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SERVICE DATE - MAY 5, 1997

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**DOCKET NO. AB-43 (Sub. No. 170X) - Illinois Central Railroad
Abandonment Between Hattiesburg and Varnado, MS**

BACKGROUND

In the above entitled proceeding, Illinois Central Railroad (IC) has filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of its railroad line. The line to be abandoned is known as the Hattiesburg-Varnado Switch line and extends from milepost MH-3.06 near Hattiesburg to milepost MH-5.00 near Varnado Switch, a distance of 1.94 miles in Forrest and Lamar Counties, MS. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the notice becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and to dispose of the right-of-way.

Upon abandonment, IC states that salvage plans include removal of all ties, bridge materials, rail and track fastenings and the restoration of the surface under all grade crossings. Other than recreational use, IC states that it does not believe the line may be suitable for other public uses.

The right of way passes through moderately hilly topography and the line begins just outside the city limits of Hattiesburg. There is one overpass on the line crossing Interstate 59.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

IC 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. IC served the environmental and historical reports 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)]. A number of agencies responded by letter and these letters were included in Applicants' application. We have investigated the record in this proceeding.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that no environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, 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

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).

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 Dana White, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-43 (Sub No. 170X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board. Questions regarding this environmental assessment should be referred to Dana White at (202) 565-1552.**

Date made available to the public: May 5, 1997.

Comment due date: **May 20, 1997 (15 days).**

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment (Map not attached.)