

31001

SERVICE DATE - MAY 19, 2000

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-6 (SUB-NO. 387X)

BURLINGTON NORTHERN AND SANTA FE RAILWAY COMPANY
--ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION--
IN STEARNS COUNTY, MN

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Company (BNSF) 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 its railroad line between milepost 81.11 near St. Joseph and milepost 86.00, near Collegeville, a distance of 4.89 miles, in Stearns County, Minnesota. 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.

The line extends through a generally rural area. No rail traffic has originated or terminated on the line since March 21, 1997, when it was embargoed due to poor track conditions. There are 5 public and 4 private at-grade highway crossings on the line.

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 Commerce, National Geodetic Survey,

has informed the Section of Environmental Analysis that three geodetic station markers may be affected by the proposed abandonment. In addition, the Minnesota Historical Society has not completed a review of the proposed abandonment, but has concluded that the entire line meets the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Therefore, **we recommend that the following conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:**

1. The railroad shall notify the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Geodetic Survey, at least 90 days in advance of salvage operations if three geodetic station markers (7380 S, F, and G) will be disturbed or destroyed by salvage operations.
2. The railroad shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the line in its entirety 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 does take place, the right-of-way may be appropriate 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-6 (Sub.-No.387X) 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: May 19, 2000.

Comment due date: June 5, 2000.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

ATTACHMENT

MAP NEEDS TO BE SCANNED.