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SERVICE DATE - OCTOBER 1, 1999

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-55 (SUB-NO. 576X)

CSX TRANSPORTATION, INC.
--ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION--
IN GUERNSEY COUNTY, OHIO

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 its railroad line located between Milepost BP-49.49, near Cambridge, and Milepost BP-41.70, at the end of track at Gibson, a distance of approximately 7.79 miles in Guernsey County, Ohio. A map depicting the 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.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

The line constitutes the last 7.79 miles of the Central Ohio Subdivision, which is a 60.3 mile branch line extending between Newark and Gibson, Ohio. There is one industry on the line proposed for abandonment. This industry receives inbound shipments of ammonium nitrate. In 1997, 68 carloads were received, and in 1998, the total was 64 carloads. In the first six months of 1999, 6 carloads were received, and CSXT states that the shipper has diverted its shipments almost exclusively to truck transportation.

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 verified the record in this proceeding. Responses to CSXT's

request for comments thus far have indicated the need for three environmental mitigation conditions, set forth below.

CONDITIONS

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service recommends that if salvage operations involve the cutting of dead trees or trees with cavities or exfoliating bark, such cutting should not take place between April 15 and September 15 in order to avoid disturbing breeding habitat of the Indiana Bat, a Federally listed endangered species. The United States Environmental Protection Agency states that all debris resulting from salvage operations must be removed from the right-of-way, streams and wetlands, and appropriate measures employed to prevent or control spills of fuels, lubricants, or any other pollutants into any watercourse. The United States Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) notes that the line crosses Leatherwood Creek and its tributaries at 17 locations and is adjacent to several large wetland complexes at three separate locations. The Corps states that if dredge or fill material is placed in any of these areas, a permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act would be required.

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

1. If salvage operations require the removal of dead trees or trees with cavities or exfoliating bark, the railroad shall not engage in such cutting between April 15 and September 15.

2. CSXT shall remove all debris from salvage operations from the right-of way, streams and wetlands, and shall employ appropriate measures to prevent or control spills of fuel, lubricants or other pollutants into any watercourse.

3. If salvage operations require the placement of fill or dredge material into streams or wetlands, CSXT shall consult the United States Army Corps of Engineers, Huntington District, prior to commencement of the salvage operations to determine if permits are required.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, and subject to the recommended conditions, we conclude that, as currently proposed, abandonment of the CSXT line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is

unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed CSXT 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 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 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 (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 Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Room 848, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Harold McNulty, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-55 (Sub No. 576X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Mr. McNulty at (202) 565-1539.

Date made available to the public: October 1, 1999.

Comment due date: November 1, 1999.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

ATTACHMENT

MAP NEEDS TO BE SCANNED.