

31075

SERVICE DATE - JULY 24, 2000

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

WASHINGTON, DC 20423

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

AB-303 (SUB-NO. 23X)

WISCONSIN CENTRAL LTD. - ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION - IN LANGLADE AND  
FOREST COUNTIES, WISCONSIN.

### BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Wisconsin Central Ltd.(WCL) 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 254.0, and milepost 280.0, a total distance of approximately 26.0 miles between Crandon and White Lake, Wisconsin. 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 north-south WCL line proposed for abandonment traverses a dense wooded area sprinkled with cedar swamps in Forest and Langlade Counties, WI. According to WCL, the sole active shipper on the Line, Consolidated Papers, ships lumber and paper products from its facility. Carload traffic statistics show Consolidated Papers originated 27 cars in 1998, none in 1999, and none to date in 2000. Currently, all traffic moving over the proposed right-of-way has been rerouted onto an alternate WCL line.<sup>1</sup>

According to WCL, there are three bridges, nine structures, and no buildings along the proposed right-of-way. WCL further asserts, that if this line is approved for abandonment, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) have indicated there is interest in turning the right-of-way into a recreational trail.

### ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

---

<sup>1</sup>This information was obtained by phone on July 17, 2000, from Michael Barron, Attorney, Wisconsin Central Ltd.

The Wisconsin Central Ltd. 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 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 WDNR, WisDOT, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, National Geodetic Survey, National Park Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Wisconsin Coastal Zone Management.

The State Historical Society has indicated that none of the structures on the line are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

In its application, WCL discusses concerns expressed by WisDOT and WDNR regarding salvage and conversion of the line into a recreational trail. WCL states that it will follow WisDOT's recommendations for salvage, restoration of roadways, and clean-up of the line. WCL states that it is open to the possibility of preserving the line as a recreational trail. WDNR expressed further concerns by correspondence to the Board, dated June 16, 2000, and WCL responded in writing in a letter to Elaine Kaiser, dated June 28, 2000. This correspondence is attached to this EA.

After reviewing the correspondence, SEA is recommending imposition of an additional condition on WCL, as listed below.

#### **CONDITIONS**

We recommend that the following environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

1. Wisconsin Central Ltd. shall comply with the Abandoned Railroad Line Salvage and Clean-up Policy/Standards/Procedures of the State of Wisconsin, Department of Transportation, as requested by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.
2. The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has identified two geodetic station makers may be affected by the proposed abandonment. Therefore we recommend, that WCL notify NGS at least 90 days prior to salvage activities in order to plan for relocation of the station makers.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, and subject to the recommended conditions, 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 Bernard L. Brown, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-303 (Sub**

**No. 23X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Bernard L. Brown at (202) 565-1539.

Date made available to the public: 7/24/00.

**Comment due date: 8/23/00.**

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

Vernon A. Williams  
Secretary

Attachments

PLEASE SCAN THE MAP AND ATTACHMENTS