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SERVICE DATE - NOVEMBER 3, 1998

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-317 (SUB-NO.5X)

**INDIANA HARBOR BELT RAILROAD COMPANY
ABANDONMENT AND DISCONTINUANCE OF TRACKAGE RIGHTS
IN COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS AND LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad Company 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 Valuation Station (-0+17) at Burnham, Illinois and Valuation Station (140+00) at East Chicago, Indiana, a distance of approximately 2.3 miles in Cook County, Illinois and Lake County, Indiana. A map depicting the rail 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, and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

The active portion of the railroad extends from Burnham, Illinois to a point west of Calumet Avenue in Hammond, Indiana. Meyer Warehouse Company, 518 Hoffman Street, Hammond, Indiana, is the only shipper or receiver of freight on the line, shipping at most a few carloads of freight per week. This shipper does not object to the abandonment because it owns another facility served by Norfolk Southern which can accommodate its car loading needs. From a point west of Calumet Avenue in Hammond to a point 100 feet east of Indianapolis Boulevard in East Chicago this line has been out of service for many years, and no trains operate in this segment. The right of way is generally 16 feet wide at its beginning near the Illinois/Indiana state line until it reaches the west side of Hohman Avenue. The line begins again at a point approximately 300 feet east of Sohl Street and the right of way is generally 100 feet wide at this point until it reaches Calumet

Avenue. From Calumet Avenue to the end point of the abandonment, the right of way is generally 66 feet wide.

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 investigated the record in this proceeding. Also, we have consulted with appropriate agencies and individuals to verify the railroad's report and to obtain additional information and comments regarding the potential environmental effects of the proposed abandonment. Contacts have included the City of Hammond, Department of Planning, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bloomington Field Office, Indiana Department of Environmental Management, Office of Water Management, the Department of the Army, Corps of Engineers, Chicago District, and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

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

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 Congressional and Public Services (OCPS) responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact OCPS directly at (202) 565-1594, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Congressional and Public Services, Room 843, 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, Room 711, 1925 K St. Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Scott Decker, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-317 (Sub No.5X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Scott Decker at (202) 565-1531.

Date made available to the public: October 29, 1998.

Comment due date: November 30, 1998.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

***** MAP HAS TO BE SCANNED *****