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SERVICE DATE - JULY 19, 1999

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB Docket No. AB-425 (Sub-No. 1X)

**Lone Star Railroad, Inc.--Abandonment Exemption--
In Taylor and Jones Counties, TX**

STB Docket No. AB-426 (Sub-No. 1X)

**Southern Switching Company--Discontinuance of Service
Exemption--in Taylor and Jones Counties, TX**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, Lone Star Railroad, Inc. (LSRI) and Southern Switching Company (SSC) jointly filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 for LSRI to abandon, and SSC to discontinue service over a 4.5-mile line of railroad known as the North Abilene Line, extending from milepost 147.3 at or near Abilene to milepost 142.8 at or near North Abilene, in Taylor and Jones Counties, TX. 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

In its joint petition, LSRI and SSC state that there are two shippers, Pride Refining that transported asphalt and gasoline and Fraley Butane (Raley) that transported methanol. In 1997, 548 carloads were transported for Pride and 9 carloads for Fraley. Pride discontinued service on the line on November 17, 1998 and Fraley discontinued rail service on July 24, 1998. LSRI and SSC also state that neither Pride nor Fraley oppose the abandonment.

The right-of-way is 100 feet in width. The surrounding terrain is generally flat and the majority of the surrounding area is rural.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

LSRI and SSC 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. LSRI and SSC 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 at 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: the Texas Department of Transportation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Texas Environmental Protection Division; National Park Service; TX Natural Resource Conservation Comm'n.; Natural Resources Division Office of the Attorney General; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Texas Parks and Wildlife Department; National Geodetic Survey; USDA Natural Resources Conservation Svc.; Taylor County Judge; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Chief of the Forest Service; Texas Historical Commission; Jones County Judge; City of Abilene, TX; and the Department of Defense, Military Traffic Management Command.

CONDITIONS

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

1. The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has identified three geodetic station markers (V 261, U 261, and T 261) that may be affected by the proposed abandonment. NGS requests that it receive not less than 90 days' notification in advance of any salvage activities in order to plan for their relocation. Therefore, we recommend that LSRI and SSC consult with NGS at least 90 days prior to salvage activities in order to plan for its relocation.

2. The Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission states that based on the review by the Water Policy Division, it is recommended that the railroad use the best management practices during and after any construction activities to preclude contamination of runoff which could impact surface and groundwater quality. Therefore, the condition will be imposed.

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 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

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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 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, 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 Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Room 711, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Ann Newman, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-425 (Sub-No. 1X), et al.** in all correspondence addressed to the Board. If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Ann Newman at (202) 565-1629.

Date made available to the public: July 19, 1999.

Comment due date: August 18, 1999.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

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MAP NEEDS TO BE SCANNED.