

Decision I.D. # 38849

Service Date: March 28, 2008

Comment Due Date: May 2, 2008

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Finance Docket No. 34992

Itasca County Regional Rail Authority

Petition for Exemption

Construction of a Line of Railroad in Itasca County, Minnesota



Prepared by:

Surface Transportation Board, Section of Environmental Analysis (Lead Agency)

United States Army Corps of Engineers (Cooperating Agency)

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395 E Street SW

Washington, DC 20423

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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis and Administration

March 28, 2008

Dear Reader:

The Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is pleased to provide you with the enclosed Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA) for Itasca County Regional Rail Authority's (ICRRA) proposed construction and operation of an approximately 9 mile rail line in Itasca County, Minnesota.

This Draft EA was prepared by SEA in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). USACE has decision-making authority independent of the Board. ICCRA will be required to obtain a permit from USACE prior to construction of the rail line.

The Draft EA discusses the potential environmental impacts that could result from the construction and operation of the proposed rail line and includes SEA's preliminary recommendations for mitigating possible environmental effects. The Draft EA reflects SEA's independent analysis and considers the views of the public, as well as Federal, state, and local agencies.

Availability of the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

SEA has distributed the Draft EA to all parties of record for this docket and the environmental distribution list, including key governmental agencies and other appropriate entities. SEA has made the Draft EA available for review in the Calumet, Marble, and Grand Rapids Public Libraries. The entire document is also available on the Board's website at www.stb.dot.gov.

Public Comment and Review of the Draft Environmental Assessment

A notice will be published in the Federal Register announcing the availability of the Draft EA. The public and any interested parties are encouraged to make written comments on all aspects of the Draft EA. All comments must be postmarked no later than **May 2, 2008**.

SEA will consider all timely comments in preparing the Post EA, which will include SEA's final conclusions on potential impacts and SEA's final recommendations, including mitigation. The Board will then make its final decision regarding this project and any environmental conditions it might impose. When considering whether to approve the proposed action, the Board will consider the potential environmental effects and the environmental

mitigation it might impose on the project.

Please submit any comments on this Draft EA and the recommended environmental mitigation to the following address:

Kenneth Blodgett
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423
Attn: Docket No. FD 34992

Written comments may also be filed electronically on the Board's web site, www.stb.dot.gov, by clicking on the "E-FILING" link. Comments are due by May 2, 2008. Please refer to Finance Docket No. 34992 in all correspondence, including e-filings, addressed to the Board.

Thank you for your interest and participation in the environmental review process. If you have any questions regarding this EA or would like additional information about the environmental review process, please contact SEA's Project Manager for this project, Kenneth Blodgett, by phone at (202) 245-0305, fax at (202) 245-0454, or e-mail at blodgettk@stb.dot.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Rutson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "V" and "R".

Victoria Rutson
Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis

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A – Agency Correspondence

- Exhibit 1 Request for Project-Related Comments
Project Area Maps
List of Contacted Agencies
- Exhibit 2 Response from United States Environmental Protection Agency
- Exhibit 3 Response from Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Exhibit 4 Response from Itasca County Health and Human Services
- Exhibit 5 Response from Minnesota Department of Health
- Exhibit 6 Response from Minnesota Historical Society
- Exhibit 7 Response from National Geodetic Survey
- Exhibit 8 Response from National Park Service-Midwest Region
- Exhibit 9 Response from United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Exhibit 10 Response from United States Army Corps of Engineers

B - Board and Petitioner's Correspondence

- Exhibit 1 ICRRA's request for waiver of EIS requirements
- Exhibit 2 Board's response to ICRRA's request for waiver of EIS requirements
- Exhibit 3 ICRRA's request for waiver of the six month pre-filing notice and retention of Burns & McDonnell as the third-party consultant
- Exhibit 4 Board's response to ICRRA's request for waiver of the six month pre-filing notice and for the retention of the third-party consultant
- Exhibit 5 SEA's request for concurrence from USFWS regarding Canada lynx status within the project area
- Exhibit 6 USFWS response to SEA regarding concurrence of Canada lynx status within the project area

C - Programmatic Agreement

D - Proposed Amendment to Programmatic Agreement

E - Itasca Railroad Emission Estimates

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List of Acronyms

ADT	Average Daily Traffic
AREMA	American Railway Engineering and Maintenance of Way Association
BNSF	BNSF Railway, Inc.
Board	Surface Transportation Board
CN	Canadian National Railway Company
DWSMA	Drinking Water Supply Management Area
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FPPA	Farmland Protection Policy Act
FRA	U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration
ICRRA	Itasca County Regional Rail Authority
Ldn	Day-Night Average Noise Level
MDH	Minnesota Department of Health
MNDNR	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
MNDOT	Minnesota Department of Transportation
MN VIC	Minnesota Voluntary Investigation and Cleanup
MPCA	Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NWI	National Wetland Inventory
PA	Programmatic Agreement
SEA	Section of Environmental Analysis
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
STB	Surface Transportation Board
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
WHPA	Wellhead Protection Area