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SERVICE DATE - OCTOBER 8, 2003

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB Docket No. AB-55 (Sub-No. 640)

CSX Transportation, Inc. – Abandonment – in Atkinson and Ware Counties, GA

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT) has filed with the Surface Transportation Board an application for permission to abandon a portion of its Southern Region, Jacksonville Division in Atkinson and Ware Counties, Georgia. The proposed abandonment extends 23.25 miles from milepost AP 594.69, near Waresboro to milepost AP 617.94, near Pearson. 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

There are three customers on the line. Cady Bag Industries, Inc. ships plastics over the line; Pope Reload ships paper over the line; and Paco Steel ships metals over the line. According to CSXT, in 2001, Cady Bag Industries, Inc. shipped three carloads of plastic flakes, one carload of plastic scrap, one carload of plastic resins or gum, and 86 carloads of polypropylene over the line. Paco Steel shipped 35 carloads of steel beams over the line in 2001, and Pope Reload shipped 16 carloads of rough lumber or timber and four carloads of wood particleboard over the line. In 2002, Cady Bag Industries, Inc. shipped 85 carloads of polypropylene, Paco Steel shipped 13 carloads of steel beams, and Pope Reload shipped 13 carloads of rough lumber or timber, one carload of green lumber, six carloads of poles or stakes, and one carload of wooden poles over the line. CSXT states that in the first six months of 2003, Cady Bag Industries, Inc. shipped one carload of plastic flakes and 54 carloads of polypropylene over the line. Paco Steel shipped one carload of steel beams and Pope Reload shipped one carload of paper, 13 carloads of rough lumber or timber, four carloads of poles or stakes, and three carloads of wooden poles over the line in the first six months of 2003.

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 and historical reports 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 and reviewed the record in this proceeding.

The National Geodetic Survey has submitted comments stating that 34 geodetic station markers may be affected by the proposed abandonment and requests 90 days notification in advance of any activities that may disturb or destroy these markers.

That Natural Resources Conservation Service has submitted comments stating that about 46 percent of land in the area of the proposed abandonment is prime or unique farmland.

The Georgia State Clearinghouse submitted comments stating that it does not recommend the proposed abandonment. The Clearinghouse based its comments on the comments of Southeast Georgia Regional Development Center (RDC) and Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT). Both RDC and DOT stated that the proposed abandonment would have a negative impact upon the economy of Atkinson County. The Ware County Planning Department submitted comments stating that the proposed abandonment would be consistent with the land use plans of Ware County.

Traffic

CSXT states that a total of 146 carloads were shipped over the line in 2001, 119 carloads in 2002, and 77 carloads in the first six months of 2003. According to CSXT, 127 carloads were shipped over the line in the base year (April 2002 through March 2003), meaning that the proposed abandonment could result in the conversion of about 127 railcars to truck traffic. Using a conversion factor of 4 trucks per railcar,¹ the Section of Environmental Analysis calculated that, if all the rail traffic is diverted to truck traffic, about 508 loaded trucks per year or 1016 total trucks (assuming an empty backhaul) could be added to area roadways. On a per day basis about 4 trucks per day could be added to the area roadways during a 240 workday year.²

HISTORIC REVIEW

The railroad submitted an historic report as required by the Surface Transportation Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.8(a)]. The railroad served the report on the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division (SHPO) pursuant to 49 CFR 1105.8(c). The SHPO has not yet completed its review of the proposed abandonment.

CONDITIONS

¹ The conversion factor is an estimate used to calculate the rail to truck conversion of varied commodities.

² 240 workdays result when weekends and holidays are subtracted from a 365 day year.

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

1. Based on the comments of the National Geodetic Survey (NGS), we recommend that the following condition be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority: **CSX Transportation, Inc. shall consult with NGS and provide NGS with 90 days notice prior to disturbing or destroying any geodetic station markers.**
2. Based on the comments of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), we recommend that **CSX Transportation, Inc. consult with NRCS prior to salvage regarding measures to protect prime or unique farmlands.**
3. Because the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division has not completed its review of the proposed abandonment, we recommend that **CSX Transportation, Inc. retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the line and all sites and structures on the line until the 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 certificate of interim trail use (CITU) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice. 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.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Rini Ghosh, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-55 (Sub-No. 640) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Rini Ghosh, the environmental contact for this case, by phone at (202) 565-1539, fax at (202) 565-9000, or e-mail at ghoshr@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: **October 8, 2003.**

Comment due date: November 6, 2003.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

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