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SERVICE DATE - APRIL 16, 1999

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-55 (SUB-NO. 569X)

CSX TRANSPORTATION, INC. -
--ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION--
IN GUERNSEY AND NOBLE COUNTIES, OHIO

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT) 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 a portion of its railroad line known as the Eastern Ohio Branch, located between milepost BPB-4.9, near Byesville, and the end of the line at milepost BPB-18.23, near Cumberland, a distance of 13.3 miles in Guernsey and Noble Counties, Ohio. 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

On July 13, 1998, CSXT placed an embargo on the line due to several washouts which resulted from heavy rainstorms in June, 1998. CSXT states that the cost of rehabilitating the line would exceed \$300,000. There are two shippers on the line. One shipper produces pressure vessel tanks for power plants and oil refineries as well as pipe for gas and oil companies. This shipper accounted for one shipment in 1996 and one in 1997. The other shipper received one shipment in 1996. The railroad states that the shippers and local authorities are considering the possible purchase or subsidy of all or part of the line. Alternative truck transportation is available for both shippers, according to CSXT.

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 one mitigation condition, set forth below.

CONDITIONS

The Ohio Historical Society (SHPO) has indicated that one bridge, a through pinned truss bridge identified by CSXT as Bridge #5, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The SHPO has requested additional information regarding the bridge. We therefore recommend that the following condition be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

CSXT shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of Bridge #5, a through pinned truss bridge, 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 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

CSXT states that all or portions of the line would remain in place if local interests prevail, but if those interests do not prevail, the right-of-way would be suitable for other public use. If a public use request is made, such 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, 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, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Harold McNulty, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-55 (Sub No. 569X) 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: April 16, 1999.

Comment due date: May 17, 1999.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

PLEASE SCAN MAP