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SERVICE DATE - JANUARY 14, 2000

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-33 (SUB-NO. 143X)

UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY
--ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION--
IN WRIGHT, FRANKLIN AND CERRO GORDO COUNTIES, IA

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Union Pacific Railroad Company (UPRR) 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 a portion of its railroad line known as the Thornton Industrial Lead (formerly known as the Fort Dodge Branch), from milepost 17.14 near Thornton, to milepost 29.52, near Belmond, a distance of 12.38 miles in Wright, Franklin and Cerro Gordo Counties, Iowa. 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.

No rail traffic has originated or terminated on the line for at least two years. There are three bridges 50 years old or older on the line. The line has been embargoed since December, 1997 due to poor track conditions. The only shipper on the line has used truck transportation to handle its traffic since imposition of the embargo.

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 the railroad's request for comments thus far have indicated the need for two conditions, as set forth below.

Conditions

The U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service has indicated that two species Federally listed as threatened may be present in the area. The species are the prairie bush clover (Lespedeza leptostachya) and the western prairie fringed orchid (Platanthera praeclara). In addition, the State Historical Society of Iowa has not completed its review of the proposed abandonment. Therefore, **we recommend that the following conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:**

1. To assess the potential occurrence of threatened plants, the railroad shall coordinate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rock Island Field Office, to determine whether surveys of vegetation types in the area of salvage operations are needed and shall conduct any such surveys during an appropriate time of year.
2. The railroad shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of all sites and structures on the right-of-way that are 50 years old or older 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 and subject to the recommended conditions, 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 take place, the railroad states that the right-of-way is not suitable for other public use as the area, because of its limited population base, is adequately served by roads and utility lines. The railroad also states that upon abandonment, it would try to sell the property to adjacent land owners or to a rails-to-trails group. If there is a request 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 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 Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Room 848, 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, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Harold McNulty, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. Ab-33 (Sub.-No.143X) 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: January 14, 2000.

Comment due date: January 28, 2000.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

MAP NEEDS TO BE SCANNED.