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SERVICE DATE - JANUARY 8, 1998

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

DECISION AND NOTICE OF INTERIM TRAIL USE OR ABANDONMENT

STB Docket No. AB-55 (Sub-No. 555X)

CSX TRANSPORTATION, INC.--ABANDONMENT
EXEMPTION--IN ALACHUA COUNTY, FL

Decided: January 5, 1998

CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT) filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1152 Subpart F--Exempt Abandonments to abandon approximately 1.41 miles of its line of railroad between milepost AR-716.89 and milepost AR-715.48, in High Springs, Alachua County, FL. Notice of the exemption was served and published in the Federal Register on November 24, 1997 (62 FR 62667-68). The exemption became effective on December 24, 1997.

The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) has issued an environmental assessment (EA) in this proceeding, served December 1, 1997. In the EA, SEA indicates that the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use following abandonment. By facsimile received on January 2, 1998, the City of High Springs (City) filed a request for the issuance of a notice of interim trail use (NITU), under the National Trails System Act, 16 U.S.C. 1247(d) (Trails Act), and for a public use condition under 49 U.S.C. 10905, in order to negotiate with CSXT for acquisition of the right-of-way for use as a trail.¹

The City requests that CSXT be prohibited from disposing of the corridor, other than the tracks, ties, and signal equipment, except for public use on reasonable terms, and that CSXT be barred from removing or destroying any trail-related structures, such as bridges, trestles, culverts and tunnels, for a 180-day period from the effective date of abandonment exemption. The City states that it needs the full 180-day period allowed because it has not had the opportunity to assemble or to review title information. The City submitted a statement of willingness to assume

¹ In a January 2, 1998 telephone conversation, the City stated that it had mailed its request for the issuance of a NITU on November 26, 1997. Search of the Board's records indicated that no filing had been received from the City. Therefore, the City re-filed its request.

The November 24 notice provided that trail use/rail banking requests had to be filed by December 4, 1997. Although the City's trail-use request was filed late, in Abandonment and Discontinuance of Rail Lines and Rail Transportation Under 49 U.S.C. 10903, STB Ex Parte No. 537 (STB served Dec. 24, 1996, and June 27, 1997), it was stated that the Board would retain the policy of accepting filings after the due date when good cause is shown. Because there is no indication that the City's late-filed request will prejudice any party, it will be accepted. See Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway Company--Abandonment Exemption--In Starke County, OH, STB Docket No. AB-227 (Sub-No. 10X), slip op. at 1 n.1 (STB served Nov. 7, 1997).

financial responsibility for interim trail use and rail banking in compliance with 49 CFR 1152.29, and acknowledged that the use of the right-of-way for trail purposes is subject to future reactivation for rail service. By reply filed December 9, 1997, CSXT indicated its willingness to negotiate with the City for interim trail use.²

The City's request complies with the requirements of 49 CFR 1152.29 and CSXT is willing to negotiate. Therefore, a NITU will be issued. The parties may negotiate an agreement during the 180-day period prescribed below. If the parties reach a mutually acceptable final agreement, no further Board action is necessary. If no agreement is reached within 180 days, CSXT may fully abandon the line. See 49 CFR 1152.29(d)(1). Use of the right-of-way for trail purposes is subject to restoration for railroad purposes.

As an alternative to interim trail use under the Trails Act, the right-of-way may be acquired for public use as a trail under 49 U.S.C. 10905. See Rail Abandonments--Use of Rights-of-Way as Trails, 2 I.C.C.2d 591, 609 (1986). Under section 10905, the Board may prohibit the disposal of rail properties that are proposed to be abandoned and are appropriate for public purposes for a period of not more than 180 days after the effective date of the decision approving or exempting the abandonment.

To justify a public use condition, a party must set forth: (i) the condition sought; (ii) the public importance of the condition; (iii) the period of time for which the condition would be effective; and (iv) justification for the imposition of the period of time requested. See 49 CFR 1152.28(a)(2). The City has satisfied these requirements and, therefore, a 180-day public use condition will be imposed commencing with the effective date of the exemption.

When the need for interim trail use/rail banking and public use is shown, it is the Board's policy to impose both conditions concurrently, subject to the execution of a trail use agreement. If a trail use agreement is reached on a portion of the right-of way, CSXT must keep the remaining right-of-way intact for the remainder of the 180-day period to permit public use negotiations. Also, a public use condition is not imposed for the benefit of any one potential purchaser, but rather to provide an opportunity for any interested person to acquire the right-of-way that has been found suitable for public purposes, including trail use. Therefore, with respect to the public use condition, CSXT is not required to deal exclusively with the City, but may engage in negotiations with other interested persons.

This decision will not significantly affect either the quality of the human environment or conservation of energy resources.

It is ordered:

² In its reply, CSXT stated that it had previously received the City's request.

1. This proceeding is reopened.
2. Upon reconsideration, the notice of exemption served and published in the Federal Register on November 24, 1997, exempting the abandonment of the line described above is modified to the extent necessary to implement interim trail use/rail banking as set forth below, subject to the condition that CSXT keep intact the right-of-way underlying the track, including bridges, trestles, culverts and tunnels (but not track or track materials), for a period of 180 days from the December 24, 1997 effective date (until June 22, 1998), to enable any state or local government agency, or other interested person to negotiate the acquisition of the line for public use. If an interim trail use/rail banking agreement is executed before the expiration of the 180-day period specified above, the public use condition will expire to the extent the trail use/rail banking agreement covers the same line.
3. If an interim trail use/rail banking agreement is reached, it must require the trail user to assume, for the term of the agreement, full responsibility for management of, for any legal liability arising out of the transfer or use of (unless the user is immune from liability, in which case it need only indemnify the railroad against any potential liability), and for the payment of any and all taxes that may be levied or assessed against the right-of-way.
4. Interim trail use/rail banking is subject to the future restoration of rail service and to the user's continuing to meet the financial obligations for the right-of-way.
5. If interim trail use is implemented, and subsequently the user intends to terminate trail use, it must send the Board a copy of this decision and notice and request that it be vacated on a specified date.
6. If an agreement for interim trail use/rail banking is reached by June 22, 1998, interim trail use may be implemented. If no agreement is reached by that time, CSXT may fully abandon the line.
7. This decision is effective on its service date.

By the Board, David M. Konschnik, Director, Office of Proceedings.

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Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

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