

SERVICE DATE - NOVEMBER 3, 2000
SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB Docket NO. AB-183 (SUB-NO. 3X)

**Union Railroad Company--Abandonment Exemption--
in Allegheny County, PA**

BACKGROUND

In the above entitled proceeding, Union Railroad Company (URR), has filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 to abandon and discontinue service over its line of railroad known as the Rankin Branch extending from point of switch Survey Station 158+50 of Turnout MU-18, and extending from that point over and across the Rankin Hot Metal Bridge to a rail connection with the Railroad's so-called Wildcat Track at Survey Station 48+35 in the Borough of Rankin, Allegheny County, PA, a distance of 0.89 miles. 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 application URR states that there have been no traffic on the line during the past two years.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

URR 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. URR 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 the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission; PA Department of Environmental Protection; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 3; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, PA Field Office; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Pittsburgh District; National Park Service-Northeast Region; PA State Office-Soil Survey Division, USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service; National Geodetic Survey; PA Historical and Museum Commission; Water Quality Program Manager; PA Department of Transportation; Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission; Military Traffic Management Command Transportation Engineering Agency; USDA Forest Service; and the National Park

The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has identified two geodetic station markers that may be affected by the proposed abandonment. NGS requests that it be notified 90 days in advance of any activities that may disturb or destroy these markers. Therefore, we recommend that URR notify NGS at least 90 days' prior to any salvage activities to plan their relocation.

URR states in its application that it intends to donate, remise, release and quitclaim to the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation its interest in the Rankin Hot Metal Bridge and the right to use and maintain certain main line tracks commencing at a point measured along the Bridge Track, a distance of 193 feet from Survey Station 158+50, for its use as rails-to-trails project.

The Pennsylvania Historic Society (SHPO) states that the project should have no adverse effect upon the historic resources but this finding is conditional upon the replacement of a preservation covenant on the rail line and the Rankin Hot Metal Bridge on the deed prior to its transfer to the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation. (See attached letter from SHPO). SHPO requests that URR provide SHPO with a copy of the draft covenant for SHPO's review prior to the transfer. Therefore, in order to respond to SHPO's concerns, we will recommend that URR retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of all sites and structures on the right-of-way that are 50 years old or older until completion of the section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f. We expect that, once SHPO has reviewed and approved the covenant, URR will notify this Office (the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis), thus completing the terms of the section 106 process for this abandonment proceeding.

CONDITIONS

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

The NGS has identified two geodetic station markers that may be affected by the proposed abandonment. Therefore, URR shall notify the NGS at least 90 days prior to salvage activities in order to plan their relocation.

SHPO has indicated that the Rankin Metal Bridge is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Therefore, URR shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the integrity of the Rankin Metal Bridge until 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, 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 discontinuance 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 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 2215, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Ann Newman, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-183 (Sub-No. 3X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Ann Newman at (202) 565-1629.

STB Docket No. 183 (Sub-No. 3X)

Date made available to the public: November 3, 2000.

Comment due date: November 18, 2000.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachments (map and SHPO letter)

MAP AND ATTACHMENT TO BE SCANNED