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SERVICE DATE - DECEMBER 14, 2001

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

DOCKET NO. AB-290 (Sub-No. 235X)

**Norfolk Southern Railway Company – Abandonment – Between Roderfield and Premier
in McDowell County, West Virginia**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, Norfolk Southern Railway Company (NS) 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 line of railroad in McDowell County, West Virginia. The line extends 4.58 miles from Milepost RP-0.0 at Roderfield, West Virginia to Milepost RP-4.58 at Premier, West Virginia. A map depicting the rail lines in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the notice 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

According to NS, there has been no rail traffic on the line for the past two years. NS states that the land use in the area surrounding the rail line is five percent commercial, 15 percent undeveloped wooded and 80 percent residential.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The applicants 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 applicants 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)]. We have reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has submitted comments stating that no Federally listed endangered and threatened species or species of concern would be affected by the proposed abandonment.

The National Geodetic Survey has submitted comments stating that the proposed abandonment could affect two geodetic station markers.

The West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection (DEP) has also submitted comments stating that the area for the proposed abandonment is not located in a Class I or Non-Attainment area for National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), and that NAAQS regulations would not be applicable to the proposed abandonment. However, DEP states that the regulations at 45 CSR 17 for the minimization of fugitive dusts from fugitive emission sources could be applicable to the proposed abandonment.

Water

The line proposed for abandonment runs along several waterways in the 100-year floodplain. The line parallels the Tug Fork River and Spice Creek for about 4.5 miles and has crossings over the Shabby Room Branch, an unnamed tributary to Spice Creek, the Little Day Camp Branch, the Honey Camp Branch and the Stone Coal Branch. According to NS, the proposed abandonment would not alter the shape of the roadbed. NS also states that “there are no plans to undertake in-stream work, or dredge and/or fill any materials in connection with the proposed abandonment.”

Comments from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) indicate that because the proposed abandonment would not cause fill material to be placed into waters, a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit would not be necessary. The Corps also states that a permit under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 would be required before any work could be conducted in or over navigable waters.

Historic

The West Virginia Division of Culture and History (SHPO) has submitted comments requesting additional information regarding the buildings and structures on the line proposed for abandonment. The SHPO has also indicated that it did not receive the applicant’s historic report in a timely matter and needs more time for review.

NS states that there are four bridge structures on the line that were built in 1909 when the line was built. The bridges consist of three small single-span, open deck wooden trestles and one small double-span open deck trestle. According to NS, due to their wooden composition, the bridges have been repaired and rebuilt and the original materials of the bridges no longer exists.

CONDITIONS

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

1. The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has identified two geodetic station markers along the rail line and requests 90 days notice to plan relocation of any markers which may be

disturbed or destroyed. Therefore, we recommend that the following condition be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority: **Norfolk Southern Railway Company shall consult with NGS and provide NGS with 90 days notice prior to disturbing or destroying any geodetic station markers.**

2. The West Virginia Department of Culture and History has not yet completed its review of the proposed abandonment. Therefore, we recommend that the following condition be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority: **Norfolk Southern Railway Company shall take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the line and all sites and structures on the line until the 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, 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 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 Rini Ghosh, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-290 (Sub-No. 235X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Rini Ghosh, the environmental contact for this case by phone at (202) 565-1539, fax at (202) 565-9000, or e-mail at ghoshr@stb.dot.gov.

Recent events involving a principal postal facility within Washington, D.C., may affect for a period of time the receipt of materials mailed to the Board, as well as customer receipt of reply mail sent from the Board. Until the timely delivery of mail has been reestablished, the Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) requests that individuals filing comments regarding this or other environmental assessments take the following additional steps to ensure receipt of their correspondence during the comment period:

1. Telephone or e-mail the environmental contact indicated above prior to the close of the comment period and inform them that you have mailed a comment.
2. If the comment has not been received, the environmental contact will discuss alternative modes of delivery.
3. Retain a copy of your comment for your records should alternative modes of delivery need be necessary.

SEA is committed to carrying out its duties to the public and regrets any inconvenience these new procedures may cause.

Date made available to the public: **December 14, 2001.**

Comment due date: December 28, 2001 (15 Days).

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

MAP TO BE SCANNED