

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

AB-579X

County of Coahoma, Mississippi
Petition for Exemption
in Tallahatchie and Coahoma Counties, Mississippi

and

AB-580X

Gulf & Ohio Railways, Inc., d/b/a Mississippi Delta Railroad
Discontinuance of Service Exemption
in Tallahatchie and Coahoma Counties

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the County of Coahoma, Mississippi 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 line from milepost 55.40 near Lula, Coahoma County, Mississippi continuing to milepost 79.00 near Clarksdale, Coahoma County, and from milepost 76.54 near Clarksdale to milepost 104.00 near Swan Lake, Tallahatchie County Mississippi, including the discontinuance of incidental overhead trackage rights from milepost 104.00 to a connection with the Illinois Central Railroad Company mainline at milepost 105.39, a distance of approximately 51.06 miles. The Mississippi Delta Railroad, which operates over this rail line, simultaneously seeks discontinuance of both trackage and lease operating rights. Both entities will be referred to here as Petitioners. 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

The Petitioners state in their application that all shippers that have utilized rail service over the line during the last twelve months support the proposed abandonment and discontinuance. In particular, the Petitioners state that all rail service has declined to the point where continued operation of the line is no longer economically viable. Petitioners state that, following abandonment and discontinuance, the County of Coahoma, which owns the line, will retain the track and bridges in place and pursue arrangements with a new operator who will provide rail service on a non-regulated contractual basis.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The Petitioners 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. Petitioners 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 and reviewed the record in this proceeding.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that no environmental 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 Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Dana White, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB- 579X and AB-580X in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Dana White at (202) 565-1552.

Date made available to the public: **April 27, 2001.**

Comment due date: May 25, 2001. (30 Days)

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

MAP NEEDS TO BE SCANNED.