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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB FINANCE DOCKET NO. 34435

AMEREN ENERGY GENERATING COMPANY-- Construction and Operation Exemption--Coffeen and Walshville, Illinois



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CONCLUSION

The Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) in response to a proposal by the Ameren Energy Generating Company (applicant, or AEGC). Ameren has filed a petition with the Surface Transportation Board seeking an exemption under 49 U.S.C. § 10502 from the prior approval requirements of 49 U.S.C. § 10901 for authority to construct and operate one of two rail lines. The EA considers the potential environmental impacts of AEGC's proposed construction and operation of an approximately 13.5-mile line in Montgomery County, Illinois, and an approximately 4.6-mile line in Montgomery and Bond counties, Illinois. Either of the proposed rail lines would provide AEGC's Coffeen Power Plant near Coffeen, Illinois, with direct rail access to two additional rail carriers. AEGC would prefer to construct and operate the 4.6-mile rail line, but, if that is not possible, would construct and operate the 13.5 mile-line instead.

Based on the information provided from all sources to date and its independent analysis, SEA preliminarily concludes that construction and operation of either of the proposed rail routes would have no significant environmental impacts if the Board imposes and AEGC implements the recommended mitigation measures set forth in the EA. Therefore, an environmental impact statement process is unnecessary in this proceeding.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Statement of Proposed Action

On February 5, 2004, Ameren Energy Generating Company (applicant, or AEGC) petitioned the Surface Transportation Board (Board) for an exemption from the prior approval requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10901 to construct and operate one of two proposed rail routes, one an approximately 13.5-mile line in Montgomery County, Illinois, and the other an approximately 4.6-mile line in Montgomery and Bond counties, Illinois. Either of the proposed rail lines would provide AEGC's Coffeen Power Plant near Coffeen, Illinois, with direct access to rail lines of both the Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP) and The BNSF Railway Company (BNSF).¹ The power plant is currently served by the Norfolk Southern Railway (NS).

The project area location is shown in Figure ES-1. Figure ES-2 shows the proposed location of Routes A and B. Route A would begin at the Coffeen Power Plant, proceed southwest across Coffeen Lake, and then proceed west to cross NS's Sorento to Coffeen rail line, as well as Illinois Route 127, at-grade. Route A would cross Bearcat Creek, Shoal Creek, and Lake Fork, and numerous other drainageways. It would also cross a number of local or county roads at-grade. Route A would extend for 13.5 miles and would make separate connections with both UP and BNSF, as shown in Figure ES-2. Route B would extend for 4.6 miles and connect the existing NS line near Sorento with the existing UP line. Route B would involve NS voluntarily selling, leasing or otherwise allowing AEGC to use its existing 12-mile Sorento to Coffeen line. AEGC indicates that, if NS were to agree to this, AEGC would build Route B, rather than Route A.

Traffic on either Route A or B would be primarily coal inbound to the power plant. A maximum of 300 loaded coal trains per year are expected to move over either route, for a total of 600 total yearly train movements, an average of approximately 1.6 train movements per day.

Description of the Affected Environment

Following is an overview of the project area. Chapter 3.0 contains a detailed discussion of the affected environment.

The project area is located in southcentral Illinois, in Montgomery and Bond counties. The area is located generally northeast of the St. Louis Metropolitan Statistical Area, as shown in Figure ES-1. Most rail and major road corridors near the project area radiate out from St. Louis. The project area itself is basically rural. Land use is primarily agricultural interspersed with wooded drainageways. Several small farm communities are located within or on the periphery of the area. Farming is mainly row crops consisting of corn and soybeans. The Coffeen Power

¹ The rail line would be constructed and operated by the Coffeen and Western Railroad Company (CWRC), a wholly owned subsidiary of AEGC. For simplicity, this EA refers to AEGC, the applicant, in the balance of this document.

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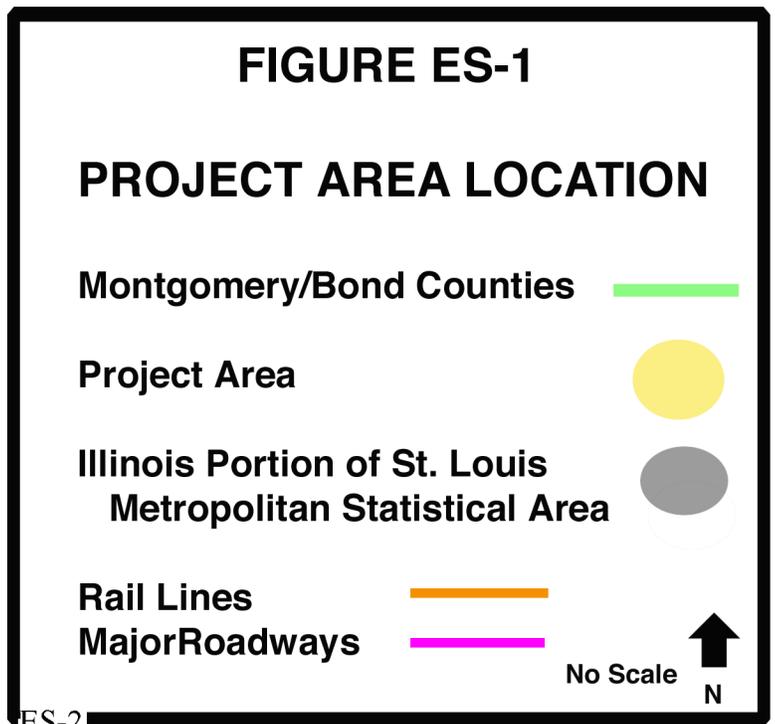
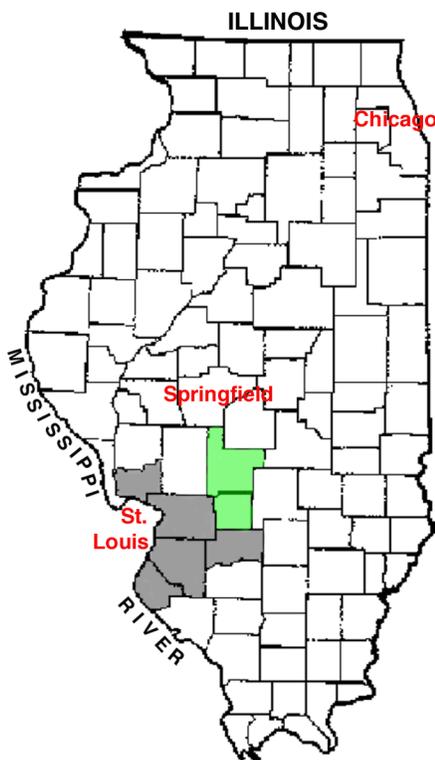
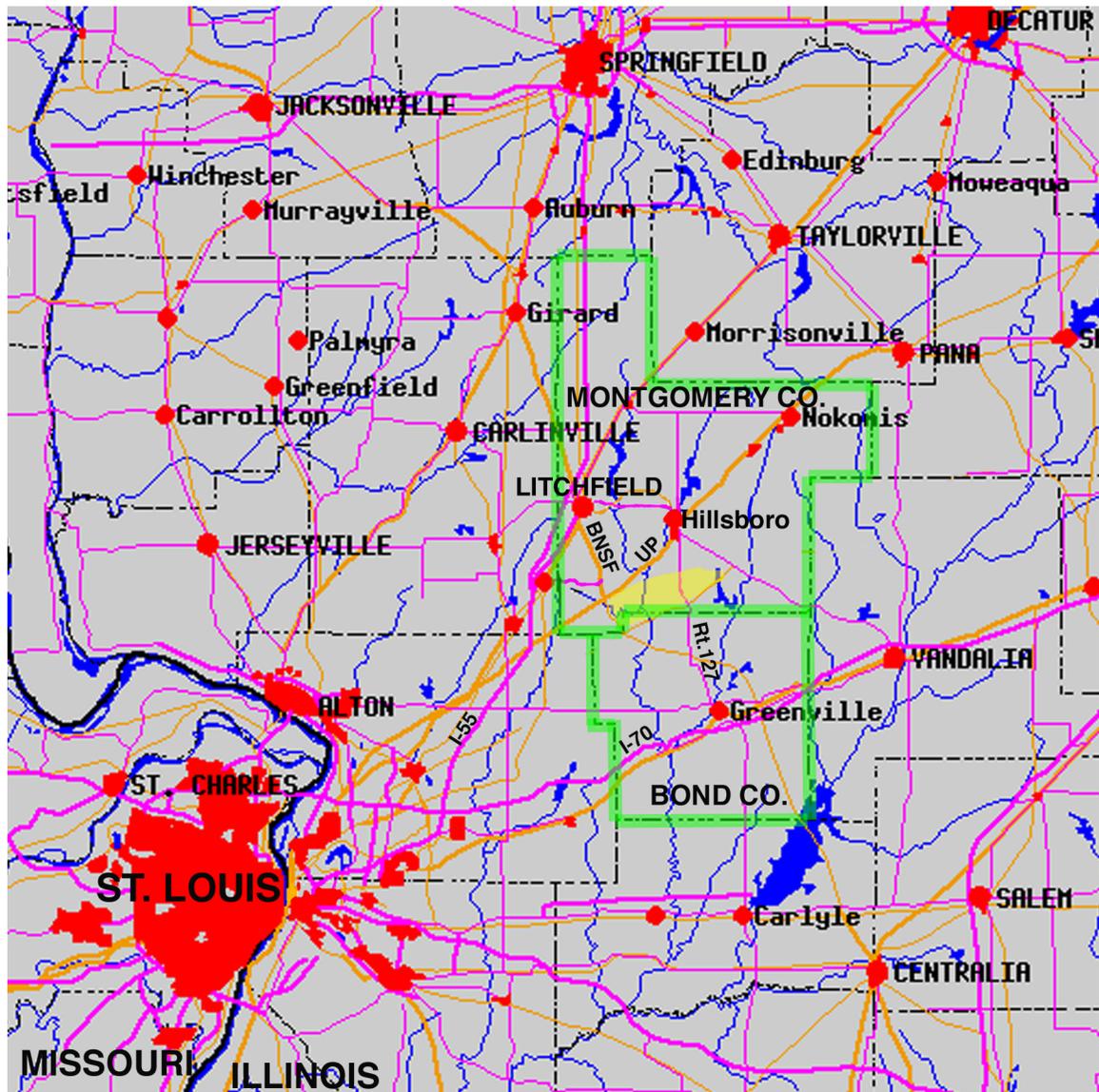


FIGURE ES-2
Proposed AEGC Rail Line Construction

Route A 
 Route B 
 Existing Rail Lines 

No Scale 



Plant is located on Coffeen Lake, a State Fish and Wildlife Area. Local topography consists of broad, flat uplands used for growing row crops, steep forested slopes near the major streams and some tributary streams, and bottomland in the major stream valley floodplains. The project area is located in the Shoal Creek watershed, which drains to the Kaskaskia River, and ultimately to the Mississippi River. Both Montgomery and Bond counties have populations which are markedly older and with lower incomes than the state as a whole.

Alternatives Considered

Three alternatives have been considered in this EA for the proposed project: both Routes A and B and the no-action alternative. Chapter 2 provides more detail regarding these alternatives. AEGC initially considered, but later rejected, another alternative rail route which was considerably longer, with greater adverse environmental impacts, than either of the proposed rail routes.

Synopsis of Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

The following is an overview of potential impacts resulting from construction of Routes A and B. Chapter 4.0 contains a detailed discussion of these potential impacts.

Table ES-1 contains a summary listing of several environmental impact parameters. The table shows that proposed Route A would require 10 new at-grade crossings of public roads and Route B would require four new at-grade crossings. AEGC would install, at its cost, the necessary signage, lighting, and safety warnings for all at-grade crossings as approved and permitted by the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC). AEGC has applied to the ICC for permission to make the proposed Route A road crossings.² Route A would make numerous crossings of utility infrastructure; Route B would make fewer such crossings, due to its shorter construction length. Most of these crossings would be of overhead electric transmission/distribution lines, and some would be of buried cables and pipelines. AEGC intends to enter into agreements with the various utility companies to make, and pay for, any needed modifications of the utilities crossed. Operations over either line would not be expected to cause significant delay or accident impacts due to the lightly traveled nature of most of the roads that would be crossed at grade, and also to the low projected rail traffic on either rail route.

Construction of either rail route would not have significant land use impacts. Route A would convert 163 acres of land to rail use and Route B would convert 52 acres. Although both routes cross several prime farmland soil map units and convert agricultural land to

² The ICC allows authorization to be requested for only one route. At this time, AEGC has elected to file for authorization for Route A; however, should circumstances allow construction of proposed Route B, AEGC has stated an intent to file for ICC authorization for Route B at the appropriate time. It should be noted, however, that AEGC's decision to file for ICC authorization for Route A was done at its own risk. In making its final decision on this exemption, the Board may deny (or alternatively approve) either or both Routes A and B.

**TABLE ES-1
SUMMARY COMPARISON OF PROPOSED ROUTES A AND B
CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS**

Impact Type	Route A	Route B
Length of new rail line construction	13.5 miles	4.6 miles
New at-grade public road crossings	10	4
Crossings of other rail lines	1	0
Acres of land required for right-of-way	163	52
Number of residences within 500 feet of rail centerline	7	1
Residences to be relocated	1	0
Number of jurisdictional streams crossed	25	5
Impacted jurisdictional stream acreage	0.612	0.413
Impacted jurisdictional wetland acreage	9.47 ^a	0.78
Farmed wetlands	5.1	NA
Open water	1.14	0.27
Other jurisdictional wetlands	3.23	0.51
Forest habitat converted to rail use	59.3 acres	12.8 acres
Affected sites potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places	3	2

^a The farmed wetlands do not currently function as wetlands, having been previously converted to agricultural use. The 1.14 acres of open water at the proposed Coffeen Lake crossing is associated with placing an embankment and bridge in the lake. The remaining 3.23 acres of Route A jurisdictional wetlands are dispersed among seven wetland sites, the largest of which is a 3.04-acre forested wetland on the Shoal Creek floodplain.

non-agricultural use, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) states that this would not adversely affect the project area's agricultural land. AEGC is negotiating with those landowners whose property would be severed by Route A or B to provide private crossings, where appropriate, to minimize severance impacts.

Table ES-1 shows that Route A would make 25 crossings of jurisdictional streams and Route B would make five such crossings. Both routes would also cross wetlands and ponds, Route A more than Route B due to its greater construction length. The proposed Route A construction would impact 0.61 acres of jurisdictional streams and remove 9.47 acres of jurisdictional wetlands and 0.33 acres of non-jurisdictional wetlands from their current use. The jurisdictional wetlands include 5.1 acres of farmed wetlands that do not currently function as wetlands, having been previously converted to agricultural use. The farmed wetlands are currently mapped by NRCS as non-wetlands, but that agency has not officially certified them as such because it does so only at the request of the landowner, and the current landowners have not so requested. Route A jurisdictional wetlands include another 1.14 acres of open water associated with placing an embankment and bridge in Coffeen Lake. The remaining 3.23 acres of Route A jurisdictional wetlands are dispersed among seven wetland sites, the largest of which is a 3.04-acre forested wetland on the Shoal Creek floodplain which is judged to be the highest quality wetland within the construction study zone.

Construction of Route B would impact 0.303 acres of jurisdictional streams and remove 0.78 acres of jurisdictional wetlands from their current use, the largest of which is a 0.32-acre palustrine emergent wetland.

AEGC has submitted Clean Water Act (CWA) permit applications to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) for the various proposed stream and wetland crossings and would need to comply with any reasonable mitigation that might be required to obtain those permits. Apart from the unavoidable stream and wetland impacts associated with placement of fill for the railbed, measures that the applicant proposes to take during construction of the stream and wetland crossings should minimize further drainageway impacts during the construction process and during operation and maintenance.

Construction of Route A would reduce the size of terrestrial wildlife communities in the project vicinity due to conversion of land from existing habitat use and to habitat fragmentation. It would cross numerous drainageways, and would result in some negative effects on aquatic habitat and wildlife populations. Construction of Route A would not affect listed protected species. Route B would have more limited impacts on terrestrial and aquatic biological resources due to its shorter length. The Indiana bat, a Federally listed endangered species, has been previously observed in Bond County. Imposition of mitigation, which would restrict the months in which tree cutting for the Route B ROW could occur in Bond County, should avoid adverse impacts on the Indiana bat.

Montgomery and Bond counties are in attainment for all of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) criteria air pollutants.³ Due to the low level of expected train operations over either Route A or B, air quality and noise impacts from the proposed project are not expected to be significant.

A Phase I cultural resources survey of the project area determined that the proposed Route A ROW contained three sites that may be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) and the Route B ROW contained one such site. The Phase I survey recommended that a Phase II evaluation of these four sites be conducted if they could not be avoided by the proposed rail construction. The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (State Historic Preservation Office, or SHPO) has completed its review of the Phase I survey report and identified an additional site on Route B that may be eligible for listing on the National Register. If a potentially eligible site cannot be avoided during construction, the SHPO has stated that a Phase II investigation of that site would be necessary. The applicant has stated that site avoidance is not feasible and has voluntarily agreed to proceed with appropriate Phase II investigations. To avoid potential impacts of construction of either proposed rail route, SEA has preliminarily recommended that none of the potentially eligible sites be disturbed until completion of the Section 106 review process.

Agency Consultation, Mitigation and Conclusions

Based on the information available to date, consultations with appropriate agencies, and extensive environmental analysis, SEA developed preliminary environmental mitigation measures to address the environmental impacts of the proposed construction and operation of Route A or Route B.

SEA emphasizes that the recommended environmental mitigation measures in the EA are preliminary and it invites public and agency comments on these proposed environmental mitigation measures. In order for SEA to effectively assess the comments, it is helpful if the public is specific in its comments, including comments regarding desired mitigation and the reasons for it.

SEA has reviewed all information available to date and conducted its independent analysis of the construction and operation of the proposed rail routes. SEA has included in this EA the comments and mitigation requested by various Federal, state, and local agencies, as well as other concerned parties. Based on the information provided from all sources to date and its independent analysis, SEA preliminarily concludes that construction and operation of either proposed Route A or Route B would have no significant environmental impacts if the Board imposes and AEGC implements the recommended mitigation. Therefore, the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process is unnecessary in this proceeding.

³ The USEPA has established National Ambient Air Quality Standards for six principal air pollutants, called “criteria” pollutants: ozone, lead, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and respirable particulate matter.

Public Comments

SEA specifically invites comments on all aspects of this EA, including suggestions for additional mitigation measures. SEA will consider all comments received in response to the EA in making its final recommendations to the Board. The Board will consider the entire environmental record, SEA's final recommendations, including final recommended mitigation measures, and the environmental comments in making its final decision in this proceeding.

Comments (an original and one copy) should be sent to:

Surface Transportation Board
Case Control Unit, 1925 K Street NW, Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20423.

The lower left-hand corner of the envelope should be marked:

Attention: Mr. David Navecky, Environmental Concerns, Finance Docket No. 34435

Questions may also be directed to Mr. David Navecky at this address or by telephoning (202) 565-1593 or by emailing to David.Navecky@stb.dot.gov. Comments may also be filed electronically on the Board's website, www.stb.dot.gov, by clicking on the "E-FILING" link.

Date Made Available to the Public: May 25, 2005
Comment Due Date: June 30, 2005

This EA is also available on the Board's website (<http://www.stb.dot.gov>), under "Decisions & Notices," and listed as "Environmental Review" by Service Date (May 25, 2005), Docket Number (FD 34435) or Decision ID No. 35831.

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