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SERVICE DATE - NOVEMBER 14, 2003

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB DOCKET NO. AB-857X

**Great Western Railway of Colorado, LLC – Abandonment Exemption –
in Weld County, CO**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, Great Western Railway of Colorado, LLC (GWRC) has filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 for GWRC to abandon approximately 11.7 miles of rail line located between Milepost 30.8 near Windsor and Milepost 42.5 near Eaton, in Weld County, Colorado. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the notice becomes effective, GWRC will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

GWRC is the successor to the Great Western Railway Company, which constructed the line proposed for abandonment in 1901 primarily to transport sugar beets. GWRC states that there has been no local or overhead traffic on the line for over ten years. Traffic that once used the line has been transferred to other transportation modes or routes.

According to GWRC, the line traverses rolling plains in a primarily rural area that has an adequate road and highway network. The right-of-way is approximately 80 feet in width for the majority of the length of the line. Based on the information in GWRC's possession, the line does not contain federally granted rights-of-way. Some of the property underlying the right-of-way is reversionary, which would affect the transfer of the property for other than rail or railbanking purposes. Upon receipt of abandonment authority, GWRC intends to remove the rail, track materials, and cross ties. There are currently no plans to remove any of the bridge structures on the line.

GWRC states that there are four railroad bridge structures along the line that are fifty years old or older. Bridge number 31.55, built in 1939, is a 48.4 foot three span open deck timber pile bridge. Bridge number 31.99, built in 1943, is a 62.9 foot four span open deck timber pile bridge. Bridge number 35.89, unknown construction date, is a 14.0 foot one span open deck wood span bridge. Bridge number 36.06, unknown construction date, is a 309.8 foot twenty span open deck timber pile bridge.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

GWRC 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. GWRC served the environmental report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.7(b)]. We have reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

GWRC states that no designated wetlands or 100-year flood plains will be adversely affected by the proposed abandonment. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service in Lakewood Colorado has determined that the proposed abandonment would not impact any prime agricultural land.

The National Geodetic Survey has advised us that two geodetic station markers have been identified that may be affected by the proposed abandonment.

HISTORIC REVIEW

GWRC submitted an historic report as required by the Surface Transportation Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.8(a)]. GWRC served the report on the Colorado Historical Society, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (SHPO) pursuant to 49 CFR 1105.8 (c). The SHPO states that the line was determined to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1998. In addition, there are several rail sidings that were determined to be National Register-eligible in 1989.

The SHPO has indicated that abandonment of the line and removal of the trackage will have no adverse effect on the rail line, provided that certain measures are taken. The grade of the railroad bed should not be changed during the track removal process. The four bridges on the line and the five rail sidings at Bruce, Severance, Hurrich, Tuber, and Gates must be photographed prior to track removal, using black and white film, with a set of prints forwarded to the SHPO's office. If, in the future, the bridge superstructures or railroad embankments are to be altered/demolished, GWRC should consult with the SHPO's office.

CONDITIONS

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

1. The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has identified two geodetic station markers that may be

affected by the proposed abandonment. Therefore, GWRC shall notify NGS 90 days prior to salvage activities in order to plan their relocation.

2. Pending resolution of the issues raised by the Colorado Historical Society, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (SHPO), GWRC shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the property until completion of the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f.

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 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.

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 Kenneth Blodgett, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-857X in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have any questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Kenneth Blodgett, the environmental contact for this case by phone at (202) 565-1554, fax at (202) 565-9000, or e-mail at blodgettk@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: November 14, 2003.

Comment due date: **December 1, 2003 (15 days).**

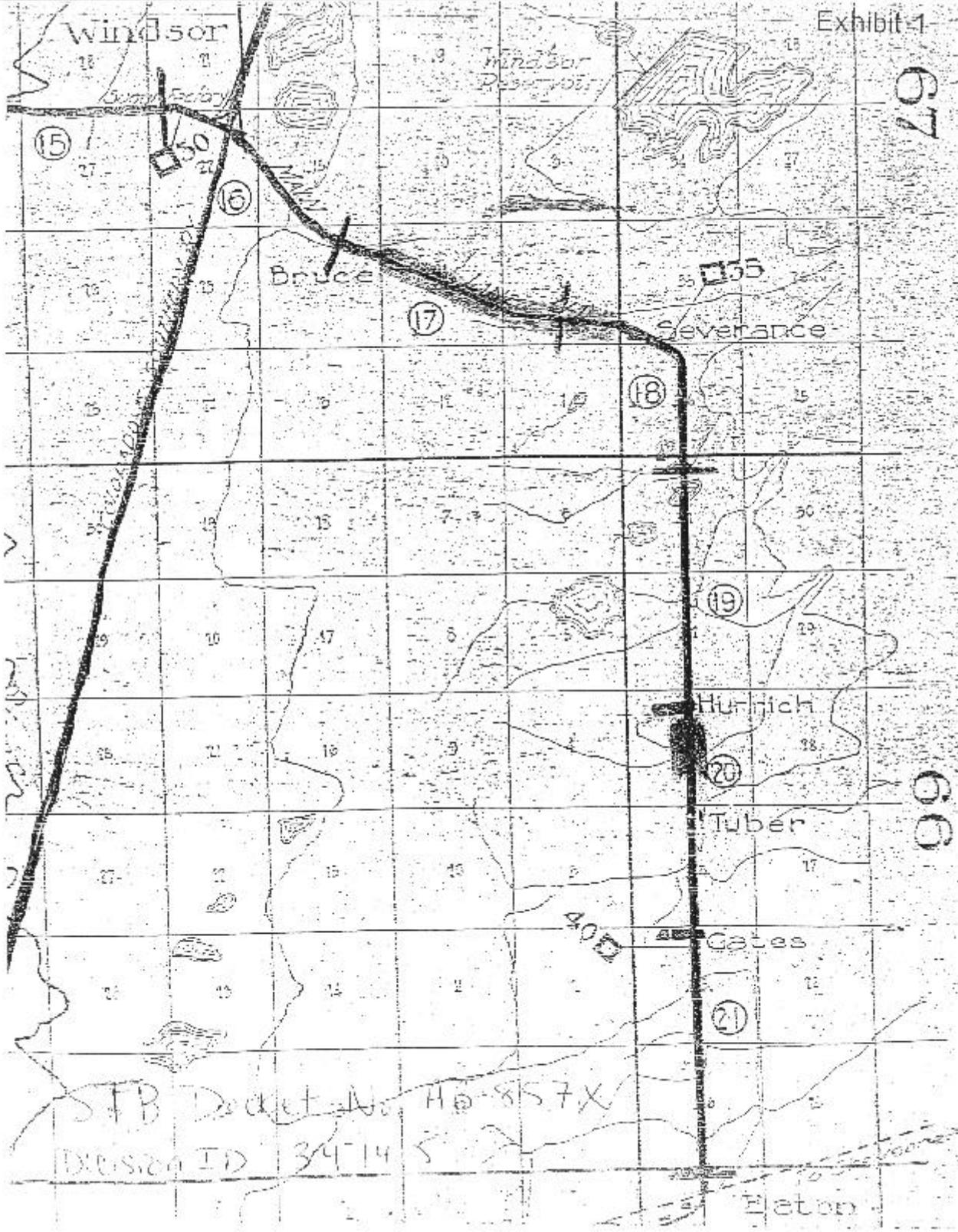
By the Board, Victoria Rutson, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

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