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SERVICE DATE - DECEMBER 22, 1998

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

December 22, 1998

NO. AB-290 (SUB-NO. 203X)

Norfolk Southern Railway Company
- Abandonment -
Between Madison, IL and Sorento, IL
in Madison and Bond Counties, Illinois

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Norfolk Southern Railway Company 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 TS-406.6 at Sorento and Milepost TS-445.7 in Madison, IL, a distance of 39.1 miles known as the Madison Branch in Madison and Bond Counties, Illinois. 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

This line is located in a primarily rural area. There is one local shipper on the line, Richards Brick Company, at Edwardsville, IL, who currently moves approximately 11 carloads per week via this rail line. According to NS, this shipper could use truck transportation. Alternative rail transportation is available in the area, including another NS line in Edwardsville, located approximately two miles away. In 1997, 542 carloads of local traffic comprising brick and slate moved on this line.

If freight currently moving over this rail line is diverted to truck, there would be an attendant increase of truck traffic on highways paralleling the affected rail line. NS states that 542 carloads moved in 1997. Assuming a truck to rail diversion of 4 to 1, this would mean a total increase of 2168 trucks on all affected roadways. The number of total rail cars diverted to truck is well below the Board's threshold of 1,000 carloads, and would result in no significant environmental impact.

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 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 5; the National Geodetic Survey; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the Army Corps of Engineers; Illinois Historic Preservation; and the Village of Glen Carbon.

CONDITIONS

Region 5, U.S. EPA has commented that the railroad should employ soil erosion and stormwater runoff mitigation practices, including revegetating the affected area with native flora, during abandonment activities. In addition, removed rail equipment should be stored away from wetlands and waterbodies. As a result of EPA's comments, we recommend that the following condition be imposed: **While conducting salvage activities, Norfolk Southern Railway shall employ appropriate soil erosion and stormwater runoff measures and shall ensure that removed rail equipment be stored away from wetlands and waterbodies.**

The National Geodetic Survey has identified one station marker, E 113, than may be affected by abandonment of this line. We therefore recommend imposition of the following condition: **Norfolk Southern Railway shall provide the National Geodetic Survey with at least 90 days prior notice before undertaking any activities which may disturb or destroy station marker E 113.**

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, and subject to the recommended conditions, 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, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Victoria Rutson, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-290 (Sub No. 203X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Ms. Rutson at (202) 565-1545.

Date made available to the public: December 18, 1998.

Comment due date: January 15, 1999.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

MAP TO BE SCANNED