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SERVICE DATE - MAY 28, 2002

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

DOCKET NO. AB-601X

Pine Belt Southern Railroad Company, Inc. – Abandonment Exemption – Between Nuckols and Hurtsboro, in Russell, Bullock, and Macon Counties, Alabama

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, Pine Belt Southern Railroad Company, Inc. (PBRR) 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 a line of railroad in Russell, Bullock, and Macon Counties, Alabama. The line extends 25 miles from Milepost S-304.00 at Nuckols to Milepost S-329.00 at Hurtsboro, Alabama. 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.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

According to PBRR, there has been no rail traffic on the line for the past two years. PBRR states that the land use in the area surrounding the line is 95% wooded and 5% residential. PBRR owns the right-of-way of the line but plans to sell it to adjacent landowners.

PBRR states that the line crosses Lockhart Creek, Reed Branch Creek, Kiogee Creek and other streams, and passes through 100-year floodplains. PBRR states that it does not intend to alter the contour of the roadbed during salvage, and that it has no plans to undertake significant in-stream work, or dredge or fill any areas in connection with the proposed abandonment.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The applicant 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 applicant served the environmental and historical reports on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.7(b)]. We have reviewed and

investigated the record in this proceeding.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that no 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 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-601X 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: **May 28, 2002.**

Comment due date: June 11, 2002.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

cc: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Dr. Lee H. Warner (SHPO)

