AB-254 (Sub-No. 9X)**. If you have any questions regarding this environmental assessment, please contact Phillis Johnson-Ball, the environmental contact for this case, by phone at (202) 245-0303, fax at (202) 245-0454, or e-mail johnson-ballp@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: March 30, 2007.

Comment due date: April 16, 2007.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment