

SERVICE DATE - AUGUST 8, 2003
SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB Docket No. AB-33 (Sub-No. 171X)

**Union Pacific Railroad Company—Abandonment Exemption—
in Washington County, IL**

BACKGROUND

In the above entitled proceeding, Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP) has 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 18.10-mile rail line over the Sparta Branch from milepost 41.1 near Oakdale to the end of the track at milepost 23.0 near Hoyleton, in Washington County, IL. 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 line is laid with a combination of 90-pound and 112-pound jointed and 112-pound welded rail. UP states that from milepost 23.0 to milepost 32.9 (St. Louis Street), the right-of-way is 50 feet wide, and passes through a primarily agricultural area with approximately nineteen at grade crossings in this 9.9 mile segment. From milepost 32.9 to milepost 37.7 (Cordes Road), the right-of-way is 50 feet wide with track being on a slight fill. This segment is agricultural mixed with residential areas. From milepost 37.8 to milepost 41.1 (Main Street), the right-of-way is generally 50 feet wide; however, there are three areas along this segment where it widens to 100 feet. The track is on level ground or slight to moderate fill. Adjacent uses are agriculture and some wooded areas. In its application UP states that there has been no traffic on the line during the past two years.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

UP 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. UP 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)]. 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: Mr. Don Vonnahme, Director, Department of Transportation; Illinois Environmental Protection Agency; Mr. Steve Klokkenga,

Office of the Governor; National Geodetic Survey; National Park Service; State Historic Preservation Office; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, North Central; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region V; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 3; U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service; and Washington County Board.

The National Geodetic Survey has submitted comments stating that 9 geodetic station markers have been identified that may be affected by the proposed abandonment. NGS states that if there are any planned activities which will disturb or destroy these markers, it requires not less than 90 days notification in advance of any activities that may disturb or destroy these markers in order to plan for their relocation.

The Department of the Army, Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District, has submitted comments stating that based upon a review of the U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute topographical map, and the National Wetland Inventory map, it has been determined that wetlands or waters of the United States are present within the project area. The Corps indicates that any future activities planned for the site or adjacent areas may require a permit prior to salvage activities. The Corps further states that once all information regarding the proposed project is completed, UP should contact its office for further consultation.

HISTORIC REVIEW

UP submitted an historic report as required by the Surface Transportation Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.8(a)]. UP served the report on the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (SHPO) pursuant to 49 CFR 1105.8(c). The SHPO has submitted comments stating that the proposed abandonment would have no adverse effect on historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). We have reviewed the report and the information provided by the SHPO and concur with SHPO's comments.

Pursuant to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations for implementing the section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act 16 36 CFR 800.5(c) and 35 CFR 800.8, we have determined that the proposed abandonment will not adversely affect historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. The documentation for this finding, as specified at 36 CFR 800.11(e), consists of UP's historic report, all relevant correspondence, and this EA, which have been provided to the SHPO and made available to the public.

CONDITIONS

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

1. Based on the comments of the NGS, we recommend that the following condition be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority: UP shall consult with the NGS and

provide NGS with 90 days notice prior to disturbing or destroying any geodetic station marker in order to plan for their relocation.

2. Based on the comments of the Corps, we recommend that: prior to beginning salvage activities, UP consult with the Corps, St. Louis District.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended conditions are imposed, 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 this case, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

If abandonment and salvage of the rail line does not take place, 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. However, 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, 1925 K St., N.W., Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, 1925 K. St., N.W., Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Ann Newman, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-33 (Sub-No. 171X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Ann Newman at (202) 565-1657, fax at (202) 565-9000, or e-mail at Ann Newman@STB.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: August 8, 2003.

Comment due date: August 25, 2003.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

ID-33855

Attachment 1

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