

SERVICE DATE - JUNE 11, 1999

30187

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

AB-462 (SUB-NO. 2X)

SOUTHEASTERN INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION - ABANDONMENT- IN Wharton
County, TEXAS

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Southeastern International Corporation 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 milepost 42.24, in Wharton, Texas and milepost 54.0, near Lane City, Texas in Wharton County. 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

In 1997, 79 were handled by SEI traffic on this line and only 21 cars originated on the line during 1997. The line has had no overhead traffic at least since 1993. During the past decade, the line has been used for seasonal outbound movements of grain. The line no longer has any local traffic and cannot be used for overhead operations. The is in poor condition and in need of substantial repair. Alternative service is available to the shippers on the line over the extensive highway network in the area.

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 Wharton County Commissioners, USDA Soil Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Environmental Protection Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Texas Historical Commission.

CONDITIONS

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers expressed a concern that an embankment on Panels 220 and 325 of the Flood Insurance Rate Maps for Wharton County may be impacted as a result of the proposed abandonment. Therefore, we recommend a condition be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority requiring the Southeastern International Corporation to consult with the Department of the Army to determine if any permits are necessary prior to salvage activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, and subject to the recommended condition 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 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.

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, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Phillis Johnson-Ball, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-462 (Sub No.2X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Phillis Johnson-Ball at (202) 565-1530.

Date made available to the public: 6/11/99.

Comment due date: 7/13/99. (30 Days)

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

PLEASE SCAN THE MAP